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1. Introduction and aims of the study

One result of the land restitution process, following the collapse of the Soviet system, is the large number of absentee owners. This has been looked upon as a problematic side effect of the transition process (van Dijk, 2007). Stiglitz highlights that one consequence is that absentee owners may feel alienated from the land and only be interested in making a rapid profit (Stiglitz, 2000). Staehr (2004) applies this argument to Estonia, arguing that the result of the widespread restitution in Estonia is that some owners are not interested in their property and therefore leave it uncultivated and let the buildings fall into disrepair. The Estonian case is of particular interest since the decision to return to the land ownership pattern that existed in 1939 means that all minorities and all those who left the country during the Second World War now are entitled to get their family land back. This is in contrast to many other CEE (Central and Eastern European) countries, in which the starting point for the restitution process is post-war ownership patterns, for example in Poland and the Czech Republic (Swinnen & Mathijs, 1997). Estonia is also of particular interest since owners of restituted properties are able to repossess the exact plot of land they (or their relatives) owned before the Soviet annexation. These historical links between family and land could generate emotional bonds with the property among this group of landowners. This procedure was not possible in many former Soviet republics, since private ownership was abolished at an earlier stage and it was therefore impossible to trace land ownership patterns (Hedin, 2003). The northwest coast of Estonia now has a group of absentee owners from other parts of Estonia and from other countries, especially Sweden.

Transition processes concerning Estonia have been studied by several authors, for example Tim Unwin (1997) and Ilka Alanen (2004). The former Swedish settlement areas in Estonia have previously been studied by Hedin (2003, 2005). Hedin compares landowners living in Estonia and landowners living abroad. However, this paper contributes with a complementary analysis by

24 differentiating between local Estonian owners and owners living in other parts of Estonia.
25 Rodríguez-Vicente & Marey-Pérez (2009) highlight the importance to consider the various profiles
26 of private landowners when designing development programmes intended to secure long-term
27 management and sustainability in an area. Brown (2007) also argues that policy should take into
28 consideration that there is an increasing plurality of landowners with different kind of values and
29 attitudes. This paper aims to give examples of how different owner groups value their land and how
30 this might affect their future plans for the property. Such knowledge is valuable when meeting
31 planning demands for future housing, second homes and tourism. The first research question
32 explores how the three landowner groups studied – local owners that live in the same municipality,
33 owners from other parts of Estonia and owners living in Sweden or Finland – value and use their
34 land. Little investigation has been made of the effects of the emotional attachment to land. The
35 second question therefore concerns analysing how emotional bonds to land have affected the
36 landowners' view of their land and their future plans for the property. This paper includes studies
37 carried out in the coastal municipalities of Noarootsi, Ridala and Nõva, situated in Läänemaa County
38 (Figure 1).

39 **Figure 1**

41 Research areas.

42 2. Land ownership in Estonia – the historical context

43 The roots of the values that landowners in Estonia attach to land can be found in the historical
44 context. In the 19th century most of the farms in the Russian province of Estonia were owned by
45 Baltic-German manors. It is of importance to the present land ownership pattern that the study area
46 was a part of the Swedish settlement area and that a considerable proportion of the population,
47 especially in Noarootsi, were Estonian Swedes at that time. The Peasant Act of 1856 made it
48 possible for tenants to purchase land. Land was categorised as peasant land or manor land and at the
49 end of the 19th century approximately 50 percent of peasant land in Estonia was privately owned
50 (Raun, 1981). The radical land reform of 1919, which was implemented during the first period of
51 Estonian independence, aimed at distributing land that had previously been owned by the manors to
52 landless peasants (Lipping 1980). This reform made it possible for a large number of peasants to
53 become owners of family farms, and Taagepera (1972) estimate that in 1939, 86 percent of the farms
54 in Estonia were in private ownership.

55 The terror experienced during the first Soviet occupation 1940–1941 and the threats of a
56 second Soviet occupation made the majority of Estonian Swedes leave Estonia in 1943–1944, most
57 of them going to Sweden. The Soviet annexation of Estonia in 1944 ended the short period of
58 independence. The subsequent collectivisation towards the end of the 1940s abolished private
59 ownership, and the population was only allowed to keep small household farms (Maandi 2009).

60 The politics of perestroika, beginning in 1987, led to the emergence of private plot farming
61 and the opportunity for some private family farms to be reinstated in the form of eternal leases of
62 land from the kolkhozes (Alanen, 1999). A radical land reform was implemented in October 1991 by
63 the independent Estonian government. Those who were Estonian citizens could demand the return of
64 or compensation for land that was nationalised by the Soviet regime (Terk, 2000). By using the land

ownership pattern from 1939, the Estonian restitution process seeks to undo and erase from history the changes that took place during the Soviet period. In this way a reconnection with tradition and family history linked to the land was made possible. The restitution process is now complete and in Läänemaa in 2008, 82 percent of the total area of the county had been registered with different owners (www.maamet.ee 10.05.17). Land has mostly been restored to previous owners or their families but the figure also includes owners that have received their property through auctions or purchases. There are some exceptions where land could not be restituted. Owners of houses bought during the Soviet period have first refusal to their houses and the surrounding land. Owners with first refusal also include those who held eternal leases of land from the collective in the late 1980s (Maareformi Seadus 1999).

3. Values of land ownership and emotional attachment to land

A number of values can be attached to land ownership, both economic and non-economic. These values may be expressed through land use, through leasing out land or selling property rights. Brown (2007) states that property ownership is not characterised by a static relationship between people and objects; it is constantly changing and “continually renegotiated depending on how people see it, the meanings they attach to it and the purpose they wish it to serve”. This view makes it crucial to further investigate owner’s attitudes to land. Several researchers have emphasised the non-economic values attached to land ownership. Hedin (2003) shows that non-economic values such as attachment to a place and kinship relations are important for understanding landowners’ relationship to the property. The importance of kinship has also been recognised in the field of generational change within farming (Errington & Loble 2002). In their study of Norway, Flemsaeter & Setten (2009) highlight that by studying this close relationship between property and kinship, it is possible to clarify why owners choose not to sell their property. They show that among Norwegian

88 smallholders, there is a strong feeling of responsibility between different generations. In the case of
89 Eastern Europe, these feelings of responsibility towards past and future generations may be
90 reinforced by the historical experiences of loss of land and then restitution. Such historically rooted
91 emotional attachments to land are in focus here. Smith et al. (2009) claim that geographical research
92 has mostly excluded emotional aspects but that there is a growing interest in emotions when dealing
93 with people and place. The absence of research dealing with emotions could be due to the difficulties
94 in defining emotions. In the case of emotional values of land ownership, these values must be
95 understood through the landowner's own experiences.

96   The particular forms of emotional bonds to land that might occur in Estonia and other
97 countries affected by the Soviet collectivisation have rarely been illuminated. One exception is van
98 Dijk (2007), who states that the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe affected the way
99 in which landowners bond with their land in a manner that has made land more emotionally charged
100 than in Western societies. Van Dijk draws the conclusion that absentee owners in Central Europe
101 seem to have a greater propensity for developing emotional bonds to the land. Hedin claims in her
102 study of the Estonian Swedish area that the main difference between Estonian and Swedish owners
103 is that "the economics of land use" is of minor importance for the Swedish owners and that their
104 landowning had more of a symbolic value (Hedin 2005). There are a few other studies that concern
105 Estonia. Research on Estonian forest owners and their objectives with respect to forest ownership
106 shows that economic objectives are the most important but that "emotional and traditional values of
107 forest ownership" was listed as number four out of ten objectives (Järvinen et al. 2003). Jørgensen
108 and Stjernström emphasise that emotional bonds can have an impact on the management of the
109 forest. They argue that these kinds of emotional links could restrict the implementation of modern
110 forestry, since the emotional bonds to land are stronger than the economic motives for land

111 possession (Jørgensen & Stjernström, 2008). Earlier research in Noarootsi shows that landowners
112 view the house as the most significant part of their property (Grubbström 2009). There is a close
113 connection between actual land use and the values and feelings that an owner attaches to land. The
114 garden and the fields close to the house are often more intensively used and may therefore have
115 stronger emotional values attached to them than more extensively used land, for example forest land.

116   A landowner's relationship with a certain place is central to understanding the emotional
117 bonds with land that owners have. Massey considers place to be "formed out of the particular set
118 of social relations which interact at a particular location" (Massey, 2004). Place is seen here as a
119 constant process of change in which social relationships from both past and present are significant.
120 Setten (2005) argues that relationships between different generations create knowledge that bind
121 together the family and create a sense of identity with the land. Tuan writes about "affective
122 bonds" between people and place (Tuan, 1974). An assumption in the present study is that the
123 affective bonds that may evolve can be long-lasting and influence attitudes towards a place and a
124 landowner's decision regarding what to do with the land. The owner's land in Estonia could also
125 be important to the next generation, even if the children were not able to visit it during the Soviet
126 period. In such cases, interaction with the place is indirect and devoid of personal experiences, the
127 result of stable, learnt images of a place (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). In this sense the mental
128 images of a place are important for the emotional bonds that may evolve.

129   The transfer of the land and the conveyance of feelings of attachment to the land from the
130 older to the younger generation can be related to Bourdieu's (1986) different forms of capital. Here,
131 the *economic* capital is the transfer of the property itself. *Cultural* capital is, as Bourdieu emphasises,
132 "invested by the family" in the form of knowledge and values. *Social* capital may be transferred in
133 the form of relationships and contacts. Both cultural and social capital can be converted to economic

134 capital. The last form of capital that could be of relevance for this study is *Symbolic* capital which is
135 the symbolic representation of the other forms of capital.

136   Although earlier research has highlighted non economic values of land ownership, this has
137 rarely been discussed in the context of the post-Soviet countries. There are few studies of the
138 Estonian case and those studies only briefly touch upon the emotional aspects of land ownership.
139 This study aims to deepen the understanding of the emotional bonds to land among landowners who
140 received land through restitution in countries affected by Soviet collectivisation. It also aims to
141 provide further insights into the effects such bonds might have for an area. Since earlier research has
142 emphasised that future planning must take into consideration many different owner profiles, more
143 research is needed to show how attitudes to land might vary between different owner groups and the
144 reasons for these variations. The present study has therefore been designed to investigate
145 landowners' own experiences and thoughts about their land ownership.

146 **4. Study area**

147 A majority of the landowners in Nõva, Noarootsi and Ridala are absentee owners (Table 1). The
148 term 'absentee owner' is used here to describe an owner who does not live in the municipality in
149 which the property is located. The coastal region is an interesting area for study since the demand for
150 land for second homes and other investments in tourism mean that it is under pressure to be
151 exploited.

152   The population in the area has traditionally earned their living from farming and subsidiary
153 occupations such as fishing and shipping. Today, the tradition of family farming is disappearing, and
154 the agriculture that remains consists on the one hand of small plot farms that are mostly cultivated by
155 pensioners and, on the other, large scale farming. According to the agricultural census in 2001, 42
156 percent of the total land area in Läänemaa is used for agriculture and 33 percent consists of forest

157 (Eesti Statistika 21 April 2009). In total only 3 percent of the population in the area declared income
 158 from farming as their major source of income in 2000. The population in the area has rapidly
 159 declined since the mid 20th century. At present, the land ownership pattern in the area is quite
 160 fragmented with many landowners involved. Swedish and Finnish landowners are more strongly
 161 represented in Noarootsi than in Nõva and Ridala (Table 1). Due to their pre-war settlement patterns,
 162 Swedish landowners mostly own properties in villages close to the coast. In most cases, there is no
 163 such historical connection among the Finnish landowners.

164 **Table 1**

(n= 8136)	Same municipality	Another municipality in Estonia	Sweden or Finland
Noarootsi	24	45	31
Ridala	38	59	3
Nõva	39	55	6

165
 166 The place of residence of landowners and their number in percent. The figure is based on the total
 167 number of properties in the municipalities studied.
 168
 169 A great many buildings were destroyed during the Soviet occupation. Nowadays many of the
 170 remaining old houses are used as second homes during the summer season. This coastal area is also
 171 attractive for building second homes. However, the coastal land has partly been designated a nature
 172 reserve with the aim of safeguarding important geological and biological values. This also prevents
 173 new buildings being erected close to the shore, and those who own land in the reserve can only sell it
 174 to the municipality. In order to prevent widespread fragmentation of plots, a restriction on the
 175 minimum size has been introduced. Forests are to be managed according to the forestry management

176 plan, and properties that include cropland must harvest hay once a year and are entitled to EU
177 subsidies for this work. The municipality has set up contact between absentee owners and the local
178 farmers so that the owners can lease out land to active farmers. This makes the conditions for local
179 agriculture more favourable while preventing land becoming overgrown. The area has a tradition of
180 resorts and sanatoria and this kind of resort tourism, combined with nature-oriented tourism with
181 visitors interested in visiting the nature reserves, has a potential in the area.

182 **5. Research methods**

183 This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A postal survey was followed
184 by an interview study. The aims of the postal survey were to investigate the relationship of the
185 owners to their property, as well as current and planned land use. Interviews were used to acquire
186 more personal information about the owners' attitudes towards their property and their ideas about
187 future land use. The interview study was also intended to achieve a better understanding of the
188 landowners' feelings about their land and how these feelings have developed over time.

189 *5.1 Postal survey*

190 The land register from 2005, with data for each land holding and the address of the owner, was
191 acquired from the municipalities studied. Properties over one hectare in size and in private
192 ownership were considered relevant to the survey. A sample of landowners was selected at random
193 and 395 questionnaires were sent out in August 2006. After a reminder, a second questionnaire was
194 sent out five weeks later. The response rate was 36 percent (n=144). Some respondents informed me
195 that they had decided not to participate, and the most common reason was that the owner was
196 deceased, ill or already had transferred the property to the next generation. If a generational shift is
197 in progress and land is in the process of being transferred or has recently been transferred, this may

198 negatively affect the response rate, since the ownership situation may be unclear. An additional
199 reason for the rather low response rate could be the scepticism towards authorities in Estonia
200 (Jørgensen & Stjernström, 2009). This argument is supported by the fact that the response rate
201 among owners living in Sweden or Finland was higher (51 percent).

202   The respondents were evenly distributed among men and women, 50 percent of each sex.
203 The mean age of the respondents was 59 years. Almost 39 percent of the respondents were 65 years
204 or older. It is to be expected that many of the owners who acquired a property through restitution are
205 relatively old. As many as 46 percent of the respondents are pensioners, and it is likely that this
206 group had more time to fill in the questionnaire compared to other groups and is therefore
207 overrepresented in the response group. Data was analysed with respect to the landowner's place of
208 residence. For purposes of comparison three groups of landowners were identified: owners living in
209 the same municipality, owners from other municipalities in Estonia, and owners from Sweden and
210 Finland. Since Finnish landowners are a minority of the group referred to as landowners from
211 Sweden and Finland, this group mostly represent Swedish landowners. A comparison between the
212 respondents and the total number of landowners in the land registers shows that relatively few of
213 those who have a property in Noarootsi but live in another municipality in Estonia responded to the
214 questionnaire. The landowners that have a property in Noarootsi but live in Sweden or Finland are
215 overrepresented. Other groups of landowners are quite representative among the respondents.

216 5.2 Interviews

217 An important point of departure is that the history of the property and of the family who owned or
218 cultivated the land is crucial for understanding the landowner's relationship to the land. The
219 interviews were designed as *topical life stories*, a concept used by Riley and Harvey where the focus
220 lies on one aspect of a person's life (Riley & Harvey, 2007) – in this case on the relationship to the

221 property in Estonia. This topic is bound up with personal and family histories. A family history can
222 reveal relationships to the land in question and provide some insight into people's reaction to
223 political changes in a broader perspective. The interviews can also present a more nuanced picture of
224 the experiences of land ownership among different types of landowners.

225   The interviewees were selected from among those who had responded to the survey, and the
226 intention was to meet landowners from different areas, of different ages and of different genders.
227 Nine semi-structured interviews were held in 2008, and an additional short telephone interview was
228 conducted with a young landowner who lives in Sweden and owns land in Nõva. Four of the
229 interviewees were women and six men, and the interviews in Estonia required an interpreter. Three
230 of the landowners interviewed lived in the vicinity of Stockholm and owned land in Ridala and
231 Noarootsi. Three local owners from Noarootsi were also interviewed. Lastly interviews were
232 conducted with three owners who lived in Tallinn and owned land in Ridala. I have also used some
233 information from an interview study in 2006, conducted with eight local farmers in Noarootsi, and
234 two interviews with large-scale farmers in Noarootsi in 2009. It is quite possible that the emotional
235 values are stronger among the group studied than among owners in general, since those who are
236 emotionally attached to their property may be more predisposed to accept a request for participating
237 in the study.

238 **6. Different ways of and reasons for acquiring land**

239 Restitution, inheritance or gift imply rather passive ways of acquiring land, but landowners who
240 have obtained land in these ways are those who are the most likely to want to re-establish links to
241 family tradition and history. Buying land is a more active way of acquiring a property, but these
242 landowners more often have a weaker emotional bond to their land (van Dijk, 2007). It is clear that a
243 larger proportion of the landowners who live in the same municipality and in Sweden have acquired

land through restitution or a combination including restitution compared to landowners living in another municipality. All landowners who acquired land through purchase or auction, within the group of landowners from Sweden or Finland, are respondents from Finland (Table 2).

Table 2

(n=144)	Same municipality	Another municipality in Estonia	Sweden or Finland	Total
Restitution	24	16	12	52
Combination including restitution	4	3	7	14
Inheritance or gift	5	18	10	25
First refusal	11	6	0	17
Purchase or/and auction	7	14	4	25
Other combinations	1	1	1	3
Total	52	58	34	144

Local and absentee owners' ways of acquiring land. The figures refer to property number one, the land first acquired by the owner.

The reason for acquiring the land provides significant information on how the owner values the land and is a measure of the relationship between economic and non-economic values. The respondents were asked how they valued a number of motives by assigning them a value from 1–5, where 1 was the most important (Table 3). Figures show that regaining family property is the most important motive for the owners. Access to a second home is also of great importance, which reflects the attractiveness of the coastal area. In third place comes re-establishing contact with the family's home district. This shows that emotional, non-economic values are of considerable importance for a large part of the landowning group.

261

262 **Table 3**

	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	1=most important
Regain family property	100	1.95	1.438	58%
Access to second home	88	2.23	1.491	48%
Re-establish contact with the family's home district	86	2.43	1.642	44%
Access to wood	100	2.49	1.521	37%
Access to arable land for own use	95	3.0	1.624	25%
Possibility of income	87	3.13	1.500	22%

263 The importance of motives for acquiring the property. Figures show the number of respondents who
264 have selected a specific motive, the mean value for how the respondents have valued each motive (1
265 = most important, 5 = not at all important), the standard deviation, and the percentage of respondents
266 who selected value 1 for each motive.

267

268 The three different groups of landowners valued their motives for acquiring land quite differently if
269 the mean values for their motives are compared (Table 4). Regaining family property is more
270 important for landowners living in Sweden or Finland and for those living in the same municipality
271 compared to landowners from other municipalities. The link between family and land seems to be of
272 great significance to those who have historical connections to the area. As one Swedish owner
273 expressed it: “When it became possible to apply for the land, it felt completely natural to connect
274 with our roots. We wanted to own it again; no-one else should take it over”. As Hedin (2003) claims,
275 the most important thing was to once again own family land; deciding what to do with it was of
276 secondary importance.

277

278

279 **Table 4**

	Same municipality	Another municipality in Estonia	Sweden or Finland	Number
Regain family property	1,8	2,32	1,6	100
Access to second home	2,74	1,9	2,3	88
Re-establish contact with the family's home district	2,52	2,76	1,88	86
Access to wood	1,48	2,58	4,45	100
Access to arable land for own use	1,95	3,16	4,57	95
Possibility of income	2,57	2,92	4,18	87

280

281 The importance of motives for acquiring the property. Figures show the mean values for different

282 owner categories: 1 = most important, 5 = of no importance.

283

284 Land forms to only a minor extent the basis of the owner's income. Overall, ten respondents stated

285 that their property contributed to their individual livelihoods. Generally, economic reasons are more

286 important for owners living in Estonia compared to owners from Sweden and Finland. Only one of

287 the landowners living abroad stressed that income was a crucial factor in the decision to acquire the

288 land. Access to a second home is most important for absentee owners in Estonia. Not surprisingly,

289 access to wood or access to arable land for their own use was most important for the owners living in

290 the same municipality. These results in some respects correlate with the arguments presented by

291 Hedin that family tradition was important for both landowners living abroad and landowners living

292 in Estonia (Hedin, 2005). However, the present study's distinction between the two groups of

293 Estonian owners indicates that local owners have the most varied motives for acquiring land.

294 Compared to owners living in other municipalities in Estonia, they are more dependent on their

295 property to make a living and, at the same time, attach greater importance to emotional aspects such

296 as regaining family property.

297 **7. Attitudes to land and land use**

298 As many as 73 percent of the landowners living abroad spend less than two weeks per year or no
299 time at all on their property. The corresponding figure for landowners living in another municipality
300 in Estonia is 47 percent. One important explanation for this is that only 36 percent of the landowners
301 living abroad and 67 percent of the landowners living in another municipality have a house on the
302 property. The standard of the houses can be quite simple, thus limiting their opportunities and
303 willingness to stay overnight. In total 67 of the respondents wanted to spend more time on their land.

304 Owners' descriptions of land use provides important information about how different
305 owners value land. Respondents were asked whether the agricultural land is tilled or if the forest is
306 managed. They also answered questions on other possible uses of the land, for example hunting and
307 picking berries. Regular visits where the main purpose of the visit is social are thus not regarded as
308 land use. Arable land is, not surprisingly, most actively used by the local owners. The postal survey
309 also shows that it is mostly Estonian owners who lease out their land. However, large scale farmers
310 in Noarootsi claim that quite a large part of their land is leased from Swedish owners. One of the
311 local owners leases land for pasture and she says that the neighbours view this positively. "My
312 neighbours come and ask if I can bring my horses. They say that the horses can graze there and I can
313 also make hay". Landowners lease out land for free since it is important for them to take care of
314 family land and prevent land becoming overgrown. One large scale farmer estimates that he only
315 pays rent to 10 percent of the landowners from whom he leases land. Compared to arable land, forest
316 land is more easily managed by absentee owners, which explains why a relatively large number of
317 owners living in other municipalities in Estonia stated that they use the forest and that their earnings
318 from forestry are important. Access to wood is also the third most important motive for acquiring the
319 property for this group of owners (Table 4). Absentee owners living in Estonia use their forests for

320 picking berries and mushrooms and sometimes use land for growing vegetables and potatoes. In this
321 way, the land provides additional economic value but interviews indicate that the main motive is the
322 opportunity to eat home-grown, clean food that is free from chemicals.

323   The earlier findings of Hedin (2003), that few landowners living abroad have done
324 anything with their property, are still valid. Only approximately 2 percent of the owners living in
325 Sweden or Finland have reported any form of land use in their response to the survey. Even if the
326 land is not actively used, ownership can still be important. As one landowner from Sweden explains:
327 “Owning it means that no one can destroy it or start building something offensive on it”. Ownership
328 is looked upon as a way to prevent the area being developed in a way that the owner would oppose.
329 However, this attitude contributes to the fact that the land has become overgrown, something that
330 several of the interviewees look negatively upon. Local owners are affected by this visually, and
331 stated that the ideal for “a real farm” is that it should be active. Earlier research has shown that rural
332 residents with a strong emotional attachment to a place are more positive towards getting involved in
333 landscape preservation, such as farmland protection (Walker & Ryan, 2008). Local owners also
334 mentioned that the overgrown landscape may result in tourists being less attracted to the area. Few
335 landowners see the opportunity to develop tourism as viable on their own properties. All in all, 62
336 owners (n= 92) consider that their own property has no potential for generating income through
337 tourism or cottage rental. Only 15 landowners describe the potential in this area as being very great
338 or great, and these are mostly owners from coastal villages.

339

340

341

342

343 **Figure 2.**

Figure 2. A dilapidated cowshed with a renovated residential building just visible behind. Photo by the author, Noarootsi 2009.

344

345 A dilapidated cowshed with a renovated residential building just visible behind. Photo by the author,
346 Noarootsi 2009.

347 A possible means of income would be to partition and sell the land. However, the most important

348 reason for partitioning the property for second homes is consideration for future generations, and

349 hence partitioning for family use. Re-establishing contact with the family's home district is also

350 important. Owners living in another municipality in Estonia are also interested in possibly setting up

351 home there in the future. The respondents who are positive towards partitioning for second homes

352 seem to value non-economic motives, such as access to the countryside, more highly than economic

353 motives, and there are no differences between owners of properties in coastal villages and owners in

354 other villages. Owners with strong emotional bonds to the property do not seem to think that the
355 location and the size of the property are important in terms of the decision to sell or keep the
356 property. However, some owners of large properties say that they could envisage selling off land to
357 which they are less emotionally attached, for example forest. In conclusion, it is clear that emotional
358 aspects override economic considerations for most of the landowners.

359 **8. The legacy of emotions and its impact on future plans**

360 Evidence from the interviews shows that the content as well as the effects of the emotional
361 attachment to land differs to some extent between the three owner groups studied and between
362 different generations. It should be clarified that the following discussion mainly concerns owners of
363 restituted or inherited property.

364 *8.1 The foundations of the emotional ties to land*

365 The interwar period with private family farms was seen as an ideal and, as Unwin expresses it, “all
366 led to a conceptualisation of the Soviet occupation embodying the destructing of Estonia’s rural
367 identity” (Unwin, 1997). The interviewed landowners explain how their parents or grandparents
368 became freeholders and subsequently built up a family farm. This process involved a great deal of
369 work and was often accompanied by a sense of pride. The Estonian Swedes talk about the frustration
370 that their parents felt when they had to leave everything behind. The Estonians recount that their
371 parents rarely spoke about the farm they owned or the possibility of nationalised properties once
372 again being in private possession. The reasons for this were fear of being reported to the communist
373 regime and the loss being connected with so much hurt and anger that it was best not to talk about it.
374 As one local landowner recalls: “We were not allowed to control the land we formerly owned. You
375 weren’t allowed to do this openly, but my father did note what happened to our land and when he
376 had been drinking he became angry and when he was at home he could say that now they are cutting

377 down trees on our land.” Hence, children were aware of the despair that their parents felt about the
378 nationalisation of land, even if it was rarely mentioned. This awareness seems to be significant for
379 the feelings they developed as adults towards the land and how they felt about the opportunity of
380 reclaiming it through restitution.

381   Not only material losses have implications for people’s attachment to land. The destiny of
382 the people who lived on the land is also an important factor. The Second World War meant arrests,
383 deportations and mobilisations, which resulted in families being scattered to the winds. Almost all
384 families were affected directly or indirectly by such acts. Family memories and experiences might be
385 closely connected to the house and the land where the family had lived. Land, and houses in
386 particular, therefore becomes a symbol of family history and in that way symbolic capital in the
387 transfer process.

388 *8.2 Memories of and experiences on the land*

389 According to the interviewed absentee owners, memories and events that can link the owner with the
390 land are essential. However, there are differences between absentee owner groups and different
391 generations. The Tallinn-resident owners point out that social capital as contact with family,
392 relatives and friends who live in the area or spend time there during holidays and at weekends has
393 significance for their attachment to the area. It is also clear that childhood memories are important.
394 One of them spent time at his grandmother’s farm as a child: “...childhood memories play an
395 important role...We were all there and there were a lot of people and it was so much fun when we
396 made hay. I have great memories from that time”. In contrast to owners from Sweden and Finland,
397 such memories from the Soviet period are likely to be found among a majority of the Estonian
398 absentees who obtained their land through restitution or inheritance.

399   The older generation of landowners from Sweden has their own relationship to and
400 experiences from the time they lived on the land in Estonia. A woman who lives in Sweden and has
401 no memories from Estonia explains the difference between her own feelings and the feelings that her
402 older brothers have towards selling the property. Her brothers have memories from their childhood
403 in Estonia: “I thought we should try to make as much money as possible ... I think they are more
404 careful in a way. They have emotional bonds in another way. They want to sell but can’t bring
405 themselves to do it”. The quote highlights that emotions can act as a constraint, prohibiting the sale
406 of the property. It is common with shared ownership among the owners living in Sweden or Finland,
407 the survey shows that 70 percent share the property with other family members or relatives. The
408 corresponding figure for the owners living in another municipality in Estonia is 34 percent, and only
409 25 percent of the local owners shared the ownership of the property with someone else. For Swedish
410 owners it seems like shared owning was a first step and that prior to the next generational shift, they
411 tend to partition the property more often. Shared ownership could be a source of conflict and prevent
412 owners from selling or subdividing land, since all owners must come to an agreement.

413   The younger generation in Sweden was long told stories about Estonia by parents and
414 relatives. “My mother was a wonderful storyteller... I knew all about her life, as much as she could
415 remember, about all our relatives, everything that happened ...”. These stories were often the only
416 connection to the land that they had during the first part of the Soviet occupation. From these stories
417 the children constructed mental images about family land in Estonia. During the last twenty years of
418 the occupation it was possible to visit Estonia, although there were tight restrictions. Those who
419 went back during the Soviet era brought back information about family land and relatives that was
420 important for the part of the family who lived in Sweden. This is example of how social relationships
421 and contacts could be upheld and transferred to the younger generation.

422 Independence and the restitution process drastically changed the situation for the Swedish
423 owners with respect to their relationship with Estonia. It was once again possible to own family land,
424 travel to Estonia, and keep in touch with Estonian relatives and friends. As one young landowner
425 from Sweden expressed it: “When Estonia became independent, it meant a new start for my father”.
426 He describes how his father started to tell more stories about his childhood in Estonia and how this
427 also had an impact on his own interest in the family’s links with the country: “it was a new start for
428 me as well”. This young landowner is an example of how cultural capital in the form of knowledge
429 and feelings towards the property has been transferred to the second generation. His mental image of
430 the place has now been supplemented with his own experiences from trips to Estonia. Those who
431 visit their family land and remaining relatives often find this a potent emotional experience. They
432 can compare their childhood memories, or the mental image they constructed from the stories they
433 were told, with reality. Interviewees describe the discrepancy between these two images. The
434 overgrown landscape, the decline in population and the fact that so many houses have disappeared
435 are features that they mention.

436 *8.3 Future generations, expectations and hopes*

437 The interviewed absentee owners are not interested in living permanently on their land. Those who
438 live in Tallinn want to maintain their comfortable life in the city. However, it is of great importance
439 to keep their property – as one of them said, “We will never sell this property.” Granberg (2004)
440 emphasises that the property can be seen as a link to their country roots while they enjoy a modern
441 life in the city. By keeping the land, these links can be upheld and possibly also strengthened in the
442 future. Such plans for the future can include a desire for children and grandchildren to spend time on
443 the property and build houses there. Several of the absentee owners interviewed had plans to build
444 second homes that had not yet been realised. Emotional bonds to the land among the older

445 generation sometimes create expectations for the next generation. As one of the landowners from
446 Sweden interviewed expresses it: “They know that I would like them to live on the land in the
447 village where our ancestors worked so hard. I think they will take up that tradition, when time allows
448 it, eventually, maybe”. This landowner had already transferred his land to the next generation.
449 However, the above quotation also shows that he has transferred other cultural values – in the form
450 of a strong desire for his children to use the family land and honour traditions. It also shows the
451 feeling of uncertainty about whether or not his expectations will be fulfilled. This is something that
452 other interviewees also mention, and they are aware that the younger generation has a complicated
453 ‘life balance’ to maintain. One landowner from Tallinn explained why their son has not yet realised
454 his plans of a second home on the property: “ He always has great plans where this is concerned, but
455 he has so little time since he has to travel a lot with his work and he also has children who take up
456 his time”. It is not easy to find the time to take care of family land and Van Dijk claims that the
457 younger generation of landowners will probably not be so interested in owning a plot, and
458 consequently a considerable portion of the absentees’ landholdings will be put up for sale (van Dijk,
459 2003). I would argue that, compared to the owners in Sweden and Finland, it seems much more
460 likely that the next generation of owners living in other parts of Estonia will spend time on their
461 family land and may even build second homes. This is, of course, simply a consequence of the fact
462 that the land is closer and easier to visit. However, it should be emphasised that childhood memories
463 and regular visits are factors that can strengthen feelings for family properties, and therefore the will
464 to keep and use the land.

465 **9. Concluding discussion**

466 This investigation of landowner’s attitudes to their land in North West Estonia adds to previous
467 research by examining the emotional bonds to land in a post-Soviet context, which previous research

468 only briefly touched on. One main finding is that the studied landowners generally attach strong
469 emotional values to land, for historical reasons, and that such values are a strong incentive for
470 keeping the property. Earlier research has highlighted the absentee owner's emphasis on the non-
471 economic values of land in contrast to local owners. This study shows that owners who obtained
472 their property through restitution generally seem to have a greater propensity for historically rooted
473 emotional attachment to land, and that this group of owners is most likely to be found among local
474 owners and those who live in Sweden. The thinking behind the emotional motives for obtaining land
475 can be summarised in three main points.

476   *Firstly* the loss of the land that parents or grandparents purchased at the end of 19th century
477 or were assigned as a land reform farm in 1919. How this loss, as a result of the Soviet annexation in
478 1940, was experienced is crucial for the development of strong feelings for land. The *second* aspect
479 is the idea that the land represents the roots of the family, thus making it important to regain family
480 land irrespective of its size and the location. The *third* aspect has to do with memories of the land
481 and the area in general. In a comparative perspective, those with their own memories of family land
482 have a greater propensity to develop strong emotional bonds with the land than those who only have
483 mental images of it based on stories told by parents and other relatives. Emotional attachment to land
484 also seems closely intertwined with the memories of the individuals who used to live on the land.
485 The first aspect concerning the experience of losing property during Soviet rule is specific to Eastern
486 Europe and can strengthen the value that landowners place on other aspects as well. The link
487 between different generations and family land that has been described by Setten (2005) for example
488 may therefore be enhanced.

489   Interviews show that parents, in addition to economic assets, often want to pass on emotional
490 values associated with land to the next generation. This is in line with Bourdieu's (1986) ideas about

491 different forms of capital within transmission. This transfer of capital could be discussed in terms of
492 *cultural* capital as knowledge about the land and the family history associated with the property.
493 Cultural capital also includes values that are passed on with the expectation that the younger
494 generation will continue to own and manage the land of their ancestors. The *social* capital is
495 transferred in the form of relationships and contacts with friends and relatives who live in the area
496 where the land is situated. The property becomes a *symbolic* representation of family memories and
497 experiences – a symbol of family tradition and history.

498   The results from this analysis also contribute to previous research by examining different
499 owner groups and the implications of emotional bonds to land. One key finding is that the non-
500 economic motives for owning land in the area seem to override the economic ones for most of the
501 owners investigated. Emotional values also appear to govern owners' decisions about land to a great
502 extent. However, economic motives are more important for owners living in Estonia than for owners
503 from Sweden and Finland, even though few make a living out of their land. Local owners were more
504 resolute than the other owner groups with respect to the importance of actively using land. One
505 strategy was to rent out land, sometimes even free of charge, if they were not able to use land by
506 themselves. An important result, in line with Hedin's research from the beginning of the 2000s, is
507 that very few of the owners settled in Sweden and Finland use the land at all. They also spend very
508 little time on their land, which is the case for a great number of the absentees living in Estonia as
509 well. Staehr claims that this shows that the owners are not interested in the property (Staehr 2004).
510 The present study indicates that it might instead be justifiable to speak of a kind of *preventive land*
511 *ownership*, intended to make sure that nothing happens to the land to which the owner would object.
512 It is also a result of the uncertainty that many owners feel about the future. They do not use their
513 land, but if they have emotional bonds to the property, they want to make sure that the land remains

514 in the family's ownership in case someone takes an interest in using it. One explanation for this *non-*
515 *active land ownership* among Swedish owners is that a majority share ownership with another
516 person, which in some cases makes it difficult to reach an agreement about land use or sale. The
517 discrepancy between the images of the land based on memory or mental images on the one hand and
518 reality on the other is also an important reason why many of the landowners interviewed do not
519 spend that much time on their property and have never realised plans of building a second home
520 there. This, along with the sometimes considerable distance between the respondent's home and the
521 restituted property, and lack of time, probably explains why many properties remain unused.
522 Another effect of emotional bonds is that relatively few owners are interested in partitioning the
523 property, especially if this means putting parts of it up for sale.

524   What do these results imply for the study area? Despite the land management policies and
525 that some owners lease out land to active farmers, the overgrown landscape seems to be a problem.
526 Non-active land ownership affects the landscape and visitors' impressions of the area. This is
527 especially relevant in Noarootsi, which has a considerable group of non-active landowners from
528 Sweden who own properties located in coastal villages. Strong emotional bonds can act as a
529 constraint to sale and with such bonds existing in a large group of landowners it means that land in
530 the area that has potential for tourism has actually been taken off the market. If few properties are
531 put up for sale, the predominance of an elderly population is likely to continue. Furthermore, the
532 level of service in the area studied will not improve and the kind of tourism that requires a high
533 standard of food and accommodation will not be attracted to the area. However, there are already
534 signs that the ongoing generational shift will lead to greater willingness to sell off land. Bourdieu's
535 view of capital as convertible could in this context be used to show how the importance of social and
536 cultural capital could decline and be converted to economic considerations. If the younger generation

537 does not form a close relationship with the land they own, most of them will not experience the same
 538 emotional attachment to it as their parents have experienced. However, it is also possible that
 539 absentee owners from other parts of Estonia will use their land more actively, most likely for second
 540 homes or perhaps as a permanent home when they retire. It is essential for contemporary
 541 policymakers to take into account the different profiles of private landowners. This knowledge may
 542 in turn have an impact on the kinds of plans and investments that are regarded as suitable for a
 543 specific area.

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