39 Popolations around the Baltic Sea

Marina Thorborg

1. Migrations in the Baltic region in history

In a historic context rivers, seas and lakes were usually seen as something that bound peoples together instead of dividing them as water transport from earliest times onwards was the superior means of communication. Hence for example Sweden's proto-history began by its expansion Eastwards from the Western side of the Baltic Sea, while at a much later date Northward exploration along both sides of the Baltic Sea began in earnest. Throughout its long and varied formation period the history of the Muscovite empire was characterized by a movement towards the sea and particularly the Baltic sea. In addition to these long-term developments around the Baltic Sea from what was later to become the German Reich there was an expansion of Germanic influence and colonization along the South-Eastern shores of the Baltic sea. This meant that the diverse peoples already inhabiting these coasts were either successfully resisting invasion and expanding as the Poles and the Lithuanians at times managed to do, or conquered and subjugated as was more often the lot of other Balts and the Estonians.

Figure 132. Teutonic Knights' strongholds symbolize the former power of crusaders. In the late 14th century, the German order controlled a considerable part of the Baltic coasts (including Gotland). Photo: Katarzyna Skalska

Because of these long-term historical trends diversity is what characterizes the populations around the Baltic Sea. Diversity in relation to background, history, languages, culture and religion. Recent history has left layers of population around the Baltic rim as latter day relics from earlier periods. Swedes are scattered on islands along the Baltic coast far into the Finnish Bay on its Northern shore and also on its Southern side and until quite recently well into the Bay of Riga, mixing with the Estonian population that earlier inhabited most of the land between the Baltic Sea and what is now Moscow, while to the North of it were Finnish speaking populations and South of this area Lithuanians dominated and at times their influence stretched all the way to the Black Sea.

2. Religion and migration

The Teutonic Order, a German order of crusaders, left a landlord class and a trading class as part of an urban population, meaning for example that Riga through much of its history was a cosmopolitan city, while for a 300 year period the Hanseatic cities of Königsberg, (now Kaliningrad), Danzig, (Gdańsk), Tallinn, (Reval), Visby, and Kalmar were dominated by German-speaking populations. Through Russian expansion layers of Slavs were added to the Germans and Swedes already there. Slavs not only made their imprint on the Southeastern shores of the Baltic Sea as rulers, military and police, but in order to practice their religion freely a Slave population of Old Believers settled in the Baltic interior in what is now Latgale. The Poles on the Southern shores of the Baltic Sea were at times in alliance with the Swedes and the Lithuanians and at other times were fighting off invasions from Sweden as well as from neighboring Germans and Russians. Being annihilated 3 times throughout its history as a nation state through unfriendly alliances between its neighbors a Polish nation managed to survive mainly through its strong culture, language, and religion.

Religion can be a uniting factor for a nation but can also work the other way. When for example, Sweden in the 17th century, being fervently protestant, took over Ingermanland and Karelia Orthodox believers fled to Russia, hence adding to the kaleidoscope of peoples around the Baltic Sea. In 1809 Sweden lost its Eastern part, Finland, after 700 years of colonization, but left a Swedish speaking population in the archipelago and in the upper class. Many historic researchers would today argue that Finland as a separate and respected part of the Russian empire experienced more freedom than under Swedish tutelage.

3. Population losses and population mixtures

Sweden as a nation during almost one generation – from the severe famine years in the mid-1860s to 1904 when a war with the formal union partner Norway was threatening – lost up to a quarter of its population, well over one million out of four left the country, through emigration mainly over the Atlantic.

What Sweden lost was mainly its dispossessed population, the landless, moving out to promised land in the West, some of it later returning with new skills. Hence when Sweden industrialized from 1860s and onwards, because there was no surplus of population the Swedish trade union movement could develop more along American than British lines, meaning that the Swedish unions were not out to save jobs as a first priority, but viewed positively new techniques including labor-saving devices, which in the long run served Sweden well.

Neither population nor language was viewed as threatened in Sweden by either the loss of Finland or loss of a quarter of its population to emigration. This was not the case on the other side of the Baltic Sea, with much smaller margins in both cases. Some theories maintain that when either a language or a population is coming closer to what many of its representatives see as the road leading towards extinction, then certain survival reactions set in, which is how these theories, questioned by many, would explain the policy on language and citizenship in Estonia and Latvia today, where both national capitals have long multilinguistic histories.

In Lithuania – never threatened in the same way either in regard to population or language – its capital Vilnius in the 19th century was referred to as the Jerusalem of Lithuania with the

Jewish population being the single largest group around the turn of the last century, making up over 40% of all, while the Poles made up 30% and the Russians 20%. Though under the Russian Empire the Polish influence was so great that many of those registered as Poles were Lithuanians with Polish as their mother tongue, while those with Lithuanian as their first language only made up 2% of the Vilnius residents. Hence the capitals in the Baltic Sea region have, throughout their history, experienced a multitude of peoples and languages, while the countryside was always dominated more by local people and idioms.

4. Migrations caused by the Second World War

In recent history during and after the Second World War, states, borders and populations were moved. The Soviet Union managed illegally, in the secret additional clause in the protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Nazi-Germany and the Soviet Union, to annex the three independent, Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It also managed to move the Eastern border of Poland 200 kms to the West by taking over Galicia, areas that earlier belonged to the Habsburg empire.

During this war Belarus lost a quarter of its population, which proportionally was a higher loss than in any other country. On the other hand the Soviet Union lost around 20 million people, which was more people than any other country. Though according to recent research after the opening of Soviet archives of the secret police, NKVD, KGB, almost as many Soviet subjects, 20 million, perished in peacetime between the two world wars in mass killings and deportations by the Soviet state. Sometimes deportations of whole populations occurred, such as the Crimean Tartars, being exposed to the wrath of Stalin, the Soviet dictator 1924-1953, as a latter-day revenge for their burning of Moscow in 1571.

In the Baltic states about one tenth of the population was deported to slave-labor camps in Siberia or Arctic Russia, or died on the way to it in unheated railway wagons made for cattle.

A quarter of a million Poles from the areas annexed by the Soviet Union from Poland in September 1939 were deported. Of these 66,000 Poles were sent to the dry steppes of Kazakhstan against their will and knowledge, 78,000 Poles were forcibly removed to the Soviet Far East and remote Northern regions, and the remaining 139,000 Poles were sent to Siberia. Of these latter 139,000 only 33,000 were men above age 18 many being old and sick, the remaining 106,000 Poles were women and children.

As has recently been acknowledged by Russia a whole corps of Polish officers and police were shot at Katyn and elsewhere, about 5000 of them, while altogether 21,857 prisoners-of-war were shot (according to the Soviet historian A. Shelepin), while their families were simultaneously deported in a carefully planned operation to Kazakhstan for 10 years. After the Second World War up to 40% of the pre-war population of the areas annexed from Poland by the Soviet Union was missing. Apart from these forced population movements, further deportations took place in Poland in 1944-1945.

In the planned genocide against Jews by Nazi-Germany, of the 6 million Jews killed by the end of the Second World War only 5% came from North and Western Europe, the majority coming from Eastern and Central Europe, and most were killed in Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Rumania, Belarus, the Baltic states and Germany, in that order. Of the quarter of a million Jews living in the Baltic states – 150-200,000 in Lithuania, 93,000 in Latvia, and less than 5,000 in Estonia in 1939 – only 10,000 survived the Holocaust.

A still debated and sensitive question is how much popular support the Nazi killing of Jews received in Eastern Europe. This has been particularly discussed in relation to the Baltic states as they were in the unique situation of being occupied by both sides during the Second World War. After being through the horror of Soviet occupation and terror initially the German invaders were greeted as liberators, which also happened in all areas that had been exposed to the terrors of the Soviet state. In 1943 over one million former Soviet citizens were cooperating with the Germans.

Another earlier and not so openly discussed question was the fate of the Germans that – since the Slavs were at the Elbe river about 500 A.D. – have for centuries been moving Eastwards, either fleeing religious persecution or by being invited as colonists. The Germans were disproportionately large both among the landowning class and the intellectual elite in their adopted countries. In the Baltic states tens of thousands of Germans, who had settled there from the period of the Teutonic Order and onwards mostly belonging to the landlord class were retreating at the end of the war with the German army. In the same way anything from several 100,000 up to a million German-speaking citizens of former Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, and the USSR who had managed to flee West with the German army were then repatriated, and later deported as forced labor and sent to the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union about 400,000 Volga-Germans were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Throughout Eastern Europe a German-speaking population of 13-15 million fled or were driven out by the Soviet army, while simultaneously the same army was the unlikely savior of those Jews having survived the Holocaust. About 7 million Germans fled from Prussia, Brandenburg, and Poznań, while Czechoslovakia expelled 3 million Germans from Sudetenland and these 10 million Germans did not return. However, some of these Germans fleeing were quite recent settlers. For example, from the mid-1880s under Bismarck, the German Chancellor, in his "Kulturkampf" (cultural fight) against Catholics and in the German "struggle for soil" in East Prussia, the German authorities had resettled up to 120,000 Germans on former Polish estates by the outbreak of the First World War. Simultaneously 30,000 Poles and Jews, mainly seasonal workers, had been expelled from Prussia.

In the Second World War educated guesses estimated that Poland lost 20% of its population, the Baltic states 9%, the Soviet Union 9% if those perished in Stalin's labor camps and prisons are included, and Germany 5%.

The period from the end of the Second World War until today can best be described as a westward movement of people. From deportees who survived managing to return home from Kazakhstan, Siberia and the Soviet Far East, to refugees fleeing the Soviet Union from Pechenga by the Norwegian border in the North to the Black Sea in the South. In addition people were voting with their feet and whenever possible leaving the countries under Soviet domination. As Finland had to deliver back refugees to the Soviet Union for geopolitical reasons, Sweden got wave after wave of refugees after the Second World War with Estonians, Latvians, Karelians, Ingrian Finns, Russians, Hungarians, Poles, East-Germans and also Rumanians.

Simultaneously the Soviet Union carried out its own policy of Sovietization in the newly conquered areas. The first measure had been deportations of indigenous people to the East, next was movement of Russians to the West. This program was accelerated by the building of a military-industrial complex in the more industrialized parts of the conquered areas from the 1960s onwards. This meant that Estonia and Latvia experienced a heavy influx of Russians, so much so that after Malaysia, no other countries have a larger proportion of foreigners. While this westward movement continues in Russia with, for example, more than

1.2 million Russians having left for the USA during the last 10 years Russia itself has in the meantime received over 20 million of its citizens fleeing civil unrest in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and elsewhere after becoming foreigners in states they grew in and saw as part of their own country. Similarly Russians in the Baltic states were suddenly living abroad and all that they took for granted was questioned. Their language and citizenship was suddenly invalid and out in the open belonging to a state structure that was dissolved, the Soviet Union.

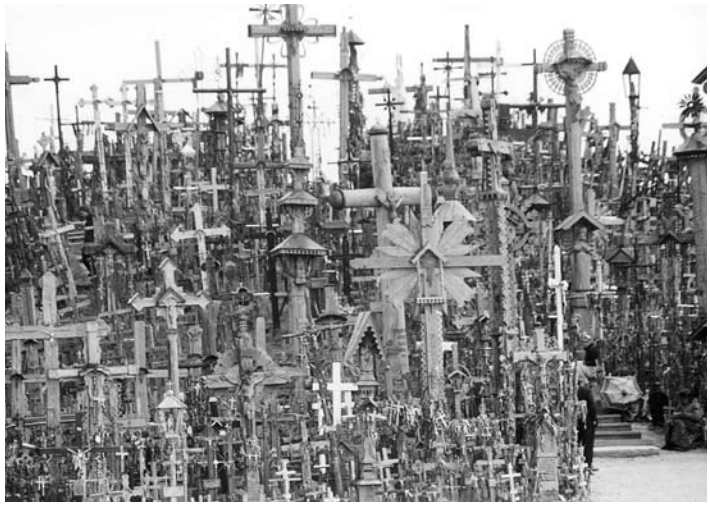


Figure 133. Hill of the Crosses, in Siaulai, Lithuania, symbolizes the martyrdom of the Baltic people. Photo: Alfred F. Majewicz

Although wide differences existed in languages and peoples around the Baltic Sea, however, greater similarities can be observed in regard to demographic development.

5. Demographic development

During the second part of the last century the population development in the Soviet Union was quite similar to that of Scandinavia with a high life expectancy, women living more than half a dozen years longer than men, low and falling birth and death rates and hence decreasing fertility rates combined with falling infant mortality rates and a population growth hovering around the replacement level of 2.1 for most of the period. (See tables 21-25 and chap. 40 by Gaiane Safarova on Population and living standards, table 28 and for basic definitions of terminology on population see the same chapter)

Further a high level of urbanization, industrialization, education and a high proportion of women in the labor market made Scandinavia and the European part of the Soviet Union look alike, except for Lithuania that like Poland had a Catholic population, with higher population growth and a large agrarian sector that usually reflected an earlier stage of demographic and economic development.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 there followed not only great demographic changes but also changes in calculation methods, thereby blurring the lines between real changes and changes due to new ways of measuring.

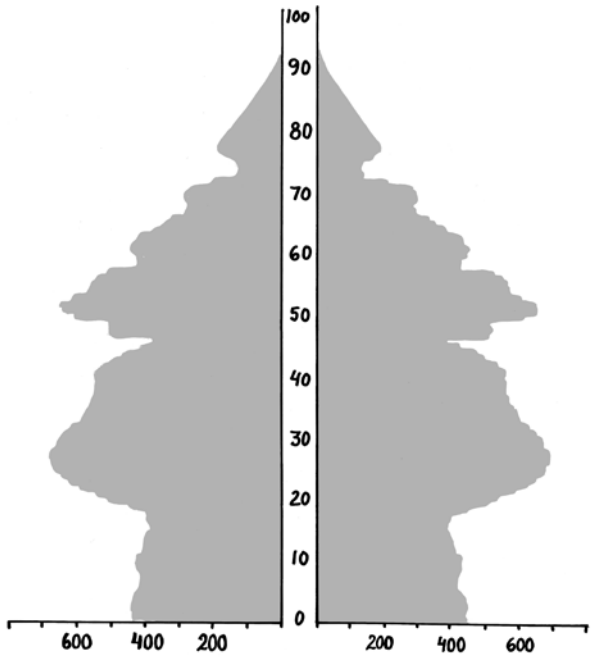


Figure 134. The age distribution of the German population mirrors the history of the country. The decrease in birth rates during the two world wars is shown as a narrowing of the pyramid around 74 and 45 years of age. A surplus of women from age 60 and upwards is due to the loss of men in the Second World War. The pyramid looks rather like a tree. Only since 1970 are the birth and death rates in western Germany on a level, around 11 per 1000 inhabitants

Table 21. Population in states around the Baltic Sea in millions, selected years

Year / Country	1963-68	1973-78	1980	1991	1999
Estonia	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.4
Latvia	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.4
Lithuania	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.6
USSR*		261		292	
Russ.Fed.**	124	134	139	149	146-7
Belarus**				10.3	10.3-4
Poland	31.5	34	35.6	38.2	38.6
Germany	75.6	78.7	78.3	80.1	82
Finland	4.6	4.7	4.8	5	5.1
Denmark	4.6	5.1	5.1	5.2	5.3
Sweden	7.7	8.2	8.3	8.6	8.9

Sources: World Bank, World Development Report, (hereafter WDR) 1980, and 2000/2001,
World Bank, Social Indicators of Development, (hereafter SID) 1993,
Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Statistical Yearbook of Latvia, (hereafter SYLa) 1999,
Statistikos Departamentas, Statistical Yearbook of Lithuania, (hereafter SYLi) 1999, and for 1999, Website, http://www.ballad.org/facts/index.ssi while the UN figures are slightly lower, hence the Website http://www.unicef.org/statis/Country, gives 147,2 for Russia and 10,3 for Belarus

* refers to mid-1978

** approximations from "Russijskij statisticheskij eshegodnik, ofitsialnoye isdanye", (Russian statistical yearbook, official edition,) in Russian, 1999 tab.5.2, where the 1999 figure is set at 146,7 and in tab.5.9 to 146,3.

Goskomstat of Russia, (Central Statistical Bureau of Russia) Women and Men in Russia, 1997, while Website, www.timesofindia.com/010300/01hlth8.htm gives a January 1st 1999 population of 145,5 citing an official report

6. Population decrease

In the European parts of the former Soviet Union population growth rates were halved from the mid-1960s to the 1980s when the whole Soviet system entered a structural crisis.

However the already low population growth rates of Germany and the Scandinavian countries were also drastically reduced during the same period.

Although the Nordic countries and Germany showed a net population increase in the 1960s below the replacement level of 2,1 children per women (which is what is needed to keep a population constant), because of immigration – consisting overwhelmingly of people of working age – still a net increase of population occurred. In addition the recent immigrants tended to have more children in the first generation in the new country.

The implications of population decrease are that a difficult transition period might become even more difficult as the future productive generation will be smaller and have to support a relatively larger old generation in addition to building up the country. For this reason the pension age, which used to be 55 for women and 60 for men, is now being raised gradually in the Baltic states.

In the early 1990s all the countries of the former Soviet Union encountered a population decrease, caused by lower birth rates, but particularly by higher death rates. The higher death rates were caused by an increase of those people, overwhelmingly men, who committed suicide and died from alcohol. The population decrease was most dramatic in the mid-1990s for countries of the former Soviet Union, and has slowed down somewhat since than (See tables 21, 22 and 28).

All countries of the Baltic region experienced population growth lower than the replacement level of 2.1 children per women, which is what is needed to keep a population constant (see table 24)

Table 22. Population growth rate in states around the Baltic Sea, selected years

Year / Country	1963-68	1973-78	1980-90	1990-99	1999
Estonia	1.2	0.8	0.6	– 0.9	– 1.1
Latvia		0.5	– 1	– 1.1	
Lithuania	1	0.6	0.9	– 0.1	– 0.01
USSR*	1.2	0.9			
Russ.Fed.**			0.6	– 0.1	– 0.5
Belarus			0.6	– 0.1	– 0.2
Poland	1.1	1	0.7	0.2	– 0.2
Germany***	0.9	– 0.4	0.1	0.4	0.5
Finland	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5
Denmark	0.8	0.3	0	0.4	0.3
Sweden	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.5

Sources: WDP 1980 and 2000/2001, SYLi-99, Statistical Office of Estonia, Statistical Yearbook of Estonia, (hereafter SYE) 1999

* Refers to 1960-70 and 1970-80

** Website, Durham University, UK, Europe population, for Russia http://www.timesofindia.com/010300/01hlth8.htm

*** Refers to Federal Republic of Germany until 1989

Since the 1930s Soviet state policy had been pro-natalistic and with large losses of men in the Second World War in 1944, women who gave birth to ten children became Heroine Mothers, while five children gave a second class Motherhood Award.

Abortion had been made legal by the Soviet government as the first country in the world in 1920, was made illegal in 1935 and 1936 and legal again in 1955. Since it was made legal the first time it came to serve as a major means of birth control and still functions that way, with all the harmful effects on women's health that this implies such as increased infertility. According to the latest data one third of the Russian women are said to be infertile because of too many abortions. For every 10,000 children born alive there were 1,693 abortions in Russia compared to 349 in Sweden and 387 in the USA in 1999. Officially the concern was women's emancipation for the labor market and not the interest of the state being of priority.

Although Western and Eastern Europe experienced a baby boom directly after the end of the Second World War, however, the 1950s were characterized by low and quickly falling birth rates and – with the exception of France – it was in Eastern Europe and particularly in the Soviet Union that the low birth rates caused concern. Historically urbanization, industrialization, female education and high levels of women's employment were associated with falling birth rates.

But surveys indicate that the malfunctioning of the Soviet planning system, particularly the lack of housing, bad infrastructure and the fact that only full-time work was available contributed to the continuing low fertility.

In Russia in the mid-1890s the difference in life expectancy between women and men was about 3 years, while 100 years later in 1998 it was the broadest in the world with 12 years, 73 for women and 61 for men. (see table 23) However, in 1995 it was even broader, with a difference of more than 13 years, 71.7 for women and 58.3 for men. (see table 28)

Interestingly enough the republics of Ingushetiya and Dagestan with large Muslim populations show the highest life expectancy for men of 66 and 65 years respectively, thereby indirectly pointing to the life shortening impact of alcohol – as Muslims are not supposed to drink alcohol and together with the republic of Tuva in East Siberia the only regions with a fertility rate above replacement level.

In Sweden as in many industrialized welfare states the most common cause of death is cancer, which only takes third place in Russia where diseases of the circulatory system are the most common cause of death, followed by "unnatural causes", accidents, poisonings and injuries which include alcohol poisoning, suicide, homicide, drowning and traffic accidents of which the latter four can also all be related to alcohol.

The lower life expectancy for men has mainly been caused by drinking, homicide, and suicide with men committing 3 times as many suicides as women. According to statistics from Goskomstat of Russia, the official bureau of statistics, in 1994 alcoholism and alcoholic psychosis claimed the lives of 290 men out of every 100 000 of the population, but only the lives of 70 women. For example, during the mid-1990s, 35,000 Russian men have died annually from acute alcohol poisoning which was double as much compared to 10 years earlier. This could be compared to 300 men dying from the same cause in the USA, which has a much larger population. However, the high suicide rate is continuing but has abated somewhat while the rates for the other "unnatural causes" of death show downturns, particularly for traffic accidents, while the rates for the rest – homicide, alcohol, and drowning – not yet have returned to the levels of 1992.

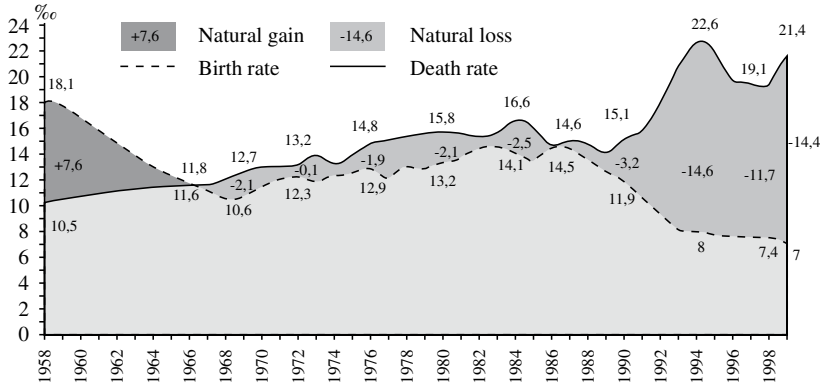


Figure 135. Parameters of natural movement of the population in the Pskov region of Russia (for 1000 people). Ill.: Andrey Manakov

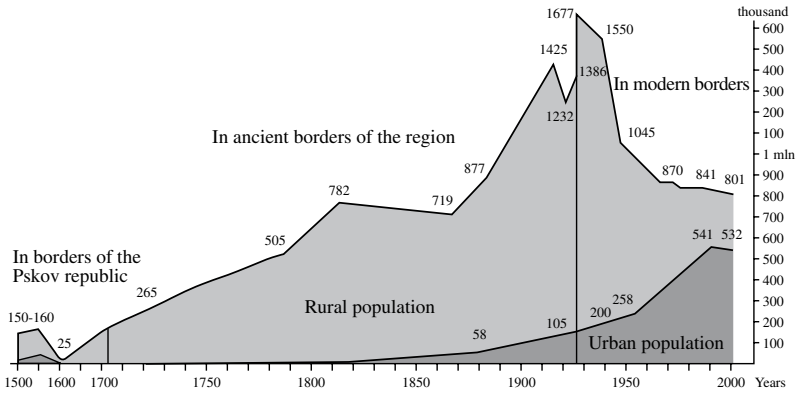


Figure 136. Change of Pskov population of the Pskov territory in the XVI-XX century (thousands of people). Ill.: Andrey Manakov

In addition Russia is experiencing the highest tobacco consumption in the world, which also contributes to death from diseases of the circulatory system. For example, tuberculosis, T.B., seen as a disease of poverty also doubled in the last decade claiming 24,000 victims in 1999.

The population of Russia has shrunk by 6.6 million people since the dissolution of the Soviet Union up until May 2001. During the four first months of 2001 a loss of 309,000 people was recorded. Russia's total population has been decreasing since 1993, and the Russian population pyramid shows a surplus of women older than 34 in every age cohort (see Figure 140 in chapter 40).

During the Second World War the Soviet Union lost 20 million people, mainly men, and until the 1980s the surplus of women over men was slowly shrinking only to be reversed in the 1990s. Today there are three women for every man above the age of 70, and one and half more women for every man past age 64.

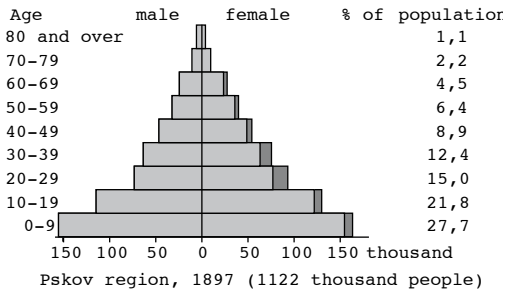
In certain areas of Central Russia today the death rates are 3-4 times higher than the birth rates, with the men dying out and contributing to a growing surplus of women.

The Pskov region is an example of this, experiencing since 1986 an accelerating population decrease, particularly since 1991, but as early as 1966 the death rate exceeded the birth rate. (see Figure 135)

When comparing the population pyramids of 1897, that look like perfect pyramids, and that one of 1998 looking like a badly grown Christmas tree, two things stand out: the lack of the very young and the surplus of women among the old. (see Figure 136 and 137)

As a border region next to the Baltic states, the Pskov region has been exposed to massive flows of population, either in or out. In 1994 the Pskov region experienced the worst depopulation of all regions of the Russian Federation. However, there is a relatively large teenage population, the result of an earlier baby boom, which can be seen as Russia's hope for the future.

In the whole of the Russian Federation so far, part of the population decrease has been offset by a positive migration balance, meaning more Russians are still arriving from the former parts of the Soviet Union than are leaving the Russian Federation for the West.



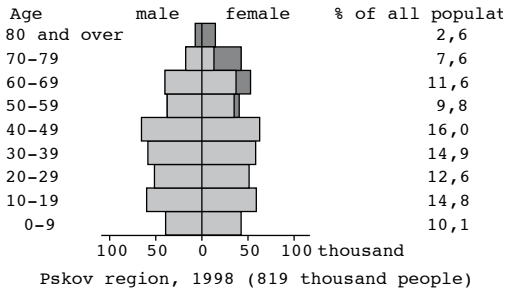


Figure 137. Population pyramids for Pskov region, 1897 and 1998. Ill.: Andrey Manakov

7. Life Expectancy

While certain well-off countries in Western Europe, such as Denmark, have experienced a reduced life expectancy – a reduction for men during the last 10 years through a self-induced unhealthy life-style and a halt in the increase in life expectancy for women – the break-up of the Soviet Union meant drastic changes, the severing of economic ties and trade links and a concomitant fall in the standard of living and life expectancy through external factors affecting whole populations.

Just as with population growth rates, the republics of the former Soviet Union experienced a decrease in the average life expectancy during the 1990s that, however, in the late 1990s turned upwards for both sexes (see tables 23 and 28).

This means that women tend to outlive men by well over 11 years, one of the highest differences in the world. Therefore there are twice as many old women as men and many of them are widows, except those women in the age bracket above 65, who were around 20 years of age in 1940. Because up to 10% of the women in this age cohort could never marry, due to the fact that men in the same age group were either killed in the Second World War or were executed or deported.

A woman in the Baltic states, for example, has on average 20 years as an old age pensioner, from 56 to 76; while a man has 4 years, from 60 to 64! This means that if men's life expectancy is not increased, then by the time the new pension age of 65 for men is fully implemented, then life expectancy will be lower than the pension age. This explains why the pension age is only being raised gradually to 65 years in the Baltic states.

Table 23. Life expectancy at birth, in states around the Baltic Sea, selected years

Year / Country	1963-68	1975		1992		1998	
	ALL	M/F		M/F		M/F	
Estonia	70	65	75	64	75	64	75
Latvia		64	74	63	75	64	76
Lithuania	70	66	75	65	76	67	77
Russ.Fed.	69	62	73	62	74	61	73
Belarus		67	76	65	75	63	74
Poland	69	67	74	67	76	69	77
Germany	70	69	74	70	77	74	80
Finland	69	68	76	72	79	74	81
Denmark	73	71	77	73	78	73	78
Sweden	74	72	78	75	81	77	82

Sources: WDR 1980 and 2000/2001,
Goskomstat of Russia, (Central Statistical Bureau of Russia) Women and Men in Russia, 1997
The MONEE Project CEE/CIS/Baltics, REGIONAL MONITORING REPORT– NO 6- 1999, Women in Transition, UNICEF, 1999 (hereafter WiT-6-99)

Table 24. Total fertility rate in states around the Baltic Sea selected years, total number of births per women

Year / Country	1963-68	1973-78	1992	2000
Estonia	1.9	2.1	2.1	1.3
Latvia	1.7	1.9	2	1.3
Lithuania	2.2	1.9	2	1.4
Russ.Fed.	2.1	2	1.7	1.4
Belarus				1.4
Poland	2.5	2.2	2.1	1.5
Germany	2.5	1.5	1.4	1.3
Finland	2.4	1.7	1.9	1.7
Denmark	2.6	1.9	1.7	1.7
Sweden	2.4	1.8	2.1	1.6

Sources: SID, 1993, for the year 2000 Website, UNICEF: www.unicef.org/statis/country

Infant mortality. Infant mortality is usually considered one of the most crucial indicators of development in a society. It is one of the bases in the Quality of Life Index. Many see it as the most revealing indicator of how developed a society is.

In regard to infant mortality it is important to bear in mind the old Soviet definition in which, according to World Health Organization, WHO, the definitions of lines between infant mortality and abortion became blurred, meaning that the very high Soviet abortion rates were to some extent taken from the infant mortality rate, which contributed to keeping the latter lower than it would otherwise have been.

This meant that in comparison to the WHO's recommended definitions, the abortion rates were higher, because in the Soviet statistical system the infant mortality rates were kept down by transferring a number of infant deaths to the abortion statistics.

Hence when former Soviet bloc states change to the WHO system of counting abortions and infant mortality rates, the first effects are decreases in abortions, and an increase in infant mortality, which is also what has happened in all the Baltic states.

The interesting question here is, of course, how many of the changes are due to changes in the statistical system and how many are real changes? Will also, for example, religious attitudes to abortion contribute to more abortions being hidden than before? And how well will newly-established private clinics report upon their abortion number?

Live births definitions in statistics

According to the Ministry of Health of the Soviet Union, prior to 1992, live births were defined in the following way: if the child died within the first week it was not counted among live births if a) the mother's pregnancy did not exceed 28 weeks, b) and/or a child's weight at birth was under 1000 grams, c) and/ or a child's height did not exceed 35 cm. The children who died during their first week according to the 3 definitions above were instead added to the abortion statistics. The WHO definitions are that a live birth is considered to be a birth with a mother's pregnancy of at least 22 weeks and where weight at birth is at least 500 grams.

Still, there are more abortions than live births as has been shown above, indicating that the transition period is so hard indeed for the population that many births are postponed, but also that due to bad economic resources and means abortion is still widely used as contraception, just as during the Soviet period.

Infant mortality has been decreasing from the 1960s until the late 1990s in most states of the Baltic Sea region. However, states of the former Soviet Union showed increased mortality rates reflecting with a delay the worst years of the mid-1990s. The situation in Belarus would seem to be particularly serious where the lack of resources, particularly hospital equipment, would seem to contribute to a further worsening of the situation for infants. In contrast, Poland is rapidly lowering its infant mortality and quickly approaching the low levels of North-Western Europe, where Sweden, Holland, Norway and Japan used to be and still are those countries with the lowest rate of infant deaths in the world. (See tables 25 and 28)

Table 25. Infant mortality rate in states around the Baltic Sea, selected years, in number of deaths under-1 year per 1000 live births

Year / Country	1963-68	1973-78	1992	1996	2000
Estonia	24	19	16	10	17
Latvia	24	24	17	16	17
Lithuania		25	17	10	18
USSR*	23	22			
Russ.Fed.			18	17	18
Belarus			12	13	23
Poland	42	25	15	12	9
Germany	24	19	7	6	5
Finland	17	10	6	5	4
Denmark	19	10	8	5	4
Sweden	13	9	6	5	3

Sources: SID,1993,
Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Latvia and the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe, 1998
for the year 2000 Website, UNICEF: www.unicef.org/statis/country
* "Russijskij statistitjeskij esjegodnik, ofitsialnoye isdanye", (Russian statistical yearbook, official edition,) in Russian, 1999 tab. 5.27

8. Marriage and divorce

In all the states of the former Soviet bloc the number of registered marriages has decreased and divorces has increased from 1980 to 1997 (See tables 26 and 27). However, much of what looks likes changes on the surface in trends in marriage and divorce might in reality reflect other things, such as new rules for housing allowances and new rules for divorce.

During the Soviet time, the tendency developed not to register a divorce, if there was no intention to remarry, because personal reasons such as divorce or remarriage were not grounds for receiving new housing, which meant that even people who already had remarried someone else, were still forced to share their old apartment with their former spouse for lack of housing. Hence when, for example, new divorce rules were introduced in Estonia registered divorces

increased markedly from 1991 onwards, because many who had separated a long time previously chose to register their divorce.

If housing conditions permit in the modern Baltic states, particularly in the Estonian and in the Nordic societies, many couples just choose to live together without any formalities, which means that they can of course also split up without involving the authorities.

Statistics on marriage and divorce will then only show part of the picture, just as statistics on children born in and out of wedlock for the same reason only give a glimpse of reality.

Table 26. Registered marriages in states around the Baltic Sea, selected years, number of marriages per 1000 mid-year population

Year / Country	1980	1989	1992	1995	1997
Estonia	9	8	6	5	4
Latvia	10	9	7	4	4
Lithuania	9	9	8	6	5
Russ.Fed.	11	9	7	6	6
Belarus	10	10	8	7	7
Poland	9	7	6	5	5

Sources: WiT-99

Table 27. Registered divorces in states around the Baltic Sea, selected years, number of divorces per 1,000 marriages

Year / Country	1980	1989	1992	1995	1997
Estonia	48	47	75	106	95
Latvia	51	46	77	71	63
Lithuania	35	36	46	46	61
Russ.Fed.	40	42	61	62	60
Belarus	32	35	50	55	68
Poland	13	19	15	18	21

Sources: WiT-99

Household size. Because of rapid industrialization and urbanization from the late 1950s onwards, Estonia and Latvia particularly came to display many of the features associated with modern Western societies, while Lithuania, resembling Poland, to a much greater extent was agrarian with a slower growth in urbanization.

The smallest families and the highest divorce rates of the former Soviet Union were found in Estonia, followed by Latvia.

Due to severe housing shortages many young people were and still do live with their parents well into their 20's, also because hardly any young people today can afford to live on their own.

Figure 138. Marriages, divorces... Photo : Katarzyna Skalska

As women outlive men by more than 10 years, a high proportion of those living in single households – which constitute the most common household size – are elderly women, while the second most common household size consists of 2 people, in which the urban areas dominate, while slightly larger households prevail in rural areas.

Thanks to the break-up of the Soviet collective system, where small flats were the norm, individual homesteads are again allowed in the countryside, leaving room for more people to cohabit.

The population group in the nations that lives under the harshest conditions of the South-Eastern Baltic, elderly women, are also those that are most exposed to economic changes by having to live alone. Hence the problems of elderly people are in the main womens' problems today.

9. Food and health

It is important to remember that a structural crisis had already developed from the mid-1980s onwards in the Soviet central planning system. With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 the planned economy was crumbling, many economic ties were severed, with high inflation and shaky exchange rates as part of the picture contributing to a steep fall in the established way of life. The fall in living standards was so great that for a couple of years the majority of the population, regardless of education and work, lived next to minimum level of existence.

Figure 139. Photo: Katarzyna Skalska

For example, according to surveys, up to two thirds of the population in the Baltic states lived from 1990-1994 close to a minimum level of existence, where food expenditures consumed half of the budget. Without resorting to bartering for or producing some of their own food in one way or another, which in the case of Estonia always figured high for 2/3 of all urban households, they could not have survived.

That the worst years for the East-European transition economies were 1993-95 is amply demonstrated in vital statistics where both population growth, infant mortality, death and birth rates and life expectancy hit an all-time low, but still the majority of the population remain far from their former accustomed way of life. (See tables 12, 24, 25 and 28).

Food expenses consume the major part of the household budget and also the time used for finding or preparing food drains already overworked people. Food expenses, which in the early 1980s were one third of the household budget, increased in the 1990s to half of the budget.

This prolonged food scarcity naturally led to deteriorated health and increased mortality and shortened life expectancy. In Lithuania, for example 35% of the women had live births

complicated by anemia – generally seen as a sign of malnutrition and worsened conditions – in 1997 as against 6% in 1989 and in Russia 36% in 1996 as against 17% in 1991. Worse, 81% of pregnant women had birth complications in 1996, compared to only half that number in 1991.

Since, according to statistics, men are the main consumers of tobacco and alcohol, and commit most suicides, men's life expectancy decreased twice as much as that of women.

Hence, health deteriorated to an all-time low in the mid-1990s, but has since improved in most states of the former Soviet bloc and this is reflected in longer life expectancy. New threats are the rapid spread of HIV and aids in which the Russian border zones such as Kaliningrad, Murmansk and the St-Petersburg area seem to be the most exposed.

10. Conclusions

The countries of the former Soviet bloc have experienced a number of massive changes over the last decade in most aspects which, with a time-lag, shows in the demographic set-up. This ranges from population decrease, to shortened life expectancy and increasing death rates and infant mortality with falling birth rates and a concomitant graying of the population, meaning the elderly, who as in more mature industrialized societies, are becoming more numerous, thereby further increasing the burden on society. This is particularly serious when the young and the active can hardly make enough to survive themselves, less so to support a growing, elderly generation.

On the other side of the Baltic Sea, the Nordic countries were characterized by slow demographic changes that for decades after the Second World War were similar to those of the South-Eastern side of the Baltic Sea with regard to high life expectancy, low birth and death rates, high education for women, and a high proportion of women in the labor force.

The break-up of the Soviet Union and its system, exposing it to new and unchartered roads to development, led to demographic decline and in the case of Russia to the brink of catastrophe, though the light can be seen at the end of the tunnel, as thus far the worst years were those of the mid-1990s.

In the former Soviet bloc some basic preconditions are there for development such as a highly educated population and, one hopes, through interaction and cooperation around the Baltic Sea the trends can be turned in more positive directions. In this regard, the Baltic states and Poland are well on their way into the Europe they were always part of, but not always allowed to belong to.