


Setos' way to manage identities and well-being: shame and pride, opposition and openness

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The paper examines how the tiny ethno-cultural group of Setos constructs its identity in the multicultural context. The study examines the validity of three acculturation models and tests earlier findings on the relationship between identity and well-being. The results suggest that Setos have clearly adopted a multicultural identity strategy while not merging different identities, and that they have managed to separate the material well-being from the pride of their identity. Despite its small size and peripheral location, the Setos' way to preserve their identity in a constantly changing context is an interesting lesson for other indigenous groups, and also for bigger neighbors.

Keywords: Seto; Estonia; ethnic identity; acculturation; well-being

Setos – a tiny indigenous ethno-cultural group situated on the Estonian–Russian border area – are worth wider attention for several reasons. There are several in-depth studies on Seto culture and identity (Eichenbaum 1998; Jääts 1998; Runnel 2002a) that focus on historical and ethnographical analyses while psychological aspects of acculturation, (bicultural) identity formation and psychological well-being in relation to identity, have deserved much less attention. In the social psychological research tradition, acculturation is studied mainly among immigrant groups, and cultural and psychological changes of indigenous communities in Europe but also elsewhere have deserved much less attention. In the European perspective, only a couple of studies about Saami, Roma, Basque, and other indigenous people's acculturation issues can be found.

Current study that follows social psychological theories of acculturation and bicultural identity development asks whether the principles of acculturation theories proved in numerous immigrant studies apply also for the sedentary group related to majority culture for hundreds and thousands of years? Seto culture shares some elements with neighboring cultures but also has several unique aspects. Their language could be called a dialect of Estonian, but if spoken properly Estonians have trouble in understanding it. Setos practice Russian the Orthodox religion with pagan elements, and have well-preserved unique folk traditions: national costumes, traditional holidays, and folk music, including the existence of bridal and funeral laments and a very special polyphonic folk song *leelo*. Setos, who have never been more numerous than 20,000 people and whose territory is currently divided between two countries, have survived through four different political regimes during the

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last century. Their peripheral location and lower income could in combination with cultural/linguistic similarity to Estonians easily result in assimilation, but it has not. Thus, Setos' identity survival and development raise questions that are interesting both from the point of view of not only their group's future but also more widely for other indigenous people, and theoretically.

Setos as an ethnic and regional group

Setomaa is an ethnographic region at the border area of Estonia and Russia, on the North-East corner of the European Union. In the past it has belonged to the Russian Empire (until 1918), the Estonian Republic (1918–1940), and the Soviet Union (1940–1941 and 1944–1991). Since the restoration of Estonian independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the territory of *Setomaa* has been divided between Estonia and Russia.

The native people of *Setomaa* are Setos, Balto-Finnic people who are culturally and linguistically closely related to Estonians, but are distinguished by both insiders and outsiders from their neighbors. Both Estonians and Setos are very small groups in the global context. The population of Estonian Republic is 1.3 million people, including 900,000 ethnic Estonians. The number of Setos in Estonia is estimated altogether at about 10,000–13,000.¹ The name “Seto” was probably introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century by Estonians and was first printed in 1860 in the journal *Das Inland*. Setos themselves started to adopt this identification at the end of the same century. In the times of the Russian Empire, Setos saw themselves close to Russians due to the shared Orthodox religion, but Russians considered them half-believers since they maintained several old pagan traditions and did not speak the Russian language, which Setos used in religious services only (Palgi 1994; Jääts 1998). In the beginning of the twentieth century, Estonian common people did not consider Setos as Estonians and derogated Setos due to lower level of literacy, education,² and economic welfare. Also Setos considered Estonians as a separate group (Jääts 1998).

In addition to their shared traits with Russians and Estonians, Setos also have commonalities with a neighboring regional minority group – the Võro people. In the linguists' opinion, both Seto and Võro are the same language, although Seto is more influenced by Russian. The Võro–Seto language was “dormant” until not long ago. Since 1997, Võro–Seto has been taught at schools (mainly as an elective subject). Although Setos share several characteristics with their neighboring groups, there are also unique aspects in Seto culture: language/dialect, folk traditions (national costumes, traditional holidays, and folk music, including the existence of bridal and funeral laments and a very special polyphonic folk song *leelo*), and Orthodox religion whose practices differ from the mainstream Orthodox religion and include pagan elements (Jääts 1998; Eichenbaum and Pajusalu 2001; Runnel 2002a). Setos have an extraordinarily well-preserved traditional culture in the context of twenty-first century Europe, and their folk song *leelo* was included on the UNESCO world heritage list in 2009.

The long-lasting existence of the quite small group of people between two very different areas, with old cultural and linguistic connections to Balto-Finnic people and administrative connections to Russia, has caused them the problem of defining their identity in the Estonian Republic today. The group is partially assimilated and positioned between a regional subdivision of Estonians and an independent ethnos. The discussion of controversies between Estonian, Russian, and Seto identity and identity politics is discussed in more detail by Kuutma, Seljamaa, and Västriik (2012). According to Estonian official views, Setos are an ethnographic or regional subdivision of Estonians who speak a dialect or regional variation of Estonian. In 1997, 46% of *Setomaa* inhabitants in Estonia identified

themselves as Seto or rather Seto than Estonian, and 45% Estonian or rather Estonian than Seto (Eichenbaum 1998, 62).³ Estonian ethnologist Jääts (1998) positions Setos on the boundary between a regional subdivision of Estonians and an independent ethnos.

As referred to earlier, Setos and their “strange” customs and habits have not been appreciated by their bigger neighbors. During the Russian Empire, the lack of schooling and difficulties in learning in the Russian language prevented their assimilation (Jääts 1998). After uniting Seto’s territory with the Estonian Republic in 1920 and also after Soviet occupation in 1940, Setos still had low prestige and were subjected to ethnic consolidation and assimilation with Estonians (or Russians in Russian surroundings), which were supported by quickly increasing school attendance (Hagu 1995; Jääts 1998). From the 1990s, Setos and other South Estonian regional groups have gone through the language and cultural awakening; similar processes occur in neighboring countries, for example, in Latvia in the Latgale region (Peipina 2002).

Isajiw (1993) distinguished between folk-community- and nationality-community-type ethnic groups. Folk-community groups are little differentiated in social status, they lack a developed conception of the group’s history, and relationships within a community are determined by kinship and close family friendships. Nationality communities are culturally highly self-aware, “their members share an image of themselves as a collectivity united by a distinct culture rather than by their kin or clan.” (11) “Contemporary history is characterized by many previously folk-community-type groups transforming themselves into nationality-type groups.” (12) In this process, many groups focus their ideology around a territory (Isajiw 1993). A similar consolidation process was going on in Setomaa where the previous folk community developed to the nationality-type ethnic community that was featured by spreading ideas of shared Seto ethnic identity and formulation of self-government institutions, for example, the Seto Congress⁴ and Vanemate Kogu, appointed by the congress. The Seto Congress declared Setos as an ethnos (*rahvas*) in 2002 (SK 2003). Although a “regional group” is more neutral, it does not definitely imply the existence of the unique regional language and culture which Setos have. From the perspective of the possible Estonization of Setos, regional identity is in a weaker position and more prone to assimilation (Jääts 1998; Lõbu 2005). The long-term low social status and regional cultural and economic problems have led to the situation where Seto identity is expressed not only in cultural and regional terms, but also in terms of injustice (Runnel 2002b, 70).

In the current paper we refer to Setos as an “ethnos” or ethno-cultural group, following the self-identification of Setos in the resolution of the Seto Congress (SK 2003).⁵

Our research was carried out only on the Estonian side and compared Setos to other inhabitants of Estonia and more specifically other inhabitants of South-Estonia – the region where Setos live.

Acculturation and bicultural identity

Minorities’ acculturation is very widely studied but mainly among immigrants. Social psychological research about acculturation and identities of European indigenous people (Grote 2006–2007) has been conducted among Basque (Montaruli et al. 2011), Sami (Kvernmo and Heyerdahl 2004), Roma (Dimitrova et al. 2014), and most probably among few other groups. The study by McKinlay and McVittie (2007) about identity in the case of intra-national migration in Scotland shows that the issues appearing in cases of within-country acculturation are comparable to transnational studies. The differences between immigrants’ and within-country acculturation relate to the absence of the essentialist discourse in contrasting group differences in the latter case often found in transnational

studies, and more easy negotiation of identity as someone who has achieved a limited acceptance by the local community.

Setos' identity has been studied but not in terms of psychological acculturation defined as changes that an individual experiences due to being in contact with other cultures, or participating in the acculturation that one's cultural or ethnic group is undergoing (Graves 1967). While group-level changes encompass phenomena such as social structure of the group, the economic base or the group's political organization, individual-level changes include amendment of identity, values, attitudes, and behavior (Sam 2006). Due to their location and size, Setos have been in constant contact with other cultures which has resulted in both group- and individual-level acculturation. As referred previously, ca 150 years ago when religion played a more important role in self-definition, Setos considered themselves closer to Russians. Due to political changes together with widening of schooling that mostly took place in the Estonian language, and increased (social) mobility, Setos have come closer to Estonians.

In social psychology, acculturation has been studied within three wide models. The bidimensional acculturation model (Berry 1980) is based on the assumption that a person can simultaneously belong to more than one culture while the cultures are held separate from each other. Assimilation theory (Gordon 1964) advocates for unidimensional acculturation, meaning that the deeper the acquisition of a new culture, the more marked is the displacement of the original one. The model of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977; Ehala 2010), used for example, for studying the Setos' neighboring group – Võro identity (Ehala and Niglas 2007) supports the latter paradigm on a group level. The strength of group identity or a group's ethnolinguistic vitality is measured in contrast to important out-groups. Opposition as a strategy in identity building is followed also by Runnel (2002b, 74) who analyzed ethnic identity in Seto's media:

The ideology of Setu-movement,⁶ spread in the 1990-ties, contrasted the Setus to the central power and therefore the conflict has served as a powerful tool for the identity-creation of the Setus. The confrontation has turned out to be a strategic resource.

The third acculturation option – the fusion – model suggests that cultures sharing an economic, political, or geographic space will fuse together, creating a new unique culture and a new identity (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). Similar to the latter is the bicultural identity integration model that measures the ability and willingness of individuals to integrate two cultures into a cohesive whole (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos 2005).

The readiness to develop bicultural identity is affected by the sociopolitical climate in the society and the attitudes, stereotypes, and acculturation orientations of the dominant majority (Berry 1980; Phinney et al. 2001; Sabatier 2008). The multiculturalism hypothesis that dates back almost 40 years (Berry, Kalin, and Taylor 1977) states that when individuals and societies can be confident in, and feel secure about their cultural identities, more positive mutual attitudes will result; in contrast, when these identities are threatened, mutual hostility will result. As shown by Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, and Solheim (2009) and Tartakovsky (2009), minority group members who experience discrimination are likely to reinforce their adherence to their ethnic identity and to reject the national identity. The opposite is proposed by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1981): in case of negative identity, if group boundaries are perceived as impermeable, minority group members may choose assimilation.

The current study analyses how Setos construct their identity in the constant process of acculturation. Do they oppose their ethnic identity to the Estonian national identity that may be assumed by taking into account the multiculturalism hypothesis, their devalued identity in history, and recent revival opposing to Estonian central government (Runnel 2002b)? Do

they merge Estonian and Seto identities which would be logical to assume considering Estonization throughout most of the last century and overlap in language and education? Or do they follow the bidimensional acculturation model accepting both identities while keeping them apart? Also marginalization is an easy road for devalued groups.

Identity and psychological well-being

Psychological well-being is determined not only by numerous sociodemographic characteristics (age, marital status, health, and education) and economic factors (income, unemployment, and inflation), but also by social relations. The importance of individuals' social relationships, and identities on subjective well-being have been stressed by several authors (Thoits 1991; Diener et al. 1999; Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz 1999). Besides the number of (role-) identities, the salience and voluntariness of identities are also shown to reduce stress and therefore positively affect well-being (Thoits 1992). In line with this finding, a recent study (Portela, Neira, Mar Salinas-Jiménez 2012) based on the European Social Survey revealed that participation in social networks has an effect on subjective well-being, while other forms (formal and political) of network participation seem to have smaller or no effect.

The questions of minority groups' self-esteem and life-satisfaction are some of the most critical ones in acculturation research. Comparing different well-being predictors among immigrants, Jibeen and Khalid (2010) found that acculturative stress was the strongest predictor of well-being followed by coping resources and strategies, and income. Phinney et al. (2001, 505) conclude in their review paper on ethnic identity, immigration, and well-being that "pressures to assimilate and give up one's sense of ethnicity may result in anger, depression, and, in some cases, violence," and that "bicultural or integrated identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being than are the other identity categories." The empirical results concerning the link between identity strength and the immigrants' subjective well-being, however, vary. When the contributions of each type of identity (ethnic and majority) are included as separate variables in the analyses, the results support the view that strong ethnic identity makes a positive contribution to psychological adaptation (Liebkind 1996; Nesdale, Rooney, and Smith 1997; Phinney, Cantu, and Kurtz 1997; Phinney et al. 2001). On the other hand, several acculturation studies claim that a strong bicultural identity (corresponding to integration) or a strong national and a weak ethnic identity (assimilation) leads to the best general adaptation (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993; Oudenhoven 2006).

Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) have solved this puzzle by showing that strong conational identification of so-journers predicted enhanced psychological well-being, whereas strong host national identification was associated with better sociocultural adaptation. The findings of Chen, Benet-Martinez, and Bond (2008) stress that for beneficial psychological outcomes it is not enough to belong to two cultures, but it is important to perceive one's two cultural identities as integrated. Opportunity and readiness to merge two identities support effective adaptation (Oudenhoven 2006) and tend to correlate with higher life-satisfaction (Pavot and Diener 2008).

We analyze the relations between both ethnic and national identities as well as social networks/identifications and well-being measures. As said earlier, Seto identity had low prestige among neighbors historically, which in combination with economic difficulties (lower employment rate and lower income) may have resulted in lower self-esteem and life-satisfaction and also lower ethnic and national identities.

Research questions and hypotheses

The current paper poses the following questions and hypotheses:

- (1) How do key dimensions of ethnic identity and Estonian national identity characterize Setos compared to Estonians from different regions?
 - (a) Due to their minority group status and possibly multicultural identity, we expected to find higher ethnic pride and lower ethnic differentiation among Setos compared to other groups.
 - (b) We also expected to find lower national pride but higher multicultural national identity due to the same minority status.
- (2) What is the relationship between different identities among Setos? Are Setos marginalized (having very low ethnic and national identities)? Do they follow the unidimensional acculturation model (the Seto and Estonian identities are opposed to each other) or rather the bidimensional or fusion acculturation model (different identity levels are either independent or even support each other)? Here one can propose two oppositional hypotheses:
 - (a) Following the unidimensional acculturation model, one could propose that Setos contrast their identity to the mainstream national identity (negative correlation between ethnic and national pride).
 - (b) An opposite hypothesis assumes that due to the similarity with neighboring groups, Setos are in general successful in merging the identities (low ethnic differentiation, high multicultural orientation and positive correlation between ethnic and national identity). This hypothesis follows the bidimensional or fusion models of acculturation, and would support the findings of Jääts (1998).
- (3) How are Setos' identities related to psychological well-being (self-esteem and life-satisfaction)?
 - (a) People (both Setos and others) with multicultural orientation (low ethnic differentiation and both strong ethnic and national pride) are proposed to have higher well-being, compared to the others.
 - (b) Following the results found by Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999), we expect that people with stronger Seto identity have also higher self-esteem, while national identity is positively related to life-satisfaction. In line with earlier studies (Thoits 1991, 1992; Portela, Neira, Mar Salinas-Jiménez 2012), we expected that besides ethnic and national identities other group-memberships also support self-esteem and life-satisfaction.

Methods and procedures

Procedure

The data for this study were collected from September 2008 until June 2011 by means of web-based as well as paper-based questionnaires. Younger participants were recruited on site in 21 high schools; the rest of the sample was contacted by the project team electronically, in personal meetings⁷ and partly by networking. Part of the adult sample was recruited via high school students who were asked to take a copy of the questionnaire home to their parents. The questionnaire included the assurance that the collected data would remain confidential and would only be analyzed for the purposes of the project. Participation in the survey was voluntary and the individuals approached were always given the option of refusing to participate without any further explanation. The questionnaires were available both in Estonian and in Russian. The predominant majority (99%) of

respondents whose data are used in the current paper chose the Estonian language. There were no questionnaires in the Seto language as the tradition of Seto literary language is so weak that people can read better Estonian than Seto.

Participants

The sample consisted of Estonian inhabitants from different regions. In the current analysis, we use data from altogether 1098 participants who represent either Estonian ethnic majority and/or were people from *Setomaa*. Based on their area of living and self-reported identification(s),⁸ participants were divided into three main groups: **Setos**,⁹ other **South-Estonians**, and ethnic **Estonians** (see overview of the sample in Table 1). The mean age of this sample was 29.1 years (SD = 13.7; age range 15–83 years) and 39.0% were male. Due to the sampling method (electronic questionnaires and connecting people via high schools) but also real-life difference, there is a smaller proportion of Setos in the youngest age group compared to the other groups. A higher proportion of young people among Estonian groups is reflected also in educational differences: there are more people with basic education in these groups compared to that in Setos. At the same time, the proportion of higher educated participants is very similar across groups. Obviously, there are differences across place of residence: Setos live mainly in the countryside, while a majority of Estonians live in the cities. The sociodemographic differences are taken into account when analyzing between-group differences.

Data about other ethnic minorities living in Estonia, mainly Russians, were also collected, but this is discussed in depth elsewhere.

Measures

The research instrument consisted of four questionnaires:

(1) *The Ethnic Identity Scale* used in this study is a shortened (12-item) version of the Ethnic Identity Scale developed by Valk and Karu-Kletter (2001). For Setos this is the measure of Seto identity; for Estonians (including South-Estonians) this is the measure of Estonian ethnic identity. The scale measures the two key identity dimensions: *ethnic*

Table 1. Sample by gender, age, education, and place of living across the three groups.

<i>N</i>	Estonians 956	South-Estonians 94	Setos 49
Proportion of males (%)	38.7	41.5	40.8
<i>Age groups (%)</i>			
15–24	52.5	52.6	30.6
25–34	17.5	21.1	18.4
35–44	13.4	10.5	20.4
45–54	8.6	11.6	26.5
55+	7.8	4.2	2.1
<i>Highest qualification (%)</i>			
Basic	29	27	19
Secondary	22	22	21
Vocational after secondary (non-tertiary)	15	20	27
Higher education	35	31	33
<i>Place of living (%)</i>			
City	66	32	14
Countryside, small town	34	68	86

pride and belonging (referred to later as ethnic pride or *EP*) and *ethnic differentiation* (*ED*). Ethnic pride describes one's feelings of attachment to his or her ethnic group as a whole, the emotions and attitudes related to the affiliation to the group and an interest in the culture, history, and customs of the group. The statements in the ethnic pride subscale are of the following type: "I am interested in the history of my ethnic group," "I am proud of my ethnic group," etc. Ethnic differentiation describes a desire to distinguish between one's own and other ethnic groups both in abstract and in concrete terms. Examples include the following: "People's ethnic background is not important for me," "When I am considering marriage, the ethnic background of my future spouse does not matter." The Cronbach alphas in the current study were for the EP, .84 and for the ED, .65.

(2) *The National Identity scale* was developed in the earlier stage of the current project and measures two main dimensions: (1) *national pride* (*NP*) and (2) support for *multicultural national identity* (multicultural identity, *MI*). The national pride subscale consists of 11 items and measures the pride and attachment to the Estonian state on the civic level that could be inclusive for everybody living in Estonia (and also Estonians living abroad) independent of their ethnic background. There are items such as "Seeing the Estonian flag, I have often felt proud," and "I am proud that Estonia is known as a successful small country." The multicultural identity subscale consists of seven items and measures how much people value that there are different ethnic groups living in Estonia and whether they consider sharing Estonian identity with other identities (belonging simultaneously to two or more groups) possible and valuable. There are items such as "It does not disturb me that people of different ethnic origin live in Estonia," and "In my opinion someone cannot be simultaneously a representative of Estonian and some other culture" (reversed item). The Cronbach alphas in the current study were for the NP, .86, and for the MI, .74.

(3) *Psychological well-being* was measured using two scales. Based on the pilot study, five statements of the 12-item Estonian version (Pullmann and Allik 2000, Pullmann 2007, Personal communication) of the Rosenberg (1986) global *Self-Esteem Scale* (*SES*) were used to measure self-esteem. In addition, we used five statements from the *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (*SWLS*, Diener et al. 1985), which measures perceived quality of life and has been translated into the Estonian language (Anu Realo 2007, Personal communication). The *SES* includes items such as "I think I am in all respects a respectable person, at least not less than others," and the *SWLS*, statements such as "Up until now, I have achieved everything I ever wanted in life." The Cronbach alphas in the current study were for the *SES*, .80, and for the *SWLS*, .77.

The measures described earlier all used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from -2 -"completely disagree" to 2 -"completely agree."

(4) *The multiple identity questionnaire* consisted of a list including 26 social categories. The respondents were asked to rate, on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from -2 ("I oppose myself to the group") to 2 ("a very important group for me"), the degree to which they feel attached to each of these categories.

In addition to the aforementioned, we also asked participants' attitudes toward "In your mind, is it possible to belong at the same time to several ethnic groups?" Regarding their self-identification, respondents had freedom to state as many identifications as they wished.

Missing data were replaced by the mean score; in case of more than five missing answers, the case was deleted from further analyses.

Qualitative study

In addition to the quantitative approach, semi-structured interviews about the culture, music, and identity were conducted with nine inhabitants of *Setomaa*, who had volunteered in the questionnaire.¹⁰ The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 80 years; seven of them were women and two men. Six respondents considered themselves as Setos (numbers 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9); one had a regional identity of neighboring South Estonian area (Võro) (number 3) and two positioned themselves as Estonians (numbers 1, 5). Interview data are analyzed in depth elsewhere (Särg and Valk Forthcoming). In the current paper, only a limited number of examples that help to interpret results from the quantitative analyses are presented. Interviews are quoted later in the paper anonymously with numbers 1–9 in the order of recording.

Results

Setos' ethnic and national identity in comparison to (South-)Estonians

In comparison to other South-Estonians, Setos have stronger ethnic pride – a result that could be explained with the status of minority group whose identity is more visible and which is therefore more conscious about it (Hypothesis 1a). See Table 2 for unadjusted and adjusted differences between groups.

Among all groups, ethnic and national pride is strongly connected (see Table 5). For Estonians and South-Estonians, these are clearly almost overlapping concepts with correlations between EP and NP being around 0.70. Among Setos EP and NP relate also strongly, but the correlation is clearly weaker (.45) compared to that of the other groups, referring that although their ethnic identity is related to Estonian national identity, they differ in this regard from Estonians. On the other hand, it is obvious that Estonian and Seto identities are not opposing each other – a finding that rejects Hypothesis 2a and supports Hypothesis 2b. This shows that Setos' identity formation follows the bidimensional (or fusion) acculturation model and does not oppose ethnic and national identities.

In opposite to Hypothesis 1b, Setos have even stronger national pride compared to other South-Estonians and Estonians. This, at first glance surprising result, can be explained with the high double identification among the Setos, and positive correlation between Estonian

Table 2. Mean scores for ethnic pride (EP), ethnic differentiation (ED), national pride (NP), multicultural national identity (MI), self-esteem, and life-satisfaction for different subgroups with unadjusted and adjusted differences between Setos and other groups.

	Estonians <i>M</i> (SD)	South- Estonians <i>M</i> (SD)	Setos <i>M</i> (SD)	Unadjusted differences	Adjusted differences*
EP	1.18 (.64)	1.07 (.70)	1.35 (.64)	b	b
ED	−0.53 (.76)	−0.41 (.77)	−0.56 (.76)		
NP	1.25 (.60)	1.22 (.56)	1.44 (.60)	a,b	a,b
MI	0.68 (.70)	0.73 (.72)	0.83 (.70)		
Self-esteem	0.46 (.76)	0.63 (.76)	0.77 (.63)	a	
Life- satisfaction	0.70 (.66)	0.29 (.86)	0.44 (.79)	a	

^aSetos differ ($p < .05$) from Estonians.

^bSetos differ ($p < .05$) from other South-Estonians.

*Statistically significant differences between Setos and other groups in linear regression analyses after controlling for the effects of age, gender, education, and place of living (city vs. countryside).

Table 3. Mean scores for ethnic and national identity aspects that differentiate Setos from other (South-) Estonians.

Subscale	Item	Estonians	South-Estonians	Setos
EP	I enjoy taking part in the undertakings of my ethnic group	1.10	1.11	1.51 ^{a,b}
EP	I am interested in the history of my ethnic group	1.27	1.07	1.43 ^b
ED	All my close friends belong to the same ethnic group as I do	0.18	0.04	-0.53 ^{a,b}
ED	Spouses/partners should belong to the same ethnic group	-0.49	-0.79	-0.92 ^a
NP	Taking part in Estonian music events strengthens my feeling of belonging to Estonia	0.95	0.77	1.20 ^b
NP	I feel connected to Estonians all over the world	0.62	0.62	1.14 ^{a,b}
MI	A person may belong simultaneously to different ethnic groups	0.64	0.71	1.10 ^{a,b}

Note: EP, ethnic pride; ED, ethnic differentiation; NP, national pride; MI, multicultural national identity.

^aSetos differ ($p < .05$) from Estonians.

^bSetos differ ($p < .05$) from other South-Estonians.

and Seto identities. In addition, despite the problems of recognizing Setos' self-determination as a separate ethnos, the Estonian state has been perceived as a protector of Seto identity.

In order to understand better the differences between Setos' and Estonians' ethnic and national identity, the items that significantly differentiated Setos from other groups are shown in Table 3. Setos are more open to other cultures and groups (both practically [marriage and friendship] and on a general level) and enjoy participating in the undertakings of their ethnic group. Interestingly, their Estonian national identity is also more based on music compared to Estonians.

One explanation for the strong ethnic and national identity can be the fact that due to their minority status Setos obviously have had to think more on the questions where they belong and who they are. The ones who finally decided to call themselves (partly) Setos have probably had to go through identity crisis and moratorium stages to reach the achieved identity as described in identity development studies (Marcia 1966; Phinney 1989).

Setos' ethnic and national identity in the context of other identifications

In order to understand the context for ethnic and national identity, we presented the respondents a list with 26 different groups and roles and asked them to evaluate these. The list included categories from "global citizen" and "European" to "friend" and "neighbor." Table 4 presents these roles and groups that differ for Setos and for other (South-) Estonians. First, Setos are clearly more multiculturally oriented. The same tendency appeared also in answers to the question "In your opinion, is it possible to belong to several ethnic groups at the same time?" 88% of Setos, 73% of Estonians, and 77% of South-Estonians answered "Yes" to this question. Second, Setos value local groups and roles – being neighbor and inhabitant of one's region – more than Estonians. Third, they are more often members of some society or movement, especially being fans of folk music. All of the aforementioned differences are clearly characteristic to Setos as almost all (except just regional identity) of these characteristics differentiate Setos from both Estonians and South-Estonians.

Table 4. Mean scores for multiple identity aspects that differentiate Setos from other (South-) Estonians.

	Estonians	South-Estonians	Setos
Multicultural person	0.07	0.09	0.71 ^{a,b}
Inhabitant of my region	1.28	1.23	1.53 ^a
Member of some society or movement	0.41	0.34	0.84 ^{a,b}
Folk music fan	0.27	0.36	1.24 ^{a,b}
Neighbor	0.63	0.80	1.15 ^{a,b}

^aSetos differ ($p < .05$) from Estonians.

^bSetos differ ($p < .05$) from other South-Estonians.

Table 5. Ethnic and national identity correlations to self-esteem and life-satisfaction among Estonians, South-Estonians and Setos.

		EP	ED	NP	MI
Estonians ($n = 975$)	Self-esteem	.22***	-.06*	.20***	.11***
	Life-satisfaction	.20***	-.05	.15***	.09**
	EP		.05	.67***	-.00
	ED			.07*	-.49***
	NP				-.03
South-Estonians ($n = 95$)	Self-esteem	.27**	-.05	.35***	.36***
	Life-satisfaction	.23*	.11	.36***	.26*
	EP		.09	.72***	.18
	ED			.21*	-.30**
	NP				.09
Setos ($n = 49$)	Self-esteem	.23	-.22	-.06	.15
	Life-satisfaction	.03	-.06	-.08	.18
	EP		.24	.45***	.09
	ED			.09	-.21
	NP				-.12

Note: EP and ED are facets of ethnic identity; NP and MI are facets of national identity.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Identity and psychological well-being

Life-satisfaction of Setos and mainly other South-Estonians is significantly lower (in unadjusted analysis only) than that for the rest of Estonians, which can be explained with the lower income level, higher unemployment, and generally more difficult living conditions in rural areas far from the capital. However, Setos' self-esteem is higher compared to that of Estonians (also only in unadjusted analyses). See details in Table 2. There is not one good explanation for this finding, but it may be related to their higher EP that correlates with self-esteem and stronger multicultural orientation. The correlation between EP and self-esteem is similar for all groups, ranging between .22 and .27 (see Table 5). The correlation coefficients between ED, MI and self-esteem (and somewhat less but also for life-satisfaction) differ more across groups, but there is a general tendency that people with stronger multicultural orientation (low ED and high MI) have also higher scores of well-being, which supports hypothesis 3a.

Table 6. Multiple regression analysis (β s) for predicting life-satisfaction and self-esteem.

	Life-satisfaction	Self-esteem
Ethnic pride	.12***	.18***
Ethnic differentiation	.01	-.01
National pride	.11**	.05
Multicultural national identity	.09**	.11**
Being an inhabitant of my region	.04	-.03
Being a multicultural person	.06	.06*
Being a neighbor	.08**	.07*
Being a member of some society or movement	.03	.09**
Being a folk music fan	-.07*	-.09*
Categorization (Estonian)	.04	.02
Categorization (South-Estonian)	-.02	-.03
R^2	.32	.29

Differently from other groups, neither Setos' EP nor NP is correlated to the life-satisfaction, thus rejecting Hypothesis 3b. This result is different from the findings of Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) and shows that for Setos identity (either ethnic or national) is not related to practical matters such as good living conditions.

Finally, regression analysis was performed with self-esteem and life-satisfaction as dependent variables. Independent variables included ethnic and national identity dimensions, multiple identity categories that differed Setos from other respondents (see Table 4) and self-categorization (Seto compared to Estonians and South-Estonians). Most strongly ethnic pride, followed by multicultural national identity predicted both self-esteem and life-satisfaction. National pride predicted life-satisfaction but not self-esteem. Different multiple identity categories predicted in most cases positively self-esteem and to a smaller extent life-satisfaction. When adjusted for identity, no differences between Setos and other respondents appeared (see details in Table 6).

Balance between openness and traditions

Setos have clearly multicultural orientation and they do not see conflict in accepting different cultural identities. But simultaneously with the openness they also value highly local connections and identities (see Tables 3 and 4). With the analysis of qualitative data, we try to explain and understand how they manage these two somewhat oppositional orientations and how much change they are ready to accept in their original culture and identity? Do they follow a rather bicultural acculturation model (developing two identities) or fusion model (merging different identities)? In order to answer these questions, we used interview data that concerned relations between different groups and identities.

The interviews showed that besides multicultural orientation and strong Estonian national identity, preserving the original ways of following Setos' traditions is very important and also perceived as threatened by Setos. Some indigenous Setos tend to blame not only new settlers, so-called New-Setos, but also younger indigenous people that do not know traditions and language and fuse different cultures. This happens since besides preserving traditions, there is both innovation and revival in Seto folk culture today: some ancient styles of traditional folk singing and folk costumes, once disdained by older generations, have again become "fashionable."

The questions of old and new, and right and wrong ways of being Seto were discussed in several interviews. A young woman described her father as genuine Seto that way: "It can be said that my father is a pure Seto. — He knows the language and all those old customs and all holidays and church feasts and that all is proper to him." (9) The question of "better" and "worse" Setos holds not only for new settlers in comparison to indigenous inhabitants, but also for people from one or another village. The tendency that everyone considers her/his local dialect better than others has also been one obstacle in creating Seto literal language.

But there is a difference between Setos and Setos. Setos from [A], they are not fully genuine in my opinion. Genuine live around [B] – that surrounding I consider as true Setomaa, but there ... I don't know, so much new settlers have come here from Tallinn and everywhere, they have taken such [a posture]: we are also Setos. They have a bit Seto roots, but that's not natural enough. ---

I do not speak at the moment Seto language. But I can do it well and also fully understand, but it disturbs me how Seto language is used today, that's awful! In older times Setos did not speak this way. I learned language from my grandmother around [C] and there the language was completely different from that what is spoken here, around [D]. Here are many new settlers and they bend and twist [the language] this way, I don't know what it is. ---

Who are not Setos, cannot wear clothes correctly. The problem is that Seto clothes have being worn very carelessly and unsuitably recently. The "hame" [long skirt] is casted on, but "kitasnik" [bodice] is not put on – that does not fit, you were not allowed to go out this way in old days nor (should not) today. (2)

The woman who came to *Setomaa* as an adult and started to take part actively in local culture underwent different attitudes; for example, more experienced singers happened to blame her for not enough perfect skill in Seto traditional singing and even accused her for only searching for fame. She confessed: "*I feel resistance. --- Other people try to hold me back. Something is different.*" (3)

On the other hand, some Seto women from mixed families welcomed Estonians in *Setomaa* today. As many indigenous Setos have gone away in search of employment, the small community needs new blood and young people.

If you bring a wife from Estonia – how she will be embraced? Rather positively. If everybody in the village are mutual relatives and live together, that would be worse – then relatives started to marry in old times, that's not good. I think that all Estonians are embraced. ---

Maybe they [older women about 70–80] are not satisfied with so-called New-Setos, who come from elsewhere and start to organize Seto living. I have heard not the best opinions about them, it is said that they make mistakes in clothing and sayings and customs, but younger people communicate enough with each other and don't make difference whether you are Seto by roots or have come here later. (4)

--- culture cannot be enforced and imposed on the new settlers. I have heard from [A] that they do not want those people from Tallinn, they want to be on our own. But at the same time – how can you manage on your own when many young people have gone away because of unemployment. And if any nimble maiden agrees to marry here, why not, let [her] come – that'll come with time, she will adapt and there is no need to enforce. There are still enough people who can preserve their culture and songs and language, and I think it won't [become] extinct. (5)

According to her words, it is not easy to arrange your real life following old traditions; for example, there are rules that regulate women's headgears and jewelry depending on their marital status and age. But some couples live together without being officially married today and women do not know which headgear to wear. She also complained that a traditional headgear of a married woman is quite complicated to attach and uncomfortable to wear. Also some elder indigenous Seto women did not abide by all rules; for example, they often wore abundant jewelry that fit only to women in fertile age. (5)

Discussion

In the current paper we analyzed the survival and revival of a tiny indigenous ethno-cultural group living on the border of the EU and Russia – Setos. They could be seen as an example of a changing but surviving ethnicity in the middle of bigger and economically usually more powerful others. Setos share some critical traits (territory, language, and religion) with their three neighbors: Estonian, Võro, and Russian culture, while having formed a unique combination of these characteristics. In addition to the fusion of the elements from other cultures, Setos' identity is based on unique folk traditions of which *leelo*, original Seto singing tradition, is included in the UNESCO world heritage list.

The survival of Seto identity could be seen as a miracle. During last 100 years, the territory of ca 10,000 Setos have been united within and divided between four different states: the Russian Empire, the Estonian Republic, the Soviet Union, and once again the Estonian Republic. Due to the shared characteristics with neighbors, floating boundaries and low status among important others (because of lower education and living standards), one could expect that this tiny group has assimilated with its bigger neighbors.

Our research refers to three strategies that Setos use nowadays that support their survival and help to overcome assimilation threats. The conclusions are hopefully interesting for social psychological studies of acculturation, research of other indigenous groups, and future research of Setos.

First, Setos have a unique and strong culture and identity that in some aspects are still preserved in the premodern ways: the tradition is conveyed orally within the family or community and the pride in one's identity is not related to the materialistic values, but rather to traditions such as singing or wearing the traditional costume in the "proper" way. Although Setos' living standard is lower from that of an average Estonian¹¹ that is reflected also in their low life-satisfaction, their identities (ethnic and national) are not related to that. This is different not only from several earlier studies conducted elsewhere among both immigrants (e.g. Ward and Rana-Deuba 1999; Pavot and Diener 2008) and indigenous people (Dimitrova et al. 2014), but also from the findings among ethnic Russians living in Estonia. For the latter, life-satisfaction is one of the most important predictors of Estonian national identity (Valk, Karu-Kletter, and Drozdova 2011). Low status and even shame related to Seto identity are tackled with the help of social creativity strategy in building positive identity via folk traditions and especially song culture. Social creativity is a collective strategy, described in the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1981) used for changing existing negative intergroup comparison in order to achieve more positive identity among a minority group. This is also in accordance with Runnel's (2002a) finding that Seto people value their difference from contemporary society; for example, the deficit of education is interpreted as the counterpart of abounding traditional wisdom. The use of collective strategies is determined by the difficulty to access the out-group (impermeable borders) or the strong internal pressure to preserve in-group identity, or both. In the case of Setos, the main factor nowadays is probably the strong internal pressure created by the revival of Seto culture during the last decades. Instead of materialistic values this movement stresses traditional culture and ethics, and emphasizes singing skills, collectivity, and belonging to the community. The latter is also proved by Setos' stronger identification as an inhabitant of one's region, member of some society or movement, folk music fan and neighbor. While having an open and multicultural identity, they stress strongly locality and relationships within the community. It is interesting to note that most of these identifications (except being a folk music fan) together with multicultural orientation support self-esteem as shown also in earlier studies (Portela, Neira, Mar Salinas-Jiménez 2012).

Second, the case of Setos could be seen as a lesson for the other tiny indigenous groups in making their culture accessible and attractive for majority group members. Since the mid-1990s newcomers take part actively in the Seto movement – conscious revival of Seto culture. In contrast to the traditional local identity building, they handle *Setomaa* as a whole and call its inhabitants irrespective of their ethnic background and other affiliations *setomaalane* (inhabitant of *Setomaa*) (Tigas 2001). A similar process is described by Isajiw (1993) as development from folk-community- to nationality-community-type ethnic group. The interviews revealed that the development of the folk community toward a more open identity can also be painful. Seto identity revival by local activists and New-Setos (sometimes called derogatorily as *setutamine* – pretending to be Seto) and the emerging political top is not always in accordance with the practices of the traditional Seto community. Seto identity was earlier a natural way of belonging without any special care and self-presentation. In the past the only way to become a Seto was to be born into a Seto family, but today being a Seto is a voluntary conscious choice that can be based on the place of living (Runnel 2002a). Somewhere between single- and double-identity Setos and Estonians are New-Setos – newcomers from other parts of Estonia who may or may not have Seto roots. On the one hand, they are required for the physical survival of the aging community from where young people are leaving in search of employment. On the other hand, New-Setos might not properly know Seto traditions or not feel the necessity to follow them in the way it has been done by the local community.

The third strategy is open identity. An interesting combination of openness toward other cultures and identities while closed and strict attitudes toward one's own culture reveals as follows. More criticism was expressed by the older generation toward New-Setos who used casually exterior culture elements without properly knowing the tradition than towards Estonians living in *Setomaa* who did not follow the traditions at all. Compared to other Estonians and also people living in the same region – South-Estonians, Setos define themselves more often multicultural, they have stronger ethnic pride but also stronger Estonian national pride, and there is a positive connection between ethnic and national pride. This proves that Seto identity does not follow the unidimensional acculturation model or the ethnolinguistic vitality theory that contrasts the strength of ethnic and national identities. The strength of their identity is not based on opposition to other groups, but rather on openness and multiculturalism. This is also proved by more positive answers to the question of the possibility of belonging simultaneously to different ethnic groups, and more positive attitude to exogamy and out-group friends. In this case Setos clearly differ from another historically devalued indigenous groups – Bulgarian Roma people, who instead of oppositional or bicultural identity have both low national and ethnic identities referring to marginalization (Dimitrova et al. 2014).

The limitations of the current study are mainly related to the sample that did not include Setos living in the territory of the Russian Federation and is not fully representative of the Setos population on the Estonian side as sampling was made on a voluntary basis. The Seto subsample is also small and differs in respect of age and education from Estonian subsamples. For dealing with the last issue, the analysis of the between-group differences is adjusted for the sociodemographic variance of the subsamples. The interview data are not analyzed in depth in the current paper, but are used only to interpret the quantitative findings. The data reflect probably the views of more active Setos whose opinions may be in some aspects more extreme compared to that of an average inhabitant of *Setomaa*.

In summary, the current study showed in an example of a small ethno-cultural group of Setos preservation and change of identity – processes that many bigger groups are facing. The paper analyzed how to keep the uniqueness of one's identity while being open to other

cultures. In the very multicultural context, Seto identity has changed but has been preserved throughout the centuries beside economically stronger and more populous neighbors. And it keeps changing. Will it survive also in the twenty-first century? Hard to say but there is certainly something to learn from their open and creative strategies for preserving and reviving their identity.

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Notes

1. There is no official data about the number of Setos in Estonia as there was not a choice “Seto” for ethnic belonging in the censuses of population in Estonia. In the Estonian census of the population in 2011, 12,549 declared that they spoke the Seto dialect. A century ago the population of *Setomaa* reached ca 15,000 people. Jääts (1998) estimated the number of Setos on the Estonian side of *Setomaa* to be 3000 and on the Russian side (Petseri region) to be 500. Approximately two-thirds of the traditional Seto territory lie in Russia, but after 1991 many people relocated to Estonia. In the Russian censuses of the population in 2002 and 2010, only ca 200 people had designated themselves as Setos. <http://www.estblul.ee/EST/Keeled/seto.html>. Since 2010 Russia recognized Setos as a small indigenous nation.
2. In the 1920s almost 50% of Setos (inhabitants of *Petserimaa*) were illiterate, while among the other Estonian inhabitants the proportion of illiteracy was less than 5%. Between the two world wars, many schools were established and by mid-1930s the illiteracy was around one in three (Jääts 1998).
3. The study was conducted in 1997 on both the Estonian and Russian sides of *Setomaa*. All students coming from *Setomaa* and going to upper-secondary schools (age 15–18) were surveyed – altogether 164 people. Due to constraints in sampling and data collection, the adult study was conducted only on the Estonian side of *Setomaa*. A total of 499 adults (simple random sample of people living in historical Seto area) aged 18–74 years responded to the survey. Information about identity is based on the adult sample only: 39% identified as Seto and 7% as rather Seto than Estonian (46% altogether); 33% identified as Estonian and 12% rather Estonian than Seto (altogether 45%); 9% had other identifications. In parallel, in 1996 in Russia 76% of the surveyed people with Seto background had Seto identity and 9% had double (Seto+Estonian) identity (Maximova 1997).
4. The first Seto Congress was held in 1921 and the second in 1930, but then was a long gap until the third congress in 1993.
5. *Rahvas* is a common word in Estonian and Seto. It is not a scholarly term in Estonian and can stand for “nation,” “ethnos,” “ethnic group,” and also “people.” In the context of Seto Congress,

the statement about Seto *rahvas* may stand for “ethnos” as the differentiation from other people is stressed.

6. The name Seto has been used in different ways: Seto, Setu, and Setuke. The quotation is given following the original text.
7. Most of the respondents filled out the questionnaire on their own, but in a few cases it was completed with the assistance of the interviewer.
8. To find Setos, people with Seto identity were compared to people with Estonian identity from Setomaa and neighboring South Estonian areas (Võrumaa and Põlvamaa), called South-Estonians, and from other parts of Estonia, called simply Estonians. People who identified themselves as Setos predominantly lived in Setomaa, only some of them dwelled in neighboring South Estonian areas.
9. There were single, double, and triple self-identifications given. In this study we grouped all cases that included Seto identification into the subgroup of Setos, irrespective of the order of components or wording.
10. There was a request in the questionnaire to provide one’s contact information, if the respondent agreed with the further interview.
11. The average income in the four rural municipalities that form Setomaa in Estonia (Meremäe, Mikitamäe, Misso, and Värska) was in 2011 81.4% of the Estonian average and 95.1% of the average of the Võru county, of which Setomaa is mainly a part. In the same municipalities less than 40% of people aged 15 years or older are employed, while the Estonian average is ca 50% (Statistics Estonia 2012).

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