

Preface

To be on the road and, retaining one's origins, to hear out what one meets along the way

The fifth book in the interdisciplinary research series *phronesis, praxis, paideia*, “Vectors of Cohesion”, has been created within the State Research Programme in collaboration with the leading researcher and project manager of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia, *Dr. phil.* Māris Kūlis, who appreciated the open and democratic style of the research series and invited participation in the project. The articles published in the book represent a wide variety both in the range of topics and the theoretical approaches. In this volume, cohesion is examined in a wide range and profound dimensions, encompassing philosophical reflection and global events, statistical analyses, sociological and humanitarian studies. Cohesion is proven to be a very complex, internally changing and contradictory process under incessant renewal, which must be taken care of, and “a finger must be constantly kept on the pulse”.

A continuous presence in cohesion is movement, it is a process where solutions are formed along with current and “hot” events, as well as traditions, values and goals. Different forms of cohesion are unceasingly emerging, being transformed and are always on the way. Likewise, this book is a form of path to shedding light upon cohesion. Cohesion is the capacity to be on the road and, without forfeiting its origins, to hear what is encountered along the way. I will quote the words of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger in his essay “The Country Path”, in which I, astounded,

perceive the idea that cohesion also happens in a similar manner – as if embarked on some long and pulsating path: But the soothing call of the country path speaks only so long as there are people who, having breathed its air, can hear it. They listen to their origin and do not serve contrivances. If a person has not entered into the call of the country path, his efforts to put the world in order by planning are in vain.¹

A cohesive society cannot be achieved with integration plans alone – a sense of belonging and authentic community is needed, even if the efforts of different communities, like vectors, each strive towards its own goal. Each vector has its own starting point and its own direction towards the goal. How is cohesion of different directions possible? The book assists in finding answers to this question.

In the current volume, paths to cohesion are found through linguistic experience, philosophical insights, solutions to educational problems, sociological and business analyses, political guidelines and international documents. The authors address the “hot” and uncomfortable, fundamental and universal problems of society, seek and find answers to the question: how to achieve cohesion? Philosophers, sociologists, linguists, lawyers, educators, economists

¹ Heidegger, M. *Der Feldweg*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1953.

have united in a shared goal – finding the common denominator of cohesion vectors.

The first part presents different, but complementary views. Maija Kūle views cohesion from the ideas of universal rationalism to difference as a feature of the modern era and connects integration policy with philosophical insights, emphasizing that in the Latvian situation, philosophical views of cohesion are grounded in social epistemology. Along with the discourse yielded by the history of philosophy and the great figures (Hegel, Kant, Sartre, Gadamer, Arendt, Buber, Žižek, etc.), spark the realizations that cohesion and integration are not to be viewed only in the sphere of universal concepts, but in a deeply subjective truth, because “it is precisely the understanding of the subject that is one of the central ones in integration and cohesion.” The fading of grand narratives, alienation, and fragmentarism characterize the postmodern era, and everyone must ask the question and seek answers: How to explain the need for a common unity of the “torn world”?

Elvīra Šimfa views cohesion from a different philosophical angle – through laughter, tears and traditional memorial days held in Latvian graveyards (*kapusvētki*), she aspires to find the key to Latvian cohesion and identity. Latvians perceive the annual memorial day marked in cemeteries without tragedy, as if substantiating Socrates’ statement that comedy and tragedy can be created by the same person, and that the poet of tragedy is also the poet of comedy. Laughter and tears are confrontational, unifying, as well as uncontrollable expressions, and meanwhile, they are truth-expressing, anti-totalitarian reactions that unite people in a similar way to a shared sense of humour.

Ineta Kivle views cohesion in the context of liminality and connects it with atypical forms of cohesion – simulacra and icons. In the liminal state, a sense of unity is formed in the transition between the habitual identity and a new status, between the past and the future. The article offers examination how

cohesion takes both confronting and complementary forms. Authentic cohesion is formed through a process in which each element, while maintaining its uniqueness, voluntarily synchronizes with the others. Shaping of the constructed forms of cohesion, on the other hand, is frequently driven by supervision, submission, infatuation, belief, and fanaticism.

In the second part, expositions of cohesion move from the philosophical dimension to the political, national and civic sphere of Latvia. Cohesion is viewed here in the context of the nation, language and education.

Inese Šūpule analyses the etymology and political usage of the concepts *Latvian people* and *the people of Latvia* in a historical context. The article discusses *civic consciousness*, *political nation*, *ethnic democracy* and other concepts characterizing cohesion. The results of sociological surveys and scientific interpretations show the constant and changing aspects in Latvian society. As an illustration, here is an example from a sociological survey: 39% of Latvians living in Latvia believe that Latvian culture and the Latvian language are rather threatened, while 42% of Russians living in Latvia believe that Latvian culture and language are not threatened to any extent. These and other comparative aspects raise the question: on what basis is social cohesion possible if there are significantly different opinions about such paramount identity values as language and culture?

Ina Druviete continues the topic of the Latvian language. Belonging to a language touches each of us profoundly and intimately, moreover – emotional attitude keeps the language alive: “A language lives as long as we speak it.” Referring to the statements of the children’s competition participants, sociolinguistic analysis of the language situation, and the results of sociological studies, the possible threat to the language is viewed existentially, linguistically, semantically and historically. Although the Latvian language ranks among the 1.5% or 105 most vital languages in the approximately 7000 languages

of the world, the narrative of language endangerment is present in the public discourse of Latvia. The author points out that it should be evaluated in each specific case from a broader perspective. The image of an endangered language can be perceived both as an encouragement to more actively advocate for the rights of the Latvian language, and as an excuse for a negative attitude towards language acquisition and functioning as the sole state language.

Līga Feldmane in her study focuses on public attitudes towards the increase in foreign students in Latvia. The author analyses data on the number of foreign students in Riga and the regions: students from the European Union and the European Economic Area are mostly perceived positively, while students from third countries have aroused reserved attitudes and caution. The results of sociological surveys analysed in the article show that attracting foreign students promotes the competitiveness of higher education and economic growth, whereas the attitude of the local community is mainly formed through direct contact, as well as based on publicly available information, and is quite complex.

Zane Akmene sees the transition of minority schools to teaching only in Latvian as an important stage of social cohesion. However, the prevailing education policy discourses and the private discourses of school principals about the importance of the state language for the ability of minority students to successfully integrate into the social and economic life of Latvia forsake the issues of identity and belonging raised by the policy “United School”. How can education policy not only realistically implement the transition to teaching in Latvian, but also address the tensions that arise in relation to language, identity, nationality and power?

The third part addresses the severe questions of the truth concerning imperialism and war. For truth or falsehood to become entrenched in the collective consciousness, it must be uttered again and again, reminded of and talked about. Russia’s messianic ideas,

the invasion of Ukraine – is it satanic doom or imperialist arbitrariness? Such question arises after reading the philosophical article by Rihards Kūlis, dedicated to Russia’s collective obsession, the analysis by Ukrainian film theorist Petro Katerinich of documentary scenes about Russian war crimes in Ukraine, as well as the search for the identity of Russia by Russian émigré and scholar Maja Soboleva. The articles complement each other and provide a broad and profound perspective on the frightening cohesion under the influence of imperialist ideas. Millions in Russia believe in messianic ideas and imperialist ideology based on lies.

Rihards Kūlis analyses the ways how to dismantle this methodically cultivated and maintained *schizoworld*, inhabited by a very large part of the Russian nation. However, it is not a question limited to Russia and the war in Ukraine – the frightening changes in political events, the inability of world leaders to decide and radically address the issue of war contribute to the threat posed by a humanity-devouring *monster* to Western democracy. The ideologists of *Holy Russia* are cultivating a new centre of the world, whose omnipotence and superiority excite the enthusiasm of the zombified part of the Russian nation. Meanwhile, others are trying to find an explanation for what distinguishes Russian culture from all others: Is the *Russian world* driven by the self-image of *eternal heroes-liberators*? Is the explanation to be found in patriotic rhetoric that appeals to people’s fears, hatred, and aggression? These and other questions permeate the articles exposing Russian imperialism.

Maya Soboleva describes the situation after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as being in a state of permanent shock. Admittedly, the society was being prepared for Russia’s mission of license and impunity for a long time, and the shock could only descend upon those who had not yet become aware of the currently prevailing identity of the Russian nation (patriotism of the contemporary Russia).

Soboleva emphasizes that the meaning of *homeland, fatherland* (Russia) for Russians is not a physical object (*terra*), but an element of the subjective narrative that forms personal identity and patriotism: the dominance of political and military forces on the world stage; the irrational and delusional defence of the *Russian world* from the enemy, manipulation with fear, hatred and aggression.

The article by Petro Katerinich complements Rihards Kūlis and Maja Soboleva's theoretical research on the manifestations of Russian imperialism with documentary facts, linking silence, air raid alerts, rhythm, and architectonic memory in an analysis of three films: "20 Days in Mariupol" (2023), which documents the siege and destruction of the Ukrainian city; "Atlantis" (2019), which shows the devastation of Donbas in an environment of industrial wreckage; "My Thoughts Are Silent" (2019), which shows cultural silence and explores generational dislocation in post-Soviet Ukraine.

In **the fourth part**, Vladislavs Volkovs and Inese Ratanova examine cohesion in the context of entrepreneurship. The central axis of the extensive study is the social culture of the organization. The article offers the analysis of the views held by target groups comprising two ethnic communities – Latvians and Russians – on team building and its functioning for sustainable entrepreneurship. Based on sociological surveys and data analysis, the research results clearly demonstrate that the visible differences

in the understanding and implementation of the values of consolidated economic life are not so much ethnically based as rooted in the unevenness of educational levels and differences between professional groups and social strata.

The studies published in the current volume show that cohesion is a living and changing process, born from shared experiences and common goals. Therefore, it is important to provide space for these moments of true togetherness and allow them to happen. We would like to thank the authors of the book Zane Akmene, Ina Druvieta, Līga Feldmane, Petro Katerinich, Ineta Kivle, Maija Kūle, Māris Kūlis, Rihards Kūlis, Inese Ratanova, Maja Soboleva, Elvīra Šimfa, Inese Šūpule and Vladislavs Volkovs; as well as the University of Latvia Press and its team – Aija Rozenšteine, Rita Zara, Andra Liepiņa; the author of the book's illustrations and translator Inguna Miļūna for the contribution to the creation of the book series *phronesis, praxis, paideia* including the collection "Vectors of Cohesion"!

In pursuit of cooperation and cohesion,

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leading researcher in the history of ideas
at the University of Latvia,
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research series
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