

ESTONIAN UNIVERSITIES SHOULD EDUCATE TEACHERS OF ECONOMICS

Introductory thoughts on the current situation

The Estonian society is currently in a rather interesting but also somewhat critical situation – members of the society, including many public figures, have relatively modest knowledge and understanding of the functioning of the society as a whole and the economy. This is an obstacle for the development of our state and this shortcoming could have been removed already about 30 years ago but probably the superficial knowledge has prevented it. It has also often been evident that instead of pursuing the goals of the state and the people, those in public service often pursue their own narrow personal interests and those of their political party and this creates disagreements from time to time. The purpose is probably also to ensure a high salary and pension for oneself, not to serve the state and the people with their energy and knowledge as much as possible.

We have to improve considerably the knowledge and understanding of our people about the economic essence and mechanisms of the state – functioning of national economy and businesses and families-households and personal socio-economic activities. It would be good to have some basic knowledge of it already by graduation from the basic school, even more by graduation from upper secondary school and institutions of vocational education, also within a family, in communication with people in general. It is humiliating and shameful for the society if schoolchildren (and also university students – it has happened) reply to the question “Where does money come from?” – “The money comes from the wall, from a cash box”!?! And unfortunately not that money comes from work, and I would emphasise – honest money comes with honest, hard and efficient work!

After the first fellowship at the universities of the Federal Republic of Germany¹ (1989/1990) and during the subsequent career in 1990–1992 at the Tallinn University of Technology (TUT), the undersigned (M. R.) took the initiative to start the preparation of teachers of economics on the level of Master studies according to the model of several universities of the Federal Republic of Germany and the educational system of Finland and other countries both for schools of general education and institutions of vocational education, and had negotiations for cooperation with the then Tallinn Pedagogical University (the current Tallinn University) and later, when working at the Pärnu College of the University of Tartu (UT), with the School of Teacher Education of the Institute of Education of the University of Tartu. Unfortunately these plans did not succeed, above all due to financial reasons but also for several other, including bureaucratic reasons. We have to admit that the decision-makers and financing providers had also not enough understanding or interest in our proposals.

¹ During the fellowship period the undersigned became also familiar with the curricula for teachers of economics prepared in German universities, later also with the study materials used at Finnish schools.

Which is a pity (probably we were not at the right place at the right time!?) as teachers of economics would have been very necessary in the Estonian educational landscape already then as the level of “systemic economic literacy” is not very high here! This need has not disappeared anywhere also today. On the other hand, it is directly related to the development of the national economy of the Republic of Estonia and the success and welfare of its population. However – the need for teachers of economics will probably be understood in Estonia in the future and the undersigned wishes more power to new and younger actors in this field! If necessary, we can also agree to give advice and participate.

Based on the experience gained from the education provided in schools of general education and institutions of vocational education of other countries, two aspects have to be taken into account. On the one hand, subjects of national economy studies, and on the other hand, subjects of business administration have to be taught, considering that these two sides are closely interrelated and eventually complement each other. We talk about and teach mainly proceeding from businesses and entrepreneurship here and even then episodically and incompletely. This is a halfway and distorted solution reminding of a person with one leg, figuratively speaking. Such teaching cannot be perfect or comprehensive in essence but a comprehensive and systemic approach is necessary for understanding economic processes. For the state as a whole (including families-households and individuals), successful functioning of the economy presumes that:

- it is understood on the level of national economy what is going on in businesses, and
- it is understood on the level of businesses what is going on on the level of national economy and why certain laws and regulations are adopted.

There is also interaction between both levels.

The economic success of the EU Member States (and also other countries) surely relies on the economic education of the population and on the fact that mainly competent persons serve in the public sector, there are fewer randomly hired people than here. It would be high time also in Estonia to make important and fundamental changes in that area. They will probably be made sooner or later but time is passing relentlessly and it is becoming increasingly more expensive to make changes or improvements or achieve developments.

This article should not be seen as criticism but above all as a concern for the friendly purpose of contributing to the improvement of economic studies in our basic schools, upper secondary schools and institutions of vocational education to provide also good and competitive knowledge of economics to students. The graduates should also continue their studies of economics at institutions of higher education and contribute to the development of the Republic of Estonia and to increase in the welfare of the society.

The undersigned believes that the teachers and headmasters of schools currently providing education in economics are doing their best, also in terms of curricula and syllabuses. But we probably lack a systemic, comprehensive approach and general

coordination and we have no special teachers of economics educated at universities and those with the Master's degree (why not also Doctor's degree in the future).

In June-July 2021
At Pirita-Kose in Tallinn

Sincerely, Matti Raudjärv
Chief Editor of the journal
(Supporter of the development of education in economics)