
Summaries

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S COLUMN

Data Is Not Oil, but Rather a Wicked Climate Problem

MARJU HIMMA

Editor-in-Chief of Riigikogu Toimetised

Data is often seen as “new oil,” but this oversimplifies its nature and risks. The article frames data as a complex “wicked problem.” It highlights solutions such as a central data agency, synthetic data, and more responsible data use to balance innovation, value creation, and privacy.

CONVERSATION CIRCLE

Choices in the Age of Data: Freedom or Control?

RIIGIKOGU TOIMETISED PANEL DISCUSSION

Estonia’s digital state faces a core dilemma: how to use data for better services, healthcare and security without undermining privacy, accountability and

freedom. The discussion highlights weak oversight, unclear responsibility, risks of surveillance and data abuse, and calls for stronger public debate, citizen control, proportionality, and a rule-of-law approach to data governance.

FOCUS

Estonian Health Data Could Save Lives If We Put It to Work

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Estonia’s health data has strong potential to improve care and save lives, but this potential remains underused. The problem is not a lack of data, but fragmented systems, limited access, and overly complex regulation. As a result, valuable data often fails to reach doctors and decision-makers in time or in a usable form. The article proposes three key solutions: simplifying the legal framework to enable faster and broader data use, creating common data

standards to ensure interoperability, and launching a rapid pilot project to make treatment quality visible in real time. Overall, Estonia does not need more data – it needs to activate existing data. By reducing legal and technical barriers and focusing on real-time use, health data can become a practical tool for improving healthcare outcomes and saving lives.

Opportunities of the Digital State for Developing a Human-Centred Data Economy

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Estonia's Digital Society Development Plan 2030 emphasises the importance of a human-centred approach in national development. It states: "In a digital state, people's fundamental rights are protected, and individuals and businesses have control over their data and the ability to share it meaningfully." This promise signals a paradigm shift in both the development of digital services and organisational data governance, aiming to create value from data in a secure, transparent, and human-oriented way. How can companies use such data in a trustworthy manner, and what should the Estonian state, private sector, and universities do to move in this direction?

The Digital Rescue Operation of the Estonian Language: How AI Learns Our Mother Tongue

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The article argues that the future of Estonian depends not only on everyday use but also on its presence in digital technologies. AI, translation tools, speech systems, and other applications need broad, diverse, and up-to-date language data. The main problem is that the use of such data is often hindered by legal uncertainty, especially around copyright and data protection. The authors propose a clearer legal framework that distinguishes AI training from AI use and supports research while protecting rights holders. They also argue that curated language data should be treated as a strategic national resource, or even as a digital language archive. The wider message is that Estonia has a constitutional duty to ensure the survival and development of Estonian in the digital age.

Artificial Intelligence in Education: Who Shapes the Child's Future?

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The article argues that AI in education is often introduced as a quick fix, while

children’s rights, voices, and real needs remain marginal. The main problem is that schools increasingly use data-driven platforms and AI systems to monitor, assess, and shape students, even though these tools can reinforce inequality, reduce agency, and make opaque decisions about young people’s futures. The authors call for clear rights-based rules, careful risk assessment before adoption, and much stronger involvement of children in decisions about educational technologies. Schools should not become testing grounds for unproven systems.

Data and Value

ANDRES KÜTT

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Estonia has high-quality data, yet struggles to create value due to a systemic “wicked problem.” The issue lies in misaligned incentives: data providers bear costs, institutions face legal risks, and users struggle with access. This leads to underuse and inefficient repeated data collection. Risk avoidance, especially around privacy, discourages data sharing. As a result, processes become complex, slow, and costly. Proposed solutions include creating a central data agency, using synthetic data to reduce privacy risks, making data collection more costly to encourage efficiency, and enabling institutions to share costs. The goal is to better balance risks and value to unlock data’s potential.

Value and Interest Conflicts in Data Law

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The article examines how data law must balance competing values: openness,

privacy, innovation, security, and democratic accountability. The core problem is that data has become a strategic economic, political, and security resource, while legal frameworks in Estonia, the EU, and beyond remain fragmented, inconsistent, and often overly restrictive in practice. Even small regulatory choices can shift society toward either greater openness or greater control.

The article highlights solutions such as clearer and more coherent legal frameworks, better alignment of public information, data protection, cybersecurity, and innovation rules, and stronger public understanding of data governance. It also points to tools like data intermediaries and data altruism to balance interests more effectively. The broader warning is that expanding surveillance, weaker anonymity, and opaque data use can gradually erode democracy unless societies make careful, informed choices.

Data Exists, Value Does Not: The Next Challenge for Estonia’s Digital Society

MARJU HIMMA

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Estonia’s problem is not lack of data but weak data use. Despite large volumes, data is poorly integrated, shared, and applied, limiting value for decision-making and services. Barriers include unclear rules, low data skills, fragmented systems, and weak public–private cooperation. Solutions include stronger data governance (e.g. data stewards), improved data literacy in the public sector, and secure testing environments for innovation. Interoperability and incentives for data sharing are also essential. Ultimately, data use is an institutional and societal challenge. Estonia must build

a functioning data-use ecosystem that balances innovation, value, and trust.

STUDIES

Crisis Communication Maturity Model for Local Governments

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Crisis communication in Estonian local governments is uneven and often underdeveloped. The authors propose a maturity model to help municipalities assess readiness, identify gaps, and systematically build resilient communication systems, including non-digital solutions. The model is flexible and must be adapted to local conditions such as size, resources, and competencies. A key solution is creating a coordinated national system for sharing best practices and experience between municipalities. The authors also stress the need for further research to develop a comprehensive crisis communication framework and to better understand citizens' perspectives.

Industry 4.0 as an Organisational and Cultural Challenge: What Can the Social Sciences and Humanities Contribute to the Renewal of Estonia's Manufacturing Industry?

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The article asks how to connect new technologies in Estonia with market understanding, work organisation, decision-making, and skills in the context of Industry 4.0. This connection is described as an organisational-technical solution. A central argument is that social sciences and humanities are not an add-on to engineering but essential for understanding and achieving this integration. In Estonia, the issue is sharpened by the contrast between the highly visible digital state and the less visible manufacturing sector.

Estonians' Perceptions of Social Stratification

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A representative survey shows that while Estonians value an egalitarian society with a strong middle class, they perceive current society as increasingly elitist. This gap between ideal and reality has persisted over time. Lower-status groups

are more critical, viewing society as more unequal, while higher-status groups see less inequality. Compared to 1994, inequality is perceived as slightly reduced, but still significant. Views of the past are divided: less successful respondents see Soviet society as more equal, while others view it as elitist. Future expectations are also stratified – lower-income groups are more likely to expect continued inequality rather than the emergence of a broad middle class.

“Good Girls” in NEET Situations: Invisible Both at School and in Support Services

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The article highlights an overlooked group among NEET youth: high-achieving, well-behaved girls whose vulnerability remains hidden until they suddenly drop out of school. The problem is that schools and support services often focus on visible learning or behaviour difficulties, while mental health problems, bullying, trauma, and family violence among “good students” go unnoticed. The authors argue that NEET youth should not be treated as a uniform group. Key solutions include earlier detection of hidden distress, stronger school-based mental health and anti-bullying support, more tailored services, and addressing root causes before pushing young people back into education or work.

VARIA

Hiiumaa as a Guinea Pig, a Lesson for the Whole World

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The article argues that Hiiumaa’s education reform exposes a major knowledge gap: school closures and programme cuts are often justified by labour-market logic, but their broader impact on rural communities is poorly understood. The reform may weaken local identity, community life, regional access to education, and the future use of Suuremõisa manor and its vocational school ecosystem. The author proposes treating Hiiumaa as a research-based test case and documenting the reform systematically over time. The central solution is to produce deep, longitudinal, community-focused research so future education decisions in Estonia and elsewhere account not only for labour demand, but also for social, cultural, and regional consequences.

Global Problems and Future Scenarios: 1987–1992 and 35 Years Later. Part 2

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The article revisits the period of Estonia's restoration of independence through the lens of global problems and future scenarios. The central problem is how political leaders in a time of major transition understood international change, uncertainty, and long-term development choices. Looking back 35 years later, the authors assess how those early visions, expectations, and strategic debates related to both Estonia's immediate challenges and wider global transformations. The article highlights the importance of historical reflection, futures thinking, and strategic policymaking in times of upheaval. Its broader solution is not a single policy measure, but the need to connect political decision-making with long-term scenario analysis, so that societies can navigate uncertainty more consciously and prepare better for future crises and opportunities.