

Article

A Training Program in Group Analysis in the Baltic States: Six Years' Experience

Steinar Lorentzen, Vivi Maar and Tore Sørli

Representing the Institute of Group Analysis in Norway, the authors have for several years been engaged in group-analytic training of colleagues from the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). During the first six years, 63 candidates have entered the course, and 17 have completed five years of training. In 2003, the Lithuanian Group-Analytic Society took full responsibility for the program. This article evaluates the program and discusses the group dynamics in this transcultural encounter.

Key words: group analysis, block-training, transcultural, group dynamics, evaluation

Introduction

Lithuanian professionals with a keen interest in group psychotherapy had participated in workshops with trained group analysts and met regularly in process-oriented groups, even some years before the liberation in 1991. However, the Baltic training program that started in Vilnius in 1995 as a collaborative project between the Norwegian Institute of Group Analysis and what was then the group-analytic section of the Lithuanian Group Therapy Society was the first comprehensive program to offer full training in group analysis. It was open to participants from the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and was modelled after a similar project in Norway that started in 1984 in collaboration with the Institute of Group Analysis, London (Lorentzen et al., 1995). The training was given in blocks, during five weekends a year, and consisted of small and large self-experience groups, supervision groups, and a theory

course. An extra course in psychoanalytic theory was established for those who wanted to take the qualifying level.

We started with a basic, one year course, and gradually developed a curriculum for a five year training program, by adding an advanced and a qualifying course, each lasting two years. Each level constituted a comprehensive entity, but completion of five years and production of a clinical paper could lead to a diploma and qualification as group analyst. We also established local peer groups, where candidates could supervise each other and discuss theory between blocks.

The original staff consisted of three Scandinavian group analysts, but the intention was to gradually include Baltic professionals, and eventually for the whole program to be run by local group analysts.

Psychiatry in the Baltic countries is underprivileged and mainly biologically-oriented. Group analysis and other psychodynamic group psychotherapies are cost-effective treatment approaches that can help a wide range of psychiatric patients. The main purpose of the program was to train psychiatrists and psychologists who could become qualified trainers for their colleagues. In this way we wanted to contribute to making group-analytic treatment available for patients in the Baltic countries. For this reason we emphasized that the training was *clinical*, and that the participants had to run *clinical* groups during the main part of the training.

Scope of this Article

This project has previously been evaluated after one and three years; detailed information on organizational structure, schedule, and evaluation procedure can be found in earlier publications (Lorentzen et al., 1998; Lorentzen et al., 2002a).

In this article we take a closer look at those who were trained, and give a more comprehensive evaluation of the program, concerning both the candidates' satisfaction and whether our initial goals were reached. We present some central group dynamics from the large groups and discuss these in the light of differences in the cultural and socio-political background of the candidates and the staff. We shall also take a broader look at problematic and helpful aspects rooted in the fact that the training took place in English, a language that was not the mother tongue for any of the participants.

Staff Composition and Transfer of Responsibility

During the first five years, the small and the large groups were conducted by Scandinavian staff. In the fifth year, the most experienced candidates from the course and two Lithuanian group analysts trained in Poland were included as supervisors and theory teachers. In the sixth year, two out of the three small groups were conducted by Lithuanians, and several others, including one Latvian, were engaged as supervisors and theory teachers. From the seventh year (2003), the Lithuanian Group-Analytic Society took full responsibility for the program, while one Scandinavian group analyst has been engaged to supervise a few times per year. In 2002 the program was formally acknowledged as a post-graduate training at the University of Vilnius, and in 2004 the Group-Analytic Society became a qualifying member of EGATIN.

Participants

A total of 63 candidates have entered the program during the first six years. Demographical characteristics are presented in Table 1.

The majority of participants come from Lithuania, the least from Estonia. There are relatively few men (27%), a relatively high age (range 23–54), and an even distribution between psychologists and psychiatrists, who have quite a bit of work experience (range 1–29 years). Recruitment to the program is presented in Table 2.

The small groups would eventually comprise members who trained on different levels, while supervision groups and theory courses would be arranged according to the candidates' training level. The course had the capacity to train 33 candidates (11 members in each small group), and new candidates would be added the succeeding year, when someone terminated. The recruitment was relatively sparse, especially in the fifth and sixth year, compared to training capacity. 26 candidates were in training during the sixth year. The number of candidates that reached the different levels is shown in Table 3.

Fifty-nine candidates had taken the basic course by the end of the sixth year; 39 of these went on to the advanced course, and 34 completed that level. Thirty of these went on to the qualifying course, and out of these, 17 had graduated when we left the program. This means that 20 (32%) had ended after the basic course, four (6%) had ended after the advanced course, while seventeen (27%) had completed the whole training. Ten candidates

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Candidates. N = 63

	Nationality		Sex		Age	Profession			Education, years	Work experience, years
	Latvia	Lithuania	Female	Male		Psychiatrist	Psychologist	Social worker		
7	14	42	46	17	36 ^b	30	32	1	5.9 ^b	10.7 ^b
(11) ^a	(22) ^a	(67) ^a	(73) ^a	(27) ^a	(7.2) ^c	(47) ^a	(51) ^a	(2) ^a	(1.1) ^c	(7.5) ^c

^a(%) ^bMean ^cStandard deviation

TABLE 2
Recruitment to the Program

Year	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	N
n	31	11	5	5	3	8	63

TABLE 3
Overview of Attained Level and Drop-outs

Training year	Attained level		
	Basic	Advanced	Qualifying
1.	29 (2)*		
2.	9 (2)*		
3.	5	20 (3)*	
4.	5	7 (2)*	
5.	3	3	10 (3)*
6.	8	4	7
Total	59 (4)*	34 (5)*	17 (3)*

()* drop-outs

(16%) continued in the program for the seventh year, while twelve of the candidates (19%) did not finish the level they started on.

The Candidates' Evaluation

The candidates completed an evaluation form with 13 items at the end of each year, rating their satisfaction with the program on a scale from 1–7 (1 = very little; 7 = very much). They also rated whether it had affected the quality of the course that it was held in English. The ratings were done anonymously, which makes it impossible to follow each candidate throughout the training. Table 4 presents the average of all candidates' ratings of the basic course.

We have also compared the ratings of the candidates on the basic course across six years, and the ratings of all candidates across the five levels (basic, first and second advanced, and first and second qualifying), using one-way ANOVA. Since the data are not independent, the results have to be interpreted with caution.

Results

After the first year the participants valued the personal and professional benefits from the large group least, while benefit from

TABLE 4
The Participants' Ratings of the Basic Course N = 56

Different aspects of the course	Mean	SD	Range
Personal benefit, large group	3.7	1.4	1-7
Professional benefit, large group	3.8	1.3	1-7
Practical arrangement	5.1	1.2	2-7
Theory seminar	5.2	1.3	2-7
The social climate	5.4	.9	4-7
Benefit in conducting own groups	5.5	1.1	3-7
Professional benefit, small group	5.6	1.1	2-7
Work of my theory teacher	5.7	1.0	3-7
The course as a whole	5.7	.9	2-7
Personal benefit, small group	5.7	1.2	2-7
Benefit from supervision group	6.0	1.1	2-7
Work of my small group therapist	6.0	1.1	4-7
Work of my supervisor	6.3	1.0	3-7

supervision on their own group work and the work of their small group therapist and supervisor were rated high. The course as a whole, the personal and professional benefits from the small group, and the work of the theory teacher were also rated high.

The ratings of the candidates on the basic course were relatively stable across the first five years, but the candidates on the sixth year rated the work of their small group conductor and the practical arrangement lower. When we compare the ratings across the five different levels, several interesting findings emerge:

- The candidates expressed strongest satisfaction with the course as a whole, at the end of the second qualifying level.
- There was an increase in professional and personal benefit from the large group with time, with the highest rating on the second qualifying level.
- Apart from a considerable drop across the basic and the first advanced year (the mean dropped from 5.7 to 4.9), the personal benefit from the small group increased throughout the course and had a peak after five years ($M = 6.3$).
- There was a steady increase in experienced benefit from supervision throughout training, with a peak at the second qualifying level. However, ratings of the work of my supervisor dropped considerably across the first and second advanced years (the mean dropped from 6.3 to 5.8).

- The benefit for conducting one's own groups was steadily increasing throughout the course, with a peak at termination of the second qualifying level.

Candidates on the basic course thought that it only affected the course to a moderate degree that it was held in English ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 1.7$). There was no change across the first four levels, but candidates who graduated after five years found it less problematic ($M = 2.7$; $SD = 1.4$). When we split the group of respondents in two (cut-off point 4), and compared their ratings (T-tests), we did not find any statistically significant differences in their satisfaction with different parts of the program.

Cooperation with the Local Arrangement Committee (LAC)

From the beginning it was important to have a local arrangement committee (LAC) in Vilnius, constituted of members who knew the local circumstances could take care of the practical arrangements, and negotiate the program on behalf of the local group-analytic milieu. We met with this committee every course weekend. The transcultural encounter between Baltic and Scandinavian traditions of leadership was felt early in our meetings, and we were expected to comply with a strongly authoritarian patriarchal tradition, where all organizational decisions had been made behind closed doors (Laurinaitis, 1997). A contributing factor may also have been the spillover of transference (and countertransference) from interactions in the training course, as most members of the LAC were also candidates in training. We considered it important to introduce and model a culture of enquiry, characterized by reflection, exploration and decision-making in a democratic atmosphere. This was difficult at the beginning, as we seemed to be left with total authority, which might mean that our utterances were treated as orders to be carried out or spited. At times, there has been too much action at the cost of reflection. Also, it may have been difficult to activate all members of the committee, as power constellations outside this group seemed to impinge on its work. Our wish to have Latvian and Estonian representatives in the committee was difficult to implement, as they would have had to spend an extra day in Vilnius in order to participate. An unpleasant problem emerged as it became clear that one committee member had taken the initiative to start a parallel basic course in Estonia, without discussing this or informing the committee. This may have reflected some of the envy,

competition, and acting out which at times has also been a part of the course as a whole. The process of assisting *the whole group* in taking more responsibility and openly share ideas and feelings about the training lasted during our whole engagement period, and was a vital precondition for transferring the program to the local society. Gradually, members of LAC seemed to realize and appreciate their own possibility of influencing the future program, which manifested itself in increased maturity and acceptance of responsibility, both on the individual and institutional level. A strong leader who had taken the initiative to the collaborative project appreciated this and gradually accepted a more peripheral position in LAC by supporting others to take the lead.

Cooperation in the Scandinavian staff group

In connection with our different interactions with our fellow teachers and candidates, strong feelings and reactions were at times activated in the Scandinavian staff group. The continuous sharing and exploration of this material amongst ourselves was a indispensable part of our training effort, and a fundamental precondition for regaining our own mental 'stability'. These discussions also proved valuable in teasing out prejudices and tendencies of 'ethnocentric' interpretations. Our experience underlines the importance of good personal matches and friendship among conductors. By being personally exposed and challenged in such a program, we also experienced personal growth and deepened friendships. New friendships were established, and learning about new cultures put our own culture in perspective.

Small and large group dynamics

It soon struck us that the groups, in several aspects, were different from those we were used to in our own countries. Although we cannot share details from the small groups, we shall describe some of the dynamics in the large group, which will be compared to experiences from our Norwegian training program. We shall especially focus on: (1) the degree of maturity; (2) the use of collective defences; (3) the relationship to authority; and (4) personal exposure.

1. The maturity of a large group is a relative concept, since the level of functioning will fluctuate, even within a given session. If the group to a large degree focuses on its primary task (in a training

program this will mainly be to study large group processes), Bion (1961) called it a 'work group' as opposed to a less mature group, characterized by so-called 'basic assumptions' (dependency, fight-flight, pairing). In Kleinian terminology, the members of a mature group will see each other as whole persons, and there will be a higher degree of concern for others (a depressive position), and less splitting, projections, and psychotic anxiety (a paranoid-schizoid position). Maturity may also be demonstrated by the degree to which the group can work with the challenges created by the progression throughout the training year, as well as throughout the course. One example is the phase where local staff gradually replaced the specialists from abroad. This turned out to be a major challenge in both training programs and led to fantasies of an imminent catastrophe. The foreign teachers were idealized and the local staff got the thumbs down. Even though the large group in both programs reached mature stages, this was more prominent in the Norwegian program, although it took two years, until a more stable culture was developed. In the Baltics, the large group has functioned on a mature level for shorter periods, but mainly after 3–4 years.

2. Collective defences can be defined as characteristic behavioral patterns that take place on the group level, and seem to work counter to the explicit aims of the group. They contain both adaptive and defensive aspects and keep the anxiety of the group on an acceptable level. We will include the following phenomena which we see as counterproductive – silence, lack of ability to observe, too much concern with there and then, rigidity/control, use of ideology, acting out, and delegation (e.g. scapegoating).

The *silence* in the Baltic group has sometimes been overwhelming, varying between apprehensive and fearful, empty and nearly dead, to full of expectation, and cross or sulky. It has been difficult to read and attempts at interpretation have often failed. Especially in the beginning, we Scandinavians felt responsible for generating interaction, which often led to strong countertransference reactions (emptiness, irritation, feelings of helplessness), when our efforts proved to be in vain. Sometimes we felt a suction towards lecturing or moralistic interventions. A very silent group with a lot of sad faces looking at the floor the first year made one of us suggest that the group was depressive. This led to strong protests against the use of diagnoses, which was a reminder of former times, when a diagnosis meant that you were a deviant person, almost fit

for commitment to a psychiatric hospital or deportation. In the Norwegian large group the silences were seldom of long duration, and were usually broken by the candidates themselves. *Lack of ability to observe and to reflect* is often demonstrated by a concrete understanding of all that is said, as if it is essential to find *the* right answer, more than to share experiences. Invitations to reflect on what was going on in the group were ignored more often in the Baltics than in Norway. In large groups the here and now relationships to the group as a whole and between members are important. Extensive interest in the *there and then situation* has been present in both programs, but possibly more in the Baltics. They have also shown a *rigid control* over chairs, and the participants, often in subgroups from the same country, secured their places in advance by placing their bags and papers on *their* chair. The staff would often be lumped together close to the door, easily visible by everyone in the group. It was as if we could be pushed collectively out of the door, if the persecutory anxiety became too strong. *Use of ideology* often has a defensive function in the large group (Hopper, 2002). Members may present banal statements that are received as if they were clever, universal truths. Main (1975) called this 'Nobel Prize thinking'. Statements like 'everyone is equal' or 'we are all in the same boat' represent forms of homogenisation that can defend against aggressive feelings, envy, or feelings of inferiority. This took place in both groups, possibly more in the Baltics, where some myths were used in the same way.

Early in the Norwegian program there was also a lot of acting out, as many skipped the large group, spending the time in the swimming pool at the conference venue. Absences of the same dimensions have not taken place in the Baltics, but strong feelings of envy and rivalry have been acted out. *Delegation* means that the group puts one of their members in a certain role, often someone with qualities which make him/her suitable to act on behalf of the group.

In the Baltics, one member behaved in a striking way, being restless, noisy, and often late for sessions. This person had a tendency to deny psychological meanings, offering superficial solutions to issues that were brought up. The group member did not listen to others, and frequently would interrupt while others were in the middle of a sentence. The comments were often meaningless, but when attempts were made to clarify, the problems only seemed to increase. The result was confusion and chaos, and one felt stupid or helpless, while many would sit around laughing. After

three years the candidate was told to leave the training, since all our pedagogical or interpretative interventions up to then seemingly had been futile. After initial reactions of anger and disappointment with us and group analysis because this member could not be contained and helped, several group members started expressing guilt feelings. They felt they had let the person down, because they only had *observed* the acting out, without *interfering*. It was suggested that this candidate had represented many in their 'fight' against 'the Scandinavian conquerors', and it came to mind how individuals during Soviet times protested against the system by being stupid, playing clown, creating confusion or overplaying the rules. Maybe the person could have relinquished this role and continued in the program, if they had taken more responsibility for their own negative feelings?

3. The relationship to authority seemed to be far more conflictual in the Baltics than in Norway, and the imagos of authorities have both seemed more omnipotent and omniscient, and more unreliable, prosecuting, worthless, or punitive. Idealization and devaluation has also lasted longer and have had a stronger impact. For a detailed comparison between large group processes in the Baltic and the Norwegian training programs, see Lorentzen (2004).

One group member had appointed one of the Scandinavian staff members as the omnipotent, omniscient leader who could have made life easier and the meeting more meaningful, rich and interesting for everyone. However, he was not willing to share with others what the key to success was, but kept it for himself. According to this candidate, the staff member was indifferent to the group members' needs. The candidate gradually got more and more worked up and finally screamed angrily: 'I hate you – I am going to kill you'.

This candidate was an experienced and responsible professional. The picture this person painted was of a malignant leader that had everything and who kept everything for himself, without sharing. Longing and admiration was quickly turned to hatred and a wish to annihilate this evil object. If the staff member had been sitting like a non-responsive sphinx, some of the aggression could have been explained as a reaction to this, but he had invited the group member to an exploration of his 'authority pictures'.

4. Lack of personal exposure by a majority of the participants has been a striking aspect of the Baltic program. Very seldom, someone has started a session spontaneously and it has often been difficult for members to elaborate further on something they said, or on connections between things said in the group. In the Baltics, the participants were sometimes masters of creating smoke screens when invited to elaborate further. A direct question might be met by: 'what do you mean?' – as if there was *always* an important issue behind the question, something that *had* to be grasped fully, before they could answer.

Language

English was the only language that could be shared. The Scandinavian conductors knew no other relevant second language than English. Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians could not understand each other's languages, but sometimes used Russian to communicate amongst themselves. Another problem, especially in the beginning, was our limited knowledge of the cultural influences upon the life within, as well as outside the groups. The participants from the different Baltic countries also represented a cultural variety. Foulkes (1964) maintained that the foundation matrix is shared by all and made up from biological, cultural, social and gender experiences, which is brought to the group by the individual members. We also experienced that differences existed.

The individual participant's knowledge of English was evaluated by consensus in the Scandinavian staff after the first basic year. Six participants were considered to have insufficient knowledge, an evaluation that may have been shared by themselves, since they did not apply for further training. After three years, the language skills were significantly improved in most members that had continued the education. We have also seen that some relatively 'expressive' candidates could make themselves understood in emotionally meaningful ways, even though their English was limited. Since English was not the mother tongue of either conductors or participants, it may have represented a more neutral ground to meet on symmetrical terms. How differences in cultural background and knowledge of the English language affected the supervision groups is described in a separate paper (Maar et al., 2000).

The Group as the Translator

To create a culture which facilitated spontaneous expression of thoughts and feelings, with possibilities for understanding, exploration and deepening of meanings, the group had to function as a translator (of languages as well as behaviours). In this role as a translator, the group assisted the individual in finding and communicating adequate English words for his/her thoughts and feelings and in grasping their personal and cultural meaning. This is consistent with the Foulkesian description of group analysis as 'the analysis of the individual, by the group, in the group' (Foulkes, 1986: 3). In our experience, translation was extremely important. Group members needed help, especially from group members from

their own country, in finding English words for their thoughts and feelings. The initial communication often was presented in their mother tongue, sometimes followed by a subsequent wording into English, by themselves or other group members. The first step allowed for an authentic and spontaneous expression, the second for including the conductor and other group members in what was going on. This activity reinforced the development of group cohesion. It also represented a continuous and consistent effort to use all information available, both non-verbal, verbal, interactional and contextual, for the purpose of grasping and understanding what was going on in the individual and the group.

Coping with Language Problems on an Individual Level

The individual member's way of dealing with the language problem 'here-and-now', often represented typical interpersonal patterns which were used to solve similar challenges in ordinary life, something that created possibilities for recognition and change in the group.

One member was initially silent and appeared somatically distressed. She wanted to quit, but continued after some support and encouragement. Then she brought her dictionary to the group, as if she could rely only on herself in understanding what was going on and in making herself understood. Influenced by other members who had disclosed personal material early in the group's life, she soon let go of the dictionary. Using her mother tongue, she started addressing a group member from her own country, whom she expected to translate her experiences into English, and voice these to the group. This interpersonal pattern was analyzed and recognized as a repetition of aspects of her relationship to her parents: they had been overprotective and demanding in their relationship to her, signalling fear towards strangers. Over time, she gradually learned to voice her own experiences to the group and showed an impressive improvement in her knowledge of English, as well as in her ability to express emotions. Eventually, her bodily stress symptoms diminished.

Coping with Language Problems on a Group Level

Introducing English as the common language may have been perceived as another suppression by imperialistic foreigners. Limited knowledge of English language was experienced as an internal suppression by everyone, when experiences and opinions could not be conveyed to others. With this background, the initial transference reactions to the conductors probably were coloured by punishing superego projections, contributing to the non-communicative style

in the groups. Limitations in language skills also reduced the participants' possibilities for using language to develop an open culture of communication and enquiry. It also opened up the possibility of defensive 'intellectualization' or 'not understanding'. As conductors we had to try to grasp the cultural meaning of the non-verbal and verbal behaviour and avoid 'ethno-centric' interpretations, based on our own experiences and Western European background; for example – that silence necessarily should be an expression of anger, fear or anxiety towards the conductor as the representative of authority in the group. In a historical Baltic perspective, it might have been equally dangerous to express oneself openly in the presence of neighbours, siblings, or at all in the public space. By remembering and reviving these historical events, the 'internal enemy' gradually became more visible for us, and could then be addressed and scrutinized. The conductors' knowledge of the 'cultural matrix' was developed, along with the participants' increasing understanding of their own lives, and improved ability to communicate this. Foulkes (1964) discusses how the dynamic group matrix created by the interactional process in the group, temporarily sets the foundation matrix aside. However, our experience was that the foundation and dynamic group matrices continuously interacted, and that the dynamic content or meaning of an event could not be fully understood without an understanding of the foundation matrix, and vice versa. This process of *understanding* is based upon the direct interactions between the members in the group and the conductors. Therefore, in our opinion, the use of external interpreters in small groups does not allow for the same full group-analytic experience (Kennard, Elliot, Roberts and Evans, 2002; Kennard, Roberts and Elliot, 2002; Lorentzen et al., 2002b). External interpreters are interposed between members and conductors with interactional and transference consequences that are difficult to foresee. Their role drains the group for the essential function of translation (interpretation) and creates an element of dependency that counteracts the development of autonomy and symmetry among partners.

Discussion

To reach our goal of training group analysts, we have focused both on the individual and organizational level. We also wanted to strengthen and contribute to the further development of an already

existing group-analytic culture in Lithuania, so that it could be nested and further developed within stable organizational structures. If possible, we saw the same prospects for the two other Baltic countries.

We seem to have reached both psychiatrists and psychologists with our training efforts. The candidates have been well-educated, adult and experienced professionals and mostly Lithuanians. The rest came from Latvia and Estonia in a ratio 2:1. This seems understandable given the fact that the training site was in Vilnius, that the Lithuanians had taken the initiative, and had become interested in the field early on. Participants from the two other countries had to travel far and to pay for accommodation. Thus, Estonians disappeared from our program, whenever training in their own country became possible. Unfortunately, only about one quarter of our candidates have been men. Psychotherapists to a larger degree seem to be recruited among women. Psychotherapy is economically under-privileged and seems to have a rather low status in psychiatry. Male physicians are often more interested in more prestigious specialties.

Of the 63 candidates who entered the course during the first six years, 17 (27%) completed the five years of training, 12 from Lithuania and five from Latvia. One third of the participants (32%) ended after the basic year and four (6%) after the third year. 19% dropped out of training, and they were evenly distributed on the different levels. This seems relatively high for a training program. Comparable numbers from the first eight years in the Norwegian block-training program were: 22% ended after the basic course; 22% after the advanced level; and 56% after the qualifying level. Only three candidates (1%) dropped out of the training (Lorentzen et al., 1995). Our sample of candidates seems to follow two trends: one group that ends early (or drops out) and another group of candidates who aim at taking full group-analytic training. We think that the subgroup that ends early and the drop-outs are different, although they may be motivated by some common factors. The principal aim of the basic course was to become acquainted with dynamic group psychotherapy, but participants did not have to run their own groups. We find it reasonable that many, after a taste of group therapy, make a rational choice and end. All candidates may not be suited or have the opportunity to take an advanced training in psychotherapy. Realistic evaluation of language problems may have been a factor for those who ended early and drop-outs alike.

Unrealistic expectations may be another common factor. We initially sensed a 'honeymoon attitude' both in ourselves and the participants, which gradually was overtaken by the realization of what was required professionally and personally to continue the training. These requirements were highlighted at the end of the third year when participants had to leave the course or were instructed to take an extra year, if they had failed to fulfil the requirements. Candidates had to invest a lot of time and money. Health workers in the Baltic countries are underpaid, and many candidates needed several jobs to earn enough money. This may have been a decisive fact for many. In addition, our program was one of many competing offers to mental health workers, many of whom were sponsored by Western professional groups (e.g. psychoanalysis, gestalt therapy, transactional analysis). An important factor in early ending and early drop-out may have been a relative lack of possibilities for containment in block-training, compared to continuous training, while some of the late drop-outs may have been acting out conflicts to staff members or other members. Many participants had suffered traumatic experiences, many of which were presented and worked with in the small groups; but because of the block-training format, we sometimes would have to wait for months before this work could be resumed after a break.

In supervision, a tendency to over-identify with traumatized patients became evident, often leading to feelings of helplessness and passivity in the therapist-in-training, a fact that was repeatedly reflected through parallel processes in the supervision groups. It was not until this was brought to our awareness and interpreted that the candidates were able to deal therapeutically with the experiences of trauma and loss, which were presented in their groups. Between blocks, the candidates met in peer supervision and theory groups.

There were some difficulties in recruiting candidates over the years; we never filled the small groups completely (up to 11 members). The most motivated candidates had probably entered the course first. However, all the factors mentioned may have contributed to low recruitment. Another factor may have been a general scepticism towards groups, as all had been living within a system where individual expression in public might be punished, whenever the needs of the individual and public interest would clash.

The candidates' overall satisfaction with the training and its different components was generally high. The large group was initially rated low, but its importance increased later. This increase

can be explained partly by better functioning of the large group; also by the fact that it takes time to understand the possibilities of learning in the large group, and to mobilize the courage to experiment with it. A similar evaluation by participants in the Norwegian program showed the same tendency to rate the large group low (Lorentzen et al., 1995).

The ratings of the candidates on the basic level did not vary until the sixth year, when the work of the small group conductors was rated lower. This year was extraordinary, since there had been large changes in the staff, and the Scandinavians were about to leave. There was grief and a tendency to idealize those who left, while the new staff to some extent was met with devaluation and rivalry. The high ratings of the whole course at the end of the second qualifying course may also be coloured by the fact that graduates had just completed a long, strenuous training, being happy about their successful termination.

The transient drops in personal benefit from the small group across the first and second year and in ratings of the work of my supervisor across the first and second advanced year may reflect the fading of an initial idealization of the small group conductors and supervisors, respectively, and maybe disappointment and anger connected to this. Few candidates were conducting groups on the basic level. Thus, the first year of advanced training opened up a more realistic cooperation around their own patients. They now had to establish their own clinical groups. At the beginning, these demands were often met with passive protest, dependency and resignation, but gradually the participants became more open and conscious of their own assets and difficulties, and thus better equipped to fight their external and internal obstacles. Over time, they managed to develop a professional identity and to take on the often-feared authority of a group therapist. During the second year, strong resistances in the small groups may have created countertransference problems, leading to a more strained relationship between conductors and their groups. On the other hand, loss of idealization at this point may have been advantageous, making it possible to work with personal issues in a more autonomous, realistic way. This may explain the high ratings of the small group after the second advanced year. Apart from these transient low ratings, supervision and the work in the small groups was considered very important, especially by those who completed the training.

We consider our main goal has been reached in *Lithuania*, where

there is now a well-functioning group-analytic society, and most of the group analysts are engaged in training and run their own clinical groups. Many have started preparing their clinical paper, and the first graduate received her Diploma from IGA, Norway during a reception in Oslo in May 2004.

The situation in *Latvia* seems more complex. During a visit to Riga in 2002, we were informed about plans that they would start their own group-analytic training program. The fact that four of the group analysts live in Riga opens up the possibility of starting a continuous training, and there was an expressed wish for further supervision. However, it also was evident that there were struggles between psychologists and psychiatrists concerning the rights to do psychotherapy (and to be reimbursed), and among physicians (who can specialize in psychotherapy); there was also a struggle as to whether individual *or* group psychotherapy should be accepted in the mandatory training to become a specialist. A further complication is that the collaboration between Lithuanians and Latvians at some point seemed to cease. No Latvians were engaged on the staff for the seventh training year, even though the plan was to continue the program in English for another two years, to ensure that the Latvian participants would be able to graduate. A possible consequence may have been that three Latvians dropped out of the program, which on the other hand then could be held in Lithuania.¹

Estonia has a special situation, as a member of the LAC at an early stage started a competing block-training in Russian in Tallin, the capital. One consequence of this was that recruitment to our program stopped. This also had repercussions to our program, as one candidate who had been recruited as staff in Tallin later dropped out of the program. The program has continued, however, and is run by Lithuanian group analysts. Several candidates are now on the qualifying level and the first graduates appeared in 2004.

As a consequence of our training, there is an increase in group-analytic activity in the region. The Lithuanian Institute is engaged in an extended course activity, where the aim is to recruit more candidates, and to reach out to other groups of professionals. In 2003, the Group-Analytic Society arranged a summer workshop with 60 participants from East European countries, and the plan is to make this workshop an annual event. The Institute has also for some time negotiated with British group analysts about becoming trainers in a joint Russian-British group-analytic program in St. Petersburg.² In 2003, two of the Lithuanians were appointed by one

of the Scandinavians to teach in an ongoing educational programme concerning the use of groups in a psychiatric hospital in Archangelsk, Russia. Their combined skills in group analysis, hospital treatment of the severely mentally ill, and in the Russian language make them indispensable for this project, since most Russians in this region lack knowledge of foreign languages. Since 2001 there has also been a Lithuanian involved in a Russian-speaking training program in Belarus.

Finally, we shall discuss the language problems and observed differences in the group dynamics. Are they real or are they artefacts, i.e. skewed perceptions, because we represent a different culture? Numerous discussions over the years and the fact that we have been following both programs from the start has been favourable, when it comes to observing contrasts objectively. Our observations of the Norwegian program are also supported by published reports (Behr, 1990; Hearst, 1990; Island, 1992, 1996, 2003). Participants in group analysis ideally should be able to use their own mother tongue – we have discussed how struggles with interpretation can be productive both on an individual and a group level. The more immature group culture, the silences, and lack of personal exposure in the Baltics may partly be explained by language problems. The use of a more simple language makes communication more demanding, it takes more time, and it may be more difficult to transfer an exact meaning. A continuous need for translations and reformulations may be confusing, and can lead to subgroups of people who understand everything, a little, or nothing. It may also have affected the therapeutic alliance, creating suspicion and distrust. At the same time, it may have influenced group cohesion favourably, offering members the opportunity of helping each other (Sørli et al., 2000). Lack of maturity may also be explained by lack of personal exposure. Turquet (1975) has described how a person changes from an isolated ‘singleton’ to a member of the group by raising his voice; Pat de Maré (1975) details the work that has to be done to become responsible ‘citizens’ in the large group, and how participation in a collective ‘democratic process’ is a prerequisite for exploring the group.

The silences have been a great challenge, both to understand, and to sustain. Initially, they probably contained an expectation that the ‘saviours’ from the West would help the participants in their difficult situation. When we failed in our attempts at creating interactions, we alternated between feelings of being frustrated,

helpless and useless and possibly becoming too active with confrontations and interpretations.

On the group level, we have perceived the lack of personal exposure and the conflicting relationship with authorities, as 'voices from the social unconscious'. In many variations, we have seen a group transference that emerged when the silence could be broken. Our attempts at breaking this silence could sometimes result in productive interchanges expressing the anxieties about revealing oneself. At other times, a stubborn, stifled protest against being drawn into interaction would appear. A more exploratory attitude from us was often met by suspicion, antipathy and more silence, as if the members were guarding something valuable that had to be hidden, continuing their 'kitchen culture' from Soviet times, where religion, forbidden literature and personal issues that could be perceived as threatening to the state, were discussed in private, secret settings. We think that the group often recreated earlier sociopolitical constellations through some kind of 'repetition compulsion', where a more or less hidden rebellion against the 'establishment' was acted out, in order to prevent suppression, punishment, or in the worst case, annihilation.

We recognized attitudes in the large group described by Laurinaitis (1997) and others in the so-called *Homo Sovieticus*. Some features are: distrust of authorities and mass media, fear of taking responsibility or making personal choices, more concern with avoiding criticism than getting a result from personal activity, a split between what one says, thinks, and does, and a fear of being manipulated by psychological means. Some of these reactions are complementary to the official ideology in the former Soviet Union. There was an effort of influencing all inhabitants in the same direction, in spite of obvious ethnic, cultural, and religious differences. Social institutions aimed to tune down or deny personal needs for the best of the collective welfare. A rational control of wishes and feelings was advocated, which led to a split between external conformity and an inner, personal life (Mirsky, 1995). This, in turn, influenced the Soviet family, characterized by enmeshed relationships between family members and undermining of autonomy and individuation for single family members (Ben David, 1994; Markowitz, 1993; Pozkanzer, 1995). In this way, parent/child-relationships reflected the collective invasion and repression by the Soviet state (Goldstein, 1984).

In the Baltics, we met a group culture that often revealed how people were more used to being led, than taking responsibility; whereas, in the Norwegian program, a democratic tradition was easier to spot. In the Baltics, the punishing and unreliable leaders had to be controlled or softened, 'at any cost'. A strong sensitivity was directed towards our potential wishes in varying circumstances. This did not necessarily have consequences as to how single members or subgroups actually acted. Negative initiatives toward authorities were often played out in a cryptic way, and were registered in the countertransference as feelings of helplessness, problems in thinking, or a general uneasiness.

In contrast, everyone in the Norwegian program had been raised in a society marked by social-democratic values, such as justice and solidarity, and where every person was important and had the right to speak her/his mind. The Norwegian large group was characterized by a more democratic culture.

Nevertheless, the Baltic large group culture developed during the six years of training, particularly during the last two years. It has been very rewarding to see how single members have become more naturally self-assertive, in human and professional matters. It was also touching and a relief to end our direct involvement in the program, and to see (and feel) the sadness connected with this, and the gratefulness over our long commitment. Several candidates described in a straightforward way an extensive personal and professional development.

Through democratic means and by fighting corruption and criminal activity, the Baltic states strive to regain and develop their national identity. They want integration with the rest of Europe, through memberships in EU and NATO. Even though a quick adaptation to new laws, a market economy, and a multi-national cooperation within the Western world is possible, our group-analytic studies have shown that the individual's development to becoming a 'democratic citizen' may take a longer time.

Notes

1. At present (July 2006) we know that a training program in group analysis was started in Riga last year.
2. It seems that these negotiations now have ceased (by July 2006).

References

- Behr, H. (1990) 'Block Training: The Influence of the Modified Setting on the Group-Analytic Process', *Group Analysis* 23(4): 347–52.
- Ben David, A. (1994) 'Family Function and Migration', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 34: 121–37.
- Bion, W.R. (1961) *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- de Maré, P.B. (1975) 'The Politics of Large Groups', in L. Kreeger (ed.) *The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy*, pp. 145–58. London: Constable.
- Foulkes, S.H. (1964) *Therapeutic Group Analysis*. London: George Allen and Unwin. Reprinted London: Karnac, 1984.
- Foulkes, S.H. (1986) *Group-Analytic Psychotherapy: Method and Principles*. London: Karnac.
- Goldstein, E. (1984) "'Homo Sovieticus" in Transition: Psychoanalysis and Problems of Social Adjustment', *Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 12: 115–26.
- Hearst, L. (1990) 'Transference, Countertransference and Projective Processes in Training Course Block Sessions', *Group Analysis* 23(4): 341–6.
- Hopper, E. (2002). 'The Social Unconscious: Theoretical Considerations', *Group Analysis* 34(1): 9–27.
- Island, T.K. (1992) 'From Peers to Parents. From Trainee to Trainer', *I.G.A.R. Warsaw: Conference Bulletin*, pp. 22–34.
- Island, T.K. (1996) 'Distortions, Echoes, Reflections: The Role of the Large Group in a Group-analytic Training Community', in F. Peternel (ed.) *Median and Large Groups in Group-analytic Training*, pp. 45–6. Ljubljana: University Psychiatric Hospital.
- Island, T.K. (2003) 'The Large Group and Leadership Challenges in a Group-analytic Training Community', in S. Schneider and H. Weinberg (eds) *The Large Group Revisited*, pp. 201–13. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Kennard, D., Roberts, J. and Elliott, B. (2002) 'Group-Analytic Training Conducted through a Language Interpreter: Are we Understanding each Other?' *Group Analysis* 35(2): 209–35.
- Kennard, D., Elliott, B., Roberts, J. and Evans, C. (2002) 'Group-Analytic Training Conducted through a Language Interpreter: Is the Experience Therapeutic? Is it Group-Analytic?' *Group Analysis* 35(2): 237–50.
- Laurinaitis, E. (1997) 'Homo Sovieticus'. Paper presented at the WPA Conference, Jerusalem.
- Lorentzen, S. (2004) 'Comparing Large Group Processes within Group-Analytic Training Programs in Norway and the Baltics', *Group Analysis* 28(3): 211–26.
- Lorentzen, S., Herlofsen, P., Karterud, S. and Ruud, T. (1995) 'Block Training in Group Analysis: The Norwegian Program', *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 45: 73–89.
- Lorentzen, S., Kuriene, A., Laurinaitis, E., Lyngstad, K., Petkute, E., Sørli, T. and Zileniene, S. (1998) 'Block Training in Group Psychotherapy in the Baltic States', *Group Analysis* 31(3): 351–61.
- Lorentzen, S., Maar, V. and Sørli, T. (2002a) 'Block-Training in Group Psychotherapy in The Baltic States. Experiences from Three Years of Training', *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry* 56: 145–50.
- Lorentzen, S., Maar, V. and Sørli, T. (2002b) 'Commentary on "Group-Analytic

- Training Conducted through a Language Interpreter: Are We Understanding Each Other?" and "Group-Analytic Training Conducted through a Language Interpreter: Is the Experience Therapeutic? Is it Group-Analytic?" by D. Kennard et al.', *Group Analysis* 35(3): 251–8.
- Main, T. (1975) 'Some Psychodynamics of Large Groups', in L. Kreeger (ed.) *The Large Group. Dynamics and Therapy*, pp. 57–86. London: Constable.
- Markowitz, F. (1993) *Community in Spite of Itself*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Mirsky, J. (1995) 'Psychological Adjustment of Immigrant Students from the Former Soviet Union in Israel: Psychodynamic Perspective'. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University.
- Maar, V., Sørli, T. and Lorentzen, S. (2000) 'Supervision in Group Psychotherapy in a Trans-Cultural Block-Training Programme: Internal and External Barriers Affecting the Learning Process', *Ricerche sui Gruppi* 10: 69–74.
- Pozkanzer, A. (1995) 'The Matryoshka: Three Generation Soviet Family', *Contemporary Family Therapy* 17: 413–27.
- Sørli, T., Maar, V. and Lorentzen, S. (2000) 'Coping with Language Problems in a Group-Analytic Block-Training Programme in the Baltic states', *Ricerche sui Gruppi* 10: 75–81.
- Turquet, P. (1975) 'Threats to Identity in the Large Group', in L. Kreeger (ed.) *The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy*, pp. 87–144. London: Constable.

Steinar Lorentzen is an associate professor in psychiatry at the University of Oslo, Norway and research director at the Clinic of Mental Health, Aker University hospital. He is a psychoanalyst and group analyst and has a part-time psychiatric practice in Oslo. *Address:* Steinar Lorentzen, Institute of Psychiatry, Clinic for Mental Health, build. 12, Aker University Hospital, Sognsvannsveien 21, 0320 Oslo, Norway. *Email:* steinar.lorentzen@medisin.uio.no

Vivi Maar is an Associate Professor at the University Clinic at the Institute of Psychology, University of Copenhagen. She is a group analyst, a specialist in psychotherapy and a supervisor of child, adolescent and adult individual and group psychotherapy.

Tore Sørli is professor in psychiatry at the University of Tromsø, Norway. He is a group analyst and has a part-time private psychotherapeutic practice.