



Intangible Cultural Heritage in Estonia

Safeguarding framework and some examples



ESTONIAN
CENTRE OF
FOLK CULTURE

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Young seto musicians on Seto Kingdom Day



Planting potatoes

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Estonia (Estonian: *Eesti*) is located in the Baltic region of Northern Europe, bordered to the north by the Gulf of Finland with Finland, to the west by the Baltic Sea with Sweden, to the south by Latvia, and to the east by Lake Peipus and Russia. Estonia has 1.3 million inhabitants (the main ethnic groups are Estonians at 69%, Russians at 25% and Ukrainians at 2%), which makes Estonia the fourth smallest country in Europe. The official language is Estonian, which belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family and is one of the world's smallest official national languages. Estonia's capital is Tallinn and its medieval Old Town is inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Estonia is a member of the European Union, the Schengen Area, the United Nations, and NATO.

Along with the language, Estonian culture is the main vehicle for Estonian identity. Estonia has many facets and a diverse culture with traditions and customs that have evolved through the centuries, with many representing living heritage.



Photo: Kullji Eichenbaum

Cutting hay with a schythe

Overview of the Intangible Cultural Heritage safeguarding process in Estonia

The notion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) encompasses living cultural expressions – knowledge, skills, customs and traditions – that give people a sense of belonging and have been passed on through generations. ICH is community-based. Only the communities that create, maintain and transmit it can define what is intangible cultural heritage for them. Therefore, to be meaningful, safeguarding activities must always be led by or involve the communities that bear such heritage as much as possible. The state aims to support the efforts of the communities by creating the necessary conditions for the viability of the ICH of different cultural regions.

The guiding principles for Estonian cultural policy until 2020 note that the strength of Estonian culture lies in regional cultures, identities and communities. Several national and local institutions, in co-operation with the communities concerned, are involved in safeguarding the ICH in Estonia. The Estonian state values and supports community initiatives, community organisations and umbrella organisations, and events where ICH is transmitted and promoted. Collecting and documenting ICH in a systematic way and facilitating access to it through memory institutions is an important part of the national cultural policy. The state supports academic research and documentation, and formal education, including the integration of ICH into school curricula and a broad range of non-formal educational activities. The aim is to provide an equal opportunity for all communities living in Estonia, including language and cultural minorities, so that they can safeguard their culture and express their creativity. Community-based safeguarding activities are supported through established financial support programmes. The involvement of NGOs and civil society through the representative bodies of tradition bearers of cultural heritage in the decision-making process on the implementation of cultural policy is an important principle that guides the implementation of the Convention.

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF THE CONVENTION

2006

ICH Convention approved by Estonia

2006–2010

Membership of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of ICH



ICH Day during the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage



A teacher and children playing the Estonian *lōõts* and *kannel*

Photos: Leelo Viita

Following the accession to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, the Ministry of Culture designated the Estonian Centre of Folk Culture as the main body responsible for the implementation of the Convention. The centre participates in the process of developing and carrying out cultural policy, organises training courses and administers ICH support programmes. A department of ICH (with three professional posts) acts as the national focal point for the implementation of the Convention: it organises awareness-raising and training activities, advises communities and administers the national inventory of ICH.

Main responsibilities of the ICH Department:

- ◆ organises awareness-raising and training activities;
- ◆ advises the communities;
- ◆ administers the national inventory of ICH;
- ◆ manages the support programme for compiling the entries to the ICH inventory;
- ◆ facilitates the work of the Estonian ICH Council;
- ◆ manages the Storytelling School.

ICH specialists work in close collaboration with other staff members of the centre and its regional network of 16 folk culture specialists (one in each county of Estonia and one in the capital, Tallinn); relevant institutions at the national, regional and local levels; and NGOs and communities.

2009

Establishment of national ICH Council

2010

ICH Summer school "Local Knowledge and Open Borders: Creativity and Heritage" at the University of Tartu

In 2009, the Minister of Culture of Estonia established a new advisory body – the Estonian Council for the ICH – which brings together some 20 experts. The council offers strategic advice for safeguarding, development and promotion of ICH in society, and approves the entries for the national ICH inventory. The ICH Department of the Folk Culture Centre functions as the secretariat of the council.

Local institutes in some regions of Estonia (Võro, Seto, Kihnu, Mulgi) operate with state support as focal points for safeguarding regional diversity, and local language and culture. They share all study results with the community concerned through publications, a webpage and direct interaction with community leaders and other interested members.

Universities and cultural research institutions work in various fields of ICH. Many of their projects are related to communities and are designed to benefit the communities. Researchers who do field work and work with communities often see it as their duty to share the results with the community and allow them to benefit. Communities actively use published research material as well as material compiled by students.

2009–
2010

Membership of the Subsidiary Body for the examination of nominations to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

2010

National inventory opened for the public

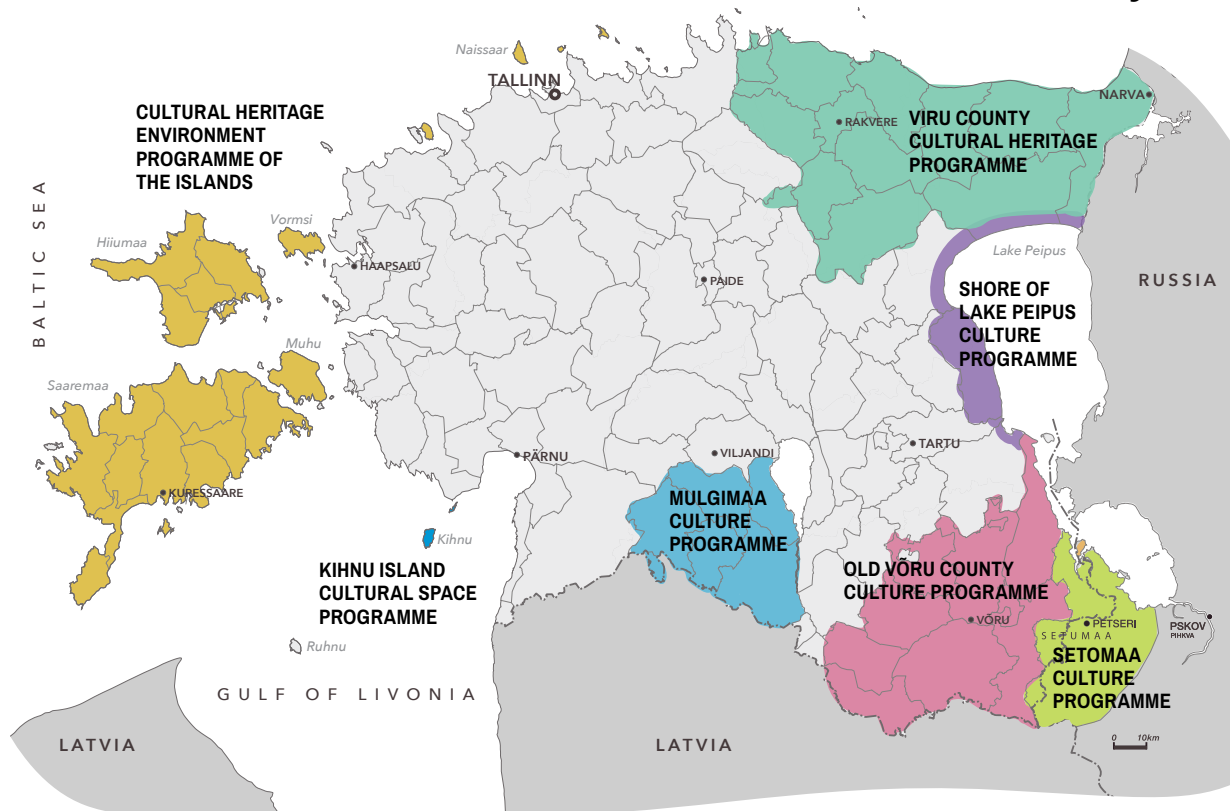
The UNESCO Chair on Applied Studies of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the University of Tartu was established in July 2018. The goal of this unit of research and international postgraduate teaching at the MA and PhD levels is to build a bridge between the academic world, civil society, local communities and policy-makers. Studies in the fields of ethnology and folkloristics, complemented with applied anthropology and cultural management, have been reinforced by the recent establishment of the new English-language Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies programme. This programme carries the mission to train specialists who are well versed in scholarly approaches to intangible cultural heritage and competent in using this expertise creatively in academia and beyond. Professor Kristin Kuutma, PhD, the chair holder, has focused her research and publications on intangible heritage matters and politics while also representing Estonia at meetings and activities related to the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Kristin Kuutma representing Estonia on the ICH Committee at UNESCO

The Ministry of Culture in cooperation with local communities has established seven regional ICH support programmes that have created the framework and conditions for safeguarding ICH. The first regional ICH support programmes were established in 2000 and since 2012 they are administered by the Estonian Centre of Folk Culture. These programmes are not firmly structured in their elements and strategies in order to take into account the changing nature of ICH and to give the communities a chance to decide which elements of their heritage need support and how to best safeguard them. As communities are not just bearers of ICH entitled to assistance but also the primary parties responsible for safeguarding their own ICH, it is up to them to develop projects according to their needs and ideas, and to apply for funding. This approach has proved to be an effective means to encourage community action and a valuable safeguarding tool. It is worth noting that these ICH support programmes have had a positive influence on other regions.

In general, all **seven regional ICH programmes** have the same aims for safeguarding or revitalising intangible heritage, increasing the number of people who participate in local culture and strengthening the ties between young people and their ancestors' language and cultural heritage. The most common examples of supported activities include organization of cultural events related to traditional culture; presentation of workshops, training courses and seminars; and compilation and publication of books and CDs, many of them in the local language. Modern interpretations of traditional music, handicrafts, art and literature are also eligible for support. Representative bodies of tradition bearers may apply for operating support in order to pursue their activities. Supporting the role of ICH in the local economy is growing increasingly important. Finally, research activities, especially community cooperation with research institutions, are supported.



Other ICH support programmes administered by the Estonian Centre of Folk Culture are:

- ◆ the support programme for folk festivals;
- ◆ the support programme for national costumes;
- ◆ the support programme for regional cultural activities and compiling entries for the Estonian inventory of ICH;
- ◆ the support programme “Theater in the countryside”;
- ◆ the operating support for folk culture partner organizations.



Midsummer's day on Hiiumaa Island







Traditional indigo dyeing

Photo: Sandra Urvek



Fishing using a *kuurits*

Photo: Külli Eichenbaum



A Võro-language song and folk festival *Uma Pido*

Photo: Dimitri Kotjuh



Celebrating Assumption (St. Mary's Feast Day)

Photo: Laila Meister



Seto Kingdom Day in Värška







Older masters instructing a future master



Dugout boats on Raudna River



A wedding in the orthodox church on Kihnu island





Winter fishing in Kihnu

Photo: Kihnu Museum

2014

ICH study materials compiled for general education schools

2015

support program for compiling entries to the national inventory launched

The Estonian inventory of ICH - an instrument for safeguarding, valuing and promoting of ICH

Work on the national ICH inventory has been a useful tool to encourage community action. It has encouraged people in many parts of Estonia to reflect on and safeguard their intangible cultural heritage. The aim of the inventory is not to showcase the most eye-catching and ear-striking elements of ICH but to recognise the inherent value of such heritage to its bearers and practitioners as well as to society at large. The national inventory of ICH in Estonia represents the dynamic living heritage of the different communities in Estonia and encourages heritage bearers to look at their traditional cultural elements more broadly.

This inventory does not directly build on existing databases in order to ensure community participation and that the inventory focuses on ICH as living heritage. The purpose of the inventory is to serve the interests of local communities, and every entry is based on research prepared by the representative of a given community. The inventory takes time to evolve but can never be completed as intangible cultural heritage itself is constantly changing and evolving.

Work on the structure of inventory began in 2007, in close collaboration with researchers from the University of Tartu, the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literature Museum. The online inventory (<https://rahvakultuur.ee/vkp/nimistu>) was unveiled to the public in 2010.

Basic facts:

- ◆ one national inventory
- ◆ online inventory
- ◆ communities have a central role – a bottom-up approach
- ◆ does not build on existing databases
- ◆ 4 types of entries

The main criterion for inclusion is the desire of a community to include a particular element that corresponds to the definition of ICH: is an element of living heritage important for its community today; and has been passed on from generation to generation. As for viability, each entry must include information on modes of transmission of the element, the threats it faces (if any), safeguarding measures and their impact. Communities can share their good safeguarding practices.

The inventory making is a bottom-up process and communities themselves compile entries for the inventory, decide if they want their intangible cultural heritage to be included, which elements, and how they wish to present them. This ensures the respect of customary practices governing access to elements of ICH. Relevant community organisations also participate in identifying and defining intangible cultural heritage. All entries will be updated every five years by the people who compiled them.

4 types of entries:

The main entry, describing the element of intangible cultural heritage, can be linked to three types of additional entries:

- ◆ individual practitioners;
- ◆ organisations connected with the element;
- ◆ places or regions that are important for this element.

- ICH Day in universities: Tallinn University, University of Tartu Pärnu College; University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy, Estonian University of Life Sciences
- International festival „Hakkame santima!“ introducing traditions of disguising and mask processions of Saint Martin's Day all over Estonia

The inventory is structured in a twofold way to present different types of entries as well as different ICH domains. The additional entries are always subordinate to the main entry of an element and cannot exist independently. However, every individual, organisation, place or region can be connected to as many elements of intangible cultural heritage as needed.

All entries concerning an element are linked to one or more thematic domains that they represent. The list of non-inclusive domains and sub-domains was developed specially for the inventory.

ICH domains:

- ◆ settlement
- ◆ way of life
- ◆ living environment
- ◆ management of natural resources
- ◆ food and nutrition
- ◆ crafts
- ◆ language and poetical genres
- ◆ customs and religion
- ◆ pastime and playful activities, etc

The entries follow a fixed structure. They include short analytical texts and audio-visual materials.

The structure of an entry:

- ◆ Description – present and past (text)
- ◆ Links to other entries
- ◆ Sustainability – transmission, possible threats, safeguarding activities so far (text)
- ◆ Additional information – photos, videos, audio, text files, references (books and webpages)
- ◆ Sources on which the entry is based

Estonian Centre of Folk Culture encourages communities to compile entries for the inventory. It also acts in an advisory capacity concerning the format of the entry and the necessity to provide informed consent letters of the practitioners and organisations representing the ICH element concerned. Finally, the Estonian Council for the ICH approves entries to national inventory of ICH.

The first entries came from Hiiumaa island followed by Võrumaa region in South Estonia. These communities were already actively safeguarding and promoting their ICH and were interested in working with the inventory. The first entries from Hiiumaa included nicknames used for different groups of local inhabitants, making beer at home, rocking in a rocking-chair, and skills of making a roundpole fence. Võrumaa presented such cultural expressions as Võru language, smoke sauna tradition, building and playing Teppo-type instruments called *eesti lõõts* (Estonian accordion), funeral customs.



Building a greenhouse

In the course of the ten years that the Estonian national inventory of ICH has been open to the public, it has gathered about 100 different elements of ICH practised in Estonia. The elements described are from different ICH domains; some elements are commonly known in Estonia, some are less inclusive, and many are attractive and festive, while most are seemingly mundane—however, all of them are important to their practising communities. To describe and verbalise the meaning of something as elusive as ICH needs concentration and work, but there is no doubt that it can be done best by the heritage bearers and practitioners themselves.



Engraving a large Seto brooch



The Travelling exhibition “Heritage Lives!”

Introducing the Estonian inventory of intangible cultural heritage

To bring the national inventory closer to the people, Estonian Centre of Folk Culture organised a travelling exhibition called “Heritage Lives!” It is composed of 14 elements of ICH from the national inventory, ranging from folk medicine in South-East Estonia, Võromaa, to the student celebrations of Walpurgis Night in Tartu. The exhibition is a way to raise awareness about the notion of ICH and to encourage people to notice it around them. The exhibition has travelled around Estonia since 2013 (the year dedicated to cultural heritage in Estonia), visited nearly 50 places and received a warm welcome everywhere. Short descriptions of the elements with pictures are printed on mostly linen clothes and hung on a clothesline to imitate the drying of the washing. There is also the DIY phenomenon - worksheets for both children and grownups. Unlike the virtual national inventory, this exhibition is enthralling and engaging.



Opening the travelling exhibition „Heritage Lives!“ -
in Kihnu and at the Estonian Open Air Museum



Rahva- meditsiin Vanal Võrmaal

Vanal Võrmaal on olnud alati tugev rahva-
meditsiin. Selle põhjal on loodud
mitmeid ravimeid, mis on tänapäeval
ka kasutusel. Vanal Võrmaal on
ka olnud palju erinevaid
taimeliikide kasutamist.

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tänapäeval ka kasutusel. Vanal
Võrmaal on ka olnud palju erinevaid
taimeliikide kasutamist.



Seto kirmas

Seto kirmas on üks vanimaid
Eesti rahvapärimusi. See on
võimeline ravima mitmeid
haigusi. Seto kirmas on
ka olnud üks populaarsemaid
rahvapärimusi. See on võimeline
ravima mitmeid haigusi.

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olnud üks populaarsemaid
rahvapärimusi. See on võimeline
ravima mitmeid haigusi.









Masking traditions during Estonia's Martinmas (St Martin's Day)





Drying of therapeutic plants



Catching herring using a *kakuam* boat in Kihnu



Drying of washed sheep's wool





Celebrating the Assumption (St. Mary's Feast Day)

The benefits of the national intangible heritage inventory as seen by communities themselves

From time to time the question has come up in several communities as to the benefits of including the entry into the inventory. Why should it be done? There are several answers to that question.

The mere fact that the inventory exists encourages community representatives to look around themselves more closely, to discuss the characteristic cultural expressions of the given region and to analyse them. This, in turn, offers a better understanding about the need to research those cultural expressions. Being aware of one's own intangible heritage makes it possible to notice old habits and automatic patterns of behaviour, and raises numerous questions: why? what? how? Where can answers be found to these questions? Where can structured and relevant information and data be found?

The answers to these questions can be found by studying, researching and analysing the activities, customs and traditions of a given community. Compiling an entry for the ICH inventory offers an opportunity to do that. It is a way to describe and highlight the reasons for doing something in a particular way, and it also raises the community's awareness about its own customs, traditions, skills or identity.

For instance, in the process of compiling entries for the inventory, communities have discovered that some of their traditions and customs are different from other similar cultural expressions. This process has also helped to shed light on the reasons why these things are done in this specific way today. In the Mulgi community, it was discovered during the process of compiling the entry for the inventory that the recipe for Mulgi porridge known and loved all over Estonia includes barley groats, but the Mulgi community itself makes the porridge with pearl barley. When this phenomenon was studied more closely, it turned out that as during the Soviet period barley groats were hard to find, pearl barley was used instead and became a common ingredient of this porridge. Such knowledge



A Haapsalu shawl making workshop

itself is an important benefit that provides community members with choice and helps to convey the message that we ourselves are an important and essential part of our intangible cultural heritage, and that its transmission depends on us.

Compiling an entry provides an opportunity for community members to meet and discuss all aspects concerning a given cultural expression, to share joys and concerns about this phenomenon, and to collect relevant data and material. To give an example from the island of Hiiumaa, these discussions contributed to the better awareness that the typical accessories to the traditional costume of Hiiumaa women – a sheathed knife and a needle case – are part and parcel of the local ICH. The knowledge and skills needed to make them were recalled and renewed, and the tradition of making such accessories was once again continued on the island.

On the other hand, there are things that the community members do not think about, but when they see their daily activities and traditions described and highlighted, it strengthens local identity. This has happened on Hiiumaa island



The building and use of handcarts on Hiiumaa Island

with the traditional friendly mocking of islanders with regional nicknames and with the tradition of rocking in a rocking chair, not to mention the colorful stripes of traditional costume skirts. The latter has been widely used in packaging to highlight the local origin of products as well as in the design of new products such as striped plywood. Preparing entries for the national inventory empowers communities' self-esteem and strengthens their identity.

The entries in the national ICH inventory have provided reference material for children when they write their school term papers. They are also a good source for finding local recipes (be it traditional soup with big balls made of pork and barley from Hiiumaa island or Mulgi porridge from the Mulgimaa region). In addition, the entries are a useful source reference for organising different events and activities.



Men's singing workshop in a traditional lavvu style tent

Photo: Tiit Saare



Making mulgi korp pastries with children



Arriving on a dugout boat to a smoke sauna in Soomaa





Different cultures meet in China

Entries in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Estonia has four entries on the Representative List that is made up of those intangible heritage elements that contribute to demonstrating the diversity of this heritage at a global level and raising awareness about its importance.

- ◆ Smoke sauna tradition in Võromaa
- ◆ Seto leelo – the Seto polyphonic singing tradition
- ◆ Kihnu cultural space
- ◆ Song and dance celebrations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania



A family makes preparations for heating a smoke sauna



Smoke sauna tradition in Võromaa

The smoke sauna tradition is primarily a family custom among the Võro community in southern Estonia. It comprises a rich set of traditions including actual bathing customs to relax the mind and body, the skills of making bath whisks, building and repairing saunas, and smoking meat in the sauna.

Seto leelo - the Seto polyphonic singing tradition

The Seto leelo is a traditional way of singing where music is combined with texts that follow articular poetic rules and structures, being defined by particular occasions and singing situations. For the Seto community in south-eastern Estonia, the leelo is a cornerstone of contemporary identity, transmitting lifestyle, language, and traditions.



Seto people singing their polyphonic style of singing called leelo.





Kihnu cultural space

Lying off Estonia's western coast, the small islands of Kihnu and Manija are home to a community of 600 people with established livelihood practices and rich cultural traditions. The local dialect, Kihnu wedding parties, calendar festivities, songs, games, dances and traditional crafts continue to define the community.



Kihnu women

Song and dance celebrations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

The Baltic practice of song and dance in organised choirs, dance groups and music ensembles culminates cyclically with nationwide parallel celebrations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These celebrations have served as a vital tool in nation-building in all three countries, while evolving into the most massive and inclusive communal event celebrating cultural identity.





The Erza community celebrating Maslenitsa

Photo: Toivo Treufeldt



Erza and Moksha communities celebrate the first day of summer

Photo: Toivo Treufeldt



Romani folk dance

Photo: European Roma Forum in Estonia



With guests from Ukraine during the pysanka seminar at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Tallinn

Photo: Estonian Centre of Folk Culture



Wool washing

Some examples of ICH in Estonia

Intangible heritage as living heritage is constantly changing and evolving. The following examples present some traditions, skills, customs, and knowledge that give a sense of belonging to the practitioner communities in Estonia and have been passed on through generations. Some of them also share successful safeguarding experiences.

Some of the introduced cultural expressions are unique to the given community. Others help people to value and to see the power of tradition in ordinary, everyday activities. Hopefully, these examples provide the reader with the pleasure of discovering something new and recognising something familiar.



Masking traditions on St. Catherine's Day

Photo: Ege Kink



Storyteller Piret Päär telling stories

The Storytelling School

The storytelling tradition in Estonia has been kept alive over the last 30 years by the Storytelling School at the Estonian Centre of Folk Culture. The founder of the school is storyteller Piret Päär. The Storytelling School has encouraged people to notice, to listen and to tell stories. It has introduced the Estonian folktale tradition in Estonia as well as abroad, and has given the old folktales an opportunity to become revived through storytelling. The school has stimulated people to cherish the oral heritage of their families and neighbourhood, to listen and to collect valuable wisdom from lives already lived and experienced.

The Storytelling School offers training sessions, lectures, seminars, summer camps and storytelling evenings, nights and mornings. The programmes are mainly for adults, but the school presents those directed at children as well. International conferences and storytelling festivals are also part of the picture. All this is done with the view that telling stories could become once again an inseparable part of people's lives.

The Storytelling School has been closely involved in international cooperation. The storytelling festival "*Jutupühad*" (Story Feast) has brought together a number of professional storytellers from all over the world. The roots of the festival lie in tradition.

Once there was a man in Tartu region, Jaan Räisa, head of the Miku farm household, who is said to have been one of the best local storytellers of his time. When Jaan was telling a story in full swing, he could easily forget the most important tasks. It could easily happen that when his wife went to the meadow in mid-morning with food for the workers, she would find Jaan standing at the edge of the field spinning a tale. The village people who had been asked to help out with the work were eagerly listening. And when it so happened that a beggar or some other fellow with many stories to tell came from far away, he was invited to Miku farm and they would tell stories until the early morning hours. Other villagers used to say then: “Oh, at Miku farmhouse they are having a story feast again”.



Listening to stories

In addition to the Storytelling School, there is now the NGO called Jutumaja (Story House, www.piretpaar.com) in the Viljandi region. One could certainly hope that the Story House will one day become a storytelling centre with a cozy room for telling stories and an excellent library. Sometimes there has been light in the windows of the Story House until the early hours of the morning. The neighbours can be sure that the Story Feast is happening once again.

www.rahvakultuur.ee/vkp/jutukool



Piret Päär

Storyteller and the leader of the Estonian storytelling movement and NGO Storytelling House



A harvest of crops

Pickling, preserving & conserving

Although fruit and vegetables and preserves made from them are available year-round in supermarkets, and it has been a long time since survival has depended on stocking up for winter, many people in Estonia still head out into the forests and bogs or onto the water (or simply to the market or their own garden or allotment) when a certain time of year comes around.

Over time, the techniques and equipment that people have used for pickling and preserving have diversified and improved, and this information has flowed from people's homes to major producers.

People are still interested in the art of pickling and preserving, and more and more youngsters are getting involved. The popularity of local ingredients and food culture has grown and healthy and organic food is valued, as is knowledge gained at home. As such, making preserves and putting them on the table is a family tradition for many people. Often this is a conscious choice in favour of healthier, more interesting or more 'personal' food. Indeed, emotional and symbolic attachments are growing in importance alongside practical reasons.



Rowan berries in a basket



Mushroom harvest

Photo: Kristina Praakil

Preserving and recipe competitions have helped promote the art. These are held, for example, at local fairs, as well as being organised by national media outlets. Competitions encourage people to recall and remind others of old tips and to try new recipes.

Apart from within your own circle of family and friends, the knowledge you need to pickle and preserve can also be gained on special courses. Quite a few villages operate shared kitchens in order to foster the development of small enterprise. Here, keen picklers and preservers can also share their skills and exchange knowledge.



Making redcurrant juice





A mother's handmade *kannel*

The Kannel makes a comeback

It is thought that the *kannel* (psaltery) – the oldest of all Estonian stringed instruments – was first used some two thousand years ago. The *kannel* is a six- to 12-stringed version of the instrument on which the placement of the strings is fanlike and where the instrument itself was originally hollowed out from a single tree. The *kannel* fell into disuse when zithers with larger numbers of strings were developed in the late 19th century. However, the little instrument has enjoyed a popular renaissance in recent decades. It is easy for people of all ages to learn how to play it.

Early attempts were made to revive the fortunes of the *kannel* (both playing the instrument and making it) in the 1970s and 1980s when the folklore movement took off in other countries. However, it was not until the Estonian Pianos factory started to manufacture small zithers on the basis of museum pieces and Finnish five-stringed zithers in 1990, that playing the zither surged in popularity. People would teach, learn and play the zither together, and sing songs accompanying it as part of folk culture courses and get-togethers up and down the country.



The blessing of a handmade *kannel* for a child

Photo: Riina Ramialg

What kind of music was played on the *kannel* in Estonia in times past is not known. For this reason, neighbouring countries were taken as an example in how it is played today.

The factory ceased production of six-stringed zithers in 1997. By this time, the first handmade instruments had been produced. Many of the master craftsmen who began making zithers during this period still do so today. Camps dedicated to making the instruments were soon launched. Today, you will even find the instruments being made in industrial arts classes at schools.

Kannel is played in kindergartens, schools and children's music schools, as well as in folklore circles and at the traditional music camps that were set up in the 1990s. There are people of all ages throughout Estonia who love the instrument, which is also given a place on concert stages. Zither lessons are offered by music colleges as well.



A ring of the Estonian *kannel*



Placing strings on a kannel



A master of traditional Hiiu island hip jewellery, called *rõhud*

Photo: Leelo Viita



Traditional costumes and *rõhud* hip jewellery from Hiiumaa Island

Photo: Eino Pedanik

Skills learned from the master

The traditional costume of the women of Hiiumaa Island includes hip jewellery called *rõhud*. The women wear a leather strap on their belts partly covered with copper plaques from which hang copper chains. The women who do not own a complete set of the traditional costume sometimes wear this particular type of hip jewellery with modern clothes in order to stress their identity as Hiiumaa islanders. The making of this type of jewellery is still a completely artisanal process. Three-sided chain links represent a special feature of the jewellery, and to this day it has been impossible to make these chains with machines.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was only one elderly master on the island who still made this special type of hip jewellery – Richard Heinaste. The islanders were worried that the tradition practiced by local masters would be discontinued. In 2009, the project “Skills Learned from the Master” was launched with financial support from the regional ICH support programme established by the Ministry of Culture. In the autumn, the Hiiumaa museum provided an historic overview of this type of jewellery to the project participants, who also had a chance to see the work of other masters. In wintertime, the participants learned the tricks of the trade from Heinaste, and as early as in spring two brothers – Eero and Enriko Nõmm – presented their first copper chains at the exhibition organised by the Hiiumaa museum.

Within the next year, Eero made dozens of such custom-made hip jewellery sets. He has acquired additional knowledge by studying different materials from the museum's collection and testing various methods of work.

All the necessary parts and pieces are handmade and assembled by Eero at his home-based workshop. The master has introduced the skills of making such jewellery and the proper way to wear it at handicraft fairs and during school lessons. Eero has created a jewellery series inspired by this special type of hip jewellery. He also makes metal buttons for men's traditional costumes and spangles for Hiiu women's headgear. His mother Elga, in turn, makes traditional costumes. In this way, the family workshop provides traditional costumes for both men and women.



A window restoration course

NGO Vanaajamaja

Estonian building owners are greatly interested in the restoration of old buildings, and traditional construction is growing in popularity. Playing its own part in this is the NGO Vanaajamaja, which was founded in 1998. It started with the study and revitalisation of log-based construction, but has since expanded to include the study, documenting, teaching and popularisation of traditional construction methods more broadly, primarily involving farm-related architecture in Southern Estonia.

The members of the NGO are experienced builders who earn a living from erecting and renovating log buildings and installing shingle roofing. The organisation also keeps in touch with older master craftsmen, whose stories, knowledge and skills are documented. Andres Uus, the founder of the NGO, also imparts his knowledge at the Estonian University of Life Sciences and Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu.

With training courses, publications and consultation, Vanaajamaja draws building owners' attention to construction heritage and teaches them how to maintain and restore it. During the practical training the organisation provides, participants primarily learn how to restore and repair old buildings, but those looking to build a new home in the traditional way can also obtain help and advice from specialists.

Apart from traditional materials and construction methods, attention is also turned to how best to ensure that the skills remain in use or are brought back into use, as well as how to renovate old buildings without destroying what makes them special and still making them good places to live today.

At first, training and consultation on traditional construction were provided as part of ongoing projects, but Vanaajamaja now has its own dedicated training centre in Mooste.

www.vanaajamaja.ee

In 2015, the Centre of Rural Architecture received the Grand Prix of the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Award 2015 in the Education, Training and Awareness-Raising category with the Programme for Owners of Rural Buildings in Estonia.



International log building workshop

Photo: Vanaajamaja



A fire education and prevention performance by volunteer firefighters

Volunteer firefighters in Järva-Jaani

Serving alongside the professional firefighters in Estonia are more than 800 volunteers, who do what they can within their neighbourhoods and communities to ensure that people know how to avoid fires but still race to the scene to help douse the flames should a fire break out. They have the skills and knowledge needed to deal with fires – not something that ordinary members of the community tend to have.

The first associations of volunteer firefighters were established on the present-day territory of Estonia in the second half of the 19th century. Not even the outlawing of associations under Soviet rule put an end to the activities of volunteers, and in recent times their numbers have grown substantially.

In Järva-Jaani, the volunteer tradition has been maintained by its firefighting association, which was re-established in 1998.



Tuve Kärner, the head of the association, says that knowledge of fire safety and what to do in the event of a fire is held in high regard and passed down from generation to generation. His father and grandfather before him were leaders of volunteer firefighter teams, and his own sons are following in their footsteps.

In their early years, firefighting associations were focal points of local cultural life, involving everything from singing in choirs to putting on plays. Today, too, the firefighters in Järva-Jaani are at the forefront of association life. A number of museums have been set up that not only showcase the history of firefighting but also local cultural history (and which of course remind visitors of the principles of fire safety). There is a firefighters brass band, and youngsters are encouraged to take up a brass instrument. The association also works with the local cultural centre and assists in organising funerals.

www.jjts.ee







Trading at Lindora fair

Country Fair in Lindora

Every year on St. Simon the Zealot's day, the 28th of October, a country fair is held in Lindora. This historical fairground is situated on the border of the cultural spaces of Setomaa and Võromaa in South-East Estonia, at the crossroad of important local roads. The origin of this tradition is not known. The country fair of Lindora is considered to be the only continuous fair in Estonia that has remained as an important trading and gathering place for the neighbourhood.

Originally at Lindora fair only domesticated animals were traded, but later people began to sell handicrafts, garden produce, food, antiques and various industrial goods.

Lindora fair is a place for meeting relatives and acquaintances, exchanging news and whiling away the time. Earlier the fair was visited by people only from the surrounding villages; now guests often come from farther away.

The importance of country fairs decreased at the beginning of the 20th century with the creation of co-operatives. In the Soviet era, the restriction on private trading caused the end of these fairs in some places altogether. Lindora fair was being consciously enforced at the end of the 1980s by locals who were concerned about the viability of the Võro and Seto cultures.

The community collaborates to make sure that the reputation of the indigenous country fair remains good, and that the local traders are in the foreground for the sake of safeguarding the country fair tradition.



Gatherings of people to help cut firewood



Gatherings to help clean-up and maintain the landscape

Work Gatherings in the Village of Sakla

In Estonian villages, from generation to generation, urgent housework is done collectively. The work gatherings, and the focus and purpose of the work have changed over time together with society.

Work gatherings have an important place in everyday life. People notice those in need and help to do the more time-consuming work, for example, sawing, chopping and stacking firewood, and tidying up the village surroundings.

On the island of Saaremaa, around the village of Sakla, the tradition of gathering for work is viable to this day. The organiser of these events is the Sakla Society for Village Improvement, which has entrenched its own traditions. People of all ages participate in the work, and the main body is formed by members of the Society for Village Improvement and their families. Young people who have moved away often come back to participate in the work and bring their children along. The people of the village of Sakla take care of their home, the appearance of the village and its wellbeing collectively.

A community feast is a part of the tradition. This creates a sense of belonging between the community and home, and brings people from different specialities and generations together. Work well done, and the gaining and transmission of knowledge and skills can be considered the most significant outcomes. Volunteer work for the benefit of the village and community is increasingly considered inspiring by participants.



Russian Shrovetide celebration

Photos: Estonian Open Air Museum



Russian Shrovetide celebrations in Tallinn

During the week before Lent (a period of fasting), Russian-speaking communities in Estonia celebrate Maslenitsa: a traditional holiday that denotes the arrival of spring after the long, dark winter. Russian Shrovetide celebrations are traditionally accompanied by pancakes, which resemble the sun in both form and colour, the burning of a ritual straw doll, trials of strength and merrymaking in the snow. People also drop in on their friends and family and pay visits to the graves of relatives no longer with them.

In Estonia, Maslenitsa is observed not only at home but also in kindergartens and schools where Russian is the language of instruction. The teachers tell the children about the meaning of the holiday and the beliefs and customs associated with it. They dance and sing together and play traditional games in circles. They also enjoy pancakes and tea. Sometimes the pupils and students from nearby kindergartens and schools where the language of instruction is Estonian are also invited to take part in the customs and learn more about Russian culture. Visiting others and having others visit you has long been a part of the Shrovetide tradition.

In the Estonian capital Tallinn where more than 40% of the population of which speak Russian as their first language, Maslenitsa has been celebrated in a big way since the mid-1990s. Parties are held in various parts of the city at the end of the week, attended by families and groups of friends. Stalls and kiosks are set up that offer all sorts of things: jams, honey, pancakes with sour cream and fish roe, meat dishes, and drinks. Many people bring a thermos with them and their own pancakes, which they share with friends and family. Slavic folk music and dance is presented, and pop artists also take to the stage. There are competitions, such as a strong man contest and a search for the biggest or most original pancake. The Maslenitsa straw doll is set alight at dusk.

These festivities help people who speak Russian preserve and promote their culture and strengthen the sense of belonging within their community. Public celebrations of Maslenitsa have also breathed new life into the marking of its traditions in schools and people's homes.



Ukrainian decorated eggs, known as pysanky

The Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Center & its promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Ukrainian Cultural Center, Labora Masters' Workshops, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Sunday School and St. Hildegard's Courtyard Garden, all work together to form a single unique whole which you can find on Laboratoorium Street in Tallinn's Old Town. Different people from different cultures meet there to explore a variety of different possibilities. On the one hand, the Ukrainian Cultural Center and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church are places where Ukrainian living in Estonia gather together. On the other hand, the entire Laboratoorium creative complex functions as an arts, crafts, and cultural center open to everyone.

The overarching goal of the Ukrainian Cultural Center—especially of its schools and workshops—is to preserve as many endangered skills as possible including: woodworking; Easter egg painting (pysanky); papermaking; calligraphy; and letterpress. Traditional skills survive only when they are passed on to as many different people as possible. To do this, the Center organises workshops and masterclasses for anyone who might be interested. As a result, the Center hopes to preserve as many traditional Ukrainian handicrafts and other related skills as possible. The Center's teachers are mainly Ukrainians who live in Estonia or are visiting here for a time. Thanks to them, the Center has become a meeting place where people from a number of different communities and from various backgrounds get a chance to learn something about each other's cultures. The Center also welcomes school children to its common creative ground.

Ukrainians living in Estonia will visit the Center for any number of reasons. At the heart of the Center are its classrooms where people can learn how to paint eggs (pysanky) for the Easter season or to make wooden toys for Christmas. Young people take advantage of the Center to organise any number of events including: folk dances, concerts, and much more. On Saturdays, Ukrainian children and their friends gather on Laboratoorium Street to hear about life in Ukraine while learning different crafts as part of the Center's regular Sunday School program organised by its School of Monastic Arts.

A Benedictine friar and Ukrainian-Estonian artist named Anatoli Ljutjuk is the main author behind this pastoral center. He built this entire complex – from its church to its workshops – together with his family and friends and thanks to the support of numerous sponsors. On Laboratoorium Street, visitors will discover a whole new world which resembles a small Ukrainian village where life goes on even when there is no special event taking place. So, don't be surprised to find craftspeople at work, artists painting icons, or local residents learning how to make handmade paper, as volunteers work in the garden, others learn a new language, and someone prays

www.ukk.ee



Playful storytelling at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Tallinn

Photo: Olev Saal

Preparing traditional Easter eggs in the Ukrainian community

Pysanka (*писанка* in Ukrainian) is an Easter egg decorated in a Ukrainian way. Its name comes from the word *pysaty* 'to write', as the designs are not painted on, but written with beeswax. The making of pysanka's is a living and important tradition for the Ukrainian community. Every traditional design used to decorate the eggs has its meaning and desired effect. In addition to the pre-Christian patterns, every decorator adds something original to the egg. In earlier times the knowledge and skills related to pysanka-making were passed down from mother to daughter. These days both women and men are engaged in decorating eggs.

In the Ukrainian community living in Estonia, pysanka-eggs are made at least once a year during Easter and people take them to church. Such decorated eggs are a source of pride for the family.



Pysanka workshop at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Tallinn



Kihnu children



Estonian Centre of Folk Culture
www.rahvakultuur.ee



Estonian National Commission
for UNESCO
www.unesco.ee



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