



Chicago Estonians: Case Study

Emily Vogel, Richard Henahan
2024



Authors: Emily Vogel, Richard Henahan

Study: Chicago Estonians: A Case Study

Overarching Study: Estonian Communities Abroad: Identity, Attitudes and Expectations Towards Estonia (Accessible here: <https://www.ibs.ee/en/publications/estonian-communitites-abroad-identity-attitudes-and-expectations-towards-estonia/>)

Study conducted by: The Institute of Baltic Studies

Interviews and focus groups conducted: Summer 2021

We would like to thank our focus group and interview participants and Estonians and Estonian cultural organisations in the Chicago area. A special thanks to the Estonian Cultural Society of Chicago (ECSC) for a warm welcome and assisting in the organisation of interviews and focus groups.

Cover Design: Intended to show facets of Estonian identity in Chicago. See Figure 1 and Figure 5 in the text below for inspiration.

Cover Design: (*top left*) Brand Estonia (Tallinn Old Town, Kaupo Kalda, Location: Suur-Kloostri, Tallinn, Kesklinn Tallinn North Estonia, #253856), (*top middle*) Brand Estonia (Tallinn Old Town, Giulio Gröbert, Location: Tallinn North Estonia, #657037), (*top right*) Brand Estonia (Pärnu coastal meadow hiking trail, Susann Kõomägi, Location: Pärnumaa Pärnu West Estonia, #256380), (*bottom left*) Canva (Pixabay, Chicago City Skyline), (*bottom right*) Brand Estonia (Kihnu museum, Priidu Saart, Location: Kihnu Islands Estonia, #256673).



Institute of Baltic Studies

Lai 30, 51005 Tartu

Phone: +372 699 9480

lbs.ee

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23657/KE1W-B242>

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
2. Background of Estonians in Chicago	5
2.1 History of Estonians in Chicago & Estonian Cultural Organizations in Chicago	5
2.1.1 Immigration ‘waves’	5
2.1.2 Estonians in the United States	6
2.1.3 Estonian Organisations in Chicago	7
3. Methodology	9
3.1 Participants and qualitative methods	10
4. Case Study Observations	11
4.1 Profiles of Estonian diaspora members	12
4.1.1 Wave 1: World War II era immigration observations	12
4.1.2 Wave 2: Post-Soviet Immigration observations	14
4.1.3 Next-generation immigration observations	14
4.2 National and cultural identity	16
4.2.1 Baseline identity	16
4.2.2 Evolution of their cultural identity.....	18
4.3 Mental and emotional connection with Estonia and other Estonians	23
5. Conclusions and Recommendations	29
5.1 Conclusions.....	29
5.2 Recommendations.....	29
Works Cited.....	32
Appendix	34
Literature Review on Diasporas and Estonian Diaspora	34

List of Figures

Chart 1 Breakdown of Participant Characteristics	10
Table 1 Archetype of an Estonian	16
Figure 1 Mosaic of an Estonian	17
Figure 2 Estonian Girl then and now.....	18
Figure 3 Girl leaving Estonia, then enjoying Florida as an adult	19
Figure 4 Leaving Estonia and returning to Estonia after a successful career.....	19
Figure 5 Girl excited to see the world	20
Figure 6 Heart belongs in Estonia and Chicago	20
Figure 7 Picking strawberries in Estonia and living it up in Chicago.....	20
Figure 8 Chicago area Estonia folk dancers	24
Figure 9 Framework of a diaspora member, based off of Kenny's (2018) frameworks for diaspora members	37

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last century, Estonians have been forced to migrate or have willingly migrated around the globe, creating diaspora communities in their new country of residence. During the Soviet occupation, many of these diaspora communities were disconnected from their homeland and relatives. Now, 30 years into Estonia's second independence, there is an opportunity to re-connect with these communities and seek synergies for future collaboration and development.

However, Estonian diaspora groups are dispersed worldwide. It is difficult to understand how many Estonians live abroad, their needs, and how these communities can be better connected with the Estonian government. To this end, the Institute of Baltic Studies (IBS) has conducted a comprehensive, international survey targeting Estonian diaspora members from around the world.

Fortuitously, the research team had two staff members working remotely in Chicago, Illinois, between June and August of 2021. As there is an active Estonian diaspora community in the Chicago area, IBS decided to organise focus groups and interviews with members of the Estonian diaspora in Chicago to support the survey results. Additionally, it offered an opportunity for IBS to delve deeper into the needs and challenges facing the diaspora community as they exist in the Chicago area, giving further qualitative insight to support the study.

To this end, the following chapter discusses the history of the Estonian diaspora in the Chicago area, the methodology for conducting the case study, key observations made based on the feedback from Estonian diaspora members, and recommendations for the Estonian government based on these observations.

2. BACKGROUND OF ESTONIANS IN CHICAGO

2.1 History of Estonians in Chicago & Estonian Cultural Organizations in Chicago

2.1.1 Immigration 'waves'

Following Tammaru, Kumer-Haukanõmm, and Anniste's historical immigration analysis (2010), the Estonian diaspora can be categorised based on the emigration era and geographical emigration direction. However, there are often more extensive sub-categories within these criteria. The most basic explanatory categories are the distinction between Estonian "Eastern sub-diaspora" and a "Western sub-diaspora."¹ These categories imply not only geographic boundaries but also take into consideration different "waves" (their terminology, used here throughout) of immigration, with the *Eastern sub-diaspora* encompassing mainly pre-World War I immigrants, with many who left Estonia heading east during this time period and were drawn by the prospect of Russia's "new agricultural" lands.²

¹ Tammaru, T., Kumer-Haukanõmm, K., & Anniste, K. (2010). The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 36 (7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.481614>, 1157.

¹ Ibid, 1167.

² Ibid.

The "Western sub-diaspora", on the other hand, was formed by two very different eras and types of emigrants, including a large wave of World War II refugees fleeing the Nazi or Soviet occupations of Estonia as well as the more recent wave of emigrants who left Estonia during the end of the Soviet era and after Re-Independence.³ Before World War II, very few Estonian emigrants were a part of the *Western sub-diaspora*, with about 15,000 Estonians in the entire sub-diaspora in 1917; by 1954, this number sharply increased to 90,000 Estonians,⁴ primarily due to Estonians fleeing from either occupying power as refugees.⁵ In the 1990s, this number mainly stayed stable,⁶ at 85,000 people in 2000, versus the previous 90,000 Estonians in the *Western sub-diaspora*.

For this case study, the *Western sub-diaspora* is of focus, which is then narrowed down to the United States, and then further specified to include Estonians immigrants in the Chicago area and their descendants. This geographical specificity not only eliminates the necessity of further exploration of Eastern versus Western Estonian migration for the case study; it also narrows in our immigration time periods studied to include mainly include World War II refugees and post-Soviet-era immigrants (and next-generation), as those were the two waves of significant Estonian immigration in the United States. Instead of geographical boundaries, the emigration era and circumstances are the salient distinctions among immigrants within a narrowed region, such as the Chicago area.

2.1.2 Estonians in the United States

Although more recent census data is limited, the 2000 Census of the United States records 25,034 persons of Estonian descent in the United States in that year.⁷ Some of these persons would be considered "single-origin" Estonians (80%), and another 20% are "multiple origins" Estonians⁸ (usually having two parents from different origins).⁹ Another point must be noted as well that 'descent' does not bear the same meaning as having Estonia as one's country of birth, and 2000 Census data compiled by the United Nations shows that if the birth country is the qualifier, the number of Estonians goes down to slightly below 10,000 (9,785).¹⁰ Estonians settled throughout North America, and many live in cities such as Toronto, Canada; New York City, New York; Detroit, Michigan; Lakewood, New Jersey; and Chicago, Illinois, among other locations.

Census data is unclear for the exact number of Estonians in the Chicago region, and Estonian organisations themselves are uncertain about the number of Estonians in the area. But estimates from interviewees and focus groups participants put the number between 800-1000 in the area. One interviewee provided post-interview material that showed a 2009 Census estimate of the Chicago Metro Area estimating 1,000 people of Estonian ancestry. Out of an estimated 25,000 Estonians in the United States, if we use the 1,000 number from the Census data as likely being the most accurate estimate available to us, we could say that the

³ Ibid, 1157, 1162.

⁴ Ibid, 1165.

⁵ Ibid, 1162.

⁶ Ibid, 1167.

⁷ Embassy of Estonia Washington D.C. (n.d.). Estonians in the U.S.A. Retrieved from <https://washington.mfa.ee/estonians-in-the-usa/>; Tammaru, T., Kumer-Haukanõmm, K., & Anniste, K. (2010). The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 36 (7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.481614>, 1168.

⁸ Tammaru, T., Kumer-Haukanõmm, K., & Anniste, K. (2010). The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 36 (7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.481614>, 1169.

⁹ Ibid, 1167.

¹⁰ United Nations Population Division. (n.d.). *Migrant Stock Data*. Retrieved from https://population.un.org/unmigration/migrantstockbyorigin_sql.aspx.

estimated population of Estonians in the Chicago area makes up about 4% of the Estonian population in the United States (and likely more if we consider surrounding areas outside of "Metro" Chicago).

It must be addressed that it is difficult to determine if Census data can give an accurate number of persons of a particular ethnic origin as it is complex and often self-reported, with only those who want to be considered Estonian reporting it.¹¹ Additionally, 'ethnic categories' can be vague such as having parents with mixed-heritage or if extended time has passed since the 'immigration event' of Estonian relatives. So, as exact population counts and percentages are difficult to attain both historically and currently, reliance on estimates becomes important in determining the scale of Estonian communities abroad. Participants differ in their perceptions of the size of the Estonian community in Chicago, with one participant saying, "you picked a little one" and two others pushing back saying that it was in the top five communities (for size); with one participant mentioning that it came in third. Although these estimates are difficult to thoroughly verify, we can say that the size of the Estonian community in the Chicago area is of significance and importance to study.

Record keeping post-1922 (with the commencement of Estonia's first independence period) allows us to trace the history of Estonians in the Chicago area with much more ease than the pre-1922 era, as United States records before this time counted Estonians as 'Russians'¹² or, if based on language, counted them either as Estonians, Russians, Germans, or Swedes along linguistic lines.¹³ Estonian immigrants coming to the United States (and Chicago would likely follow this trend) in this pre-World War II time period, were often young men¹⁴ (and women as well)¹⁵ who left Estonia due to the "political repression of tsarist Russia"¹⁶ and for work¹⁷ as well as often low-skilled workers and those fleeing due to political reasons after the 1905 attempted revolution.¹⁸ How these immigrants interacted with society and other Estonians often took place in cultural groups, which is our next subject of examination.

2.1.3 Estonian Organisations in Chicago

National Estonian organisations in the United States started to develop in the late 1800s. Today they include "more than a hundred Estonia-related organisations" such as Estonian Houses and other cultural organisations and groups.¹⁹ Estonian organisations, important for retaining ties to "the homeland" and maintaining the Estonian community, language and culture, began to develop in the United States and

¹¹ Embassy of Estonia Washington D.C. (n.d.). Estonians in the U.S.A. Retrieved from <https://washington.mfa.ee/estonians-in-the-usa/>. See Tammaru, T., Kumer-Haukanõmm, K., & Anniste, K. (2010). The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 36 (7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.481614>, 1163. for a discussion about data collecting style limitations.

¹² Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>;

Granquist, Mark A. (n.d.). *Estonian Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Estonian-Americans.html#ixzz6yQjijqOU>.

¹³ Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>.

¹⁴ Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>;

Granquist, Mark A. (n.d.). *Estonian Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Estonian-Americans.html#ixzz6yQjijqOU>.

¹⁵ Granquist, Mark A. (n.d.). *Estonian Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Estonian-Americans.html#ixzz6yQjijqOU>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>;

Granquist, Mark A. (n.d.). *Estonian Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Estonian-Americans.html#ixzz6yQjijqOU>.

¹⁸ Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>.

¹⁹ Embassy of Estonia Washington D.C. (n.d.). Estonians in the U.S.A. Retrieved from <https://washington.mfa.ee/estonians-in-the-usa/>.

throughout Estonian diaspora communities. Estonians who had already settled in the Chicago area banded together and started Chicago's first 'Estonian association' in 1930.²⁰

Both Estonians and Estonian organisations in the area saw a significant membership growth during the World War II refugee wave, with many Estonians in the United States sponsoring fellow Estonians coming from displaced persons campus with a 'guarantee' of both housing and job opportunities.²¹ In 1948, the Chicago Estonian Society and the Chicago Estonian House were created in 1967.²² These cultural organisations helped fill a void that many Estonian refugees felt due to their sharp cut off from Estonia which was then under the Nazi or Soviet occupations, allowing them to still interact with other Estonians in their new place of arrival. During the Soviet occupation of Estonia, organisations such as the already-founded ones played a large role in keeping Estonian culture alive and giving Estonians a sense of community. The organisations as mentioned above, along with the newly formed Estonian Cultural Society of Chicago (ECSC), created in 2018,²³ have helped to maintain Estonian cultural identity both historically and presently in the midst of Chicagoland, USA, by offering cultural events and activities such as folk dancing, choirs, scouting groups, language learning,²⁴ church services (focus group participants tell us there used to be 4 churches in the Chicago area in the 1960s or 1970s), and other activities.

The 1990s (and late 1980s) brought a new type of Estonian immigrant to Illinois; this time, immigration was more fitting of the 'voluntary migrant' category and was typically a response to greater opportunities, whether that be economic, familial, educational, or fulfilling a wish to see the world with Estonia's now open borders.

Presently, two prominent organisations (with sub-organisations) still operate in the Chicago area. The Chicago Estonian House (Chicago Eesti Maja), the Chicago area's longest-running Estonian organisation established in 1964, along with its counterparts,²⁵ operates out of a physical Estonian House on 'Estonian Lane' in Riverwoods, Illinois, a northwest suburb of Chicago. The building was meant to be a "home" for the Estonian community²⁶, and the organisation is a "cultural centre that promotes Estonian culture, language and history and serves as a meeting place for people of Estonians heritage and friends of Estonia."²⁷ The Estonian House fulfils its purpose through various activities, Sunday lunches with homemade Estonian foods, the Vana Tallinn bar, and a library consisting of a variety of Estonian books.²⁸ A variety of events occur throughout the year, with some of the highlights including a Midsummer festival (*Jaanipäev*) and Christmas festivities.²⁹

The Estonian House's counterparts, the Estonian School and the First Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chicago also operate at the Estonian House.³⁰ The Estonian School was founded in 1967 with a recess

²⁰ Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>.; CEM. (2018, April 20). *About*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/about/>.

²³ Estonians in Chicago. (n.d.). *About ECSC*. Retrieved from <https://estoniansinchicago.com/estonian-cultural-society-of-chicago/>.

²⁴ Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>.

²⁵ CEM. (2015, August 17). *About >> Chicago Estonian House History*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/about/chicago-estonian-house-history/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ CEM. (2018, April 20). *About*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/about/>.

²⁸ CEM. (2015, August 17). *Activities*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/activities/>.

²⁹ CEM. (2018, April 20). *About*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/about/>.

³⁰ CEM. (2015, August 17). *Activities*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/activities/>.

from 1987 to 2008 due to low student enrolments, it was revitalised in 2008 and continues to operate twice monthly.³¹ The school serves as a way to diffuse Estonian language and culture and operates both means of literary, historical and language instruction, but also teaches children the arts (like theatre, choir, and arts and crafts) as well as other creative activities.³² By offering activities such as summer camps and its bi-weekly meetings, the school can reach its goal to "strengthen our Estonian community and help our children create strong friendships with other Estonian children."³³ An additional sub-organisation of the Estonian House, the First Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, "was established in April 1950 by refugees from Estonia who had fled their native country to escape religious and other persecution by Soviet Communists who had occupied Estonia during World War II."³⁴ Services still take place today in the Estonian language, meeting at the Estonian House.³⁵

In 2018, another Estonian cultural organisation was founded, The Estonian Cultural Society of Chicago (ECSC) and known in Estonian as *Eesti Kultuuriselts Chicagos*.³⁶ The not-for-profit organisations aim to "promote the educational and social interest of American Estonians living in Illinois, preserve American Estonian culture and language, and introduce Estonian culture to other nations living in Illinois," which is done through events promoting the culture.³⁷ Examples of such activities include costume making lectures, *Jaanipäev*, and celebrations, such as celebrating the anniversary of the Estonian Restoration of Independence.³⁸

Estonian cultural organisations in the Chicago area contribute and have contributed over the years to maintaining Estonian cultural ties in the midst of a new homeland for hundreds of Estonians and their descendants.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this case study was first and foremost influenced by the circumstances of the research team being able to be physically present in the Chicago area during the study; had there not been researchers on the ground, it would not have been possible to conduct this study. Second, and given a relatively small number of Estonian people within these diaspora communities around the world, Chicago is an ideal location to conduct such a study as it has one of the largest and most active Estonian communities in the United States, making it an interesting opportunity to speak with members of the Estonian diaspora directly. Lastly, the larger study of the Estonian diaspora for which this case study is supporting, is based on the results of a global survey sent to thousands of Estonians around the world. Naturally, such a large survey does not allow the researchers to directly speak to the respondents and ask them further questions about their personal experiences. As such, the research team decided to take a qualitative, targeted, and small-scale approach to understand the needs of the Estonian diaspora as they exist in the Chicago area.

³¹ CEM. (2020, January 29). *Home >> Estonian School*. Retrieved from <http://chicagoestimaja.com/kool-2/>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ CEM. (2015, August 17). *Activities*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/activities/>.

³⁵ Chicago Estonian House. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/>.

³⁶ Estonians in Chicago. (n.d.). *About ECSC*. Retrieved from <https://estoniansinchicago.com/estonian-cultural-society-of-chicago/>.

³⁷ Estonians in Chicago. (n.d.). *About ECSC*. Retrieved from <https://estoniansinchicago.com/estonian-cultural-society-of-chicago/>.

³⁸ Estonians in Chicago. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://estoniansinchicago.com/>.

3.1 Participants and qualitative methods:

Two qualitative methods were used to collect data: (1) interviews with Estonians in the diaspora community (both formal and informal); and (2) focus-groups (focus group interviews).

The participants in the study represent three distinct groups: Estonian refugees from World War 2, Post-Soviet immigrants, next-generation Estonians³⁹. Thus, project participants were either born in Estonia or are the children/ancestors of Estonians who had moved to the United States. A breakdown of the characteristics of each Estonian in the focus groups or formal interviews are indicated in the table below:

Immigration class	Age range	Sex
World War 2 refugees (first wave)	75-85+	3 Males
Post-Soviet independence (second wave)	20 – 50+	3 Males; 6 Females
Next generation Estonian	30-80+	1 Male; 1 Female
<i>Total</i>		<i>7 Males; 7 Females</i>

Chart 1 Breakdown of Participant Characteristics

Note: Two participants participated in multiple interview formats but are counted once here.

The research team did not have any specific criteria for the inclusion of Estonian participants in the study; if they were able and willing to participate, the research team was happy to include them. They were also allowed to participate in multiple interviewing formats if the occasion arose. The only exception was a request to speak to World War 2 refugees; given the relatively few Estonian refugees alive during Soviet and Nazi occupation, the research team was very interested in hearing about their immigration experience and comparing it to those of younger people Estonian generations.

Formal interviews were organised with five Estonian diaspora members who were selected based on demographic criteria, including age, sex, and the year they immigrated to the United States. This was done to ensure a blended and diverse range of responses. We were assisted in contacting these participants by one of the Estonian groups in the Chicago area. The participants for these formal interviews were a mix of female and male participants (two female, three male) and ranged in age from late 30s/early 40s to 80s. There was a mix of immigration waves, with two participants being part of the post-World War 2 wave and two participants coming after the re-Independence of Estonia, and one participant who was born in the United States. The interviews were held in person or online, depending on availability and circumstances.

The interviews stayed within the one-to-two-hour timeframe. Additionally, informal interviews were conducted at a local *Jaanipäev* event held on 26 June 2021 taking place in the Chicago area with an Estonian cultural organisation. Interviews were conducted in an ad-hoc manner to anyone willing to be interviewed.

³⁹ Defined as having been born in the United States.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were organised at the home of one of the Estonian diaspora members. Four Estonians were in the first group, and six Estonians were in the second group, for a total of ten participants. The subjects were equal in terms of the number of males and females (five males and five females), varying in age from early/mid- 20s to 70+. The focus group consisted of direct Estonian immigrants who moved to the United States and one third-generation Estonian. Each focus group was approximately 90 minutes long and was moderated by research team members.

4. CASE STUDY OBSERVATIONS

The case study is meant to provide pointed and succinct observations about the diaspora community in the Chicago area focusing on the immigration experience, national and cultural identity, and the mental and emotional connection with Estonia. Thus, the case study observations are organised into three main categories:

1. Profiles of Estonian diaspora groups
2. National and cultural identity
3. Mental and emotional connection with Estonia

Profiles of Estonian diaspora groups

The Chicago diaspora community members who participated in the study represent first-generation Estonian immigrants and ancestors or relatives of Estonian immigrants, i.e., second, third, fourth, etc., generation immigrants. Further, differences between these groups, including age and immigration circumstances, can impact their perspective of the United States and of their Estonian identity.

Therefore, to identify these differences, the research team made observations based on interviews and focus group data, highlighting these differences and exploring these different groups' diversity and unique perspectives. As mentioned in the methodology section, these diaspora groups include Wave 1 and 2 immigrants and next-generation Estonians.

National and cultural identity

One facet that our case study sought to explore was the national and cultural identities of Estonian immigrants and people with Estonian ancestry. Specifically, the research team sought to examine how Estonian diaspora communities identify themselves – cultural and national identity – and if/how these perceptions of identity have changed over time.

Cultural and national identities are interesting to the research team because understanding how Estonian diaspora community members identify themselves and the reasons why they identify a certain way can lead to practical applications. For example, understanding how and why cultural or national identity changes over time in Estonian diaspora members can inform outreach activities to these diaspora groups. From an academic perspective, it is also interesting to understand if the idea or perception of an Estonian changes in the face of integration and assimilation pressures in a host country.

Mental and emotional connection to Estonia

One of the outputs this case study will produce is a better understanding of why Estonians in the Chicago community seek each other out and what their expectations of the Estonian government might be. In this context, the case study explores: What are the needs are of Estonians and the Estonian diaspora community? Why is it important to maintain these cultural ties? What are their expectations from Estonia and the Estonian government? and other related inquiries.

The answers to these questions will be illuminating in identifying diaspora member groups' motivation for celebrating and advocating for Estonian culture abroad and creating more robust, mutually beneficial relationships between Estonian diaspora members and the Estonian government.

4.1 Profiles of Estonian diaspora members

Estonian immigrants – defined as persons who were born in Estonia - who participated in the focus groups and interviews were either World War 2 refugees or Estonian immigrants who moved to the United States after Estonia regained independence in 1991. For the purposes of this case study, Wave 1 immigrants are Estonians who moved to the United States following the events of World War 2 (between 1945-1955); and Wave 2 immigrants are Estonians who moved to the United States after Estonia regained their independence (from 1991 to the present). The third group includes second or third generation Estonians who were born in the United States and are active in the Estonian community.

4.1.1. Wave 1: World-War II Era Immigration observations

The conditions in Estonia between 1940-1945 were oppressive and dangerous. The Soviet Union had forcibly annexed Estonia in 1940 and shortly thereafter, the Nazis had invaded the Soviet Union, and occupied Estonian from 1941 – 1944. Then, as the Nazis began to lose control of the Eastern front, the Soviet Union re-occupied Estonia in 1944, which saw the exodus of thousands of Estonians fleeing the advancing Soviet army.

Of the three participants who were alive during this time, only two of the participants were old enough to remember the events leading up to their escape from Estonia and the third was born in a refugee camp in Germany. The two participants born in Estonia were 3-5 years old when they fled the country.

Observation #1: "Push" factors were more to blame for Estonian Wave 1 immigrants.

Estonian immigrants fleeing during or after World War II were often solely influenced by a 'push' factor, rather than a 'pull.' Meaning, that many Estonians fled the country in fear of the Nazis or the Soviet Union. For example, life in Estonia became much more dangerous and chaotic following the invasion and occupation of Soviet troops in 1940. One participant recalls that:

"...well [my parents] were both very unhappy when Russia annexed Estonia and moved troops in 1940. And uh, I was two years old at the time. And they were so heartbroken of how things are going..."

During the Soviet occupation, one participant noted that Soviet forces would take people in the middle of the night for forced deportations to labour camps in Siberia. Such experiences cultivated a sense of uncertainty and danger in Estonia, with many Estonians fearing for their lives.

In 1941, the Nazi army pushed Soviet forces out of Estonia, which, at first, was a welcome change. For all three participants, they mentioned that, at first, the Nazis were seen as a liberating army and were viewed positively, but it was soon apparent that they were trading one oppressive regime for another. In fact, all three participants mentioned that their fathers had been drafted into the Nazi army to fight the Soviet Union.

Being drafted by Nazis put all three participants' families at risk because they would have been seen by the Soviet army as Nazi collaborators and would either be executed or sent to labour camps. In fact, even before the Soviets lost control of Estonia, one participant mentioned that:

"...when the Germans moved in in 1941, they discovered the lists of people to be deported after, later, and uh, our name was on the list of people to be also deported. So uh, if we had stayed there, it would have been a couple of months, and then we would have been sent to labour camp also."

As the Nazi army began to withdraw from Estonia, the participants recalled their sense of safety and security quickly deteriorated, and the urgency to flee the country increased. For both participants born in Estonia, their description of fleeing Estonia was very similar. For example, when recalling the sudden nature of their departure, one participant described leaving their home with bread still baking in the oven and that their father released their farm animals before leaving home. The other participant remembers hundreds of Estonians taking boats from Tallinn to Germany to escape the advancing Soviet Army. While harrowing, these dramatic immigration experiences underscore the danger for many Estonians as they fled the country and are a key feature to understanding post-World War II refugees and their later experiences.

Observation #2: Estonians developed "Little Estonia's" in Displaced Person's Camps.

As was the case with many Estonians who fled the country, the three interview participants mentioned that they were all placed into Displaced Persons Camp's in Germany, often for years at a time (up to five years). Although Displaced Persons Camps in Western Germany were not at all ideal circumstances, Estonian culture still survived there, with one participant describing these places as "Little Estonias," equipped with everything from schools to theatres. One participant even described his father, as being educated as a teacher, helping other Estonians learn English to help them integrate into their host countries such as England, Canada, Australia, or the United States.

Estonians created contacts within these displaced camps, celebrated national holidays, and participated in cultural events. This can be seen as the foundation for Estonian post-World War II diaspora communities in many ways. In fact, this trend of interaction with other Estonians continued for many immigrants in the United States, as Estonian displaced families were sometimes sponsored by other Estonian families living in the United States or ended up in a location (like on the East Coast of the United States) where there was a concentration of Estonians.

4.1.2 Wave 2: Post-Soviet Immigration observations

Wave 2 immigrants were well represented in our focus groups, making up 8 of the participants in the focus groups. In contrast with Wave 1 immigrants, Wave 2 immigrants had more of a choice as to where they decided to immigrate too. Further, after Estonia regained independence, many young Estonians wanted to take the opportunity to travel the world, work abroad, and/or go to school in a different country.

As such, Wave 2 immigrants were much more influenced by "pull factors", that is, they were influenced to leave Estonia for better economic opportunities and a chance to explore the world, which, at that point, had been much more difficult being under Soviet occupation.

Observation #3: Wave 2 Estonian immigrants were driven by "pull factors"

After Estonia regained its independence in 1991, there was a lot of uncertainty about the future of Estonia. Participants from the focus groups explained that there were not many economic opportunities in Estonia and, given their tumultuous history, it was unclear if these economic prospects would improve.

For example, one Estonian participant mentioned that they were living in Pärnu, working as a florist in the mid-1990s but not making a lot of money. So, at the request of a friend, they decided to move to the United States for better job opportunities and more pay. Similarly, another participant in the focus group was offered a construction job to work in the Chicago area in the late 1990s, so they decided to take the job and move to the US. Both participants cited that it was an uncertain time in Estonia, and as young adults or teenagers with few responsibilities, they decided to take a risk and move to a different country. However, some participants did not move simply because they wanted better economic opportunities; rather, they wanted to explore and see the world. For this group, the "pull" factor was wanting to leave Estonia and experience life in a different country.

Wave 2 immigrants tended to be younger when they left Estonia, ranging roughly from one to three years old to around 30 years at the time. Discounting the children who had left Estonia as babies (and did not have a choice), most of the Wave 2 immigrants interviewed seemed to have come to the United States out of a desire to be here. One immigrant was an outlier in this regard and was convinced to come by a co-worker to move to the United States with the understanding that it would be a short-term experience. Compared to the Wave 1 immigrants, Wave 2 immigrants had a much more optimistic view of making their choice to move to the US and saw it as an opportunity to create a new life. Wave 1, on the other hand, was in a much more desperate position and were forced to start a new life outside of Estonia.

4.1.3 Next-generation immigration observations

The sample size for next-generation immigrants is very small, including one male and one female participant. However, both participants are very 'active' in the Estonian community and are vocal supporters of Estonian culture in the Chicago area.

Observation #4: Next-generation Estonians involved in the study were very active in the diaspora community

Next-generation Estonians only consisted of two participants in this study, one representing the child of an Estonian immigrant and the other the grandchild of an Estonian immigrant. In both cases, the participants served as leaders in the Estonian community and were vocal advocates for Estonian culture, language, and the community.

One participant's sense of 'duty' is best represented by their political activism, which stems from a trip they took to Estonia in the 1970s. When asked about this why the participant was so politically active in advocating for Estonia, the participant responded that they were shocked by the "sad" conditions that their relatives were living under. Specifically, they remember their relatives telling the participant "Don't talk here, it's not safe to talk here" and their relatives would walk the participant to a more secluded location where they could speak freely. The participant notes that this was done out of fear of being overheard by the secret police.

The other participant was the principal of the Estonian language school and was the decedent (third generation) of Estonian immigrants. When asked why they wanted to be so involved with Estonian culture, the participant stated that their desire to be involved in the Estonian community came from a place of "personal responsibility" to carry on the traditions, language, and culture of their grandparent's generation. In fact, the participant draws their motivation from their grandparents and their experience as refugees fleeing Estonia. The participant explained:

"Any problem I think my generation faces; I think it pales in comparison to having to leave everything behind at age ten... Go to a war-torn country, like life in a Displaced Person's Camp and then come across - on a boat, not knowing if you're going to survive to another country... and then starting from scratch, not knowing the language ... so the hardest problem I've faced in my life is maybe like 1/4 of that... So, so, like just having that perspective helps."

Comparing next-generation Estonians to first or second wave immigrants, there is a clear difference in how they have come to experience Estonian culture. For direct immigrants, they were born into Estonian culture and already fully understand the language and customs. Next-generation Estonians are born into American culture and their mother tongue is English, which could be a barrier to being a full participant in Estonian cultural groups, i.e. language barriers, lack of interest, etc.

However, and while representing a small group, their importance to preserving Estonian culture and language in Chicago cannot be understated. In fact, the participation of second, third, fourth, etc., generation Estonians is necessary for the survival of these cultural groups because the number of active participants in the Chicago diaspora community has seen a precipitous decline since the first wave of Estonian immigrants.

4.2 National and cultural identity

National and cultural identities are tied to the individual experiences of each participant in the case study. As such, the interpretation of what it means to be an Estonian is often subjective. However, the descriptions of "what it means to be an Estonian" are illustrative because they define a baseline caricature of who an Estonian is. The research team can observe how the participants' cultural and national identities evolve over time from this description.

In this context, observations of cultural identity follow a linear path, starting with a baseline understanding of who an Estonian is and leading to how the participants identify themselves now.

4.2.1 Baseline identity

Both focus groups were asked to describe the "archetype" of an Estonian.

The answers received are diverse and result in a "mosaic" of personality traits. The main results are presented in Table 1.

ARCHETYPE OF AN ESTONIAN					
Personality (External)	Personality (Internal)	Culture	Strong Identity and Connectedness	Work Ethic	Other
A little bit cold	Proud	One who speaks the language	Know what we are	Hard-working (x2)	Pretty
(Very) welcoming (x2)	Real	Avoids eye contact	Know what we want	Go-getters	Knows how to party
Interested in other people	Curious	Patriotic (x2)	Very proud of our small country	Handy	Pure person
Not very demonstrative in terms of feelings	Short-spoken	Tied to their culture	Homogenous and hold similar beliefs	Proud of being self-sufficient	Quite Conservative
Keep to themselves	Depth to their soul		Maximum two degrees of separation ⁴⁰		
Their way or no way	Like to explore		Very connected		
Their way or the highway	Taciturn		Making sure everyone knows they are from Estonia		
Very to the point	Brave				
Quiet					

⁴⁰ Informal expression to explain that, at maximum, every one Estonian is only 2 personal contacts away from all Estonians.

Table 1 Archetype of an Estonian

Source: Authors own, 2022. Descriptors directly quoted or summarised from conversations we had with Estonians in the Chicago area, answering the question "how would you describe an archetype of an Estonian" and comments about Estonians throughout the conversations.

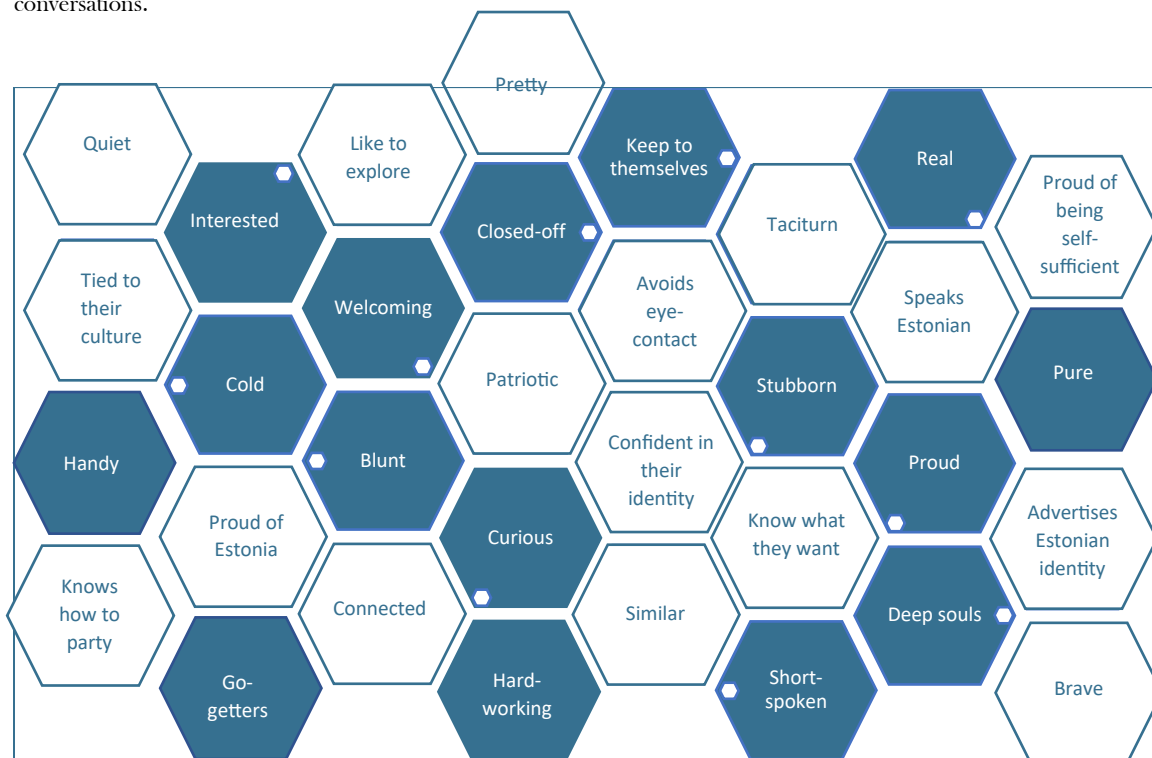


Figure 1 Mosaic of an Estonian

Observation #5: Estonian diaspora members hold similar opinions about who an Estonian is.

With the above table and figure, one can notice many folds of a how participants described a typical Estonian. As one participant pointed out, demonstrating reservations about the question saying, "Persons are very different, even Estonians," these categorisations and typifications do have the danger of teetering between stereotypes, assumptions, and archetypes, but nevertheless give insight into Estonian identity for Estonians abroad.

Observations that most participants seemed to agree with was that, in general, Estonians were "cold" "reserved" or "taciturn" for both internal and external personality traits. Indeed, this archetype of an Estonian is well known; however, participants also felt that an Estonian had deep, emotional depth and a range of traits that make them unique. For example, describing Estonians as "very welcoming," "brave," "curious," "hard-working," and "self-sufficient".

In terms of their national identity, most participants communicated a sense of pride in Estonia and their Estonian heritage. It was also mentioned that the participants are very willing to educate people about where they were from and the culture and language that makes Estonia unique. In this sense, most participants seemed to be keenly aware that being Estonian is very special due to its small population size

and tumultuous past and were more likely to "advertise" their Estonian identity to people outside their diaspora group.

4.2.2 Evolution of their cultural identity

For most participants in the study, their perception of identity and culture was the sum of all their life experiences. That is, the individual life experiences of the participants impact their original understanding of what it means to be an Estonian. As most participants are immigrants directly from Estonia, the perception of cultural and national identity was developed in Estonia then changed when they came to the United States.

Observation #6: For Estonian immigrants, the "evolution" of cultural identity started when they left Estonia.

As a focus group activity, participants got into pairs (or alone) and were asked to draw two characters, the first one of a typical Estonian person or an Estonian who is just leaving Estonia for the first time and the second character represented an Estonian who has been abroad for a longer amount of time. After the participants were given time to discuss and execute their drawings, we asked participants to describe their drawings. We ended up with six drawings which are shown in the following discussion.

Comments from this exercise ranged from comments on how clothing expectations differed in the United States and Estonia and how a drawing of clothing differences represented a "physical manifestation of mindset." Personal immigration anecdotes and a high focus on America as being a "land of opportunity" and a dream for many Estonians. For some participants, this contrast played out in a physical change, others in a changing setting and others from a geographical viewpoint.

To start with the physical change, one participant described a drawing (Figure 2):

"So this is like the physical manifestation of mindset...Then and now. So, this is the girl that came here, she was always in high heels and fancy dress, and she never left the house without being like presentable...Right. And then this is sort of the, the now, relaxed but always busy. Minimum make up, dressed for comfort, flip flops, gym shoes, kind of like the, the, physical body changed from when I first arrived here to kind of how I look at it now..."



Figure 2 Estonian girl then and now



Figure 3 Girl leaving Estonia, then enjoying Florida as an adult

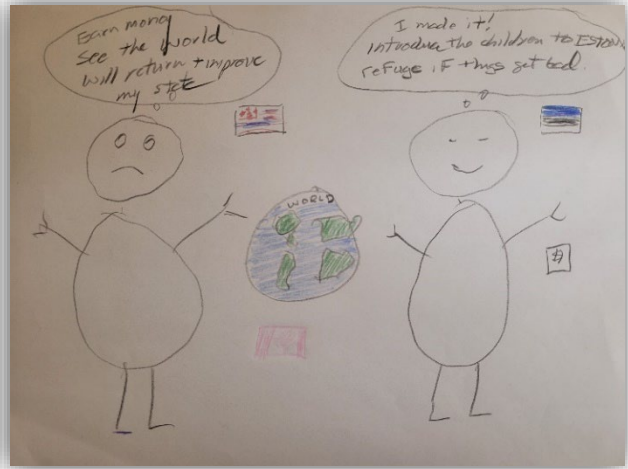


Figure 4 Leaving Estonia and returning to Estonia after a successful career

Continuing with the physical nature of the theme, some participants also talked about the change in geographical/physical features in the United States, such as how it feels like a much brighter outsider in the US than what participants experienced in Estonia. Geography and time in the sun also seemed to be part of the dream of America, with one group identifying Florida as being part of that dream and how Estonia is quite grey (Figure 3). The participant elaborated saying,

"...maybe it's a little bit uh, because of the weather, because of, I don't know what, but, I do like it better here. My heart is always there in Estonia, in that little grey spot, but I enjoy being here."

In addition to these physical contrasts, in reference to the physical weather and sunlight differences, one participant described, "that contrast kind of carries forward to everyday life." This brings us to our key theme from these drawings: the United States being viewed as a "land of opportunity." One group talked about their drawing as exemplifying the idea of someone coming here to make some money and "see the world" but hoping to go back to Estonia. The person was successful and says "I made it" with a smile, returning to Estonia (Figure 4).

"My heart is always there in Estonia, in that little grey spot, but I enjoy being here."



Figure 5 Girl excited to see the world

This is exemplified in multiple participants' drawing descriptions but most succinctly as follows from this participant (Figure 5):

"this is a young girl, Estonian girl, who is very excited to explore the world, ...She has the globe in her hand and she has a backpack on her back and she's ready to explore America, and that's all she can visualise is like this bit skyscrapers, and opportunities but part of here will always hold on to the Estonian umm who she is, ... And what her roots are. ... Um, the other girl here, she's been here now for a while. She has a bag full of opportunities ...Because I think for Estonian, it was always the land of opportunity, like that's what was America, you know, as we visualised it...because I think that if we wouldn't like it here, nobody would be here, right?..."

This quotation answers the drawing prompt well in that it tells of what the Estonian girl was like before she left Estonia and then what she was like after a while in the United States. It also gets at the idea of Estonian immigrants having a multi-faceted identity, as previously discussed, from the idea of her holding on to "roots." This was echoed in another participant's comment in the context of talking about contrast who said: *"despite being in two parts of the world, throughout our lives, our heart-- bits and pieces of our hearts are... in both places, kind of everywhere,"* (Figure 6) which seems to sum up the multi-faceted identity idea that many Estonian immigrants experience very well.



Figure 6 Heart belongs in Estonia and Chicago



Figure 7 Picking strawberries in Estonia and living it up in Chicago

Observation #7: Estonian diaspora members identify as Estonian, American, and sometimes both

When asked how the Estonian participants (focus groups and interviews) identified themselves, six participants identified as overwhelmingly Estonian, two as American, two as both Estonian and American and three had a mixed answer that was not well categorised. However, the rationale for these decisions was not as straightforward.

For example, one respondent stated: "Well, if I'm honest, I sometimes have an identity crisis because I feel like I don't definitely feel like an American because we haven't been here long enough" and another told explained an approach to identity as: "I definitely identify as an American with baggage... If that makes sense."

It also seemed that the concept of national and cultural identity was an evolving process that could change based on life experiences. For example, one young immigrant explained:

"[i]n recent years, I used to always think that like, I was brought up in an Estonian house, speak the Estonian language, I know a little bit about the culture, so I'm an Estonian person."

"I think it's just over the years. I've had so many friends who are from different countries, and we kind of like had different conversations about this, we're like, you know, we're more American now than like our own home countries...So it's better to view ourselves as an American and like keep, you know reaping the benefits of feeling like an American...Because there's so many benefits in this country... There's no point in like keeping your old mentality umm of your own home country."

However, some participants stated they were very deliberate in claiming their Estonian identity. For one participant, they stated that choosing to identify as Estonian usually leads to a conversation about Estonia as a country and sees it as a positive way to share information about Estonia. For example, the participant stated: "most people in the States, you know, may have never heard of it, so usually there's a lot of background that goes into that conversations, but I- I always say Estonian." This sentiment was also shared by a third-generation Estonian who is active in the diaspora community. This participant stated: "even though I was born in the States, like unequivocally, no questions asked, if anybody asks, I say Estonian."

For this participant, the reasoning was much more pragmatic, with the main reason being that:

"It opens up a new conversation. I think we like we each have a responsibility no matter where we're born to represent Estonia and sing its praises, so I like, with that personal responsibility, we're all like ambassadors,...Because any American, Cuban, Korean you meet, you're most likely, the odds are, statistically speaking, you're probably the first Estonian they meet, and the last Estonian they'll ever meet. So, let's think about like a 20-year-old person, they meet one Estonian, for the rest of their life, that's their

"I think we like we each have a responsibility no matter where we're born to represent Estonia and sing its praises, so I like, with that personal responsibility, we're all like ambassadors."

only impression of Estonia. And of an Estonian... And on the identity question, too, I do feel like a werewolf at times. When I'm in Estonia, I feel American, but sometimes in the States I feel very European. But I like that, it's like a unique character that, kind of distinguishes me, but I believe that identity is like, you have your core, so like my core is Estonian-American, but then you have your periphery that kind of grows and expands as you experience life."

For the two older immigrants (70 – 80+ years old), their identity and culture were more aligned with the United States. One commented that speaking English without an accent puts an immigrant more into the 'American' category, which is something that immigrants who immigrated at a young age or with great language acquisition skills could acquire, not just a function of being a post-War immigrant.

Indeed, language skills seemed to be related to whether a participant identified as America, Estonian, or both. In the case of two participants who did not speak English well, both participants unequivocally felt that they were Estonian. For example, one respondent claimed: *"My heart is in Estonia... I am Estonian..."*.

Observation #8: Upon returning to Estonia, some participants felt out of place and noticed a change in the way they perceived Estonia, and the way Estonians perceived them.

Interestingly, when Estonian participants had travelled back to Estonia to visit family and friends, they noted that they feel out of place and that assimilating to American culture had made them feel like an outsider. Examples of this included when one participant, talking about personality, said *"I feel like for my own personality matches better with the American society than it does with the Estonian society...I'm from a very, very small town and I always felt restricted over there...And here I don't felt like that at all."*

Another participant in a different focus group felt very similarly saying: *"...the funny part, when I was in Estonia, people kept telling me like 'you don't belong here, you're like outside of Estonia ... Like, like too smiling, too conversation, like I always talk to people, so I'm sorry about that, too much talking, uh, so, but, I never understand what they mean under that. Like I don't belong there. Yes, I belong, like, like this is my home..."*

When asked how specifically American culture had changed them, participants noted that they feel like living in the United States had *"opened up us"* and that they liked being more *"open and smiling"*. This particular focus group attributed some of what they considered Estonian personality aspects to Communism and Estonia's history leading to a closed-offness. Whether this is accurate or not can be left up to interpretation, but the point is that participants had personality dimensions of identity that they felt were influenced by culture.

However, not all respondents have received positive feedback from this "cultural change" when returning to Estonia. For example, one participant mentioned: *"I'm very proud to be Estonian, but if I do go back*

home, everyone is telling me right away 'you have changed' like 'Estonians don't act like this' and I'm like 'no, that's still me' like what do you mean? I often, I often get that kind of criticism when I go back, and I'm like I don't know how I changed, ..." This is interesting as it shows that although participants know that they have changed, they also do not always know what to attribute it to and also see the implications of this

"...and I always referred to every Estonian here in Chicago as, 'they are my family'".

change play out with other Estonians.

4.3 Mental and emotional connection with Estonia and other Estonians

In this case study, mental and emotional connection with Estonia and other Estonians refers to the participants' need to connect with Estonia or other Estonians. This need manifests itself in the form of searching out other Estonians in the Chicago area, celebrating and practising Estonian traditions, their direct ties with people in Estonia, and their needs from the Estonian government.

The feedback from participants in this section can be informative for understanding the individual experiences of diaspora members. Participant feedback also highlights their individual and collective needs, which serves two purposes: (1) It creates a better understanding of why the Chicago Estonian community continues to be active today. (2) Participant feedback can lead to insightful feedback for the Estonian government on how best to engage with Estonian communities around the world.

In this context, the following observations are made:

Observation #9: Estonian immigrants seemed to have a much deeper emotional need to connect with other Estonians.

Participants cited a deep emotional need to connect with other Estonians as the main reason for seeking and being an active member in the Chicago area Estonian community. From an immigration perspective, this is a logical response to living in a foreign country. Indeed, many participants cited "missing their home and families" as a need to connect with other Estonians. This was particularly relevant for one participant in Focus Group 2 who stated:

"in my apartment in Jaanipäev, Easter, like those used to be big holidays in our family and then I realised like I'm alone, in my apartment, I don't know anyone, my whole family right now, they just had, having like a big party, they're exchanging gifts, having all this food.... I actually cried every Christmas, every Jaanipäev, every Easter, I was just so down, and I was so depressed so I'm really like so thankful that we have this Estonian community and I always referred to every Estonian here in Chicago as, 'they are my family'".

This sentiment was shared by several Estonians in both focus groups, with several participants explaining that holidays are the worst for them and the loneliness that comes from not having anyone to share these moments with was a major motivating factor for seeking other Estonians. In fact, Focus Group 2 participants

were also asked if, in the absence of an Estonian cultural society in Chicago, would they seek out other Estonians? The answer for most participants was a definitive yes.

It is also worth mentioning that Estonians who cited this emotional need seemed to be more active in the Estonian community, hosting folk dancing classes, traditional dressmaking, and getting together for *Jaanipäev* (See Figure 8 below for Estonians at a *Jaanipäev* event in the Chicago area).



Figure 8 Chicago area Estonian folk dancers at *Jaanipäev* event. Photo taken by: Emily Vogel

However, this was not always the case. For participants who either moved to the United States with their families or started a family in the United States, it seemed these participants were less active in the diaspora community. For example, a participant in Focus Group 1 mentioned that:

"I feel like our connection is more related to grandma and grandpa and being in Estonia when we're in Estonia... we've been involved, like our son's been to Estonian school and we've attended concerts and events and

um Jaanipäev and stuff like that, but we don't right now."

Another participant in the same group shared a similar opinion and stated:

"We tried Estonian school, but life is just so busy, that there are so many activities, it-it's-it's not working, but yes, going to Estonia, I think that's like the most important thing for me."

In both cases, this perspective came from that of the parents. For them, there is not a deep emotional need to be involved with local Estonian activities. However, visiting their families and maintaining strong bonds with their relatives back home is very important for both participants referenced above.

In the above-referenced case, two distinct groups are those who have families in Chicago and those who do not. For those who do not have families, the need to reach out to other Estonians is stronger. Those who have families seem to be more content with their lives as is and do not make much of an effort to connect with other Estonians in the area. It is important to point out that Estonian culture and language is still very important for both groups. However, the level of daily interaction is much less with those who have families. Similarly, for the participants who do not speak English very well, they interact with Estonians

on a daily basis and seem more reluctant or resistant to integrating into American culture and prefer to keep company with those who they are familiar with.

***Observation #10:** For children or decedents of Estonian immigrants, exposure to Estonian culture, people, and events is the key to keeping them involved in the Estonian community.*

It should be mentioned that the case study only had three to four participants who were the children of Estonian immigrants and grew up in the United States or are the descendants of Estonian immigrants. However, it was clear from discussions in the focus groups and interviews that early involvement of the youth in Estonian culture events, classes, and camps, was very important to maintaining an active Estonian diaspora community.

For one participant, their father prioritised engaging and interacting with Estonians when they first moved to the United States. In fact, if their father would meet another Estonian, they would schedule social activities and get together with them. As a child, the participant remembers their parents taking them to meet other Estonians.

The parents of Estonian children in the Chicago area also seemed to echo this sentiment. For example, both parents of Estonian children in Focus Group 1 mentioned that introducing and educating their children about the Estonian language and culture was a high priority for them. However, both parents in Focus Group 1 stated that it is very difficult for them to pass the language down to their children because they do not speak it at home. This is partly because both participants live in a multicultural home where one spouse is not a native Estonian speaker. The participant mentioned that one of their biggest regrets was not passing down the language to her children. However, through their personal connections and their family in Estonia, the participant makes sure that their children know of their heritage and keep in regular contact with their parents at home.

In this context, learning the Estonian language was a very important vector for strengthening the emotional and mental connection to Estonian culture. Participants who were more active in the diaspora community mentioned that they had been exposed to Estonian language classes from an early age. In fact, one a third generation Estonian from Focus Group 2 is the principal of the Estonian Language school offered by the Chicago Eesti Maja.

However, it is difficult to maintain interest in learning Estonian amongst the children and descendants of Estonians in the Chicago area. First, it was cited that language is a point of contention amongst Estonian culture groups because some factions believe that printed materials and information about cultural organisations should only be in Estonian. However, this can limit the number of people who can participate in Estonian cultural events/activities because as successive generations of Estonians get older, their children and grandchildren no longer speak Estonian, and the language can act as a barrier to participating in the Estonian community.

Another challenge to teaching Estonian to younger generations is that they may not feel it is important to learn because they do not need to use it on a daily basis. For example, one participant stated:

"I feel it's important. And uh, a lot of times, the children don't feel that way. They feel it's difficult to learn. And of course, Estonian isn't an easy language, but children can learn it quite easily. A lot of times if the parents didn't uh teach their kids Estonian, then later on, their kids regret it and they tell their parents, 'why didn't you teach us?'"

In this sense, youth engagement is a key enabler for the participation of future generations in the Estonian community.

Observation #11: Participants wish there were a more effective way to receive information from the Estonian government.

In both focus groups, a participant brought up that they felt that Estonia's communication with its diaspora members was lacking. There were a few reasons given for this, but the main themes that emerged were (1) that it was inconvenient for diaspora members to find information relevant to them; (2) some participants felt ignored or under-appreciated by the Estonian government; (3) lack of general knowledge about the types of services, activities or programmes that are available to them as Estonians and/or Estonian descendants.

To the first point, the participant mentioned that there was not a very convenient way to find relevant information for their community. Participants sometimes offered ideas that could solve this, like having a *"centralised data base of organisations and people, especially youth..."*. Another participant felt that they get dispersed information from the various Estonian ministries, and it is difficult to find information relevant to them. These ideas go along with an additional suggestion we received. It would be helpful for the Estonian government to help in the realm of funding, both in general and for specific areas (such as funding the US Estonian newspapers that one participant brought up). These could be areas of action for the Estonian government to help diaspora members feel more connected to Estonia.

Regarding the second point, participants felt that the government could make more of an effort to reach out to their Chicago community. This sentiment was reflected by a Wave 1 Estonian immigrant who felt they had done a lot during the Cold War and raised awareness about Estonia's situation, for example, organising captive nations day parades with other lobbying groups to protest the Soviet occupation of Estonia. The participant further explained that Estonia really benefitted from how *"...this small émigré community that existed here during the Cold War really influenced Congress, and, I think helped Estonia a lot....And that's kind forgotten by a lot of people now."*

Other Chicago area Estonians shared this sentiment and felt that their community was often "skipped over" by Estonian diplomatic visits to the United States and how it seemed official government visits often favoured East coast Estonian communities like in New York City. One participant felt that if the Prime Minister took an official visit to Chicago and met with Estonian community members, she or he would have a better understanding of what *"the community needs...what info is needed"* and continued by saying, *"It, it's gonna be a good exercise for him or her."* An additional participant also expressed a similar sentiment on the lack of diplomatic visits as well as the lack of response when diplomats/members of government are invited for special celebrations (like the anniversary of an organisation that was mentioned). These visits,

the participant urged, need to be *"Not only in New York, of course, they always stop in New York... But uhh, they should stop in other places too."*

To the third and final point, it was observed by the research team that there was a general lack of knowledge amongst the participants of what kind of services were offered by the Estonian government that could benefit them. Specifically, participants showed a general lack of knowledge about:

1. Programmes offered to Estonians (like children's camps).
2. Resources for questions related to the Estonian government (such as interpreted confusion about Estonians abroad and their relationship to the mandatory military service policy).
3. A desire for a "program" to make it more comprehensive for parents wishing to come to Estonia for a short time and who want help with the job search (for parent(s)) and schooling (for child(ren)).
4. A way to make buying property and loans in Estonia easier for foreign Estonians.

In the vein of lacking information about government services or programmes, participants noted that they were not aware of the rules and regulations for retiring in Estonia. Many participants seem inclined to move back to Estonia at retirement age, and this would be an important area of policy consideration due to the ageing populations of both immigration waves as well as the nature of how a diaspora member retiring in Estonia could affect social spending, pensions, and healthcare considerations for both the person who re-immigrates and the Estonian government.

Observation #12: Some participants felt the Estonian government should do more to engage with the youth in Estonian diaspora communities

One area that stood out as a sector of need from the Estonian government was more involvement with youth and young adults. As one participant put it when asked if the government should do more to reach out to youth, *"that's pretty much all that matters, right?... If you don't keep the young people interested enough, kind of, I don't know if 'dissolve' is the right word, but they kind of, they, they won't be Estonian or their kids or grandkids..."* (this same participant though did acknowledge that the government does already reach out to the youth). Camps were brought up and discussed in the focus groups (and in-depth interview) and drew great interest from the participants, especially those with school-aged children and those desiring 'being Estonian' to be passed down. The idea of initiating a program similar to "Birthright" that the Israeli government operates was also discussed in two of our interviewing platforms. One participant urged that if there were an Estonian program, a "follow-up" would be important to continue the learning experience (the said participant was drawing from the experience of family members who did the Birthright program in Israel).

Two participants in the focus groups and interviews also mentioned tech as a huge draw to Estonia and an area where youth could get involved, calling it a "carrot dangle" for the youth. Another participant came up with an additional idea for the youth, being a "virtual job fair," saying that at a younger age,

"one of the best ways to connect with youth, what really motivates them are jobs and internships...So if there are better ways...Uh to build pipelines into Estonian companies...for Estonian youth living abroad...one example would be a virtual job fair, it's so easy now with zoom... you could have Estonian startups, anyone from the government can come and introduce the Estonian business ecosystem...and then you have breakout room for students interested in working in financial services... Health care, uhm, medicine or what, whatever fields right, or technology... And wherever they're studying around the world, they can learn more about working for internships and jobs... Uhh Estonian companies and it's a win-win I think and with virtual, it's so easy to do these days. It's pretty much cost, cost-free... same with academia too, universities... could be doing that while students are still in high school say like 14-18, considering college to go full time, or even when they are in college, study abroad in Tartu or Tallinn..."

Youth seem to be one of the most frequently discussed topics in the focus groups and interviews when it comes to the survival of Estonian culture abroad and the future of Estonian diaspora communities. There could be many benefits for the Estonian government to consider some of these initiatives or build upon the comments of these specific diaspora members.

***Observation #13:** Estonian cultural groups play an important role in the communities they serve and the Estonian government.*

A few other individual, but enlightening comments to end this section on the needs from the government, regard the desire to keep Estonian cultural groups independent of the government (which one member elaborated upon when asked if the government should "give some type of authority to these Estonian groups" like lobbying for the country). The participant brought to our attention the nature of an Estonian diaspora group having a double-identity, and that too much government involvement ('authority') could be seen negatively and that they would then "cease to be like working in America's interest," recognising that the participant (who was born in the USA) was "an American, but with strong, with a strong love and attachment to Estonia. So you know, even though I'm both, I still think that we need to be cognizant of you know what's in America's best interest and to look for ways that we can make those interests kind of come together" and that too much governmental influence could lead to the sentiment of the organisations being "just paid mouthpieces for the government' versus people who really have an interest and are working from the heart."

Some participants expressed views on Estonia's future and showed concerns about Russia. One participant viewed Estonian cultural organisations as an important part of preserving the Estonian language and customs if their fear of a Russian invasion ever materialised. This sentiment was held mainly by Wave 1 immigrants who had direct knowledge and experience of being invaded. In this sense, Estonian cultural groups serve an important role in helping to raise awareness of the needs of Estonians and the Estonian government. The following quote best exemplifies this: "that's why, again, we're keeping these organisations going, we're monitoring what's going on, and you know, kind of talking to each other worldwide, just because you know, things are uncertain and things can change overnight."

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The conversations the research team had with members of the Chicago Estonian diaspora community gave us unique insight into the lives of the Estonian Chicago community. From our observations, we can conclude that the Estonian community in Chicago is vibrant, active, diverse, and a very, tight-knit community.

Further, the importance of Estonian cultural groups cannot be understated. First, these groups act as a community gathering spot, linking Estonians from multiple generations together. Such connections fill an important emotional need for Estonians living abroad, and it gives them an opportunity to connect and/or re-connect with their Estonian culture and heritage.

Second, they serve as an important networking tool and can promote Estonian national goals. For example, Estonian immigrants who may wish to invest or start a company in Estonia; Estonians who have been living abroad but would like to retire in Estonia; connecting Estonian diaspora youth to higher education institutions in Estonia, etc. Given the population pressure and investment needs for the Estonian government, such connections could have a major impact on the socio-economic development of Estonia.

Lastly, the Estonian community in Chicago is very enthusiastic and proud of their cultural heritage. From the research team's perspective, they represent Estonia well, are active community members, and enthusiastically engage with non-Estonians to educate them about their culture and values.

5.2 Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made based on the interviews and focus groups with Estonian diaspora members.

1. Communication channels between the Estonian government and Estonian diaspora groups should be improved.

It was clear from the participant feedback that communication channels between the Chicago diaspora group and the Estonian government should be improved. The main challenge cited by the participants was that it was difficult to find relevant information from the Estonian government to suit their needs. For example, information about potential funding opportunities for activities in Chicago, youth camps for Estonian diaspora members, information about starting a company or investing in Estonia, information about higher education for diaspora youth, and information about retiring in Estonia was not clear for the participants.

In general, this information is readily available on Estonian websites such as "Work in Estonia" or on university websites. But the challenge for diaspora members is that they are not familiar with these resources, and to find this information, they need to search multiple websites or groups, i.e., Facebook groups or other similar platforms for information.

Thus, it would be helpful if the Estonian government created a "one-stop-shop" platform for Estonian diaspora groups that they could access for information that is relevant to them. Such a platform could also

include a function where diaspora members could easily contact the government to give feedback and share opinions or a networking tool where they can connect with other Estonian groups around the world. Opening the channels of communication between diaspora communities could lead to a more synergistic and mutually beneficial relationship.

2. Create a more targeted outreach approach for younger Estonians in diaspora communities.

The youth is identified as a key touchpoint maintaining the future health of Estonian community groups throughout the world. Particularly, as diaspora members age, move from a community, or if they don't pass down their language, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain to keep the youth involved in the Estonian diaspora community.

Unfortunately, for some Estonian cultural groups, the decline or closing of these organisations is inevitable, but more engagement with the youth in these community groups could make a significant impact. The Estonian government could help engage this target group more by supporting "youth camps" or language schools that introduce diaspora groups to Estonian culture and language at a young age. Of course, these types of groups exist, but more should be done to advertise them to diaspora communities worldwide.

One suggestion from a focus group participant was to establish a "Birthright" programme like Israel, where the Israeli government pays for young Jewish people to travel to Israel and learn about their culture and heritage.

Another suggestion from the focus groups was to promote a virtual job or higher education fair that targeted young adults from Estonian diaspora communities. Particularly in the United States, where education is very expensive, attending school in Estonia could be a better alternative, and it would also serve to immerse this target group in the culture, traditions, and language of Estonia.

3. Create a "retire in Estonia" incentive.

Several participants in the focus group who had moved to the United States in the early 2000's expressed interest in retiring to Estonia. Depending on the person's financial situation, this could have significant benefits to local communities and the economy. For example, foreign retirees purchasing and renovating property, spending money at local shops, cafes, restaurants, etc. This could also indirectly translate to the retiree's family and friends visiting them in Estonia, which brings tourists to the country.

Of course, Estonian citizens must buy into the retirement fund, but creating such incentives could be a way to spur investments into Estonia and to encourage re-migration back to Estonia.

4. Consider diplomatic visits to communities outside of traditional population and/or government centres in the United States, i.e. New York City and Washington DC.

Participants from the Chicago area mentioned that they would appreciate if they were included in more official state visits from Estonia to the United States. The Estonian diaspora community represents one the most significant – in terms of population – Estonian diaspora groups in the United States and interacting

with them more could improve communication and build connections with groups outside the main political and economic hubs of the United States.

Of course, official state visits are often focused on the East Coast of the United States for practical reasons. But it might be beneficial to create an official "townhall" style meeting where members of the Estonian diaspora community from around the country could gather, network, and voice their opinions and concerns to the Estonian government. This has the dual benefit of strengthening ties between the Estonian government and diaspora communities worldwide. It is an opportunity for diaspora groups to engage with each other and create stronger bonds.

WORKS CITED

- Aspen Institute. (n.d.) *Experiences of Immigrant Workers: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future of our Economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/experiences-immigrant-workers-challenges-opportunities-future-our-economy/>.
- CAP. (2019, 26 July). *Building a More Dynamic Economy: The Benefits of Immigration*. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/building-dynamic-economy-benefits-immigration/>.
- CEM. (2015, 17 August). *About >> Chicago Estonian House History*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/about/chicago-estonian-house-history/>.
- CEM. (2018, 20 April). *About*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/about/>.
- CEM. (2015, 17 August). *Activities*. Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/activities/>.
- CEM. (2020, 29 January). *Home >> Estonian School*. Retrieved from <http://chicagoestimaja.com/kool-2/>.
- Chicago Estonian House. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://chicagoestimaja.com/>.
- Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
- Embassy of Estonia Washington DC (n.d.). *Estonians in the USA*. Retrieved from <https://washington.mfa.ee/estonians-in-the-usa/>.
- Estonians in Chicago. (n.d.). *About ECSC*. Retrieved from <https://estoniansinchicago.com/estonian-cultural-society-of-chicago/>.
- Estonians in Chicago. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://estoniansinchicago.com/>.
- Estonica: Encyclopedia about Estonia. (n.d.). *Estonian in a World Context*. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20180927005518/http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/The_Estonian_Language/Estonian_in_a_world_context/.
- Granquist, Mark A. (n.d.). *Estonian Americans*. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Estonian-Americans.html#ixzz6yQiiqnOU>.
- Kaša, Rita and Inta Mieriņa. (2019). *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia: National Identity, Transnational Belonging, and Diaspora Politics*. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Emigrant_Communities_of_Latvia/EgmXDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover.
- Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*.
- Maegi, B. (n.d.). *Estonians*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/435.html>.
- Migration Data Portal. (2020, 9 June). *Diasporas*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas>.
- Smith, Graham and Andrew Wilson. (1997). *Rethinking Russia's Post-Soviet Diaspora: The Potential for Political Mobilisation in Easter Ukraine and North-East Estonia*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/153488.pdf>.
- Statistics Estonia 100. (n.d.) *Migration*. Retrieved from <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/migration>.

- Tammaru, T., Kumer-Haukanõmm, K., & Anniste, K. (2010). The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 36 (7).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.481614>.
- UNHCR. (n.d.) *What is a Refugee?* Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.html>.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Migration*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>.
- United Nations Population Division. (n.d.). *Migrant Stock Data*. Retrieved from https://population.un.org/unmigration/migrantstockbyorigin_sql.aspx.
- Visit Estonia. (2021, 22 April). *Your Quick Guide to the Estonian Language*. Retrieved from <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/your-quick-guide-to-the-estonian-language#:~:text=The%20Estonian%20language%20is%20spoken,along%20with%20Finnish%20and%20Hungarian>.
- Von Hagen, Mark. (2004). *Review Essay: Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era*.

APPENDIX

Literature Review on Diasporas and Estonian Diaspora:

Immigration and integration – challenges and opportunities for new immigrants

The United Nations Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant as “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence,” and says that someone is considered a migrant regardless of their “legal status,” “voluntary or involuntary” nature of their movement, the reasons for immigration or how long they are staying in the new country.⁴¹ The ideas and terms of migration (both emigration and immigration) and the study of this subject are vital in the background of our case study. There were 272 million migrants around the world in June 2019,⁴² making migration a large topic for the fields of political science, international relations⁴³, sociology, anthropology, economics, and other areas. This topic is relevant for the country of Estonia both historically due to large waves of emigrants and refugees fleeing Estonia as well as for today as even though emigration flow is not circumstantially or numerically the same as it was in the past, it has not stopped.⁴⁴

Immigration is broadly seen as having two categories: A. either as a method of escape or B. as one step in the direction towards a bright future. The UN describes these categories as being those who “migrate out of choice” and those migrating “out of necessity.”⁴⁵ Flowing from these broad conceptions of immigration are the terms ‘involuntary’ migrant (such as ‘refugees’ or ‘asylum seekers’⁴⁶) and ‘voluntary’ migrant (often someone seeking either job opportunities, economic improvement, family ties or other factors that cause them to *want* to immigrate). More nuances exist in this heavily studied area seeking to categorize complex sets of individual circumstances into frameworks. But with nuances and smaller terms of categorization in the background, what all immigrants share is a set of challenges and a set of opportunities, which vary depending on circumstance.

Common challenges can include one of the most outwardly apparent barriers: language. Language is particularly important for the country of Estonia historically, and this is has been apparent ever since the late 19th century when “the rural people speaking the common language felt themselves to be the Estonian people, who read, wrote and acted in the Estonian language,” (i.e. important to a sense of national identity) and “[e]ver since, the Estonian language has been at the centre of Estonian identity.”⁴⁷ As language in the Estonian case and other cases is also often a strong part of someone’s identity and culture, when outside of their ‘homeland’ the immigrant may feel like they lose parts of their culture (or themselves) by not being to speak their internal language in their everyday lives. The immigrant may be self-conscious to more external aspects of language such as an accent or inability to communicate with desired eloquence or

⁴¹ United Nations. (n.d.). *Migration*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>.

⁴² Ibid. (IOM Migration Report 2020)

⁴³ See section *The Role of Diasporas in International Politics* starting on page 169 in Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

⁴⁴ Statistics Estonia 100. (n.d.) *Migration*. Retrieved from <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/migration>.

⁴⁵ United Nations. (n.d.). *Migration*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Estonica: Encyclopedia about Estonia. (n.d.). *Estonian in a World Context*. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20180927005518/http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/The_Estonian_Language/Estonian_in_a_world_context/.

vocabulary. Sometimes immigrants are able to make their own community with other immigrants from their same home country (such as ‘enclaves’ in the United States consisting of those with similar immigration backgrounds) and can find solace in being able to speak their language and stay connected to their culture, one aspect which may largely affect their experience in their new country. Other immigrants may feel isolated, without community from members of their homeland and without ability to communicate with members of their host land. This linguistic separation could also flow into cultural separation as well, with immigrants who cannot find community with other members of their particular immigrant group also finding it hard to celebrate their country’s (or religion’s) holidays and traditions or connect to other important parts of their culture through music, dance, educational traditions, art, or other cultural forms.

Financial uncertainty is also common, especially for involuntary migrants, who often arrive with no more than a few belongings and little (if any) money. Some voluntary migrants arrive to happier situations, being greeted and supported, both socially and monetarily, by family members. But many migrants from both categories do not have such luxuries. Even migrants who arrive being ‘supported’ still have to face other types of challenges common to all immigrants such as those that go along with finding work, learning a new language, finding schools for their children, and overall navigating a new system.

Social and cultural challenges are also an inevitable part of the immigration experience be it things of lesser significance (such as having to get used to a different monetary or measuring system, or inability to buy certain products) to large scale social system changes (like a different dominant religion or drastically varying cultural customs) all the way to discrimination or complete lack of acceptance from the host land that immigrants sometimes experience. For refugees and other sorts of involuntary migrants, one of the most salient challenges can be completely cut ties with their homeland as well as oftentimes not having the ability to return due to the conditions that made them a refugee (examples can include “ wars, ‘ethnic cleansing’, natural disasters, pogroms,”⁴⁸ genocide, persecution due to “race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group, or political opinion”⁴⁹, etc.. For voluntary migrants, especially ones coming with familial ties, immigration may seem ‘easier’ but also comes with its unique challenges. All migrants have to wrestle with identity formation and retention in the midst of their new culture, discovering who they are and how this sense of identity plays out in an area with new cultural customs and expectations and with the process (or not) of assimilation and integration. These challenges shift and change with the amount of time after the arrival of an immigrant and new challenges and opportunities can arise.

But immigration also comes with a set of opportunities, both for the immigrants themselves and for the country that hosts them.⁵⁰ This may be a new start and safety (‘refuge’) for refugees or general financial, educational, or experiential gains (such as the ‘adventure’ of being in a new place⁵¹) for voluntary

⁴⁸Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, 162.

⁴⁹ UNHCR. (n.d.) *What is a Refugee?* Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.html>. from 1951 Refugee Convention.

⁵⁰ Aspen Institute. (n.d.) *Experiences of Immigrant Workers: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future of our Economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/experiences-immigrant-workers-challenges-opportunities-future-our-economy/>.

⁵¹ This concept was also shown in Kaša, Rita and Inta Mieriņa. (2019). *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia: National Identity, Transnational Belonging, and Diaspora Politics*. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Emigrant_Communities_of_Latvia/EgmXDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover. where Latvian migrants experienced similar new opportunities with open borders that post-Sovietism provided.

immigrants. Although often criticized and politicized, immigrants can add much to their new host country such as “skills, knowledge, and labor”⁵² and positive economic impacts⁵³ as well as other less-tangible impacts such as added cultural diversity factors, bringing music, food, and other cultural variety to the host culture.⁵⁴ The field of immigration studies is the key background to our study, but we narrow in further on the concept of ‘diaspora’ as a way of defining a particular sub-set of immigrants with a shared experience that fits specifically well with the Estonian experience.

Diaspora communities

‘Diaspora’, the term at the heart of our case study, is also a part of immigration literature and is a word in its simplest form meaning ‘a group of people outside of their homeland.’⁵⁵ Despite the succinct and simple look of the aforementioned definition, diaspora can be a messy word, as unhindered use of the term has led to a somewhat diluted and unclear meaning.⁵⁶ Even this definition leaves one with many questions such as, if diaspora can be reduced to a ‘group of people outside of their homeland’, what constitutes a ‘homeland’ and what happens if borders change? Does anyone who emigrates, voluntarily or involuntarily, become a part of ‘the diaspora’? And how many generations after an immigration event are a person’s descendants considered still considered diasporic? One author writing about diasporas comments, “If everyone is potentially diasporic, and every migration or ethnic group a diaspora, then how much analytical value can the concept retain?”⁵⁷ The definition of diaspora is important for the field of immigration studies, for understanding the Estonian experience abroad, as well as for the people themselves who are living these experiences, as often, personal identity as a member of a particular diaspora group aboard is used by them to “make sense of their disrupted lives.”⁵⁸

To create a clearer definition, we pull from the “framework” (a term he often uses) set out by Kevin Kenny in his book *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*. Through the points in his book, he highlights main factors that are important for someone to typically be considered a diaspora member including those who:

1. Are involuntary instead of voluntary migrants⁵⁹
2. Are part of a time period where their country has witnessed a “defining historical event”⁶⁰
3. Are somehow connected to the citizens of their homeland⁶¹
4. Have the dream of returning to their home country⁶²

⁵² Aspen Institute. (n.d.) *Experiences of Immigrant Workers: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future of our Economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/experiences-immigrant-workers-challenges-opportunities-future-our-economy/>.

⁵³ CAP. (2019, 26 July). *Building a More Dynamic Economy: The Benefits of Immigration*. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/building-dynamic-economy-benefits-immigration/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*.; Migration Data Portal. (2020, 9 June). *Diasporas*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas>. Kenny and Migration Data Portal also start off their writings with definitions of diaspora. See these sources for further definitional nuances.

⁵⁶ Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, 1,6,11. Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. Also comments on this.

⁵⁷ Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, 11.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 15

⁵⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁶¹ Ibid, 105.

⁶² Ibid.

These four framework items can interact to form the usual circumstances of a diaspora member but are by no means the ‘ingredients’ of a diaspora member, as each immigration circumstance contains its own individual flavour.



Figure 9 Framework of a diaspora member, based off of Kenny's (2013) frameworks for diaspora members

Common Trends in Diasporas

To add onto our framework and go beyond diaspora members circumstances, we probe into the *identity* of a diaspora member and their relation to their homeland⁶³ both collectively and individually. The IOM (International Organization for Migration, part of the United Nations) lays out a more nuanced definition calling diasporas “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background.”⁶⁴ “Identity” and “sense of belonging” create a more complex picture of a diaspora member, one whose current view of themselves seems to be influenced by their experiences. This trait of diaspora members, identity formation, such as how Kenny (2013) (described earlier) makes the point that diaspora immigrants seem to use this framework to “make sense of their disrupted lives”⁶⁵ is key to this case study, as we explore how the identities of Estonian immigrants are shaped by their immigration circumstances and how these diaspora members define themselves in relation to Estonia and their host country in one particular diaspora community: Chicago, USA and surroundings. Identity also brings up the important question of generational identity and if descendants of diaspora members are still considered a part of diasporas (both by definition as well as their personal identity and if they are accepted by other diaspora members as part of the ‘group’), which is important for longevity of a community.

⁶³ Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. often focuses on identity as well.

⁶⁴ Migration Data Portal. (2020, 9 June). *Diasporas*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas>. Citing *IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019*.

⁶⁵ Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*.

Cohen (2008)⁶⁶ sets forth a different way of thinking about diasporas. He emphasizes that they are in a constant cycle of change,⁶⁷ and provides multiple criteria. Cohen’s “common features of a diaspora”⁶⁸ that he later summarizes have many aspects similar to Kenny’s framework mentioned above such as the emphasis on the disruption of having to leave their homeland, a strong connection to their former land (i.e. “a collective memory and myth about the homeland” and “an idealization the supposed ancestral home,” among points) as well as connection to their own group (“a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time”) and also a dream of return.⁶⁹ But important distinctions are added for the categories of:

A. *Motive* (opened up to also include “the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions”)⁷⁰

B. *Relationships*

- *to host land members* (members have “a troubled relationship with host societies”)⁷¹
- *to other homeland members*⁷² (members have “a sense of co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries”)

C. *Community* (members have “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries.”)⁷³

These additions to the previous definitions provided not only further detail who is part of a diaspora but also contribute to understanding the diaspora members identity and common challenges that diaspora members may face. It also brings up another key aspect of diaspora study being the community formation aspect and the way that diasporas interact with host countries, within their ‘homeland member communities.’ As Kenny says, “[d]iaspora opens up new cultural spaces beyond the boundaries of homeland and host land. The focus here is not on the process of migration but on the connections migrants form abroad and the kinds of culture they produce.”⁷⁴ This intersection of home-land and host-land is where our study takes place. The question of if voluntary migrants and second-generation immigrants are part of the diaspora may be debated, but for the purpose of our study, we consider anyone who self-identifies as “Estonian” and has a connection (familial or personal) to the immigration experience as part of the diaspora and therefore valid for our study.

Diaspora trends of the former Soviet space

An additional fold to our study is the former-Soviet context in which we find ourselves. Cohen describes how when Communism fell, earlier diasporas were effected saying, “The break-up of the postwar

⁶⁶Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, 161-162. Also cited by Migration Data Portal. (2020, 9 June). *Diasporas*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas>.

⁶⁷ Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, 141.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 17, not definitional strict for this framework.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 161-162.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 161.

⁷¹ Ibid, 162

⁷² Smith and Wilson also talk about this as an important defining feature of diasporas on page 846, citing Brubaker.

⁷³ Ibid, 162.

⁷⁴Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, 12.

international balance of power has radically altered the character of international migration” and that this change drastically opened up borders and relations between West and East.⁷⁵ One author, Mark Von Hagen (2004), takes a different look at diasporas, viewing them from the context of a post-Soviet historical light and he, citing many sources, reviews multiple major ethnic groups throughout the historical Tsarist and Soviet time periods that could be considered diasporas within Russia/the Soviet Union itself. Looking at diasporas from a political viewpoint, Von Hagen writes that a diaspora in its broad definition, “can include the millions of people who at any given time are displaced from where the state authorities would like them to be (or they themselves would like to be).”⁷⁶ This quote can be argued to suggest that a diaspora can both be viewed politically and is also subject the winds of geopolitical change, a subject that is important for our post-Soviet time period, as major political upheaval took place with the complete changing of governments in the 1990s. Other articles also comment on one of the remnants of the Soviet Union on how it dispersed peoples and made diasporas even of Russians themselves, such as an early article published in July 1997 Smith and Wilson’s explores Russian “diaspora” populations in Eastern Ukraine and North-Eastern Estonia and their potential to band together for “mobilization.”⁷⁷ This, again, shows a political emphasis in diaspora studies, and this emphasis seems to be especially relevant for countries of the post-Soviet type.

One recent study of interest to those looking at the diasporas and their implications in the post-Soviet space is a study published in 2019 about Latvian emigrants,⁷⁸ which explores their immigration “push” and “pull” factors⁷⁹, identities,⁸⁰ as well as general immigration experience abroad⁸¹ (aspects of which one could likely see many parallels to Estonia and other formerly Soviet-occupied countries). In general, as there is little reason to believe that diaspora members from the former Soviet sphere would stray from conventional definitions and former studies of diaspora, we thus embrace the frameworks provided by previous diaspora literature as a way of understanding the Estonian experience.

The Estonian experience and the Diaspora model

From these basic starting points, one can see Estonian communities abroad strongly encompassing the term ‘diaspora’ in the majority of formerly mentioned definitional aspects for most immigrants. Like other diaspora groups, most Estonians who ended up abroad witnessed a ‘defining historical event,’⁸² as with the entrance (or exits) of Nazi, Soviet, or earlier powers that stemmed them on to migrate. Though it can be said that many Estonians had some say in their immigration process, the high number of Estonians considered refugees, leads them to fit more closely the ‘involuntary migrant’ category, at least for the period before the break-up of the Soviet Union. Additionally, as is important for this case study, Estonians

⁷⁵Cohen, Robin. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Second edition. Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.8830&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, 144.

⁷⁶ Von Hagen, Mark. (2004). *Review Essay: Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era*, 465. This quote is in the context of talking about Cossacks as possible diaspora members.

⁷⁷Smith, Graham and Andrew Wilson. (1997). *Rethinking Russia’s Post-Soviet Diaspora: The Potential for Political Mobilisation in Easter Ukraine and North-East Estonia*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/153488.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Kaša, Rita and Inta Mieriņa. (2019). *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia: National Identity, Transnational Belonging, and Diaspora Politics*. Retrieved from

https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Emigrant_Communities_of_Latvia/EgmXDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 56.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 69-96.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, 8.

formed communities aboard that maintained cultural ties, going along with both frameworks provided above. For the fourth aspect of the original framework shown in *Figure 9*, many Estonians wished to return to their homeland when able, which was expressed through many of our conversations with Estonians abroad, although the nature of this dream is also subject to time, personal situations, and other factors, as well as often likely seemed unattainable during the period of occupations.

Importance of the Estonian Diaspora for Estonia

One distinctive reason to explore ‘Diaspora’ for Estonia going forward is that, with centuries of occupations behind them, Estonia now has reached 30 years of post-Soviet independence, and this changes the nature and number of their current emigration flows, as well as future flows. Naturally due to very different circumstances than their 1990s and (especially) their 1940s counterparts, the reasons and demographics of current and foreseeable future migration are changing and are no longer are refugee-based or tied to a specific historical event such as war and occupations. Additionally, the demographics of Estonians abroad are changing with an “ageing population and the assimilation of new generations”⁸³ posing questions about the strength of the connection to Estonia the younger generation feels and if descendants are just as much a part of the diaspora as their parents or extended relatives. The Estonian diaspora abroad was integral for maintaining Estonian culture ‘in exile’ for the unforeseen length of Soviet occupation in Estonia. These diaspora groups carried on cultural traditions and language, and constitute an alarming 160,000 speakers abroad,⁸⁴ and using a few available numbers⁸⁵, we can estimate that 12- 15% of the worlds’ Estonian speakers total today are outside of Estonia, making diaspora groups also very important for language retention as well as identity.⁸⁶

Will the term ‘Estonian Diaspora’ and large part of Estonian culture continue through the genealogies of prior Estonian refugees and emigrants or does full integration into the new country occur so acutely that the ties to the ancestral ‘homeland’ are completely lost? Although this is difficult to gauge, one counter to this idea that the diaspora could fade away is that if Estonian Diasporic communities stay alive, even voluntary migrants (that might not be considered ‘diasporic’ in the discussed framework) “can engage in diasporic activities aboard, depending on the types of connections they establish” and “these connections occur when migrants or their descendants in one country continue to involve themselves economically, politically, or culturally in the affairs of their homeland.”⁸⁷ With this stream of thought in mind, the Diaspora could continue for years to come if Estonian cultural institutions abroad continue to exist and/or if new waves of Estonian immigration occur, and this is where our study begins.

⁸³ Tammaru, T., Kumer-Haukanõmm, K., & Anniste, K. (2010). The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 36 (7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.481614>, 1172.

⁸⁴ Estonica: Encyclopedia about Estonia. (n.d.). *Estonian in a World Context*. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20180927005518/http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/The_Estonian_Language/Estonian_in_a_world_context/.

⁸⁵ Visit Estonia. (2021, 22 April). *Your Quick Guide to the Estonian Language*. Retrieved from <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/your-quick-guide-to-the-estonian-language#:~:text=The%20Estonian%20language%20is%20spoken,along%20with%20Finnish%20and%20Hungarian.;>

Estonica: Encyclopedia about Estonia. (n.d.). *Estonian in a World Context*. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20180927005518/http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/The_Estonian_Language/Estonian_in_a_world_context/.

⁸⁶ Estonica: Encyclopedia about Estonia. (n.d.). *Estonian in a World Context*. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20180927005518/http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/The_Estonian_Language/Estonian_in_a_world_context/.

⁸⁷ Kenny, Kevin. (2013). *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*, 13.