№53 1/2020

life in ESTONIA

Cool Estonian startups disrupting global markets

Entrepreneurial Estonian women taking on the world

Chasing unicorns in real life and film

Ott Tänak — the biggest star in Estonian sports

Noblessner — from industrial heritage to modern urban space

Teamwork makes the dreamwork



Ott Vatter: e-Residency turns five!



Photo by Renee Altrov

Cover photo by
Atko Januson

The ecosystem within the ecosystem

Success is a combination of hard work and luck — for individuals, for companies, and for countries. There is plenty of advice available in bestselling books and business journals, giving us step-by-step action recipes or recommendations. Despite the lure and lustre of such advice, success in an environment with many unknowns can rarely be designed — it can only be enabled.

Estonia has worked hard to enable success for its citizens and for its companies. We are #1 in Europe for our education, and #1 in the world for the number of tech 'unicorns' per capita. Our pioneering digital services, transparent tax system, and overall ease of doing business have attracted many investors and tech entrepreneurs over the years, and we hope to continue on this path.

This success has greatly benefitted from our citizens' trust towards the government and its digital services, and in the coming years, this trust will be a significant success-factor for advancing our digital ecosystem. It will make or break our plan to build data-heavy services and add (automated) decision-making assistance with the help of machine learning algorithms and AI applications.

We must ensure that our digital services follow the principles of fairness and transparency, and that an individual and their needs are at the centre of service design. We must ensure that personal data that has been handed over to the government will be handled in a secure manner. We must ensure that we don't mistake fancy tools for ultimate goals.

And, above all, we must understand the importance of creating and sustaining a favourable, balanced ecosystem for individuals to thrive and businesses to succeed. This ecosystem must allow for safe-to-fail experiments to be conducted, and it must disincentivise blame and scapegoating. An ecosystem in which we bring together the designers and the users, the government and the citizen, the public and the private sectors, and the technical with the societal. An ecosystem in which an education in the humanities is seen as equal to an education in STEM is a crucial part of building human-centered systems.

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Estonian Investment Agency supports companies investing and expanding in Estonia. World-class human capital, unique digital capabilities and a competitive business environment make Estonia a smart, agile location for businesses with global ambitions.

investinestonia.com

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Growing bigger in spirit

The Estonian e-Residency programme has reached its first 5-year milestone. In those first five years, 63,000 people from 167 countries around the world have joined Estonia's digital nation as e-residents. Ott Vatter, Managing Director of the e-Residency Programme, speaks about the past, the present and the future of this initiative.

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Accelerating personal growth

It's becoming a nice habit that female founders in Estonia raise capital in Asia and build products that help users expand their personal horizons. Kadri Tuisk recently announced that her startup Clanbeat raised a round of 1 million euros and now she and her team are all set to disrupt the field of personalised education.

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James S. York builds bridges between Estonia and America

Enterprise Estonia has appointed export advisers now in a total of 14 markets. The latest addition is the USA's James S. York, who has been the Director of US Business & Innovation for EE since summer 2019. Life in Estonia asked James about his goals in his new post as well as some tips on how to be successful in the USA. Read also about two successful Estonian firms in the US — The Farmer's Dog and Tera Ventures.

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Carlos Espinal: visiting Estonia has been built into the DNA of Seedcamp

Seed fund Seedcamp was founded with the aim of finding the best European startup founders and helping them to build global businesses. Carlos Espinal, the managing partner of the fund, reveals how to manage the fear of failing, why they have backed many Estonian companies and whether Seedcamp would even exist without TransferWise and GrabCad, which have been two of Seedcamp's most successful investments.

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Estonian Cell AS invested 200 million euros in Estonian economy

Winner of the 2019 Entrepreneurship Award, the aspen pulp mill Estonian Cell AS is a traditional industry in the world of startups. The company started production for the Estonian market in 2006 and has since brought in over 200 million euros in foreign investment.

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Paldiski — the Baltic Sea region's important industrial centre of the future?

Paldiski has been an industrial town for nearly 300 years. During the Soviet era, it was a closed area because of the Soviet Navy's nuclear submarine training centre. In the last decade, Paldiski has undergone a total transformation. Now, three massive projects may turn life upside down in this industrial region.

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Researchers and entrepreneurs team up to create unique solutions

What is the link between a life-saving smart pedestrian crossing, the relocation of plants, border guard surveillance technology, reusable laundry detergent and statistics on mobile positioning? At first glance, nothing. Yet spins-offs at Estonian universities are working on exactly such diverse and research-heavy topics.

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Reinventing the wheel

Most of us follow the saying 'don't reinvent the wheel'. Back in 2014, three young, Estonian men decided to ignore this wisdom and engineered a new electrically-powered bicycle. Now, Ampler bikes can be found in 23 countries.

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Ott Tänak — the Estonian idol who had to hit rock bottom before achieving his life dream

The date October 27th will be forever written into Estonian sports history. On this day, Tänak and Järveoja secured the WRC title in Catalonia. But the road to success had its bumps and sudden turns.

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PORTFOLIO. Maarit Murka: stepping out of the comfort zone

Art audiences are familiar with Maarit Murka's black and white, technically perfect, hyperrealist style. But behind the sterile painting style and on-the-surface laconic manner, we find a bold creator who is unafraid to think out of the box and swim against the current.

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"Chasing Unicorns" — a peek inside the life of a startup founder

Rain Rannu is perhaps the most well-known and successful Estonian startup entrepreneur turned movie director. His second movie, a startup comedy "Chasing Unicorns" has received positive reviews from all around the world, offering the pleasure of recognition on screen for many startuppers and investors alike. Read why.

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Four generations of knitwear — Nordic cool, sustainable and modern

Approaching its centenary, the 4-generation family business Woolish is a great example of a living tradition. Their original patterns have found their way into utterly cool new products while retaining the sustainability factor of high-quality knitwear.

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Noblessner quarter — from hidden industrial heritage to prime waterfront urban space

The completion of the first development phase of the Noblessner quarter has created a new waterfront neighbourhood that combines high-end residential properties with restored industrial era architecture filled with arts, entertainment and dining experiences.

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Tribe Theory — not just a hostel to spend the night

Tribe Theory — a chain of hostels conducive to building businesses and networks — was founded by Vikram Bharati. His goals are ambitious — by 2030 there should be a Tribe Theory hostel in every major city in the world, in 100 countries. His first hostel in Europe was opened in Tallinn.

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Events calendar: Highlights from January to April











Photos by Aivo Kallas

Education nation – PISA study reveals: Estonian pupils are the best in Europe

According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a premier global metric for education, the results of Estonian 15-year-olds are the best in Europe and among the strongest in the world.



Pupils from China, Singapore, Macao (China), Hong Kong, Estonia, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Taiwan and Finland achieved the best results in the latest PISA study, compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and published on 3 December 2019.

Estonia's 15-year-olds rank 1st in reading, science and mathematics in Europe while in the world, the country's students rank 5th in reading, 8th in mathematics and 4th in sciences.

In reading, which was the focus of PISA 2018, Estonia, Canada, Finland and Ireland were the highest-performing OECD countries. In science, the highest-performing OECD countries were Japan and Estonia. In mathematics, the highest-performing OECD countries were Japan, Korea and Estonia.

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Science pointed out that the number of top performers has also increased, compared with the last PISA assessment in 2015. "13.9% of [Estonian] students are able to solve complicated and very complicated tasks, compared with the OECD average of 8.5%," the ministry said in a press release.

According to the study, the majority (77%) of Estonian students exhibit a growth mindset — they believe they are capable of improving their intelligence and are willing to put effort into their own development in order to secure a better future. This is the highest among the OECD countries. 70% of students plan to attain higher education; the most popular professions are ICT specialist, doctor, CEO, architect and psychologist.

PISA was introduced in 2000 and the rankings take place every three years. Estonia has been participating in PISA surveys since 2006. The OECD's PISA 2018 tested 600,000 students in 79 countries and economies. PISA focuses on 15-year-olds because, at this age, students in many OECD countries graduate from compulsory education and decide their next steps.

Photos by Erlend Staub



Nordic Female Investors & Entrepreneurs Meetup

21st of November @ Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Anna Wretling and Ira Stening



How to become a successful female entrepreneur and/or investor? More than 60 participants at the Nordic Female Investors & Entrepreneurs Meetup had an opportunity to get the answer to this question from a select group of successful female entrepreneurs. The event, which was hosted by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with Enterprise Estonia on November 21st, certainly gave Estonian businesswomen a boost of confidence.

The international event was hosted by **Kristi Saare**, the Founder of Estonian Female Investor Club at the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. **Anna Wretling**, a Swedish founder and CEO of PowerWomen, did an energising presentation on her business and how women can support each other in their efforts to do business more efficiently. The presentation was followed by an inspirational speech from Finnish female entrepreneur **Sari Sopanen**, the CEO of Hedon Spa in Estonia.

The main topics of the seminar were discussed during a panel discussion with **Ira Stening**, **Marit Ilison**, **Aide Tõnts** and **Anette Nordvall**, all of whom are very familiar with managing successful businesses. The panellists shared their own experiences of starting out in the business world and discussed the topic of different challenges female entrepreneurs face. The discussion enabled the participants to gain useful knowledge and encouraged them to build their business further.

A common truth that became clear and was shared by every panellist was that if you want to succeed, never underestimate the power of networking. And that is why the event was also finished by a networking session hosted at the premises of the Finnish Embassy in Tallinn.





Business Festival Calendar 2020



29th — 31st of January
sTARTUp Day @ UT Sports Hall, Tartu

sTARTUp Day is the biggest business festival in the Baltics, bringing together startups, traditional entrepreneurs, investors, innovators, and students. The aim of the event is to connect startup-minded people and celebrate entrepreneurship in the smart city of Tartu. sTARTUp Day 2020 is a three-day festival with a marvellous stage program, effective matchmaking, hands-on seminars, an exhibition area full of innovation and vibrant side events. The inspirational-educational program consists of various topics — from marketing to space tech, fundraising to smart city, artificial intelligence to creative economy.

www.startupday.ee
startupdayfest
startupdayfest
startupdayfest

7th — 8th of May
Asia Update Conference 2020: The Race is On @ Proto Invention Factory, Tallinn

Asia Update is an international conference organised by Enterprise Estonia in cooperation with the University of Tartu, Tallinn University, TalTech and relevant ministries and enterprises.

Asia Update 2020 brings together local, regional and international experts, business people and decision-makers who engage with Asia to share ideas and build networks for future growth and development. The conference focuses on discussing both the challenges and opportunities in today's society caused by conflicts between different stakeholders, environmental and societal problems, challenges between countries, differences in perceptions between Asia and the West, and the shifting of the world order.

estonia.ee/asiaupdate

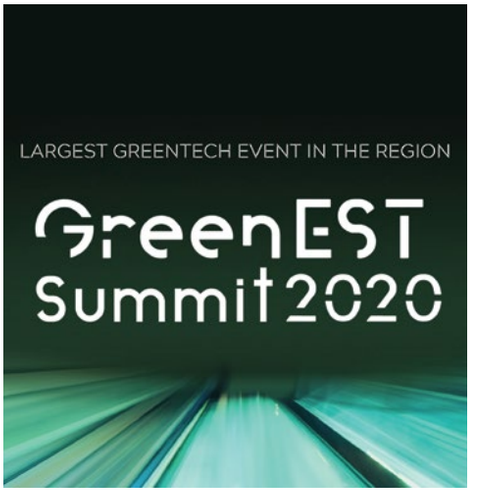


Photos by Annika Haas



Photos by Mattias Kitsing







28th — 29th of May
Latitude59 @ Tallinn Creative Hub

Latitude59 is a cosy spring gathering for people serious about startups, investing, and the future of governance. Most startup conferences are about speeches, pitches and wooing investors; the big ones are like the cruise ships of seafaring. Latitude59 is a lovely yacht without the crowds: only people who really matter.

latitude59.ee
latitude59
latitude

13th of October
GreenEST Summit @ Tallinn Creative Hub

GreenEST Summit, organised by Science Park Tehnopol, brings together public and private sector experts, Greentech companies and investors from all over Europe. Renowned speakers from leading international companies will be present to answer your questions and give you amazing insights into building a sustainable company.

greenest.tehnopol.ee

4th — 6th of December
Robotex @ Saku Suurhall

Robotex International is the biggest robotics festival on the planet, where thousands of engineers, executives, students and families come together to network with industry leaders, examine new startups, build robots for various challenges and learn about the latest technology innovations. Robotex International will be hosted for the 20th time in a row. The festival will be jam-packed with amazing keynotes and competitions, two expo halls, workshops, and much more.

robotex.international
robotexinternational

Growing bigger in spirit

By Ede Schank Tamkivi



Photo by Atko Januson



The Estonian e-Residency programme has reached its first 5-year milestone. In those first five years, 63,000 people from 167 countries around the world have joined Estonia's digital nation as e-residents.

E-residents have established 10,100 new companies so far — around 8% of all the active companies registered — and contributed directly or indirectly towards boosting the country's economy.

In 2019, e-residents paid 10.8 million euros in direct taxes, and the cumulative profit for Estonia in those 5 years has doubled year-by-year, now exceeding 31 million euros. "In addition, there is an obvious spillover effect," claims **Ott Vatter**, Managing Director of the e-Residency Programme. According to Enrico Moretti from Berkeley University, every high-value exports job created in the country further supports over five service jobs in the economy, from accountant and lawyers to drivers to yoga teachers. "But we still need to agree how to measure the socio-economic impact," Vatter admits. For now, he prefers to stick to measurable facts like the total cost of the programme, which was 7.4 million euros until the end of 2018.

Vatter, who runs his team of 18 people from a rather frugal office located in an old limestone building of a former papermill with a view of the planes landing in Tallinn airport, stresses that it's not just the tax income but mostly the indirect effect — Estonian brand awareness outside of the country and easing the process of conducting business abroad for Estonian companies.

"In the five years, they have learned that a big part of e-residents actually come from EU countries. They are company owners, freelancers who travel extensively due to the nature of their work and they might not have one certain base for their business. Thus Estonia provides a perfect solution," Vatter overturns the common understanding that the programme's main focus is attracting aspiring entrepreneurs from 'third countries'.

Yet, there are obvious success stories from elsewhere in the world: starting from an Indian ceramicist who got to sell his pottery in the EU market thanks to his e-Residency status; to Silicon Valley-based venture capitalist **Tim Draper** who uses e-Residency to manage his investments and praises Estonian e-Residency to big audiences whenever he can.

Disrupting a country

"If we cannot be big in numbers, we have to be big in our spirit", **Jakob Hurt**, one of the forefathers of Estonian independence movement, famously announced in his speech during the first Song Festival in 1869.

Hurt appeared to be an oracle: the population figures have not improved too dramatically over the 150 years since. Yet as an interpretation of the second part of his famous sentence, a similar idea was launched. In 2014, **Taavi Kotka**, **Ruth Annus** and **Siim Sikkut** came up with an idea to pursue the numbers from outside.

For the ideation contest for the then state-run Development Fund, the trio came up with an idea called "10 million e-Estonians by 2025". The idea was seen as carrying major potential and a team was set up to work on implementing it.

On December 1st, 2014, **Edward Lucas**, then Senior Editor of **The Economist,** became the first e-resident of Estonia. "I run a small company which I use for my freelance work and I'm tempted to put it on Estonian pay and taxes to see how it goes," Lucas said at the launch event. "For anything we do online we increasingly need digital signatures and this will enable a digital signature issued by a government the way that isn't possible at the moment in Britain."



Kaspar Korjus, an aspiring young leader, got to building the team of other young disruptors. One of them was Ott Vatter, who initially joined for a few months only. He had just sold his previous venture and was about to move to New York, but issuing of the visa and other paperwork took time so he offered himself to help out the recently launched e-Residency team.

"My task was to figure out how to set up the online application process and the initial job was supposed to last for two months." But as is usually the case, the job got so interesting he never made it to the US and decided to stay to build this new programme instead. It offered an enormous opportunity: "You can shape the country and contribute to the GDP," Vatter said.

Formerly, if a foreign founder wanted to set up a company in Estonia, they had to physically show up or pay a lawyer or a notary to set it up for them. Now they could apply for e-Residency from anywhere in the world, and after the Police and the Customs Department have approved the application, pick up the card from a local embassy.

Obstacles on the way

Nevertheless, something unexpected changed on the way. The restrictions around the international finance sector have tightened quite a bit. A five-year timeline of e-Residency has coincided with a row of falling domino pieces: the invasion of Eastern Ukraine, which triggered Western countries to impose economic sanctions on Russia, which in turn complicated money flows in and out of Europe, which in turn has led to money laundering scandals that recently shook the three largest Scandinavian banks, that also operate subsidiaries in Estonia.

Logically, e-residents should benefit from their special status in this situation. Each of them has been carefully background checked and has traded their biometrics for a government-issued secure digital identity.

But it is only natural that in this age of heightened 'know your customer' (KYC) pressure on banks, many honest e-residents trying to start their businesses in the EU have been caught in the general scepticism bankers may have of new customers they have never physically met. "We do not stand apart from the global finance sector, and we cannot force the banks — and a government should never force — opening accounts for foreign residents," Vatter admits.

When Kaspar Korjus left in early 2019, Vatter was about to leave as well but nevertheless stayed on: "I decided to dedicate these years of my life to take e-Residency to phase 2.0 and rebuild the team. My promise has been to solve the issues within the country, to make our people actually believe that e-Residency is an asset to the country."

"I had reached the goals I had set for myself," recalls Korjus who has now co-founded **Pactum**, a company building an AI-solution to automate negotiation processes. "E-Residency had found a problem-solution fit, product-market fit, business model and a scalable solution. As the last step, we had to make it sustainable inside the country and, in this new phase of stability, Ott is the best leader."

Big in Japan

According to the "E-Residency 2.0 White Paper" published a year ago, the number of mentions of the e-Residency program in foreign media in 2017 equalled the number of other mentions of Estonia. Thanks to this programme, Estonia has been hailed as the most digitally advanced society in the world by several world-renowned outlets such as **Forbes**, **The New Yorker** and **Wired** magazine. From 2014 until the summer of 2019, there were 11,000 mentions of e-Residency in the media, 4 books have been written on the topic and more than 20 academic papers. For some reason, Estonia seems to be especially popular in the Japanese media.

"The Estonian story has really grown big in Japan," Vatter laughs. "Estonia is perceived as some sort of a fantastic fairy-tale land, an e-Narnia that everyone wants to be part of. I guess it relates to the fact that Japan has historically been leading in hardware technology and would like to catch up in software as well. Estonia seems like a tiny distant country in the future that has a good cultural fit, a somewhat similarly sounding language and Scandinavian ambiance; plus Finnair will physically help them directly get here. In 2018, we received the most queries and applications from Japan and many of their e-residents actually do relocate to Estonia."



Kaspar Korjus

Telling the story of Estonia

Kaspar Korjus, former manager of the e-Residency programme:

"Most of the things around us are based on stories. States are governed based on stories. Services and brands are based on stories. These stories have been created to make people around us participate in order to cooperate and to breathe as one. The story of e-Residency is a story about a country that is much bigger than a physical entity limited by its geographical borders. The only reason this story exists is the people telling the story. And why do countries, as such, exist after all?

The story of Estonia has grown so much bigger thanks to the fact that we have managed to attract global talent who believe in our story. There is a piece of Estonia in almost every nation in the world.

Almost every country in the world wants their share of the international talent pool. What makes Estonia stand apart is the fact that we realised that, in the 21st century, immigration no longer needs to be physical. In a digital society, we can let people participate digitally.

I have personally participated in helping set up e-Residency programmes in Azerbaijan as well as Switzerland and I'm certain that in ten-years-time I'll be an e-resident of ten different countries. This is a platform that enables me to switch from just one mandatory relationship to many voluntary ones. I can decide which services I use where. There will no longer be countries that own their people; they will have to face the partial attachments. In the long run, everyone wins as it's much better to have partial attachments to a billion people than be strongly attached to a million."





Photo by Jelena Rudi



One of the many Japanese e-residents who moved to Estonia, **Kota Alex Saito**, seconds Vatter's words on why he initially became an e-resident three years ago: "It sounded like the future. So I decided to come to Estonia just for 3 months to experience the actual e-Estonia and avoid the hot and humid Japanese summer. But this experience — the lovely environment, friendly people and stimulating business environment — turned my life upside down. A year later, I declined the job offer from a consulting firm in Japan to physically relocate to Estonia and found a company, all thanks to the e-Residency programme."

After initially working for **Veriff**, an Estonian startup, Saito has now set up his own company. **SetGo** works with a wide range of startups in IT, trading and even a sports association, offering them consulting services to bridge Estonian and Japanese business environments. "E-Residency really helped my relocation to Estonia even though it does not work as a visa. I can do almost the same things that an Estonian does."

As a contributor to Forbes Japan and other business media as well, Saito is essentially one of the soft-power agents telling the story of e-Estonia and its business environment.

"In the long term, it would make sense to set up a subscription-based model," Vatter sums up his plans and adds that it's more about the quality and less the quantity. "And why not reach the number of 10 million e-residents sometime in the future?"



Photo by Kalle Veesaar

Accelerating personal growth

By Ede Schank Tamkivi



Photo by Kalle Veesaar

It's becoming a nice habit that female founders in Estonia raise capital in Asia and build products that help their users expand their personal horizons. Yet another success story in the line — Kadri Tuisk, recently announced that her startup Clanbeat raised a round of 1 million euros from the Japanese venture capital firm Mistletoe and now she and her team are all set to disrupt the field of personalised education.

Clanbeat has gone through 3 pivots throughout its four-year life cycle and is currently building, on top of a teachers' onboarding and personal development tool, a much broader platform to support the acceleration of personal growth.

"My main concern is how to support a person in his/her personal development," **Kadri Tuisk** explains Clanbeat's mission. "Why do people get stuck at some point on the learning curve and do not know where and how to direct their energy? Positive change in the world only happens through self-managed active humans and my mission with Clanbeat is to help people to be self-aware individuals with strong self-management skills so that they can reach their true potential. I am also well aware that growth does not happen in a vacuum or only inside some app, so community and individual 1-on-1 support is very important in the personal growth journey. We are the enablers and connectors."

She has become one of the few brave entrepreneurs in Estonia who has decided to tackle the complex and very conservative field of education by offering an educational technology (**EdTech**) solution to schools, which is seemingly a huge market — if it were only the international IB schools all over the world, that would already be over 5,000 schools and 1 billion euros — but will take an enormous effort to persuade all those likely interested parties to test the (yet another new!) product and eventually end up with paying customers. Tuisk is happily challenging that obstacle.

From a Mobile app to another MA degree

Five years ago, Tuisk was working as a project manager in an advertising agency and writing her masters' thesis in international business management, focusing on building mobile applications with service design methods. She came across a competition by **Telia** to build mobile apps and she entered with a product that helps solve personal relationship problems. She made it to the top 10 from 10,000 other contestants and a member of the jury, **Ragnar Sass**, recommended she participate at **Garage48** hackathon as a good venue to pursue the idea. Although the idea was not developed further after that event, it did create a new beginning.

This was where she met Sass again, one of the founders of **Pipedrive**, a CRM-company that was growing fast and looking for solutions to keep their millennial employees engaged. Soon after that event, Tuisk had quit her job in an advertising agency; she was not growing there personally anymore and did not feel that advertisements would solve real problems in the world — she felt stuck. Instead of asking Tuisk to join Pipedrive, Sass saw a bigger opportunity and they cofounded Clanbeat at the end of 2015 to build a tool that enables startups to have meaningful 1-on-1's, to solve the very problem she had been experiencing in her previous job. Personal development and having a real impact with the things you do daily.

In 2017, Clanbeat entered **500 Startups**, a world renowned startup accelerator based in Mountain View, smack in the middle of Silicon Valley. And indeed, this 4-month experience opened completely new horizons: "We realised that the US market we had been aiming at, is actually not a good fit for us at the moment. We were to find out that US market at that time was more KPI driven and our product's core essence was human before numbers — that was the complete opposite of that market's needs. Also, we found out that to enter organisations who do value our humane approach — our product was too thin for them. More of a feature than a product. We needed to broaden our value proposition." As a 1-on-1's main job in an organisation was to generate trust between people so there would be a shift from survival mode to growth mode, the next logical step in that journey was to go to the beginning where this trust is generated — onboarding new people to organisations.

"Before launching the product upgrade — our team spoke and conducted a survey of a hundred organisations to map the problems with onboarding. Besides that, I read so many academic articles on human growth and the sense of belonging that this by far surpasses the amount of work I conducted for my first MA degree," Tuisk recalls. She also reached out to specific academics and they directed her towards the materials and knowledge she needed. "The information is actually all out there, if you only dig a little and talk to the right people. There is no need to enter a university if you really want to learn. I believe in on-demand learning based on personal needs."

The new direction shifted the company's focus from startups to a wider perspective, which was also the time Ragnar Sass decided to jumpstart new ventures and most of the team left with him. Tuisk was left with a crucial decision to make it or break it.

A new product market fit

"At some point, I started looking at the statistics inside the product and noticed that there was a line that was going dramatically upwards which was caused by the few schools that had asked to use the product meant for startups." Tuisk decided to pick up the pieces, create a new entity and build the knowledge gathered into a slightly different product.

Photo by Kalle Veesaar



The most driven person I know



Kaia Kont-Kontson,
Operations manager of Rakuten Estonia (Fits.me):

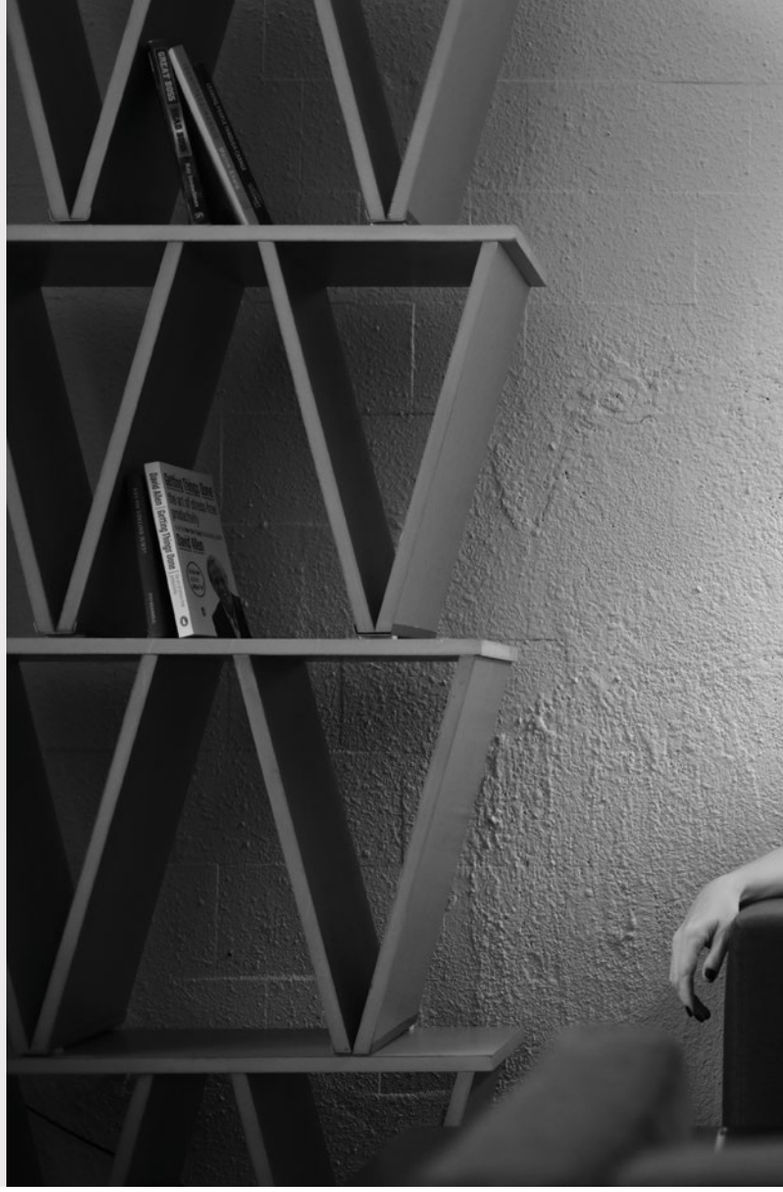
I first met Kadri in 2004 in Hong Kong as we were both working as models there. In retrospect, working as models probably helped us both in setting goals and knowing where we wanted to get in life. It gives you enough experience exploring the world and setting yourself in another person's shoes.

What first struck me about Kadri was how determined she was. When others were asleep at night, she was always working on her computer, teaching herself to code and other things I have no clue about.

It seems very logical that she is now working in the field of education despite the fact it must be difficult working as a woman in Asia. Although my company, **Rakuten**, is very open and modern, I've heard from my female colleagues in Japan that the business environment is still very conservative elsewhere in Asia.

But Kadri definitely has the charisma to overcome all of those obstacles — she is very driven and will by no means give in easily. Whenever I see her talking about her product, she is on fire: there is never a doubt that she's the best expert on whatever she's talking about.

Photo by Kalle Veesaar





Taizo Son, Kadri Tuisk, Triin Noorkõiv, and Tiina Pauklin

She found out that the schools are really struggling with onboarding new teachers. They are lacking a live overview of everybody's obstacles and successes, and a systemised yet simple way to conduct personal development reviews: "Most schools have annual reviews once a year, although they'd really need them to be much more often and the information needs to be flowing in in real time — to prevent problems growing overhead. But there is no human capital allocated for that — there is just not enough time for that. Being a principal is a super-demanding job. I saw a possibility of reducing the principal's pressure by gathering important milestones of their people, implementing peer-to-peer coaching so teachers could help each other out, and creating meaningful connections between the teachers' community to give them more autonomy in pursuing their passions."

Clanbeat now works on a yearly subscription model and has paying customers from Southeast Asia and Europe. Among them schools in Singapore, which is their obvious target. "I've met with the Ministry of Education in Singapore (a few times) and their message was: your product is great but we'll have to build our own, as we need government tools to be working centrally — not to outsource our core competences. Until then I have their blessing to use my product in their schools."

Curiously enough, Tuisk met her most recent investor, **Taizo Son** from **Mistletoe**, through a common friend in Estonia: "Mari-Liis



Estonian female founders always support each other

Mari-Liis Lind,
Cofounder and CEO of Vivita International,
Young Female Entrepreneur 2019

I first met Kadri around 7-8 years ago when both of us were working in the field of service design, and I was struck by her deep understanding of customer needs and her ability to empathise with the end user — core elements to successful design of any service. I think once Kadri started building Clanbeat, she tapped into an important and underserved area in team building tools — I was instantly eager to test it out with a few teams I was working with, to better track the mental well-being of the teams and to be able to spot the potential red flags in team spirit as early as possible.

While there is no formal female-founder organisation group in Estonia, the community exists informally, and is highly supportive of its members. We are very lucky to be able to easily reach out to our peer female founders and ask for their advice in leadership, insight on prospective investors, possible new hires, or general feedback on a product/service.

Additionally, I am proud and humbled to see the community of these female founders not only being supportive of each other, but for its various efforts and initiatives in inspiring and encouraging women and girls to become more entrepreneurial and get excited about technology, such as **Tech Sisters**, the **Federation of Business and Professional Women EENA** or the **Female Investors Club**.

Lind recommended we should meet and we found common ground instantly. He is just as passionate about changing the educational system as I am, to be more humane and student-driven. Throughout my journey I've understood that the investors in the field of education are completely different from other types of investors — they have a much longer perspective in mind and are thinking about the wellbeing of humanity and the planet."

By spring 2020, Clanbeat launches a product directed at students that will help each student set up their own learning trajectory, as majority of the client base has been asking whether they could use Clanbeat to manage student growth. Being a student is the pivotal time in a human's life — learning self-management skills. This was where Clanbeat found its new meaning and mission with students: "The way we build our product is by using a co-creation model: we go to our clients and we build the product together. You do not push your MVP to the market and wait for the response but you build it WITH the market," Tuisk has figured out the best way to move forward.

That is a brave step towards the personal education that everyone keeps talking about but Tuisk, with her team, is willing to tackle it. "I'm in love with solving this problem of accelerating human growth. There is no better motivator for me than seeing people benefitting from the solution and turning their lives towards a better, more meaningful direction."

Photo by Renee Altrov



Mari-Liis Lind



Photo by Eleri Ever

James S. York builds bridges between Estonia and America

‘It is true that if you can make it in New York, you can make it everywhere’

Enterprise Estonia has appointed export advisers now in a total of 14 markets — in Asia, there are offices in Singapore, India, China, Japan and the United Arab Emirates. The European offices are located in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The latest addition is the USA’s James S. York who has been the Director of US Business & Innovation for Enterprise Estonia since summer 2019.

James York is a native New Yorker, and former stockbroker turned professional entrepreneur and marketer. He has been the Head of SME Sales at **Fits.me**, an Estonian startup that was acquired by Japanese e-commerce giant **Rakuten**.

Estonia is like a second home for James as he came to live here ten years ago along with his Estonian wife. Currently, he resides in Estonia as well as New York. One of his goals is to connect and build bridges between Estonia and America so that Estonian entrepreneurs would have more chances to grow and promote their businesses.

‘Life in Estonia’ asked James about his experiences with Estonia and Estonians, his goals in his new post as well as some tips on how to be successful in the USA.

Estonia is often praised for its digital society. They even say that to file an income tax return online takes about 30 seconds. Do you agree? Is there something other nations should learn from Estonia?

No. In my experience, filing your taxes online in Estonia takes three minutes. ‘30 seconds’ is pure marketing hype. But all joking aside, and in all seriousness, the country’s digital prowess is truly impressive and affords Estonia a leading position on the world stage that it has very wisely leveraged for its advantage. I often tell people here in the US that living in Estonia is like living 5 to 10 years in the future, and they are almost always surprised to hear that until I begin rattling off the long list of things that are possible, and taken as normal, in Europe’s ‘best kept secret unicorn hatchery’.

In Estonia, you can easily get spoiled by the ease with which everything operates. I know I did, having living there for almost four years. It wasn’t until I moved back to the US that I really understood and appreciated that even when things are ‘slow’ in Estonia, they are still moving at light speed compared to nearly anywhere else on the planet.

And yes, there are many, many things that can be learned from Estonia, and I am glad that Estonia has made itself an open and accessible environment where people can come to learn, experience and better understand what is possible. Whether it is a governmental delegation coming to learn from the e-Governance Academy, or an entrepreneur coming on a startup visa to build their business, or a multinational company setting up a shared service centre — Estonia is a welcoming place with lots to offer.

Estonians have a straightforwardness and candour about them that I really appreciate and I find valuable in business and in life. In fact, I think it’s part of what makes the startup ecosystem so successful.

The threshold for BS is quite low, and people move with a bias towards action and doing, not talking and wishing. Many people might be surprised to hear this from an American, especially a New Yorker… but I very much feel that I learned how to be an effective entrepreneur largely from my experiences living and working with Estonians. And today, working in a very public-facing role on behalf of the country, here in New York, I bring that same can-do, will-do attitude to everything I touch and am using all the country has taught me to help give back to the community and ecosystem as much as I can.

James about finding Estonia

To be honest, my wife is the reason Estonia first came on my radar. When we met in 2004, I had never really heard of the country, and definitely had no idea at the time how big of an impact it would have on the rest of my life.

My wife is Estonian, our son is fully bilingual and is a dual-national, and most of my closest friends are now Estonian. I also have no shame when it comes to climbing into a sauna and have been told my endurance for the heat rivals some locals. I've learned this is a very important skill in both personal and professional circles.

At this point in my life, I'm proud to say that I'm about as Estonian as you can be without technically being Estonian myself. I can even speak a little bit of the language. So it's fair to say, I like Estonia and Estonians a lot.



Would you advise starting a company in Estonia and become an e-resident?

The short answer is yes. The long answer is, it depends. Not every business needs a company around it. In the US you can often act as a sole-proprietor or independent contractor, purely as an individual. In other jurisdictions this isn't the case, or your business requires more structure around it in order to make it a success.

It will also depend on where you work and live, and what sort of tax situation you find yourself in. The tax environment in Estonia is the most competitive in the world, ranked #1 by the OECD. It is also one of the least bureaucratic countries in which to operate, so I recommend it highly to everyone I speak to as an ideal place to set up shop, especially for those who want access to the EU single market in a simple, no-nonsense way.

But ultimately, every business and its needs are different, and deciding whether e-Residency and starting a company in Estonia is right for you is a decision you should make with your co-founders, your investors, and your accountant.

As the Director of US Business & Innovation for Enterprise Estonia, what is your main goal in that position?

I officially joined Enterprise Estonia in the beginning of June of this year. But I applied for the position in the first place because I've already been doing similar work for years, and I wanted to do more.

As a long-time mentor with Startup Wise Guys (also known as a 'mentosaurus', because I've been there for so long), I've also been the de facto 'first call' for Estonian entrepreneurs coming to explore the New York market, for years.

In my professional life, I found I was also doing more and more to connect the startup ecosystems in both my homes, and in April of 2019 I organised the largest Estonian startup showcase in New York with about 20 teams and supporting organisations participating, with SAP and Google hosting us here in New York.

Now that I am onboard with Enterprise Estonia, and officially opened for business as of late October when we had the opening ceremony for the office with the Prime Minister joining us and officiating, my focus has expanded to be of help not just to the startup community, but the business environment as a whole.

It's a new and exciting role for me that has already given me great insights into the broader needs of Estonian companies, and afforded me the opportunity to open my network, connections and experience to many more businesses and entrepreneurs than I could have before.

My main goal remains what it has always been — to help Estonian companies reach and expand into this market, and increase the economic ties between both homes. Today, working for Enterprise Estonia from the offices of the Consulate General of Estonia in New York, that means I mainly focus on trade. But there is a large component of investment, business diplomacy, and country promotion that is also an inseparable and valuable part of the mix of my daily work, which ultimately serves to open more doors for the companies I am here to help.



Opening ceremony for the Enterprise Estonia New York office with the Prime Minister Jüri Ratas

Photo by Eleri Ever

‘As a native New Yorker with an Estonian family, it is as if I am a bridge-builder for new relations and a creator of new opportunities between my two homes: Estonia and the USA’

Many companies, startup or not, dream to enter the US market and successfully expand there. What should they keep in mind, if they want to be successful in the US?

The most important thing to remember is that you will need help. The adage of, ‘if you want to go faster, go alone. If you want to go further, go together’, holds very true in this market. Look for trustworthy partners, rely on them, and use them to do more, faster. The USA is not a single market, there are 50 local markets here, each with their own features, rules and regulations. It’s too big of a market to do everything yourself, and you will need to find both borrowed networks that you can plug into, and more leveraged ways of working if you are going to make an impact.

Here in the US, and other markets, Estonian companies can rely on Enterprise Estonia and its network of foreign representatives, of which I am one. Additionally, either directly or with the assistance and cooperation of an Enterprise Estonia foreign rep, the Honorary Consuls network that is maintained by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also a tremendously valuable resource and asset for Estonian businesses looking to expand abroad. And last, but not least, foreign-born and expat Estonians are usually tremendously keen and happy to help Estonian entrepreneurs and individuals at home in any way they can.

It’s also important to come and experience the culture and the environment first-hand before making the jump into this market. American business culture is simultaneously similar and different to that of Estonia, and it’s very important to learn where those similarities and differences fall so that you can better navigate them and avoid some common mishaps.

In an ideal world, when looking for partners, referrals and references are absolutely the way to go. Business is about relationship-building and the ability to leverage existing trust networks is a tremendously powerful skill. You can of course do your research and go purely on the information provided to you publicly on the web, however, that is never a substitute for using real connections, from real people.

Would you name some Estonian startups that have potential in your eyes?

There are lots of promising Estonian startups! Both in Estonia, and founded or co-founded by Estonians abroad. From those founded in Estonia, I can easily point to **Zelos**, **Entify, Tutor.id**, **Consorto**, **Taddy**, **Modash**, **Mash Machine**, and **Lumebo**t just to name a few.

From those founded abroad by Estonians living here, definitely **The Farmer’s Dog**, **Bolt Scooters** and **Elip Solutions** are the ones to watch.

Estonians have a natural knack for entrepreneurship and anytime I see an Estonian-founded or ecosystem-based company coming down the pike and heading for this market, I get excited and I know that great things are on the horizon for them.

Farmer's Dog offers a healthy diet to our best friends



Photos by Farmer's Dog



With its headquarters in New York, **Farmer's Dog,** a subscription company that makes fresh and personalised dog meals, has raised a total of 49 million dollars in funding since starting in 2015. Raising 39 million in the beginning of this year in a series B round was the largest sum for any pet-related startup. The round was led by **Insight Venture Partners** and included previous investors **Shasta Ventures** and **Forerunner Ventures**.

Although the company is active in the USA with **Jonathan Regev** and **Brett Podolsky** as its founders, the company is linked to Estonia. Namely, Jonathan and the then future first staff member of Farmers Dog, **Andres Tuul**, became acquainted at the technology conference **Latitude59**, which took place in Tallinn. Jonathan met Brett sooner after and the rest, as Andres says, is history.

Today, Farmer's Dog employees 100 people and the company delivers healthy dog food all over the 48 mainland states, with five storage warehouses across the USA. Just like in the case of many companies, it was born out of personal need. Brett's dog Jada was experiencing serious health problems, but no food in normal stores was helping his digestion to recover.

Ultimately, Brett and Jonathan were fed up with highly-processed, burnt brown balls being marketed as 'natural' and 'healthy', so they decided to reimagine pet food from the ground up. Following the recommendation of one vet, Brett tried home cooking. He simply prepared ingredients pictured on the front of a bag of traditional dog food — but what he made actually looked, smelled, and tasted like real food. Seemingly overnight, Jada was cured. Teaming up with Jonathan (and his pup, Buddy) they built the company they wished existed for their own dogs.

So, how does it work exactly? Farmer's Dog is already delivering millions of meals monthly to dogs across the USA. Meal plans start at $2 per day and include free shipping. As each dog is different, full-meal pricing depends on a variety of factors including age, weight and activity. Every recipe uses clean USDA proteins, mixed with simple produce, is balanced with vitamins and minerals and shipped, usually once a month.

Andres Tuul explains that the company's home market is New York, closely followed by California, which is the largest state in the USA. The company is still in the process of analysing the customer profile: "Today we have the Data & Insights Team of 7 people which is looking for answers to these questions. In terms of income, we have always aimed to make the product attainable for everyone. People on a tighter budget can take our DIY solution and the mixing plan, where they can simply mix our food into their dry dogfood."

But why can't you just cook dog food at home? Recent research found 95% of recipes online to be lacking in crucial nutrients for dogs. Serious complications from nutrient deficiencies (and, more commonly, overdosing) could arise if a recipe hasn't been properly calibrated. That's where The Farmer's Dog DIY programme comes in and provides premixed nutrient packs formulated by veterinary nutritionists to use with suggested recipes.

Taking care of your pets and spending money on them is a globally growing business. Over 72.5 billion dollars was spent on pets in the United States in 2018, according to the American Pet Products Association. Spending on pet food continues to make up the majority — over 30 percent — of dollars spent in the industry.

Tera Ventures helps born global startups to enter larger markets

"Guys, tell me — why should I care?" This was the question uttered by a notable investor after an initial intro to **Tera Ventures.** The meeting took place on the 55th floor in Manhattan last summer. It may seem like a rude question, but actually it is the one in the mind of all investors, the current companion was just unusually upfront.

"Luckily, we had been preparing for this question for more than a decade, so we spent the next two hours providing insight. The main point is that we have been lucky with many portfolio companies that we have invested in first and then helped them to raise the next round from international investors, including several top tier VCs from the East Coast — Union Square Ventures, Matrix Partners, Atlas Ventures, CRV, etc.," says Tera co-founder and partner **Andrus Oks.**



"It takes hard work and dedication to capitalise on this luck and we are also enjoying the benefits of the Estonian ecosystem. Estonia is often described as the digitally most advanced country in the world; this entails many benefits beyond the efficiency gains — part of the reason our founders are able to come up with these truly disruptive ideas, is related to the fact that they are essentially living in the future compared to the rest of the world."

To capitalise on this opportunity, Tera Ventures was founded — a venture capital firm based in Tallinn, Estonia focused on exceptional founders from Estonia, Scandinavia and the CEE disrupting digital space globally. The VC company has offices in Estonia, Finland, and California and will continue investing in born global startups ready to thrive in international markets. Specifically, the California presence is useful for the portfolio companies for a soft-landing in the US and for raising money there. Initial check sizes will be between 200K — 1.5 million euros per company with substantial follow-on funding for select investments.

One of the latest investments for Tera was in **Snackable AI**, a seed-stage startup building a discovery engine for spoken word audio. It is an Estonian-American startup founded by Estonian **Mari Joller**, who is the first Estonian ever to graduate from **Harvard Business School**.

The startup is creating an artificial intelligence-based audio content search engine founded just last year. They have already 1.4 million dollars in seed investment, the majority of which was provided by Estonian investors. Snackable has offices in Tallinn and in New York. "We need to be in the U.S. because that's where our clients are," elaborates Mari Joller. "But being in Estonia has also been fantastic because that's where a lot of the technical talent is. We actually got the company started by partnering with the **University of Tartu** and **TalTech**.

The founder and partner of Tera Ventures, **Stanislav Ivanov,** notes that the investment decision was based on the confidence that Snackable's artificial intelligence-based application will lead to the long-awaited ability to navigate in the world of audio recordings. "Snackable is adding a new dimension to previous search possibilities."

Ivanov added that Tera Ventures provides its portfolio companies access to expert knowledge and practical assistance required to help them grow into mature companies and raise capital from international investors. Tera Ventures also helps startups develop networks in markets where the portfolio companies want to expand, such as the UK, the USA and Asia.

Tera Ventures portfolio includes many successful Estonian startups, such as **Cleveron**, **Jobbatical**, **Monese**, **Realeyes**, **Scoro**, etc. In all of these companies there are also great investor syndicates — this is a particular goal of Tera Ventures — engage the best possible international investors who can help to scale these companies further.

Another star performing portfolio company, Monese, which has attained pan-European scale in just a few years and continues to grow fast, is now planning to reach other continents as well. Tera Ventures was the first investor in Monese and an amazing investor syndicate has already been created, including very notable US investors like **PayPal**.

For Cleveron, the US is the main market — Walmart is their key customer currently and has already deployed Cleveron's pioneering automated parcel terminals in many of their retail locations. This has enabled Cleveron to achieve quite a significant scale and they continue to invest in ambitious product and technology development initiatives on their way to automating the whole last-mile delivery space.

All these efforts have already led to several successful exits, for example **GrabCAD** has been one of the most successful Estonian startup exits so far. Aside from GrabCAD, **Modesat** and **VitalFields** have also been sold to major Nasdaq-listed US corporations.

"So, it makes sense to keep paying attention to the cool startups coming from Estonia and disrupting global markets. Specifically, the US remains one of the main destinations as a market, place to fundraise and exit to," says Andrus Oks, adding that Tera's portfolio companies are also targeting the UK, the rest of Europe and Asia, especially Japan. "The opportunity really is to join this tech expansion."



Photo by Seedcamp

Carlos Espinal: visiting Estonia has been built into the DNA of Seedcamp

By Ronald Liive

12 years ago, a group of European investors started the seed fund Seedcamp with the aim of finding the best European startup founders and helping them to build global businesses.

Seedcamp has invested in over 250 companies. Many of their most successful investments have been into companies founded by Estonians. One of them was FinTech unicorn **TransferWise**.

Many of the founders that Seedcamp first backed have joined with Seedcamp in their seed fund to invest in startups with the potential to become unicorns.

Carlos Espinal, the managing partner of the fund, talked to 'Life in Estonia' about how to manage the fear of failing, why they have backed many Estonian companies and whether Seedcamp would even exist without TransferWise and **GrabCad**, which have been two of Seedcamp's most successful investments.

A guy that gives advice

Honduras-born and US-educated Carlos Espinal describes himself as the guy that founders call when they need advice. Now Espinal, just like the fund he manages, is located in London. To help answer many of a startup's questions around the fundraising process he wrote a book called '**The Fundraising Fieldguide**'.

Seedcamp has invested in many Estonian startups. To name a few: TransferWise, GrabCad, **Teleport**, **Monese**, **Erply** and **Nevercode**. The last time Espinal visited Estonia was back in April, his next visit will be to Tartu in the end of January.

"When we started off, it was designed to be a platform where we could find the best European founders, no matter where they are, and help them build global businesses. From day one of Seedcamp, we travelled all around Western and Eastern Europe, we met a lot of different companies all over. That's why we have one of the largest founder communities of people from everywhere; people from Romania, Finland, Estonia and Latvia."

According to him, Seedcamp hasn't limited themselves to just one location. In the early days, they clicked into various different communities and the Estonian community was one of the strong and early ones. Espinal says that is due to the success of many Estonian startups.

"All those relationships made a strong ecosystem. We nurtured that relationship. Estonia is the area that is constantly pushing the boundaries of innovation and there are very ambitious founders, so we love going back."

Two of the biggest Seedcamp success stories have been TransferWise and Grabcad. Espinal is very aware that a huge part of the success of the European ecosystem is due to Estonian companies but just being from Estonia does not give a startup founder an advantage.

Does being from Estonia help a company out?

"It works differently. Just to give an idea. We have multiple investments in Estonian companies. If you look at how we have invested in them, it is not just because they are Estonians. The community is small enough that people can say: "Hey, a friend of mine was number two or three in this successful startup company. He is building something new; would you like to meet them?" It's not so much that if you are from Estonia."

Many of the startups that he has backed have had a connection with a previous company that he backed, some of the connections have not been the strongest and according to him it's not a requirement to know someone who has taken part in Seedcamp.

For startup founders thinking of how to get in touch with a potential investor, Espinal sees that the best way would just be to get in touch directly. He sees that there is a fear when reaching out to a potential investor but at least he himself tries to be as available as possible. The utmost thing not to do would be to stalk an investor.

"The best way is through a common person and doing research. If the investor Tweets or blogs about the future of healthcare and you are working on a healthcare company, then it's perfectly acceptable to reach out to them. Don't stalk. There are times that is inappropriate. Most people know that there are times where it's not socially acceptable. Know the focus of the investor or fund you are contacting. People have reached out for a series A or B round but our brand is about seed, it is difficult for me. Not our area."

Failing is just a step in a journey

Although there are a lot of startups in Estonia, failing is still something that the general public does not aspire to. Espinal sees that failing should be looked at as merely a step in a journey and, in the last ten years, the negative stigma of failing has been fading. Nowadays.

"Estonians are very good at looking at something, putting their ambition toward it and getting it done. Being to the point about it and not trying to dress it up. Being direct about it. If you look at failure it's a step in that journey. If you look at failure as an end point, I can see where it could generate fear. But if you look at it as a step you are less intimidated by it. I have seen in the last 10-12 years there has been a huge shift. I remember going to different countries around Europe, there was a lot more hesitation and fear. It came with a negative stigma, family and social pressure. But now that is changing. It's gone down in my opinion. If failure is just a step in the journey it probably changes things."

The limit to failing is right when it does not teach you anything new, says Espinal. He has had experiences with entrepreneurs that have failed with a business but have pushed on and have had successes later on. He can remember only two examples from the last 12 years where they have not been happy about how things were handled.

A lot of the times, failure can be attributed to a certain reason, for example, there wasn't a market yet or the business was not monetisable; it does not automatically mean the founder did something bad.

Failing, social pressure and the sheer excitement of starting and running a startup has been documented in the movie **"Chasing Unicorns"** ('Ükssarvik'), directed by successful startup-entrepreneur and investor in his own right **Rain Rannu** (see p. 62). Espinal hopes he can watch the movie while in Tartu in January during the Baltics' biggest business festival **sTARTUp Day 2020**.

When values coincide, business is done in both directions

Sten Tamkivi, the president of the **Estonian Startup Leaders Club** and Chief Product Officer of **Topia** (previously Teleport), a company that helps to move and manage global talent, sees that Espinal has great influence both in European and, more narrowly, Estonian startups.

As an ex-Skype employee and head of Skype Estonia, Tamkivi knows the backstory of how Seedcamp was founded and sees that Skype played a big part in Seedcamp's beginnings.

Photo by Raigo Pajula



Sten Tamkivi

"One of the cofounders of Seedcamp was **Saul Klein** (ex-chief marketing officer of Skype), which means that in the beginning a lot of early Skype people out of Tallinn were advising Seedcamp startups, investing in them etc. This, in turn, meant that from the outset, a disproportionate number of Estonian companies were on Seedcamp's radar through our networks. Including TransferWise, which has been one of the best investments in the fund ever."

According to Tamkivi, what makes this network special is that when values coincide, business is done in both directions.

"I have been an investor in several Seedcamp funds, but when I started to raise money for Teleport, they were also the only European fund I called to invest in my company, because I wanted this collaboration to continue. The decision was probably 24 hours for them, if any."

A few years later, Tamkivi was at a crossroad of several possible business lines.

"Spending a few hours with Carlos in London was what led directly to the partnership with Move Guides, and indirectly to their purchase offer and, what today, is Topia. Perhaps in this story alone, Carlos has "channelled" millions of euros and dozens and dozens of new jobs to Estonia. Some other investments like TransferWise or Monese have hundreds of these people."

Tamkivi assures that Carlos is still a humble and warm Honduran guy you want to spend as much time with you as possible. For founders interested in him, he recommends reading his book on raising money.

"Then you do not have to repeat this base when you meet, but you can dive deep into the content right away."

Being from Estonia is good but not necessarily an advantage

With the help of Seedcamp, Nevercode**,** a Google-partnered continuous Integration & Delivery service provider for mobile app developers, managed to raise 1.5 million dollars last year. The co-founder, **Triin Kask**, got her foot in the door thanks to a pitching event run by Seedcamp in Finland a couple of years ago where they won the event.

"Seedcamp is not an accelerator but an investor program. They are focused on helping you to find an investor and raise money. They help to make the business attractive for an investor. You still need to do a lot of the work yourself. You need to consult with people and ask help from mentors but they don't offer a three-month-long accelerator program. For us it worked. Thanks to Seedcamp, we found an investor in London who has made follow-up investments."

Kask got many contacts through Seedcamp and directly from Espinal. She sees that getting an investor without the help of Seedcamp could have been possible for them but they would not have managed to grow as fast as they did.

"Carlos has advised me greatly on different tactical choices for what to do when raising money. He has been of great help."

Kask has recommended other Estonian startups to Espinal and is planning to introduce another really soon. She does not want to reveal the name yet.

"Many companies have asked whether they should contact Seedcamp and I have definitely recommended it. They have managed to keep the core very small, so that makes approaching them very simple. Another good thing is that there are a lot of other startups that have been in Seedcamp and are successful now and are helpful for new joining startups."

As Espinal has said: being from Estonia is good but not necessarily an advantage.

Estonian Cell AS invested 200 million euros in Estonian economy

By Ann-Marii Nergi





Photos by Jarek Jõepera



Winner of the 2019 Entrepreneurship Award organised by Enterprise Estonia, the aspen pulp mill Estonian Cell AS is a traditional industry in the world of startups. 100% of the pulp produced in the factory in Kunda, a small town in north-eastern Estonia, is exported to European and Asian paper mills, where it is made into various paper products. The pulp produced by Estonian Cell can be found in most paper products: wall paper, school exercise books, high-quality art- and printing paper, perfume packaging and even simple cardboard. The company exports to approximately 30 countries annually, from Germany to South Korea.





Siiri Lahe

Belonging to the Austrian **Heinzel Group**, the **Estonian Cell** factory is unique in Estonia in many ways. Not only is it a very innovative company that values environmental sustainability, it is also special in terms of numbers. CFO **Siiri Lahe** points out that last year the annual turnover per employee was over 1 million euros.

The industry is also the biggest electricity consumer in Estonia, consuming more than 2.5% of all electricity in the country. The company started production for the Estonian market in 2006 and has since brought in over 200 million euros in foreign investment; it employs 90 people and more than 500 people are employed in the value chain.

Siiri Lahe emphasises that, even though it is the case in Estonia, there is no reason people should be afraid of industry.

"Heinzel Group has two much larger pulp- and paper industry companies in two small Austrian towns and, in the last few years, they have invested 400 million euros in them. Large industrial investments have been made in Austria, which has one of the highest quality living environments in the world. Austria is a popular travel destination due to its cultural heritage, ski slopes and charming small towns, full of flowers. In this context, the fear of industry seems strange. We should be bolder in learning from the experiences of countries with some of the highest living standards in the world," emphasises Lahe.

Estonian Cell just won the Enterprise of the Year award, including the title of Foreign Investor of the Year. How important are these awards for the company?

Whereas we were nominated for the Foreign Investor award presented by Enterprise Estonia with our 20-million-euro investment and also expected to win it, the Enterprise of the Year title came as a total shock. We still cannot believe it! This is mostly due to the fact that throughout the time that Estonian Cell AS has been in production, we've had to convince the general public and decision-makers about the need for the company in Estonia, about the value we create for the economy by raising the value of low-quality aspen pulp more than fivefold.

Before receiving those awards, I was convinced that we would still have many years of explanatory work ahead of us. And then, unexpectedly, this recognition came in one evening through two awards — **Foreign Investor of the Year** and **Entrepreneur of the Year**. Those awards are indeed important for the management, owners and employees of Estonian Cell AS. Several employees sent me text messages during the award ceremony, saying that they are proud of our company!

Was it a surprise that at the time of many success stories of IT companies, this high recognition went to a so-called traditional factory?

In order to manage risks in the economy, there needs to be a balance between fields of activity and priorities. The existence of industry, especially industry which cannot easily be moved from one country to another, should provide a solid base and security in terms of several economic indicators.

It seems to me that Estonians are unappreciative of the value of industry on the economy and many fears stem from our past. Many Estonians over middle age still have images of Soviet factories that didn't have the best environmental reputation. Younger Estonians have grown up in the Republic of Estonia where the role of industry has been relatively insignificant and hence, they have never seen contemporary and environmentally sustainable industrial production. From the beginning of production in 2006, Estonian Cell AS has used the best available technology in the world, complying with the strictest environmental regulations.



Photo by Rene Riisalu

The competition of the 2019 Entrepreneurship Award,

organised by Enterprise Estonia and the Estonian Employers' Confederation, was held for the 19th time. The Entrepreneurship Award competition is the highest recognition of the state to outstanding and progressive companies. History has shown that public recognition and attention have opened new doors for companies — it is a clear signal of the impact and importance of the competition.

The three most notable companies in five categories are selected in cooperation with experts in the field, who evaluate the companies' economic indicators as well as the values and contributions to society.

Many people are probably unaware that in modern industry, IT and technology are used in tandem. We are proud to say that the production processes in our factory have been totally automated from the start of production, and production management takes place only via computers. This has enabled us to reach a very high level of productivity with a relatively low number of employees. Namely, our turnover per employee in 2018 was over 1 million euros. This is a significant indicator in the Estonian industrial landscape.

As you export all of your produce to other factories, to what extent is Estonian Cell AS influenced by the global economy?

The global economy influences everyone indirectly, but especially exporting industries are influenced directly by global economic trends. The previous two years were great for our company, mirroring global economic developments. In 2018, the company finally became profitable after several years of losses. This positive change enabled us to deal with unexpected technological challenges as well as to create a 20-million-euro investment programme without bringing in loan capital.

Unfortunately, the global economic situation has drastically changed since the end of last year, after the US-Chinese trade war began. Due to the size and impact of the Chinese economy, we first felt the negative changes on the markets of states near China, but during the year this change started to impact European markets as well. We primarily feel this impact in the decline of sales prices, which brings everything to do with the cost effectiveness and competitiveness of our own prices into focus.

Do you have plans to add value to your produce yourself, perhaps starting to create products from pulp, which would raise export prices?

Throughout the years, Estonian Cell AS has worked in the name of producing various and higher profit margin pulp subtypes. To date, we have created five different products which, considering our one production line and limited storage facility, is still the maximum today. The range of products could be increased by focusing on growing production capacity in the existing factory or by creating another production line. Our current focus is on increasing the production volume of aspen pulp.

In terms of the economy, it would make sense to increase the volume of upgraded paper wood in Estonia, mostly because we have the resource and today about 3 million cubic metres of wood is exported from Estonia as raw material without added value. In order to produce any paper products, it is necessary to first import the rest of the ingredients into Estonia.

It is also important to clarify that Estonian Cell AS produces aspen pulp, and the production technology and -process are significantly different from that of producing cellulose. Whereas in cellulose production the wood is boiled and treated with specific chemicals, the production of pulp entails the mechanical crushing of food and, in order to achieve the required brightness, we only use environmentally friendly chemicals. Therefore, the production of pulp is free of odour.

Photo by Jarek Jõepera



As a side product from your factory, Estonian petrol stations sell biogas. For this you had to make a notable — and you've also said risky — investment. Why did you do it?

Throughout the years, our owner and company have been bold enough to make innovative investments. When establishing the factory in 2006 in Estonia, it was the world's most powerful and effective single production line at the time. In 2014, we were the first in Europe to start the production of biogas in addition to the main production of pulp, and we became the largest biogas producer in Estonia.

As investments are expensive, those decisions have been made after thorough analyses and calculations. Numerous pilot tests preceded the creation of the biogas complex. We started to explore this issue because the warm sewage water from the production process of Estonian Cell AS is energy-dense due to the wood and chemicals used. We used to go through a lot of trouble to cleanse this water according to requirements, before directing it into the sea.

As our sewage water is rich in organic substances, at a suitable temperature and without toxic ingredients, the research showed that it is very suitable for the production of biogas. Therefore, we were able to make the innovative and risky 11-million-euro investment into the largest single container biogas reactor in Europe, in which live organisms break down the energy-dense organic substance into methane and carbon dioxide.

It is noteworthy that our biogas production was achieved and functions without a support scheme. This investment has enabled us to become the largest Estonian biogas producer. 7-8 million cubic metres of 75% biogas is produced by our factory and, after it is upgraded by our good partners onto the level of natural gas, subsequently sold by Estonian petrol stations.



The winners of the 2019 Entrepreneurship Award

Company of the Year 2019
Estonian Cell AS

Family Enterprise of 2019
OÜ T-Tammer

The company led by father Raigo Tammer and son, CEO Anti Tammer, produces metal windows and -doors for the building- and naval sector. Almost 80% of the company's revenue is earned in export markets. In 2018, sales profits exceeded 20 million euros.

Innovator of 2019
SK ID Solutions AS

The company specialises in international e-Identity solutions and it is the partner of the Republic of Estonia in offering the most important e-Service solutions. SK ID Solutions is a partner in issuing certificates for identification documents such as the ID-card, Mobile-ID, residence permit and the Digi-ID for e-residents. SK ID Solutions was founded in 2001; the founders and owners are Swedbank, SEB Pank and Telia Eesti.

Foreign Investor 2019
Estonian Cell AS

The aspen pulp factory based in Kunda has made over 200 million euros in investments into the Estonian economy. Estonian Cell AS has formerly received the Innovator of the Year title (2016), because it began producing biogas in addition to pulp and made an 11-million-euro investment to do so.

Design Implementer of 2019
Evocon OÜ

Evocon is active in 36 countries and offers monitoring solutions for production appliances. Evocon solves the first step of digitalisation for producers: the digitalisation of production data. By using Evocon sensors, companies can improve efficiency and resource use — the data is visualised in a simple to understand manner for all participants in the production process; tools are created in order to increase efficiency and decrease costs.

Exporter of 2019
Cleveron AS

Cleveron is one of the top parcel robot solution providers in the world. The headquarters of the company is based in Viljandi where investments are also made into the future of the sector by training new robotics engineers in the Cleveron academy in Viljandi, using the company's own staff and resources.

Paldiski – the Baltic Sea region's important industrial centre of the future?

By Tanel Saarmann





Photos by Argo Viikvalt

Situated on the Pakri peninsula, Paldiski is a town that has undergone a total transformation in the last decade. Three massive projects may turn life upside down in this industrial region.

Paldiski has been an industrial town for nearly 300 years. Today, the two ice-free ports and fast rail- and road connections have turned this area into an attractive location for industry. When you also consider the great wind conditions typical of the peninsula, it is no wonder that the goals set for the year 2030 may be reached much earlier. Paldiski is looking for investments mainly in six industry sectors.



Paldiski is a town and Baltic Sea port situated on the Pakri peninsula of north-western Estonia. Previously a village of Estonia-Swedes known by the historical name Rågervik, it was extended into a Russian naval base founded by Peter the Great. The location was chosen in 1715, and construction started in 1716. It was meant to be sea fortress and in 1790, during the Russo-Swedish War, it was conquered by the Swedes through trickery, after a Swedish war ship sailing under a Dutch flag was allowed to dock. On the 23rd of June 1912, the Russian emperor Nikolai II and German Kaiser Wilhelm II met for the last time before World War I in Paldiski.

The Russian authorities renamed the site "Baltiyskiy Port" in 1762. In written Estonian, the name was spelled Baltiski until 1933, when the phonetically spelled version Paldiski became official.

During the Soviet era, Paldiski was a closed city because of the Soviet Navy's nuclear submarine training centre. Employing some 16,000 people, and with two land-based nuclear reactors, it was the largest such facility in the Soviet Union. Because of its importance, the whole city was closed off with barbed wire until Estonia regained independence in 1991 and the last Russian warship left in August 1994.

It would have remained a mere 'potential' had it not been for a meeting of active local companies and organisations which gathered in 2010, all interested in the success of Paldiski. The city government was on board from the start. This is how the **Paldiski Association of Entrepreneurs** was born and set the huge goal of turning Paldiski into the industrial centre of the Baltic Sea region.

"We realised, together with entrepreneurs, that there is no point acting in isolation when together we could achieve something huge. Today, we have 15 members in the association and many more companies in the region, but we said from the outset that we would make big things happen. Therefore, the smallest companies are not able to keep up," explains member of the Board, **Nikolai Pitšugov.**



The hugely important LNG terminal

There are already dozens of companies from different sectors, ranging from construction to the chemical industry, working on the Pakri peninsula. In 2020, the long-awaited **Baltic Connector** which links the Finnish, Estonian and Latvian gas markets will go into operation and its Estonian side is located in Paldiski. The **LNG terminal** will be serving the Baltic states alongside it. Construction workers are literally waiting to start working. This means that the building permission has been issued and the ball is in the court of politicians. The important question is whether European funding will be attracted to the project. The budget of the next period has not been locked. The answer should come in the near future as this pivotal regional terminal should already be operational in 2024.



A unique pumping station

There are plans to complete the Estonian **pump-hydro accumulation power plant** by 2027. A lake will be created at the depth of 500 metres underground which will be connected to the sea via turbines. This is a huge step for the Estonian sustainable energy sector. It is a solution which compensates the need for wind when there are windless periods. Whenever there is a sufficient amount of wind, the water will be pumped back into the sea.

It is the only project of its kind in Europe. The plan has been established and currently the evaluation of the environmental impact is underway. Building may already begin in 2021," explains **Ester Tuiksoo**, Executive Director of the Paldiski Association of Entrepreneurs.

A billion-euro investment

When the Association of Entrepreneurs was at the planning stage, the goal was to bring a billion euros in investments to Paldiski by 2030. The LNG terminal means a 350-million-euro investment and the pumping station 400 million euros. In addition, there are continuous smaller investments in the Pakri peninsula, reaching millions. But then something happened which the entrepreneurs could not have imagined in their wildest dreams. The Swiss company **Larkwater Group** announced that it wanted to build the largest **methanol factory** in Europe on 60 hectares of land. The likely investment will be a billion euros. Hence the goal of 2030 would be fulfilled with just that single large investment.

Looking for new investors in Paldiski



Margus Vihman, Commercial Director and Board Member of the Port of Tallinn

The vision of the Port of Tallinn is to become the most innovative port in the Baltic Sea region. Paldiski is a developed area which is very entrepreneurially-minded and offers various innovative solutions ranging from logistics to opportunities in the energy sector or complete solutions and joint marketing for new investors. Paldiski is on the world map with two ice-free harbours. There is free land and the interest of the local government, which creates a favourable environment for realising your industrial investments in Paldiski. The Port of Tallinn as an innovative company is expecting and favouring new investors in the port and in the region.

We believe that the existing infrastructure, geographical location and connections, good collaboration between local government and entrepreneurs, as well as the future sufficient supply of competitive energy, will ensure the realisation of the Industrial Hub concept in Paldiski.



Photos by Egert Kamenik

Pitšugov claims that the Swiss were attracted to the area precisely because of the Baltic Connector and the LNG terminal. "When you are making a billion-euro investment into such a factory, you need to have a big sense of certainty about the gas delivery. Here they have double certainty. When they finally understood this, the decision became very easy," says Pitšugov.

In order to establish a methanol factory, there needs to be a specific development plan from the county, the planner has already been chosen. Optimists say that the entire process can take two years. All participants are making efforts for this to be true. The construction process itself may take three years.

Turning life upside down

Even if one of those projects were realised, it would turn life in Paldiski upside down. For example, for the LNG project, 800 people are needed for four years of construction. The same applies for the pumping station. However, 2,500 people are already involved in operating the methanol factory. All of them need to be housed and fed. Developing the living environment is something that the local government and the Paldiski Association of Entrepreneurs are concerned about.

"The county needs to be prepared that when it goes 'bang!' we need to be ready with our plans and the folder of the new residential area, together with building permission, should already be filed on the shelf," says Pitšugov.

The Association has achieved much

Some years ago, Paldiski was a real dump and this is how it has remained in the memories of many Estonians. Paldiski today has undergone a total transformation. Local entrepreneurs are satisfied that ministers and the President of the Republic have visited Paldiski on various occasions. Decision-makers know that Paldiski has set a new course.

In addition to attracting investment and foreign relations, the Association of Entrepreneurs has accomplished much more. In collaboration with the security company G4S, they have changed the area into a much safer one. Finances have been spent building a city sauna and a grand gym. The Association is actively working for local enterprises. The fact that the members can sometimes speak to different ministers face to face is already a very significant thing.

In cooperation with Lääne-Harju municipality, the Harju Economic Development Centre, Alexela Group, the Port of Tallinn and the Estonian Trawling Association, the Paldiski Association of Entrepreneurs has organised the annual international investments conference **"Teistmoodi Paldiski"** (Different Kind of Paldiski) for a couple of years already, in a picturesque site next to the Pakri Lighthouse**.** Its aim is to make Paldiski attractive to investors from both home and abroad.

Synergy of companies

Paldiski has a 4 in 1 industrial concept. It means joint development of energy and logistics solutions, digitalisation and focus on industries, by looking for and leveraging the synergies in this community. This raises the competitiveness of the whole region and individual enterprises.





Advantages of Paldiski

- Paldiski is looking forward to investments from six main industries — energetics, chemicals, metal and machine building, construction materials, food and logistics
- more than 400 ha of free land for industrial developments
- the price of land is one of the most favourable in the EU
- in terms of its advantages and capabilities
- low building and running costs
- locally produced and consumed green energy with competitive prices
- good sea, highway and railroad connections (2 year-round ice-free ports capable of handling oversized cargo. Tax-free zone)
- Baltic connector and LNG terminal for stable gas supply
- labour accommodation under development and all residential services available
- business-oriented and supportive local government
- strong clustering in energy and industry
- world class R&D centres
- labour costs are more favourable than the Nordic countries and Western European countries
- work ethics are better than in other Eastern European countries
- population in 50 km radius: about 600,000 out of which 357,000 are working-age, skilled people
- recruitment capacity from neighbouring markets: 250 million people
- work permit average processing time: 1 month

More information can be found here: **investinpaldiski.ee/bsih**

Paldiski is the Estonian model of Silicon Valley



Heiti Hääl, majority shareholder of Alexela Group

I see big potential in Paldiski — Pakri peninsula is a unique place in Estonia where, in a very short time after Estonia regained independence, the modern energetics- and logistics competence has accumulated. The perspective of Paldiski is to be a nice example of an energetically independent area in the Baltic Sea region which connects various modern sustainable energy production and application solutions.

Preparations for the pump-hydro accumulation station, LNG terminal and the methanol factory are underway in Paldiski, it is also home to one of the largest windparks in Estonia. Combining all these components creates excellent preconditions for the development of a contemporary industrial centre.

Paldiski is becoming an energy competence centre (PPP project), resulting in applied solutions of a CO_2 neutral and economically affluent Estonia.

I see Paldiski as a small model of Estonia because our small country has served as a so-called testing ground for the world in many global questions. Developments here are much faster and so are the changes in society. We adapt faster and supply responses to the world about processes in a much quicker way than large countries can afford to do. Thus, we can position Paldiski in the context of Estonia and test the functioning mechanisms of a climate-neutral energetically independent region. The experience of Paldiski may be a unique and informative sample project for a world searching for solutions to the global climate problem. As the project turns out to be successful, we will encourage much larger areas to implement similar energy solutions.



Researchers and entrepreneurs team up to create unique solutions

By Sven Paulus



Delta Centre in Tartu

Photos by Henry Narits



Erik Puura

What is the link between a life-saving smart pedestrian crossing, the relocation of plants, border guard surveillance technology, reusable laundry detergent and statistics on mobile positioning? At first glance, nothing. Yet spins-offs of Estonian universities are working on exactly such diverse and research-heavy topics.

Unlike some high-flying Estonian start-ups which have conquered the world, Estonian spin-offs have not received much media coverage to date. Most people will not be able to name a single one of the 67 spin-offs that cooperate with Estonian universities. At the same time, most local drivers have used a **Regio** roadmap. This company, founded in 1990 and renamed **Reach-U** in 2016, is a spin-off of the **University of Tartu** (UT).

The oldest university in Estonia has an impressive number of spin-offs — 55 at the moment with an annual turnover of 39 million euros in 2018. In the last decade, 33 new companies have been added, creating high-tech jobs in the region. According to **Erik Puura,** Development Vice Rector at UT, it is one of the roles of the university to put knowledge into economic use, whilst the role of companies is to make profit out of it. **Aivar Pere,** Business Advisor at the Enterprise- and Innovation Centre of the university, adds that spin-offs can also promote local research by bringing the commercial contracts to solve complex questions back into the university. "We know what is happening in the field of spin-offs, having analysed it for the last decade, and we see growth; a change in volume and new jobs," says Pere.

The figures speak for themselves: whereas in 2006 the total number of jobs at UT spin-offs was 200, by last year it had increased to 460. The success story is also visible when we consider export. Whereas in 2012, the export volume of spin-offs was 5.4 million euros, by 2018 it had increased to 17 million. A positive impetus comes from the fact that entrepreneurship is a compulsory subject in all fields of study at the University of Tartu, and about 200 research-heavy companies are active around the university.

Biotechnology as the engine

Another trump card is that a significant number of spin-offs — 14 in total — are in the field of biotechnology. Pere explains that there are certain buzzing areas at the university which create new entrepreneurial opportunities and one of those is gene technology: "I predict that we will see new business growth around the data and services of the Estonian Genome Project in the near future." The university is also preparing to launch the **Science to Business Programme** in collaboration with the **Tartu Science Park**.



Photos by Elen Kontkar

Bercman Technologies, Smart Crosswalk

At the same time, the University of Tartu and some entrepreneurs are initiating the Delta Centre in collaboration with the City of Tartu: entrepreneurship will play an important role there. Erik Puura says that people in Tartu tend to fear that all the best ideas go to Tallinn, from there to Helsinki and on to London, finally landing in Silicon Valley. "The solution is in a growing number of IT companies who establish their base in Tartu. It is a town with a clean and academic environment that attracts many smart people from Estonia and abroad," says Puura.

Whereas the **Estonian University of Life Sciences** and the **University of Tallinn** do not have any companies that can be defined as spin-offs and the **Estonian Academy of Arts** only has one, **Tallinn University of Technology** (**TalTech**) has 11. This is due to how the university defines this form of entrepreneurship. **Kaja Kuivjõgi,** Technology Transfer Manager at TalTech **Mektory**, believes that the promotion of spin-offs is not widely popular in Estonia and more efforts should be made in this field: "We have not foreseen that, at a certain point, researchers or doctoral students may feel that they do not want to spend the rest of their lives in academia. That they may wish to enter the private sector or put their knowledge into use as entrepreneurs. We have not created a structured path for that." Kuivjõgi adds that if startups can take advantage of the right ecosystem, financing bodies and accelerators, this potential should also be used for spin-offs.

At the time when more and more new Estonian startups are conquering world markets and attracting media headlines, spin-offs have taken a calmer approach. Producing a real consumer product in a research-heavy company is not comparable to creating a website or an app. Pere explains that spin-offs are typically following a very different timeline: "Our stories develop slowly, because it is our wish that researchers also stay at the university developing their field." A perfect example is the academic **Mart Ustav**, who in the 1990s started his spin-off **Quattromed**, which grew into two companies, **Icosagen** and **SYNLAB**, which are now part of the biggest lab chain in Europe.

Scientific solutions serving society

Bercman Technologies, which collaborates with the University of Tartu, is dedicated to saving human lives. This autumn, the company opened the first smart pedestrian crosswalk in Tallinn, which makes crossing the street safer mostly for pedestrians, but also for cyclists. This globally unique **Smart Pedestrian Crosswalk** is a smart traffic sign that can be used everywhere, notifying drivers and pedestrians of danger. The smart crosswalk uses artificial intelligence, interaction with self-driving vehicles and sensors, and it combines more than 30 different functions in order to adapt to various traffic situations and weather conditions.

The young men behind the company **Crystalspace** started out during their masters' studies in the student satellite team of **ESTCube** and brought the experiences they gained into the world of business. Today they are working in the European Space Agency (ESA) Tartu Incubator which has invested a development funding of 50,000 euros in them. They are one of the leading creators of a camera that works in the vacuum of space.

Although the topic of mobile positioning never used to be a subject of research at the University of Tartu, it came into focus thanks to professor **Rein Ahas**, the founder of **Positium**, whose initiative attracted both attention to the field and contracts to the university. The company creates statistics on the basis of location-based big data, however extracting useful information from the data requires sound methodology. Develop-

ing the latter is what the company focuses on. "This is where our links to the university are helpful, because methods which are published and thereby validated by the academic world, are acknowledged by the customers of Positium. This is what largely differentiates us from competitors, who do not really publish their methods to the same extent," explains Executive Director of the company, **Erki Saluveer**.

For example, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism uses mobile positioning data from Positium's product to calculate official tourist numbers for those who do not provide immigration information. The country has over 17,000 islands and, before using the mobile positioning application, many tourists were left out of their local statistics due to lack of adequate tracking solutions.

Relocated plants and protected borders

The mission of another UT spin-off, **Nordic Botanical**, is to restore biodiversity and create nature-friendly landscapes and cities. The company started research and development in cooperation with **Alexela Oil**, in the framework of which scientists from several universities were brought together to develop the methodology for the relocation of protected orchid species from one area to another. This thorough study provided the base material for the research works of many University of Tartu students, also laying the foundation of good practices for future collaborations. The spin-off continues to take advantage of the experiences gained by the ecologists of the university by working together with private companies and local government bodies to develop nature-based solutions for the design of cities and landscapes, as well as offering alternatives to the standard lawn-based landscaping.

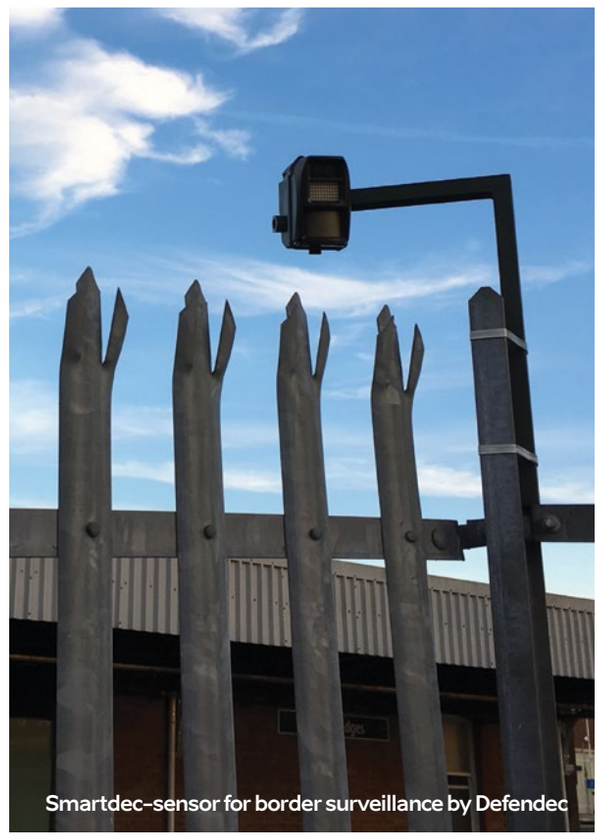
The company **ReLaDe** aims to give the world a reusable washing detergent that can be collected from the washing machine after use. Scientifically speaking, the company has its Proof of Concept, in other words the conceptual preparedness, and now only needs to attract funding for technological development work. As the company will have to integrate its system into existing washing machines, they are in the process of negotiating with international producers.

Another notable TalTech spin-off is **Defendec**. Founded in 2007, this company develops wireless sensor network technology. The primary goal of the company was to create IoT based products. The first sensor created for border surveillance came onto the market in 2009. Under the name **Smartdec**, it is the main product of the company, used to secure the outer borders of NATO and the European Union. The appliance helps to curb international trafficking, illegal trade and -border crossing, and it is a necessary technological means of assistance for defence forces and the border guard. Defendec solutions are used in 30 countries all over the world today.

In addition, the list of TalTech spin-offs includes **Crystalsol**, which in collaboration with the researchers of the university is developing a totally new type of flexible and semi-transparent photovoltaic or solar panel. This will enable different kinds of surfaces to be covered with solar panels; widely available elements such as copper, zinc, sulphur and selenium will be used as raw materials.

In summary, the Estonian spin-off landscape is characterised by diversity and the emphasis on solving serious problems, the large volume of knowhow and a relatively calm pace of development. Various exciting developments are on the horizon as, according to Puura, the first companies in the field of IT and genomics are being created and joining them is likely to produce profit.





Smartdec-sensor for border surveillance by Defendec

This article has been produced in cooperation with Estonian Research Council's initiative "Research in Estonia"

Reinventing the wheel

or how a group of friends started a successful bicycle company

By Ronald Liive

Most of us follow the saying "don't reinvent the wheel". Back in 2014, three young Estonian men decided to ignore this wisdom and engineered a new electrically powered bicycle.







Stellar



Curt



Ardo Kaurit (28) and his friends **Rait Udumäe** (31) and **Hannes Laar** (28) decided to design a bicycle that could not be identified as an electrical bicycle. It looked just like a regular bicycle that a hipster in a trendy part of the town would use. They garnered a lot of attention and decided to form a company, naming it **"Ööbik"** ('nightingale' in Estonian), and started to sell the bikes.

Soon they realised that the name is difficult for foreigners and renamed the company **Ampler Bikes**. Now you can find Ampler bikes in 23 countries. 99% of the Estonian-made bikes are exported.

Thanks to Ampler, Kaurit was awarded the **Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2019** award back in October.

Kaurit talked to 'Life in Estonia' about the reasons they founded the company, what their plan was at first and why they have been so successful.

Ampler has surpassed their own expectations

Ampler Bikes has been in the Estonian news quite often, one of the most recent stories was that the company raised 2.5 million euros in August from investors in just five days. Despite their success in recent years, according to Kaurit, who holds the CEO position at the company, they did not have a five-year business plan carved out.

"We did not think too much about business at all. But I think in the very early days we expected to sell more, but honestly the product was also not quite ready for that, and I think later on we even surpassed our expectations at times," says Kaurit.

The idea for an electric bike came to them because the founders call themselves product people, meaning that they always think about improving things.

"When we got ourselves involved with electric bikes, we soon started to believe that we could do this and we could be better at it and so it got started. I believe that often the biggest inventions are the small and simple things."

Nowadays, Ampler focuses mainly on the German market, which is roughly 75% of their marketplace. The company is profitable and they are overbooked with production.

Ampler e-bike models

Curt

Athletic and lightweight city e-bike with a sporty geometry, making the ride feel firm and highly responsive — just like a true racer.

Drive	Single-speed / 10-speed
Weight	3.5 - 14.3 kg
Speed	25 km/h
Range	70 km

Stout

Strong and modern commuter e-bike with the support and comfort you'd expect from a fast city bike. Available in diamond frame.

Drive	10-speed
Weight	17.2 kg
Speed	25 km/h
Range	70 km

Stellar

Modern commuter e-bike with the comfort and flexibility of a city bike. Available in step-through frame.

Drive	10-speed
Weight	17.2 kg
Speed	25 km/h
Range	70 km

According to Kaurit, it is hard to evaluate the success of the company, and he believes they could have been even more successful than they are.

"In general we work hard; we do things that we believe in and have a team of highly motivated people; this is quite a good recipe for success."

Talking about potential obstacles on the way, Kaurit sees that entrepreneurship in general is tough and every success story has its dark sides. He does not want to mention the hardships that they have faced but concludes that their story has by no means been an easy one.

Range of a fully charged Ampler bike is 70km

As of today, Ampler pays the wages of around 40 people. Most of them work at the factory near to the capital of Estonia. Some of the team is also located in Berlin, Germany. "We just moved to a new factory in Jüri, near Tallinn, where all the bikes are assembled. We are constantly growing in headcount and will probably go over 60 in the next 3-4 months."

The CEO's message is clear — Ampler's goal is to become the first choice for an urban commuting solution. To accomplish this they sell their bikes online, directly to the customer without a middle man. This gives them the option of keeping the cost of the bike to the customer as low as possible but still maintain a good enough margin.

"One of our main values is accessibility, which means being the best choice for more people. Cost is one of the variables and we want to be affordable for many. In the short term, we are focusing on keeping costs down by offering very high quality (low service and repair costs alongside long lifetime) and offering different leasing and flexible payment options."

In general, he sees that electric bikes will get cheaper, but a 500-euro bike which is used daily and can withstand 5+ years is a bit too optimistic.

Although the whole product development process in done in-house, many of the parts used in the bikes are produced elsewhere. The final assembly is done in-house. Due to controlling the assembly, Ampler can offer quality that they are proud of, in the words of the CEO.

With a fully charged Ampler bicycle you can cycle 70 km, Kaurit says that is good enough for a day's commute and it would be wasteful to carry more energy with you, for example, by having a bigger battery on the bike. Kaurit says that they have found the optimum balance between cost, weight, size and range.

Kaurit does not think that developments going on in battery technologies will change electrically powered bikes any time soon.

"I would say that available technologies for batteries to be used in electric bikes are very sufficient. As the bikes are light and have limited power, the batteries are not being used to their limits, thus extending their lifetime. I do not see that super-capacitors will be widely used for light electric bikes, but for getting more peak power in cars they make sense."

The most popular electrically powered transportation vehicles, electric scooters, are something that Ampler has looked at but plan not to endeavour towards in the near future. Kaurit believes bicycles have the most potential to change peoples' lives for the better.

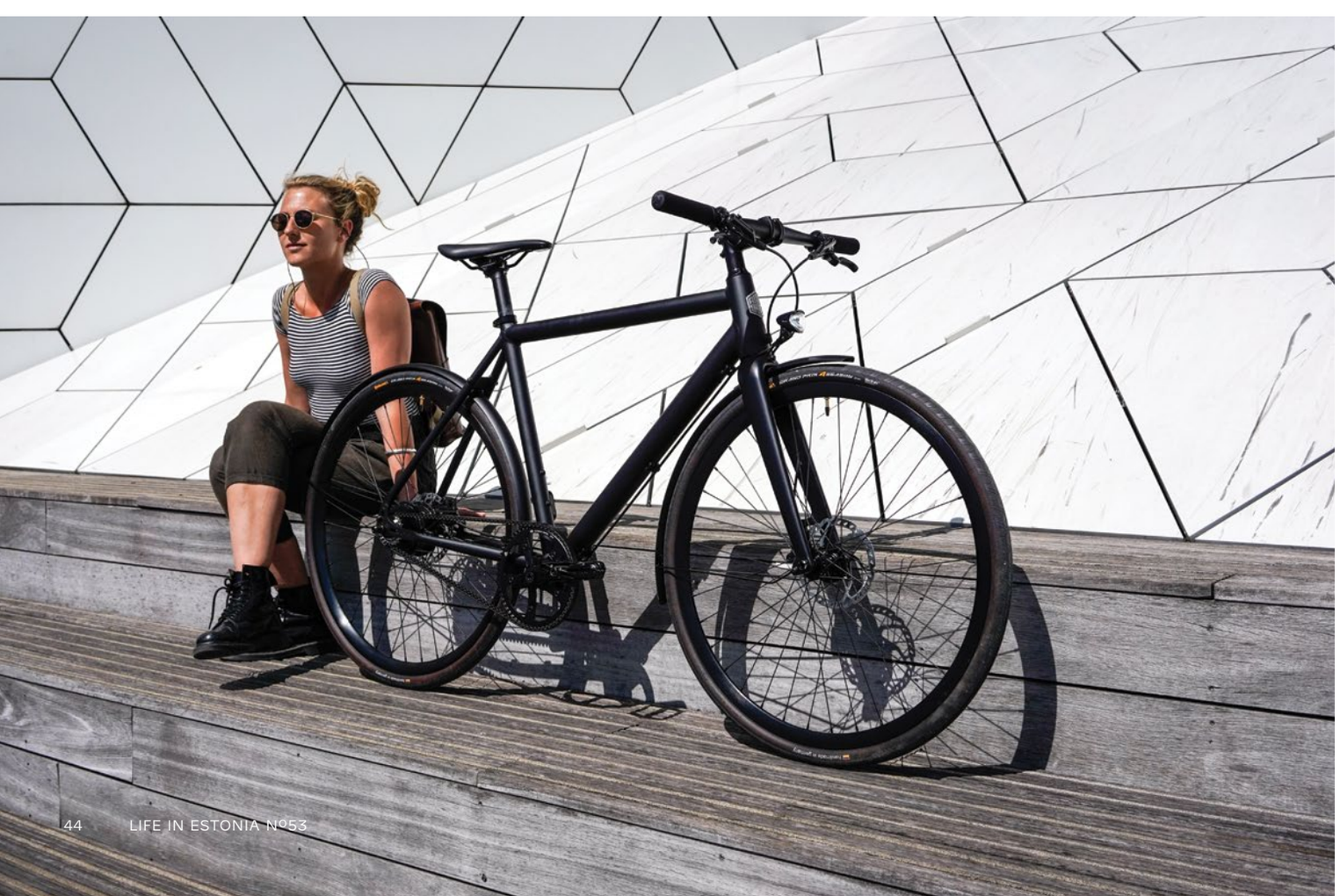




Photo by Henri Rump

Ott Tänak – the Estonian idol who had to hit rock bottom before achieving his life dream

By Peep Pahv

Photos by Margus Pahv



Ott Tänak is undoubtedly the biggest star of Estonian sports today. In autumn 2019, he became the World Rally Champion.

Coming from the small Kärla village on the island of Saaremaa, Ott Tänak has never kept it a secret that his goal was to become the World Rally Champion. Many specialists already considered Tänak to be the fastest rally driver in the world a year ago. But due to various problems, he and his co-pilot Martin Järveoja had to settle for bronze.

However, in 2019, it was the Estonians who dictated the course of events. October 27th will be forever written into Estonian sports history, as on this day, Tänak and Järveoja secured the World Rally Championship (WRC) title in Catalonia. The entire country was celebrating with them.



Ott Tänak has made the podium jump one of his trademarks

It is not often that athletes from a small country such as Estonia become world champions. It is even rarer for this to happen in a sport like rally which has a global reach. The winner of the WRC series is touted all over global news channels. But who cares about the world and the attention of other nations! In Estonia, probably even the government would not step down on a WRC weekend. At least not before the race is over, because everyone's eyes are on Tänak's competition.

The love of your people means a lot, but the athlete's own will and emotion are the real keys to success. Although the championship title meant the fulfilment of one of his biggest life goals, Tänak's emotions in crossing the finishing line in Catalonia remained subdued.

"At that moment it was difficult to realise what had happened. The tension which had built up did not just disappear after the finish line," explained Tänak. "It was such a relief though. Regardless of whether there will be more titles or not, this one is ours forever."

The biggest fan

"I am Ott's biggest fan," claims his father Ivar Tänak in one the scenes of the film **'Ott Tänak — The Movie'**. His eyes fill with tears at the thought — after all, he has been next to the most famous Estonian sportsman since little Ott first sat behind the steering wheel, supported him on his way to the WRC series, seen days when it seemed to be all over, and then the climb out of the crisis. The father said those words about a year before his son became world champion.

It is unlikely that Ott Tänak would have become world champion in the autumn of 2019, had he not been blessed with such a dad. Aside from his father, the supportive men in his life include another rally legend in Estonia, **Markko Märtin**, and entrepreneur **Oleg Gross**.

Gross first saw Tänak drive over a decade ago and realised it was worth investing in the young man. His faith held strong even in the most complicated times when many believed that Tänak was not up to much more than demolishing cars. "Of course I believed in him, otherwise I wouldn't have invested in him," says Gross.

Märtin was able to identify that the young rally driver had the qualities of a future champion. Thanks to his experience and contacts, he knew exactly how to get a foot in the door of the rally world. In tandem, they moved higher and higher in the WRC circles. Still today, Märtin remains Tänak's closest ally.

Ott Tänak is riding a new wave in Estonian sports. Whereas just a few years ago people complained that sport in Estonia was taking a back-seat, today the difficult times seem to have passed. Regardless of the small size of the country, there are athletes the nation follows and supports: tennis players **Anett Kontaveit** and **Kaia Kanepi**, javelin thrower **Magnus Kirt**, decathlete **Maicel Uibo** and — the favourite with young people — freestyle skier **Kelly Sildaru** and, of course, Ott Tänak who has been continually visible throughout the year.



Ott Tänak and Martin Järveoja took their first victory of the season racing and flying on the snowy roads of Sweden

Ott Tänak

- Born on October 15, 1987
- World Rally Champion
- Won 12 WRC rallies and 223 special stages
- First WRC rally in 2009 in Portugal
- First WRC rally win in 2017 in Sardinia
- Co-driver Martin Järveoja
- From 2020 member of the Hyundai team



Amidst the thick dust of Portugal, Ott Tänak managed to be faster than his competitors



Ott Tänak's and Martin Järveoja's magnificent flight at the Finnish rally

Tänak as a national treasure

Those who think that only petrol-sniffing slackers are interested in Tänak's career are clearly mistaken. Tänak has become a national treasure. In addition to young speed-addicted fans, his world championship rallies are also keenly followed by female pensioners, for example. Ivar Tänak frequently has to answer people's questions regarding his son's whereabouts. "We have a small car repairs shop and, in fact, all our customers inquire about Ott. Some people don't have a clue about rallying and their questions can be strange. Then we're happy to explain things," he says.

Understandably, people who visit his garage are drivers and hence more likely to be interested in the rally driver. But what about pensioners and other people who have no general interest in sports? Ivar Tänak has heard about people who have no interest in sports but sit in front of the television watching the rallies. "They even do it with their families," he says.

A road full of twists

Tänak's road to popularity has not been without its twists. For years, a reputation of failure followed him. With the help of his mentor Markko Märtin, he made it into the WRC series, but the first entry did not bring a breakthrough. First, he had to sink to the bottom and find himself in a situation in which the end of his career as a rally driver seemed more likely than its continuation. At the same time, he had to tolerate the cursing of online commentators and the pessimism of the media. In 2013, Tänak did not participate in a single World Championship rally. If someone had said that in six years he would be the most popular athlete in Estonia and win the world championship title, they would have been considered crazy.

But Tänak believed in himself just like some of his faithful supporters. But in order to start moving upward, something had to shift in the young rally driver. The extremely bold youngster, who tended to just push hard on the gas pedal, needed to become a smart driver. He had to develop his interaction skills and become more open. Today we can say he has succeeded.

"I'd like to think that Ott has changed because of me," says **Janika,** who met Ott Tänak in 2012 and has become his wife as well as mother to his two children. "Actually, I do not see the change because I don't know what he used to be like. But I am sure that having a family has influenced him. As a rally driver, he no longer goes to competitions to act out. He has a lot to live for at home."

Family always comes first for Tänak. Due to his busy schedule — competitions, tests, promotional events — he rarely has time to be home. But when it happens, quality time spent with his wife, son and daughter is a priority. Taking refuge in the domestic idyll is in sync with Tänak's personality as someone who'd rather avoid public attention. During the rallies, he deals with obligatory duties that accompany racing, but in his spare time he tries to avoid them.



Ogier: Tänak was the right man to end my era

When Ott Tänak became the World Rally Champion, he ended the ruling era of **Sébastien Ogier** that lasted for six years. According to the Frenchman, Tänak was the right man to do this.

"He is extremely fast and made this year significantly less mistakes than the rest of us — this is enough to win the title," said Ogier. "Tänak is currently the best rally driver in the world. He is World Champion. A talentless driver would not be able to pull it off. Tänak is able to demonstrate incredible speed at times and I like his style. Mentally it is very difficult to win your first title, but Tänak managed to do it. He did a great job!"



Photos by Margus Pahv

Ott Tänak and the Cup of the Portugal rally

After his return to the rally elite, Tänak has proceeded to go a step further each season. His confidence returned with the help of **Malcolm Wilson** whilst driving in the **M-Sport** system. After making his way into the full team member, he reached his first rally victory in 2017 with co-pilot Martin Järveoja. They took four wins a year later and this year, which culminated with the world championship title.

Two years ago, Tänak's reputation was already so good that the **Toyota** rally team did everything in their power to hire him. From 2020, Tänak will be competing in **Hyundai** colours. In the WRC series, all team leaders wish he would sit in their car.

A special love

Rallying has always enjoyed a following in Estonia, but Tänak's racing has taken interest in this sport to new heights. "Consider **Rally Estonia** — if we didn't have Tänak, people would not come along with such a large project," says **Urmo Aava,** Estonian rally driver who competed in the WRC between 2002 and 2009. "For us, it is the most important thing that Tänak and Järveoja will be at the starting line with their WRC car." Aava has no doubts that rally events would be organised in Estonia even if we didn't have someone like Tänak in competition, but the level and interest would be much smaller. "If we took the top driver away from the Estonian rally, it would be like a Western without Clint Eastwood," he says.

Estonian rally fans on WRC rounds have earned a legendary status. Even in the most distant places we can see the Estonian tricolour next to the racing track. In all European rallies, it becomes a sea of blue-black-and-white. News on Tänak's activities are also very popular. Each action, each word of the idol is meaningful for fans.

The entire country was waiting for Tänak to become World Champion. The tough road full of twists brought the nation together. Whether Tänak's popularity will bring a second, third or further titles remains to be seen.

Tänak's unbelievable career

Tänak's journey to winning the World Championship title is possibly one of the most exhilarating stories ever experienced in WRC's history. The islander was unable to use the chance given to him by the M-Sport team in **2012**. They finished only six rallies without major problems and the only beautiful moment of the season was his first podium finish, when they came third. Back then, Tänak's co-pilot was **Kuldar Sikk**.

In **2013**, Tänak was not offered a place in the WRC series and many believed that the Estonian's career was over. Yet, **in 2014** he got the chance to race in WRC2 with the R5 car of the DMack team. In addition, he raced in three rallies with the WRC machine. Raigo Mõlder became Tänak's co-pilot.

In **2015**, Tänak was back in the top of the WRC series, receiving a second chance from M-Sport. At the end of the season the Estonian came tenth, but he proved that he can race in a smarter way. After a terrific race in Poland he fought his way to the podium for the second time in his career by beating **Jari-Matti Latvala** in the last special stage and coming in third. In Mexico he survived the most frightening accident of his life when the car drove into a lake.

In **2016**, Tänak raced in the WRC series for the DMack team. This was a true breakthrough season for the islander — he was in eighth place at the end of the season but he proved to be a mature and speedy driver. In Poland, the first rally win of his career slipped out of his reach in a dramatic way when his car tire burst towards the end of the race. During the season, he made his way onto the podium twice by coming second in Poland and Wales.

In **2017**, Tänak changed his co-pilot again and teamed up with **Martin Järveoja**, again driving for the M-Sport team with **Sébastien Ogier** as a team mate. For the first time, it seemed that Tänak could really be the guy who could win the World Championship title. During the season, he stepped onto the podium on seven occasions and won the first World Championship rally of his career in Sardinia and a race in Germany. At the end of the season Tänak was third in the WRC series after Ogier and Neuville.

As a big surprise in the season of **2018,** Tänak went to drive for **Toyota,** raising questions about how he would adapt to the new car. Is Toyota fast enough? The questions were answered in the opening rally of the season in Monte Carlo when the Estonian came in second. However, there were technical problems that prevented him from going for the title — during the Welsh rally he had to stop while leading and Tänak's chase of the title was over. The season's end brought a third place after Ogier and Neuville again. However, five rally wins and two podium places proved yet again that Tänak was speedy enough to win the WRC title.

The year **2019** turned out to be successful for Tänak and Järveoja. Six rally wins and two podium places with just one unsuccessful rally in Turkey were enough to bring home the historical World Championship title one rally before the season's end!



Ott Tänak at the Finnish World Championship rally giving autographs to happy fans



OTT TÄNAK THE MOVIE

The film portrays Estonian rally driver Ott Tänak, one of the most elusive athletes in the eyes of the media, with a highly reclusive character. His self-willed tenacity has forged the stubborn country boy, through a rollercoaster career, into a motivated rally pilot.

In addition to Ott himself, people who have been close to him at different times in his life are opening up about the foundations of his adventurous life and career.

"The best quality film I've ever seen of rally."

Malcolm Wilson, M-Sport

"It showed the highs, the lows and everything in between. The reality we never get to see. The human story."

Becs Williams, Rally Commentator

"The film, like Tänak's career, is a rollercoaster."

David Evans, Autosport

www.sterotek.ee



"Nobject" installation, Vaal Gallery, 2013 with KUU Architects

Maarit Murka: stepping out of the comfort zone

By Laura Elisabeth Konsand

Arts audiences are familiar with Maarit Murka's black-and-white, technically perfect paintings in the hyperrealist style. But behind the sterile painting style and on-the-surface laconic manner, we find a bold creator who is unafraid to think out of the box and swim against the current.

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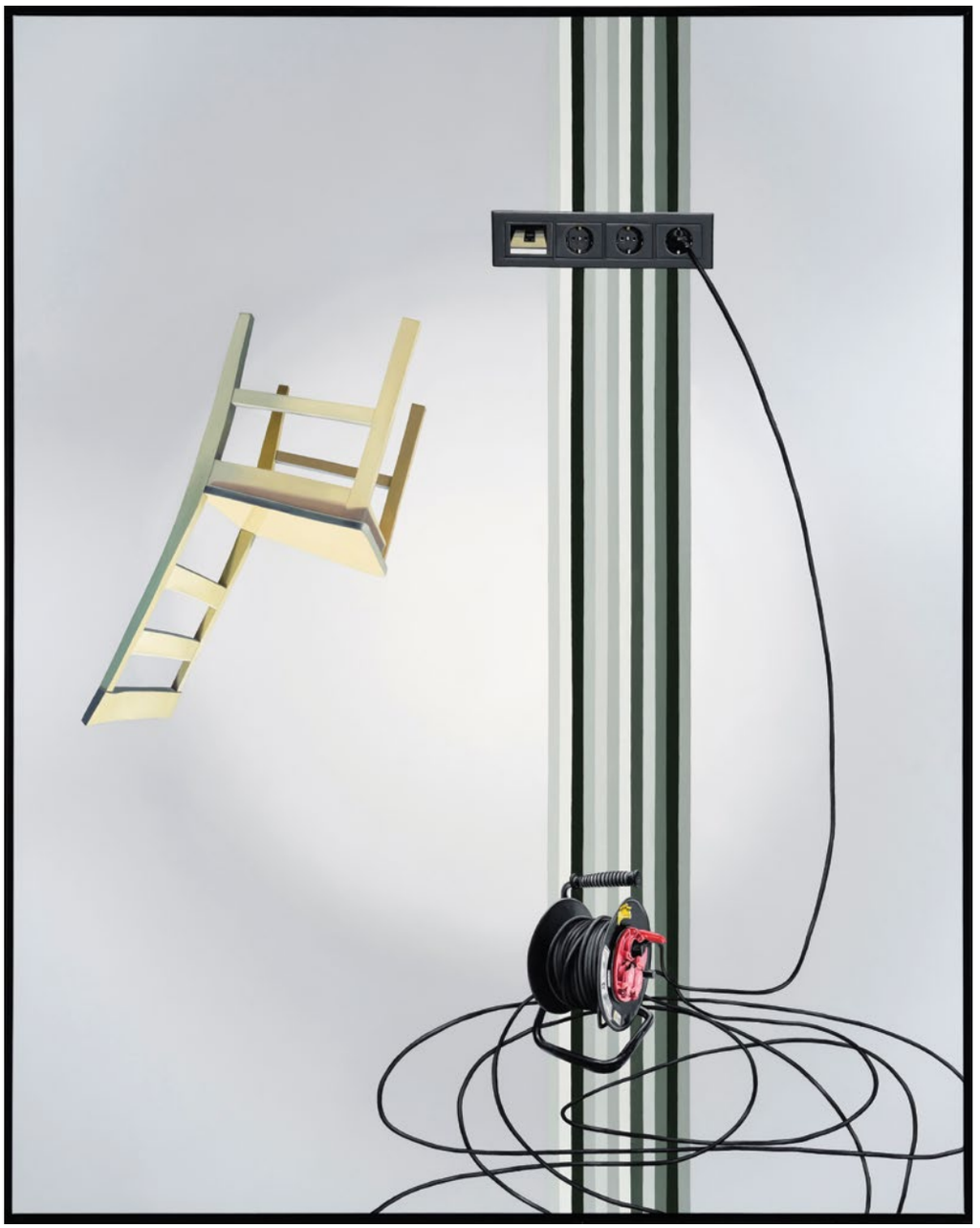
Portfolio
Maarit Murka



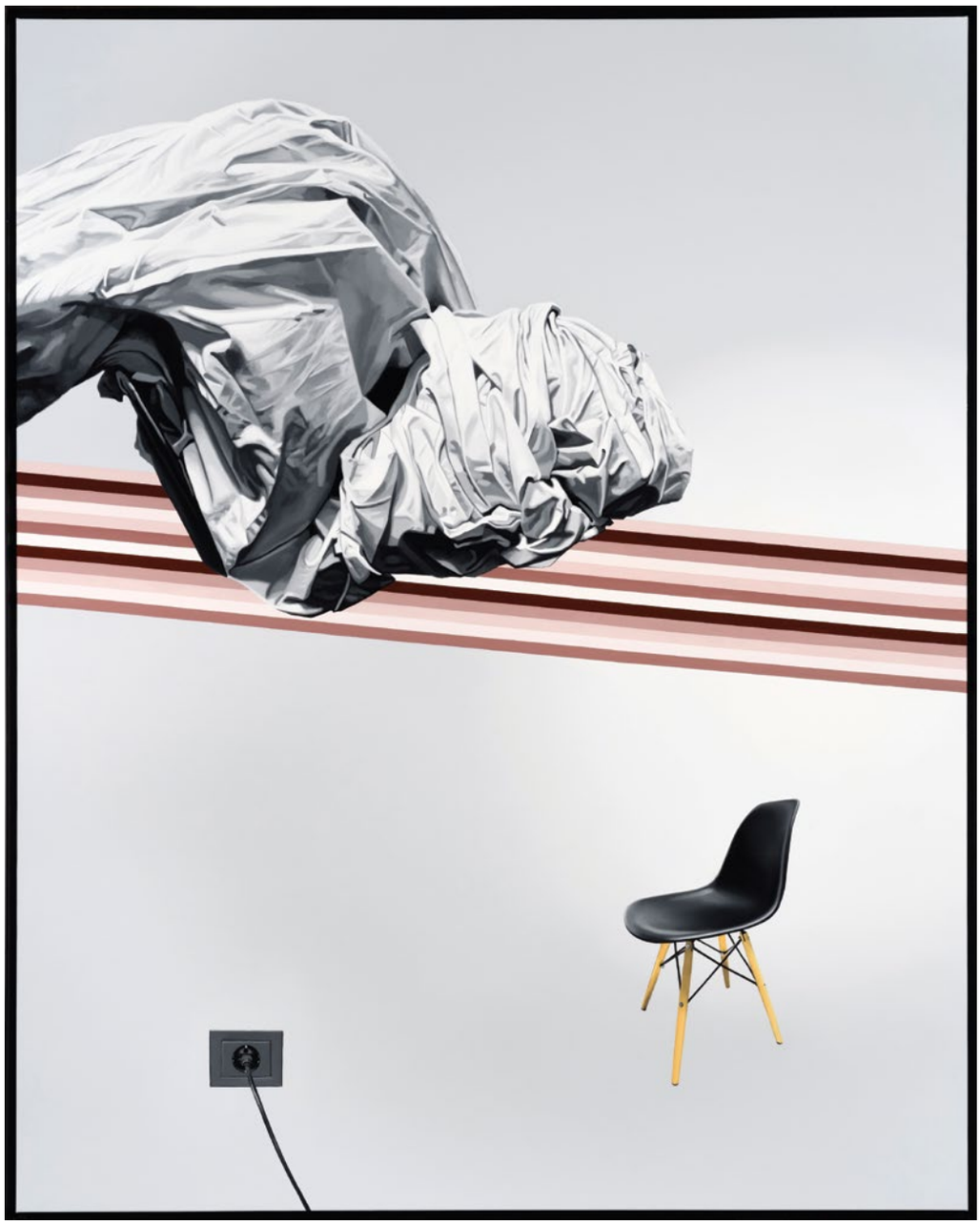
Moment, 2010
Oil on canvas, d. 120



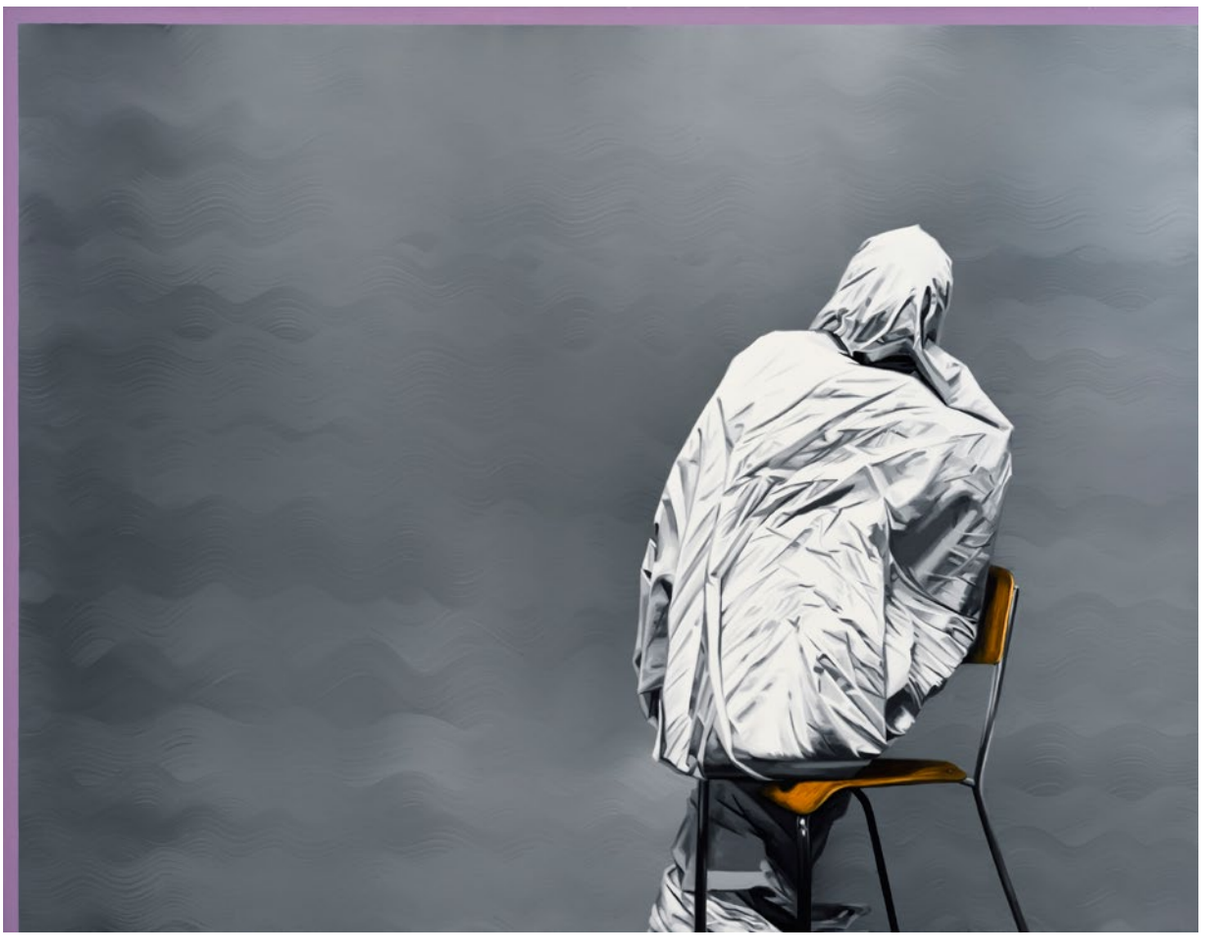
Fragile, 2010
Oil on canvas, d. 120



Out of context 1, 2017
Oil on canvas, 200 x 160



Out of context 2, 2017
Oil on canvas, 200 x 160



MindRoom 9, 2017
Oil on canvas, 100 x 20 x 130



Soundwave 1, 2017
Oil on canvas, 200 x 20 x 180



MindRoom 1, 2016
Oil on canvas, 200 x 140



MindRoom 2, 2016
Oil on canvas, 180 x 140









Positions (3, 4, 1, 2), 2015
Stone litography, 46 x 39

Kill Your Darlings 1, 2006
Oil on canvas, 142 x 260





Secret shoot, 2006
Oil on canvas, 155 x 270



Kill Your Darlings 2, 2006
Oil on canvas, 140 x 240

Maarit Murka represents the new generation of hyperrealism. The themes in her art emerge from society, dealing with everyday life, collective history, political situations as well as the questions of what makes us human. Maarit Murka's works, with their accurate commentary on contemporary global issues and paradoxes ranging from criticism of the consumer society and the current political situation to deep reflections on human psychology and the subconscious, speak to the audience with their direct, honest and poignant expressive style characteristic of hyperrealism. Freelance curator and writer **Triinu Soikmets** has written: "It seems that Murka has captured something so universal that it is enough to reach catharsis by and through the realisations which come through this capturing." Maarit Murka's paintings are characterised by a sense of being taken along, offering the viewer the possibility to recognise themselves.

Maarit Murka graduated as a painter from the Estonian Academy of Arts in 2004 and proceeded to do her master's degree in Helsinki, Finland. She developed a clear and recognisable artistic style during her years of study. In contrast to the colour scheme of the hyperrealist generation of the 1970s-1980s, Murka started to paint black-and-white large-scale photorealist works which looked like shots from films. The subjects came from television, mass culture and media and often depicted the artist herself. Art critic **Kaarin Kivirähk** has written that the atmosphere of Murka's paintings from this period — the black-and-white series **"Kill Your Darlings"** (2006) and **"New Beginning"** (2006) — recalls American action films, depicting semi-naked women, angel wings and guns. The artist herself has commented that the black-and-white colour scheme allows her to be slightly otherworldly in our multi-coloured world. "I have created paintings in colour, but they have felt too fake and flashy, so in the end I always return to the black-and-white gamut," said Murka in one of her earlier interviews. In the course of the last decades, the hyperrealist black-and-white paintings have become Murka's signature style by which the arts audiences recognise her.

One of the central techniques of Murka's works is positioning herself physically in a certain space or situation and depicting it on canvas. Art researcher **Ants Juske** has written: "Murka is a very self-centred artist, who exposes her own body, fears and the surroundings." Yet Murka's honest and self-centred works are not only dealing with herself; through the personal, they address political and collective levels of meaning. She has found the right way to approach social issues — namely, through herself.

In 2009, at the exhibition **"0.43"** in the **Korjaamo Gallery** in Helsinki, Murka carried through several physical experiments on herself. Manipulating her senses, the artist tested her capability of creating paintings in a situation in which one of her senses is damaged or repressed. The photorealist self-portraits were born, for example, in a state of drunkenness, whilst holding her breath, being in total silence and with her eyes closed. By testing her own limits as an artist and human being during the various experiments, Murka manifested herself as a contemporary and rational painter whose creative principles are not comparable to the outdated cliché of the artist as a bohemian.



Escape Room no 1, 2019





Another personal and social experiment was Murka's research trip to **Afghanistan**. Inspired by this experience, the artist completed exhibitions **"Mission"** (2013) at the Art Hall of the Estonian Parliament and **"Contact"** (2014) at the Tartu Arts Hall.

At 'Mission', Murka exhibited photos, paintings and installations that captured the daily experiences and life in the barracks of the soldiers on their mission the way that the artist experienced it. By drawing parallels between the missions of the artist and the soldier, Murka reached a sad realisation that, in a way, both contemporary art and contemporary warfare are wasters of resources in the eyes of society.

The exhibition 'Contact' dealt with the interpretation of contemporary political contacts which are realised through war. On the second floor of the Tartu Arts Hall, there was a direct row of black-and-white flags of NATO states. Tubs of paint were hanging from the ceiling, from which different colours were dripping out. Art critic **Indrek Grigor** wrote back then that, even though the point of the exhibition was the artist's personal resistance to the military regime which she experienced during her trip to Afghanistan, the nature of the exhibition only seemed to be political. Murka herself has admitted that she does not know social power games well enough to be able to join the discussion. Instead she remains true to her creativity and addresses the symbols of power primarily through herself, by mirroring her inner world.

In addition to painting, Murka's creative works include installation, video and photography. By often exhibiting various media next to each other within an exhibition, she creates experimental spaces that try to capture all senses of the viewer. The artist has said that at the exhibitions she wishes 'to create an environment that will have an impact on the audience through the backs of their heads'. One of the more recent exhibitions which deals dynamically with the environment and gets to people from behind their heads is **"Escape Room no 1"** (2019). At this exhibition, held at **Vaal Gallery** in the first half of this year, Murka offered the experience of an experiential room in a fake natural environment. On the lower floor of the gallery, live nature which had already been handled by human beings was on show. 37 (just like Murka's age) dried-up Christmas trees, piled up firewood, artificial grass and snow-white rubber boots with cement in them. The second floor exhibited a large painting installation which, when viewed from one angle, depicted colour transfers and, when viewed from the other angle, was a black-and-white image of a forest. The 'Escape Room no 1' was immediately and slightly absurdly addressing topical social issues like the state's forestry policy and the impact of human activity on nature.







Illusions, 2019

Maarit Murka's latest personal exhibition **"Illusions"** took place in September at the **ArtDepoo Gallery**. It is remarkable that Murka decided to exhibit a photo series carrying the same name, which she created back in 2013. The series depicted ordinary people, young and old, whose bodies were partially covered in tanning spray. In addition to those large-scale photographs at the exhibition, there was a giant figure of a swan covered in hair, and here and there viewers came across their own images in mirrors which carried different slogans #STRONG#, #HAPPY# and so on. But the most shocking and raw impact came from the video 'Surface', showing a little girl in full make-up and wearing a spray-tan, which emphasised the absurdity and contradictory nature of beauty competitions organised for children. With this exhibition, Murka was pointing a finger at the societal pressure to look ever more beautiful, asking whether we are devaluating our true selves.

Albeit throughout the years Maarit Murka has remained faithful to her hyperrealist style, the forms and themes in her works are characterised by a continuous search for something new, innovative and different. "I have always been interested in questions of form and exiting the dictatorship of one format," the artist has said. Undoubtedly, such a continuous investigation of the form of one's creations, requires boldness and willingness to step out of one's comfort zone. Murka is not lacking in courage or ideas and this is reflected in her exhibitions, which always make a novel and sometimes an uncanny (in a good sense) impact, begging the question: is it really the same artist? Even in selecting her exhibition spaces, Murka has tended to swim against the current, presenting her works in various near cities like Helsinki, Riga, Vilnius, Minsk and Kiev instead of standard art meccas.

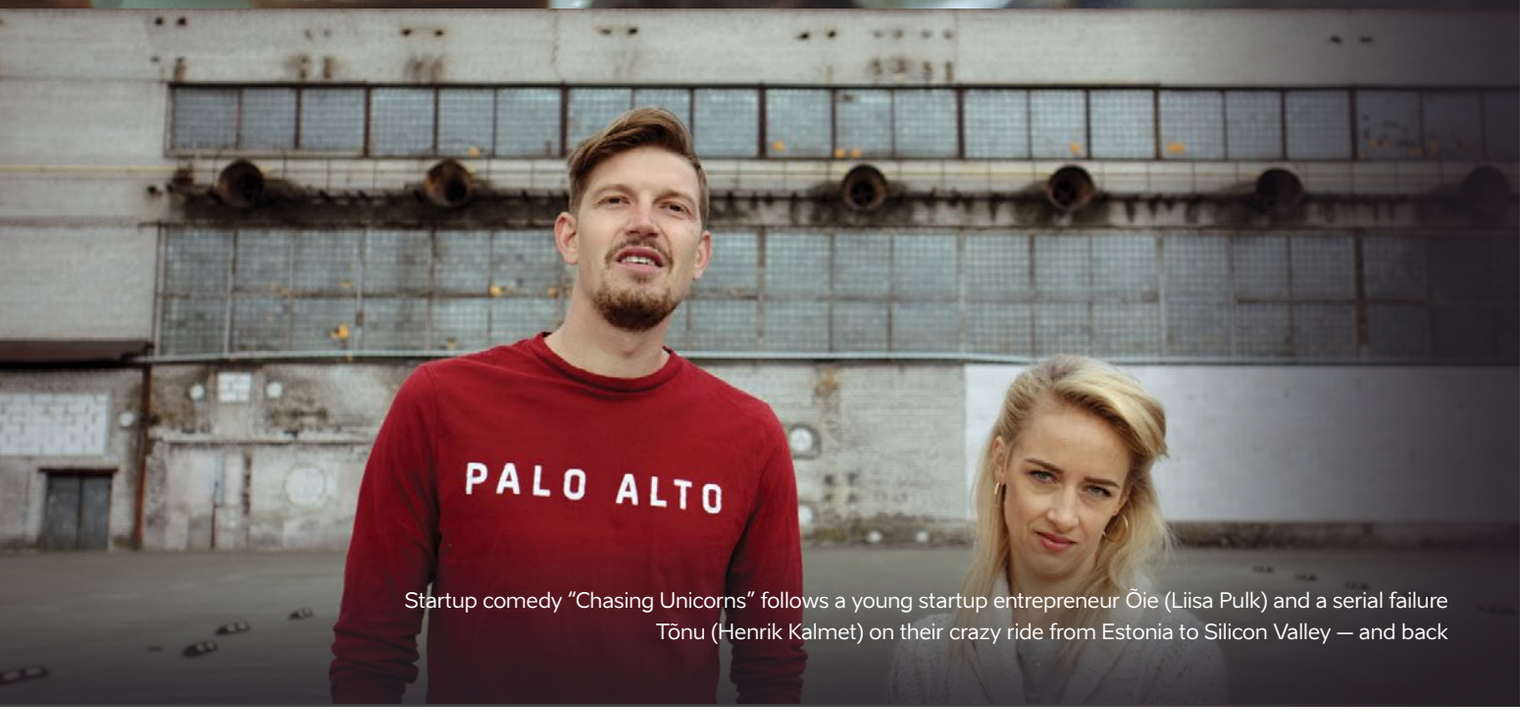
When asked about her future plans during the writing of this article, Murka says: "At the moment, I am interested in the artistic landscape and how it functions. The artist should be one of the key figures on this landscape, but it seems to me that this is no longer the case. Is there even a place and need for an artist as they used to be known?" asks Murka about the topic currently engaging her mind. She adds that she is simultaneously interested in some old ideas: "I'd like to create a pure exhibition of only paintings," she says.

One thing is certain — Maarit Murka does not tend to just present her works in their known quality, but views each exhibition as a platform for new ideas and opportunities, thereby always reconfiguring the nature of hyperrealism. We can only wait and see what she will come out with next.

"Chasing Unicorns"

a peek inside the life of a startup founder

By Ann-Marii Nergi



Startup comedy "Chasing Unicorns" follows a young startup entrepreneur Õie (Liisa Pulk) and a serial failure Tõnu (Henrik Kalmet) on their crazy ride from Estonia to Silicon Valley — and back



Actor Johann Urb in the role of Tom Marcusson

Photo by Egert Kamenik

Rain Rannu is perhaps the most well-known and successful Estonian startup entrepreneur turned angel investor and venture capitalist turned ... movie director!

It can be said that Rannu is one of the first startup founders in Estonia: he created the mobile payment space **Mobi Solution** in 2000 ('space' and not 'app' because it was still a time before smartphones). Seven years later, he co-founded **Fortumo** — also a mobile payment service, but this time for digital content and app stores, available now in over 90 countries. Today, as a managing partner at the early-stage investment fund and company-builder **Superangel**, he shares his time between mentoring and looking for promising start-ups alongside his most recent passion — making films.

Rannu's second movie, a startup comedy **"Chasing Unicorns"** has received positive reviews from all around the world, offering the pleasure of recognition on screen for many startuppers and investors alike. Why? Because the stories and characters in the movie are all based on real-life events that have, in one way or another, happened to people in the startup community.

Rain, could you start by explaining — why a startup movie and a comedy?

When we started with the movie, our goal was not to make it in any particular genre. The goal was more to tell authentic stories about start-up life. But the movie had to be fun to watch for anyone — inside or outside of startup community. So that's how it is — these are real-life stories, maybe just a little bit exaggerated. Overall, I'm happy with the result! Of course, there are some things that could've been done differently, but this can all be fixed in the next movie.

How could I not ask now — what will your next movie be about?

It is too early to talk about it in detail yet, but yes, there will be a next one!


Rain Rannu

And you always write the scripts yourself?

Yes, but it's also a lot like the startup process, because for "Unicorns" we shared the drafts with many people in the startup community and we got a lot of feedback and new stories and recommendations. And I noticed that it is exactly like startups — you make an early prototype, you test it, improve it, test it again, etc.

The movie is mainly located in Estonia, there are many scenes with its natural and urban landscapes? Is it a little bit like an advertisement for Estonia as a country as well?

Clearly, we are excited, if because of the movie more and more people discover Estonia and maybe find a startup in Estonia! We have one of the best ecosystems in the world for startups, we have e-Residency which makes starting a company very easy, we have a strong investor community and a strong track record of building globally successful startups.

I don't want to give any spoilers, but aren't you afraid that the movie shows too stereotypical 'startupper' vs. 'big industry boss' characters? Do you think that your movie helps so-called 'traditional industry' leaders to understand the new and disruptive culture?

Yes and no about the stereotypes. On the one hand, the stories are gathered from real-life events and, in the movie, we portray certain types like startupper Tõnu or industry-leader Aadu Mäeveski. But you have to use stereotypes, because it helps to make the point of the movie clearer. But on the other hand, it is not a commercial movie to promote startups. I believe that some people, after seeing that movie, want to make their own startup and some of them would never do it. Which is good, because most people actually shouldn't be startup founders in the first place.

Why is that so?

Whether you have or don't have what it takes to be a founder is based on what you want to do in life. Because you can only be good at stuff you are very excited about. And founding a startup is super hard, you can't do it from 9 to 5. And the more successful you are, the harder it may often be, because people already expect things from you and you have much more responsibility. And it is absolutely fine if you are not up for this kind of life.

You have said before that you can't be driven by money. It's actually a little surprising considering how much money there is in this business!

If you are driven by money, you probably won't last. You can go work for a startup where you can be motivated by money or options.

You are also a venture capitalist, one of the founders of the Superangels Fund. How do you divide your time between making films and making investment decisions?

I would say it's half and half. Superangel invests in top Estonian global founders who will make the next TransferWises and Bolts. Our goal as investors is to find the best startups at the early stage and help them to build global business. As of right now, we have invested in nearly 30 companies!

Have you as an investor sometimes felt FOMO — fear of missing out — and therefore made some not-so-good investments? It is one of the key themes in the movie.

I'm not sure if we have done investments driven by FOMO, but if you don't make investments that fail and look only for the safe ones then yes, you miss out on the good ones. In venture funds, the math is that if 1-2 investments out of 30-50 are super successful, they cover for others.





Photo by Martin Kosseson

Four generations of knitwear – Nordic cool, sustainable and modern

By Maris Hellrand







Photos by Martin Kosseson

Approaching its centenary, the 4-generation family business Woolish is a great example of a living tradition. Their original patterns have found their way into utterly cool new products while retaining the sustainability factor of high-quality knitwear.

In 1928, **Eigo Siimu**'s great grandmother **Hilda** opened her knitting studio in Viljandi. 90 years and four generations later the family business has survived shake-ups of history, changing fashion and, with the new flagship store in Tallinn's old town, it is doing better than ever.

In her studio, company founder Hilda was knitting the braids, laces and patterns by hand that can still be found in the latest product lines, which are now made by knitting machines and incorporated into contemporary design. Mother **Külli** and father **Raimond Siimu** took over the knitwear business in Viljandi decades ago. The traditional multi-colour elk-patterns of the early 1990-2000s have now been replaced by modern designs brought to the company by son Eigo and daughter-in-law **Anna**.

Eigo Siimu left the Baltics' biggest distribution company 4 years ago to give the family business a contemporary makeover both in style and marketing. Together with wife Anna, they have created a new approach to product design and a proactive sales strategy to reach contemporary consumers and new markets. With success.

The former track and field athletes are the power couple of development in **Woolish**. Anna is in charge of design for women's apparel, sales and social media, Eigo looks after the finances, marketing and the online store while being hands-on in designing the men's clothing line. The biggest challenge according to Siimu: finances. In its current growth phase, the family team has to combine creativity in design with strict business discipline.

Siimu is pleased though with the progress made in the last few years: "In the Estonian context we have achieved a great result. Our products are on sale in the best retail stores in the country, such as Stockmann and Tallinna Kaubamaja, which in itself is a proof of quality and a right approach."

Woolish has had a very good 2019 with the opening of a flagship shop in Tallinn's old town — a store that attracts 50/50 locals and tourists. Current export markets are in Finland, Germany and the UK. Among the most popular products is a long soft ladies' cardigan, although — come winter, the trademark Woolish hats in all colours appear on Tallinn's streets. Home accessories, like throws and pillows by Woolish, can be found in some of Estonia's luxury hotels, adding this extra cosy wow-factor.

Eigo on challenges of a traditional family business: "Change and innovation is necessary. Every business has to find a model and a way to make its products distinct and add value. For sure, the experience working outside of the family business has proven to be very useful."



Eigo and Anna Siimu as models for their latest designs







Photos by Martin Kosseson

Eigo Siimu describes the company mission as a journey of sustainable slow fashion. The natural traceable materials and high quality of the garments contribute to a sustainable low-consumption lifestyle — buy better, buy less.

Mother Külli Siimu is really pleased that the next generation decided to join the family business and gear up both the design and marketing of the knitwear, which is still produced in the small factory in central Estonia. She shows off the factory: "This is where we knit blankets, hats, scarfs and sometimes jumpers. A simple blanket takes 4 hours. Now we produce modern design, whereas before we used to make more traditional folk patterns. The modern design still combines many traditional elements like the braids and laces. These are old patterns that were already in the first generation — handmade at the time and mainly used for scarfs and jumpers. We were very happy as our son decided to join the company. We were worried, how long could we keep going just knitting the elks one way and the other! It was a moment when we really needed a new approach. The young generation is able to create modern design and to sell the products. This was really necessary."

Visual mother tongue

Viljandi is actually a true heartland for Estonian handicraft, especially textile. At the **Viljandi Culture Academy** one can even take a bachelor's course in traditional textile craft. Professor **Kristi Jõeste** has published several studies on the traditional patterns of Estonian knitwear and teaches students to keep the tradition alive. She says, it's important to preserve this tradition, especially in the era of globalisation: "We consider here in Viljandi, that people should preserve not just their native language but also the visual mother tongue." Jõeste admits however, that the cultural heritage can't survive in the shape of a museum. It has to develop and adjust to modern materials and context.

Exactly this has happened with Woolish — the traditional knitting patterns have made it into new products. The typical braided pattern of a thick woollen jumper can now be found in an elegant throw or a pillow, the traditionally shaped woollen hats come with a soft cotton lining, a fine wool knitting technique is applied to create sporty T-shirts, elegant jackets or dresses.

The latest addition to the designs of both men's and ladies' clothing lines is a woollen jumper paying homage to the hometown and production location of Woolish — Viljandi**.** The sweaters, designed by **Liisa Peips** carry the brand of this quirky small town — **VLND**. Although developed as part of the winter collection, Eigo Siimu says: "It's a geographical fact that here in Estonia a woollen jumper is wearable both in winter and summer."

Noblessner quarter

From hidden industrial heritage to prime waterfront urban space

By Maris Hellrand

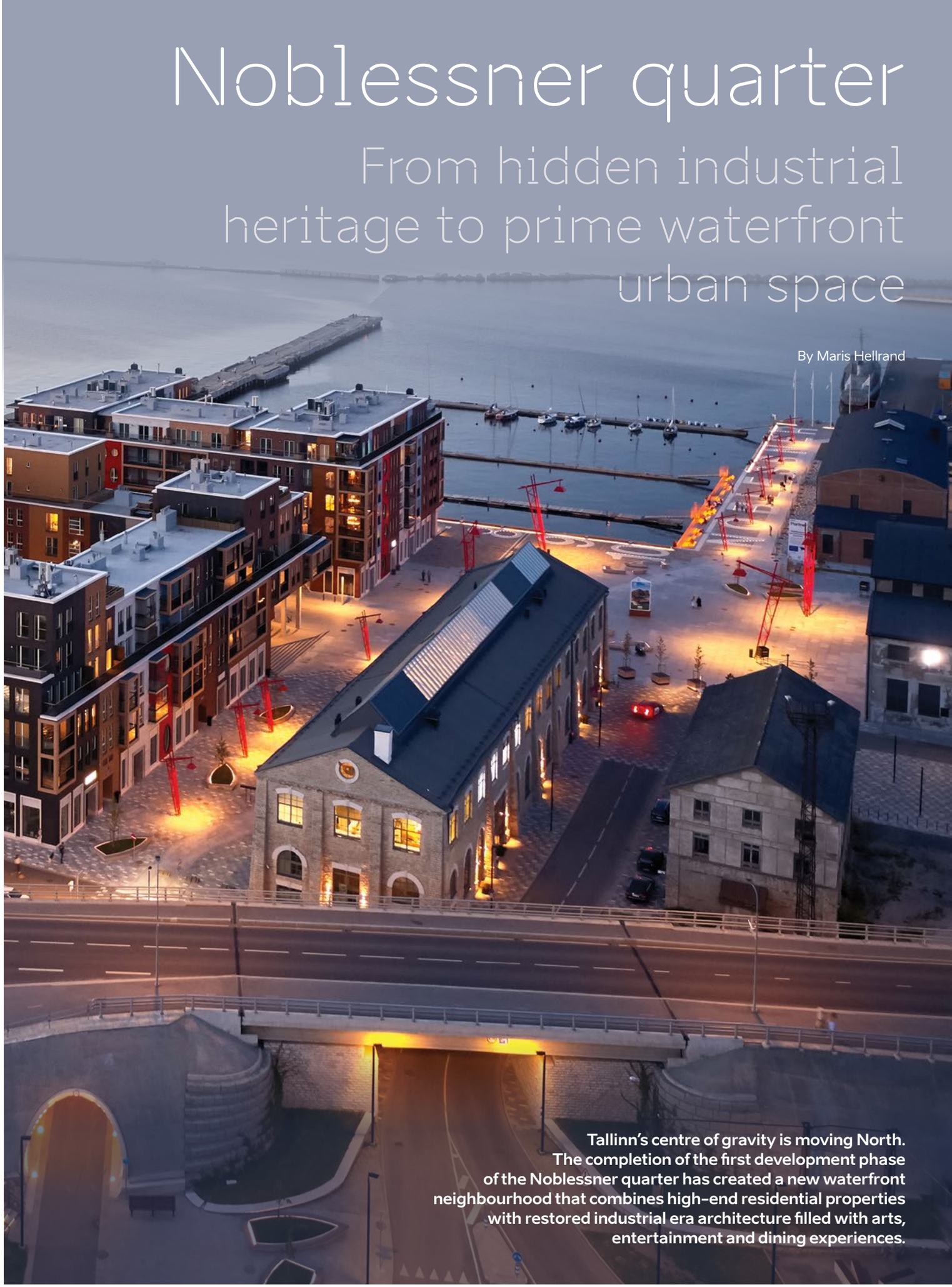


Photo by Martin Dremljuga

Tallinn's centre of gravity is moving North. The completion of the first development phase of the Noblessner quarter has created a new waterfront neighbourhood that combines high-end residential properties with restored industrial era architecture filled with arts, entertainment and dining experiences.



Photo by Martin Dremljuga

Proto Invention Centre in the previous Noblessner foundry





Kai Art Center

Founded in 1912 by **Emanuel Nobel**, nephew of Alfred Nobel, and **Arthur Lessner**, the submarine shipyard has led a secluded life for a century, hiding some shining examples of the innovative industrial architecture of the era. The area was planned by **Christiani & Nielsen**, engineers from Denmark (also architects of the nearby Seaplane Harbour, which was restored and opened as a maritime museum in 2012, as well as the Sydney Opera House).

Ann Virkus, Head of Special Projects & Transformation at BLRT Grupp / Noblessner, remembers when the BLRT Grupp AS bought the bankrupt maritime factory in 2001: "The whole area, from the former Patarei prison towards North Tallinn, was closed for the public. Now Noblessner is the first real waterfront quarter of Tallinn. The former submarine factory has become a friendly urban space, a combination of grand historic industrial architecture, seaside promenade, marina, homes and retail spaces." The first phase of development saw the reconstruction of several historic buildings as well as the addition of infrastructure and 200 new residential apartments.

Indrek Kasela, entrepreneur and resident of the quarter, is hoping to see it develop into the best living environment in Tallinn. He discovered Noblessner more than a decade ago, when it was still a working shipyard in the daytime but starting to experiment with new ideas after hours — from Arvo Pärt concerts to Ariel Pink and rave parties. Kasela has invested his time and money into the **Kai Art Center** and restaurants but was also actively involved in selecting and inviting different 'craftsmen with character' to settle in the neighbourhood, such as the **Põhjala Brewery** and **Tap Room**, the decoration business **Shishi** and the whole Kai complex with its restaurants and bars.

"The special DNA of Noblessner can be characterised by the fact that Tallinn's most expensive real estate co-exists with the darkest underground club: **HALL.** The aim is a happy, lively neighbourhood — freedom, individualism, a high quality public space where different stakeholders form a symbiosis. We only live once and real estate development should think about happiness, not just walls and square meters."

For Kasela, Noblessner is also a logical extension of Tallinn's 'museum mile', together with the **Seaplane Harbour** nearby and Fotografiska in Telliskivi. Unlike in Tallinn's Old Town, this is a place where tourists meet locals, not just as service personnel but as residents and visitors alike.

Of the 12 historic industrial buildings of the complex, the majority have been reconstructed with others soon to follow. The two flagship buildings — the former foundry and the ship systems' workshop — have been reimagined by **KAOS Architects**, a team of **Margit Aule** and **Margit Argus**, well-versed in the restoration of Estonia's heritage-protected buildings. They are approaching the challenge by creating a conversation between the old and the contemporary.



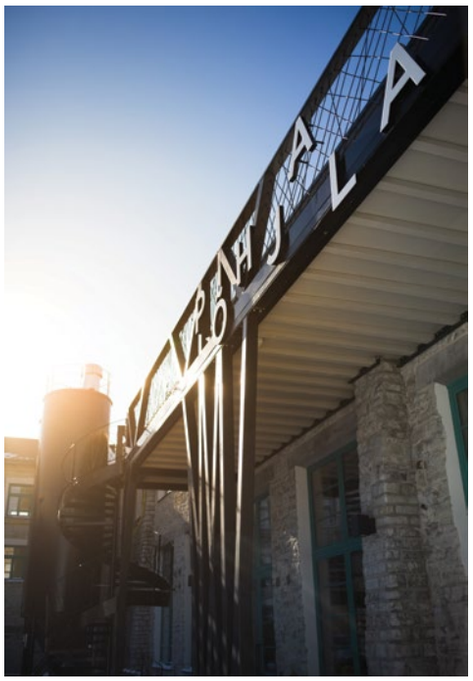






Photo by Renee Altrov

Dining

Põhjala Brewery and Tap Room
A recommendation of the Kai team for after-work drinks. A great selection of craft beer, kimchi sandwiches and a sauna!

Kampai
The first izakaya-style Japanese restaurant in the Baltics, led by chef Hide Hirakata and sommelier Oskar Pihlik.

Lore Bistroo
A new hit by well-known restaurateurs Janno Lepik and Kristjan Peäske (Resto Leib, Umami). Beautifully designed by Marit Ilison, with sea views and fireplace.

180 degrees
The place for gourmet dining. The first restaurant to open in Noblessner, founded by the German Michelin star chef Matthias Diether, who came to Estonia via the kitchen of Alexander of Pädaste manor and decided to settle down with a place of his own.

Proto Café
Casual dining opportunity at the Proto Invention Factory.

Bakery Suhkruingel
A definite recommendation by the Kai team.

Stay tuned for more to come!



Põhjala Brewery and Tap Room



Bakery Suhkruingel











Photos by Aron Urb

Artistic heart of Noblessner

Kai is a new international art centre in a reclaimed submarine plant dating back to 1912. Kai includes an auditorium and education centre in addition to the sprawling main exhibition space with its 6-meter-high ceiling and gracefully arching roof.

The **Estonian Contemporary Art Development Center** has finally found a home in the former industrial ruin and filled it with top-end international art, cinema, education and events.

Karin Laansoo, programme director of Kai Art Center, wants to create synergy between Estonian and international art and elevate the awareness of Estonia's art scene to a whole new level. "Kai defines itself as the artistic heart of Noblessner, offering high culture, entertainment, food and a seaside experience," says Laansoo.


Kampai









Shishi

Kai Art Center hosts an international residents' programme — already immensely sought-after before its actual opening. The first year's application round received more than 300 applications from 61 countries.

The second major exhibition will open in Kai at the end of January with a large-scale light installation by renowned Norwegian artist Anne Katrine Senstad. During some of the darkest months in Estonia, the installation illuminates the dark season of the northern hemisphere. The exhibition envelopes the public in radiance as they wander through its large, 450 m^2 exhibition space. "Radical Light" is accompanied by sound compositions by international composers.

Kai Art Center is an example of public-private partnership in the Noblessner quarter. The reconstruction of the building was a joint effort of the EU Regional Development Fund, the BLRT Grupp AS and Lindermann, Birnbaum & Kasela OÜ. Now the daily activities are operated by the Estonian Contemporary Art Development Center, supported by the Ministry of Culture and sponsors.

Proto Invention Factory, the latest attraction to open in Noblessner's old foundry, follows a similar funding model with 2.4 million euros coming from the European Regional Development Fund.

Something special

Shishi

The Estonian-Norwegian decorations brand has found its new home in one of the old industrial buildings. Shishi designers have decorated the main Christmas tree of Tallinn for many years, and now the first Noblessner Christmas tree of 2019!

HALL

The underground techno club that comes to life well after midnight, when suddenly a queue forms outside one of the two leftover Soviet-era buildings of the quarter, right on the corner of Kalamaja park, once the oldest cemetery in Tallinn. HALL is a place of unlimited freedom.



Proto Invention Factory

A tribute to the experimenting minds

The former shipbuilding hall of the foundry is filled with colourful artefacts, from a floating hot-air-balloon to half a submarine, old train carriage and fantasy-flight-machines. A zip-line curves just below the ceiling. Kids are queuing for attractions, lights, bangs and smoke fill the space — all in all, very lively indeed!

The foundry is probably the most spectacular building of the complex — it was first rediscovered for its amazing acoustics by conductor **Tõnu Kaljuste**, who has used it to stage special musical events throughout the last decade, including the historic production **"Adam's Passion"** by **Arvo Pärt** and **Robert Wilson**. But in its raw state, the building was not really a sustainable option for an art venue and has now luckily found a multi-purpose function with a unique VR Experience Centre at its core. Proto invites visitors to try antique inventions via a combined sensory and VR-experience, among them are dream objects of mankind that defy the laws of physics.

A brainchild of one of the most accomplished museum-creators, architect **Andrus Kõresaar**, Proto stretches the imaginations of kids and adults alike. Kõresaar was inspired by the location itself: "...the brave mindset of the Noblessner quarter 100 years ago, when submarines were built here, the rapid technological development, the need to invent, the faith that all problems of mankind can be solved by steam engine and bicycle... We looked at the inventions and dreams of this era, as well as those that didn't accept the laws of nature, and brought them to life with virtual reality."

For it not to remain a fantasy world, Proto has been developing educational approaches too. **Ott Sarapuu**, CEO and partner of Motor Agency, wanted to find ways to spark curiosity and exploration in order to go beyond just having fun: "We added several hands-on experiences and will start educational programs in 2020, including a science school. This will encourage our visitors to start inventing themselves."



Photos by Martin Dremljuga

The biggest challenge, according to Sarapuu, was the combination of VR, mechanics, electronics and the physical environment: "It's easy to imagine how to drive a car by moving your body on the seat, but how to actually make it happen? All exhibits are unique and developed by ourselves, there was nothing to copy from."

Kõresaar and Sarapuu have a decade of experience in creating exhibitions and museums but never before such a fantasy world: "It has been quite an effort to create an exciting, true-to-era environment that is rich in detail and authentic, but at the same time sturdy enough to entertain thousands of visitors." Thousands of visitors are indeed streaming to the new centre. Already during the first opening month, 20,000 people from Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Russia visited. Now the team is considering the possibility of exporting the concept.

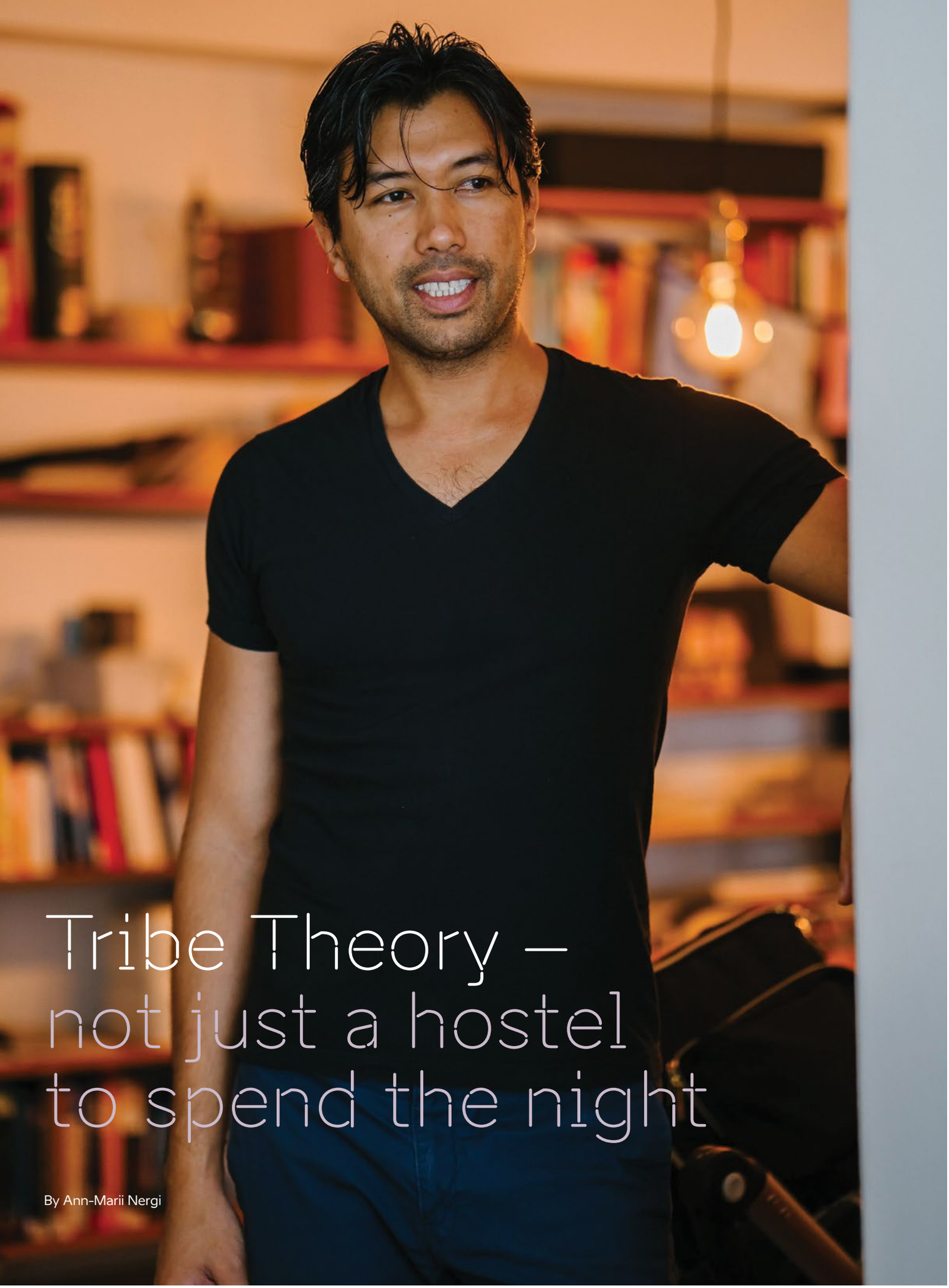
Noblessner is far from being ready. Ann Virkus of BLRT Grupp / Noblessner said that 2020 will see the start of the second phase of development, with 300 apartments and 4000 m^2 of retail space to be added: "The reconstruction of the marina and several historic buildings are also part of the plan, due to be completed by 2027 at a total cost of 250 million euros."



Proto Café







Photos by Tribe Theory

Tribe Theory – not just a hostel to spend the night

By Ann-Marii Nergi







Working for a long time in the finance sector in California, Vikram Bharati moved to Singapore three years ago and founded Tribe Theory — a chain of hostels conducive to building businesses and networks.

The goals are ambitious — by 2030 there should be a Tribe Theory hostel in every major city in the world, in one hundred countries. The first hostel in Europe was opened in Tallinn.

'Life in Estonia' talked to Vikram Bharati, the founder of the Tribe Theory entrepreneurial ecosystem about the past, the present and the future of his mission.

Vikram, first of all, would you introduce yourself and tell our readers a little about your background. What led you to founding the entrepreneurial ecosystem Tribe Theory?

My previous life was in banking. I spent 8 years in JPMorgan, doing client coverage, helping large companies with their banking. Then I decided to make a change and take my life in a different direction and have a sabbatical for six months. But I had so much fun, so I ended up backpacking for two years, travelling around the world! During that time, I was working on projects on my own, building a couple of startups in Bangkok and so on. While travelling, I met my wife Anna and I moved to Singapore because it was where she lived. So, I got a job here in a venture capital fund and I was offered an opportunity to run the funding for early stage startups. And during that time, I was thinking about my next adventure and I actually pitched the Tribe Theory idea to the same fund I was running: that we should create a new category of hostels where the purpose would be business building more than just a place to sleep. It would be for people who want to build a company or are thinking about creating something on their own. They liked the idea and I built a prototype hostel in Singapore. And it was working! So many interesting ideas, people and investment opportunities were coming through our spaces and we realised there's something there. So, we started expanding — we opened in Bangalore, India, then Bali, then we went to Myanmar and now Tallinn. We are opening up in Lisbon, Manila... The goal is to build a new brand of hospitality businesses around the world.

So it might happen that when you stay in Tribe hostels, you could pitch your business idea or find a partner to build something together?

The concept is that in each place, the environment is very conducive for building a business, building things. From the events we organise and networking that happens to eventually the people who stay there — they all try to build things. We want every space to be an ecosystem and instead of doing it in a co-working space, we do it in hostels where ideas and people are moving around and we want to capture that.

Can just travellers stay in these hostels or is it strictly for startuppers?

Yes, absolutely, we don't have any restrictions! In some of our spaces — like Tallinn for instance — up to 80% of visitors are in that category but other places it's more like 20-30%. We have been open in Tallinn for 6 months now and we see a clear opportunity to increase the number of young entrepreneurs staying with us.



Photos by Tribe Theory

Vikram Bharati

Usually all the great startup ideas come from personal needs or problems that a person needs to solve. How about you — did you get your idea while travelling?

Indeed, while solo-travelling in over 50 countries, I always stayed in hostels and met so many people around the world. I built a massive network of friends around the world. I genuinely fell in love with the idea of hostelling, but the thing that was missing was that everywhere I went, every single space was targeted towards travel and tourism — city walks and pub crawls etc. I noticed that all the spaces had three very important dynamics. Firstly, the hostels are great aggregators of people from all around the world. So, if you have 20-30 people from different countries, you have 20-30 ideas. Secondly, it is a great distributing point. Third thing I noticed is everyone staying in a hostel is generally a seeker — seeking for new adventures, opportunities, cultural emerges. And you have a small space filled with young seekers. These three dynamics are so powerful that it dawned on me — we could do so much more in these spaces than travel and tourism. And when I was actively seeking ideas while working for a venture capital fund, I kind of put two and two together. I realised that we could use the spaces to become venture builders.

Our mission now with the company is to enable the creation, through our spaces, of one million businesses in the next ten years, by 2030.

It is a very ambitious mission. How do you keep track of the number of companies created?

It's a good question. We are not keeping very good track right now but we are in the process of building the right systems and tools to be able to track all these things. And we ourselves are a very young company, only a year and a half old, so we have a lot of things to still figure out.

A million businesses by 2030, but how many hostels are you planning to open by then?

The vision is to be in every major city in the world. By 2030, we want to be in 100 countries. And I do believe it's realistic, because with very little resources and with one and a half years we have already done seven countries.

And where in all that is your business model? Is it the hospitality side or all of the rest that you do in the hostels?

If you do a very good job running a hotel or hostel, you generate approximately a 20% margin. So our foundational business model is this. But what we're saying is that we want to do something that no one else does and that's where the real economic value is going to come from. So, we want to focus on the people inside that space where they can create businesses that support the people within the space. This is where very high margins come from - education, venture business — from the talent marketspace. So, all the other businesses on top of the hospitality is where the real economic value will come from. And that's why it is crucial for us to attract a targeted audience. It doesn't have to be 100% and I don't think it will ever be, but even with 40-50% it is good enough for this model to work.

Your Tallinn hostel's country manager is Indrek Pällo, a former Chief Representative Officer at Enterprise Estonia in Singapore. Did you first hear of Estonia when meeting him?

I would say, yes, that our connection to Estonia happened in a very serendipitous way. Indrek was the head of Enterprise Estonia in Singapore and I met him at an event and I invited him to our hostel launch in March 2018. He really liked our idea and he kept coming back to our events and meeting people. When he returned to Estonia, he kind of jokingly said: "Maybe I could help you guys launch it in Estonia?" And that's how it started in Tallinn! But it all happened very interestingly. In Singapore, Indrek introduced us to an Estonian entrepreneur **Rain Rannu**, who was also the managing partner of the early stage investment fund **Superangel**. So Superangel is now one of our main investors and also our board member.

So, opening your first hostel in Europe in Tallinn was a coincidence?

No, it wasn't. Even though I met Indrek by coincidence, I have always been fascinated by Estonia in general and I had never been there until after I met Indrek, who invited me to the Latitude59 conference. Before that I was very intrigued by Estonia — by the e-Residency program, for example. Estonia has some similarities to Singapore — very small country with small population but yet it has had a lot of success compared to its neighbours.

So the reason we decided to start from Estonia and Tallinn specifically was that it is probably one of the most exciting startup cities in Europe. Even compared to Berlin or Amsterdam. I think there's so much more going on than in western European cities. So, for me, the decision was easy to make.

Are you an e-resident of Estonia?

I am and actually the e-Residency program is a very good partner of Tribe Theory. We promote them in all of our spaces, and e-Residency has its marketing materials in all our spaces, and we have done many events promoting them, for example in Bali and in Singapore. Now we're going to Lisbon to Web Summit and doing an event with the e-Residency team there.



At the time of publishing this article, Tribe Theory was in late-stage discussions with a world-renowned venture capitalist from Silicon Valley who is considering adding some fire power to this concept. This will be announced in early 2020.

What is Tribe Theory Academy?

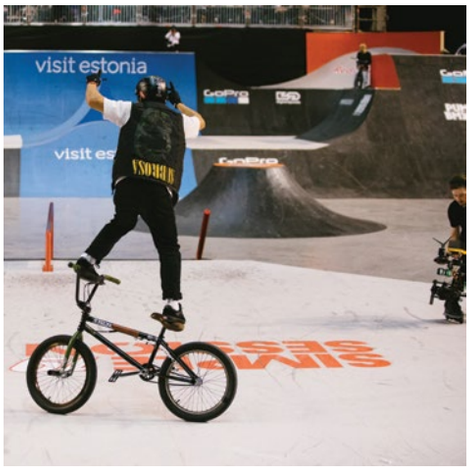
Tribe Theory Academy is a venture designed to lift students and entrepreneurs to the next level. Running 2-3 week and even up to 6-month-long programs in which each will target a specific skillset and get students connected with successful and experienced leaders in their fields. Vikram Bharati describes the Academy's first program which was held in Singapore for 26 Australian students. This particular program lasted for two weeks and, judging by the feedback, it was a great success. Because of its short duration and travel component, it is especially exciting for students. Aside from learning new skills and attending seminars, there was real-life experience because the Academy partnered up with large companies such as Google and BMW and students were actually building projects for these companies.

"We are still testing it, but we can definitely also come to Tallinn with the program because, when we asked many of our potential students which country they want to go to, then Tallinn was their second preference after Japan!" Bharati says now they are thinking of doing a small program in Tallinn next winter.

Bharati's wife Anna was involved in building Tribe Theory from the start and she is also one of the mentors on the Academy's list. "Although she recently left her full-time job at McKinsey to start her own consulting firm, she is going to spend some of her time as our CFO. She is mentoring at Tribe Theory Academy because she has a lot of experience from McKinsey with the future of work and merging data to understand organisations," says Vikram Bharati.

How much does it all cost? The two-week program, for example, cost 3000 Singapore dollars (ca 2000 euros), which included everything except the flight tickets. "It's not cheap, but also prohibitive for students. Why we chose Australian students to be first is because the Australian government pays for these types of educational programs," Bharati explained.

Events calendar: Highlights from January to April
Life in Estonia recommends



Simple Session
8th — 9th of February
@ Saku Arena, Tallinn

The annual Simple Session BMX & skateboarding contest — one of the world's most anticipated action sports events — will take place for the 20th time. SS20 will be hosting over 100 top athletes from around the world. With 30+ different countries represented, Simple Session has grown into one of the most international extreme sports events out there. The unforgettable contest will be followed by unstoppable after-parties that form together one awesome festival experience.

www.session.ee
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The European Sauna Marathon
15th of February @ Otepää

This sauna marathon sees that registered teams experience as many of the saunas in and around Otepää as possible over a period of six hours. The start is at midday; teams are given orienteering maps. All of the members of a team must be in each sauna for at least 3 minutes, with bonus points for dips in ice holes and cold-water pools and use of other attractions provided by the sauna owners. The team that visits all of the saunas in the shortest time wins, with awards presented to them with the sauna owners at Kääriku Sports Centre. Bring your friends and join in the fun!

Euroopa Saunamaraton Otepääl



Tartu Marathon
16th of February @ Otepää

Tartu Marathon is the largest ski marathon in Eastern Europe, bringing together nearly 10,000 participants each year. The Tartu Marathon's tracks are located in beautiful Southern Estonia and it is possible to choose between 63 and 31 km distances. Foreign visitors have said that this trail is one of the most beautiful and interesting in the world. Tartu Marathon is part of the international Worldloppet cross-country skiing series. For the second time, there will be a Vintage Race during the marathon as well; covering the same distance with skis made before the year 2000 will be a totally new experience.

www.tartumaraton.ee/en
Tartu Maratoni Kuubik
tartu maraton



Tallinn Fashion Week
19th — 20th of March @ Tallinn

Tallinn Fashion Week is an event that has been organised by the Estonian Fashion Council since 2007. TFW is a dialogue with fashion consumers that develops society's awareness of design and promotes cooperation between different areas of design. The programme includes several fashion events, including designer shows, exhibitions of fashion drawings, seminars, and performances. Naturally, guests can also enjoy a show of the latest trends in the Estonian clothing industry.

www.estonianfashion.eu
Tallinn Fashion Week



Tallinn Music Week
25th — 28th of March @ Tallinn

Tallinn Music Week (TMW) is one of the biggest indoor festivals in the Nordic-Baltic region. The artist line-up presents over 100 Estonian and international acts from diverse musical genres, attracting an enthusiastic audience of nearly 20,000 music lovers from Estonia and abroad. Apart from the main frenzy taking place in the capital's finest venues, there's a way to discover a lesser-known side of the city, free pop-up concerts, pub-quiz style chatter, culinary delights and art exhibits within TMW's sub-programmes and fringe-events, City Stage, TMW Talks, TMW Tastes, TMW Conference and more.

www.tmw.ee
tallinnmusicweek
tallinnmusicweek
tallinnmusicweek



Võhandu Marathon
18th of April @ Võhandu River, South Estonia

One of the world's toughest and most beautiful canoeing marathons, located in southern Estonia, is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year. A wonderful but extreme 100-kilometre-long river will give you an excellent opportunity to see the wild nature of Estonia.

www.vohandumaraton.ee
Vohandu Maraton
vohandumaraton

Events calendar



Jazzkaar 2020
17th — 26th of April @ Tallinn & different locations across Estonia

The 31st Tallinn International Festival, Jazzkaar, will delight jazz lovers with concerts by Grammy-awarded American stars, the vocal jazz legend Dee Dee Bridgewater, the trendsetter for the new generation, Cécile McLorin Salvant, guitar genius Marc Ribot with the band Ceramic Dog, as well as the magical Scandinavian super group, Rymden and Cyrille Aimée, a French singer who has risen into the starry sky of jazz vocalists. Check the full festival programme on our website.

www.jazzkaar.ee
jazzkaar
jazzkaar



Jõhvi Ballet Festival
19th — 26th of April @ Jõhvi

The festival hosts both the performances of guest ballet companies and numerous Estonian ballet studios. The versatile festival program meets the expectations of a wide audience, including dance performances for children as well.

concert.ee/en/kontserdi-kategooria/johvi-ballifestival-en/
Eesti Kontsert



Haapsalu Horror and Fantasy Film Festival (HÕFF)
30th of April — 3rd of May @ Haapsalu

A four-day, independent film festival focusing on the best genre films from recent years, exploring the darker and odder side of cinema: from fantasy to horror, forgotten classics and special retrospectives to extreme films.

www.hoff.ee

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