



National Museums in Estonia

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Summary

In order to describe the rationale and practice of establishing national museums in Estonia, our research group chose four major institutions: the Estonian History Museum, the Estonian National Museum, the Art Museum of Estonia, and the Estonian Open Air Museum. These museums are not listed here with the intention of presenting a hierarchy, either past or present, but rather of following a chronological sequence. On the other hand, the initiatives and processes that led to their founding appear inherently related, if not more than institutionally: the National Museum was originally conceived as a counterpart to the History Museum in order to defy the prevalent ethnic representations; the founding of the Art Museum was initiated inside the National Museum institution, to defy geographic placement; the Open Air Museum was conceived and initiated by the staff of the National Museum. In general, the history of museums in Estonia can be characterised by various oppositions, based on ethnicity, locus, or political agenda. In the nineteenth century, the earliest museum initiatives were related to territorial divisions and aspirations for national identities under the rule of the Russian Empire first by the Baltic Germans, whose example was followed later by ethnic Estonians. The national ideas that circulated among the Estonian intellectuals interpreted (peasant) folk culture as the historical legacy of the Estonian nation. Folk heritage was seen as a substitute for genuine Estonian high culture. To this overall frame of national discourse was related a claim concerning salvage ethnography – to preserve valuable representations of the past. Therefore the major endeavours in the early twentieth century were defined by ethnographic interests, which may explain the eventual nature of the current major museum institution that is called the Estonian National Museum. National arguments have been supported by ethnographic arguments both in professional and public narratives through different times and political regimes.

In the following article, the 'Introduction' gives a synopsis of the political history of Estonia, followed by an outline of the development of the museum system in the contemporary socio-political context. The four case studies stand in chronological order and each of them is provided with a summarising annotation. The historical and political developments of Estonia are most prominently addressed in the presentation of the Estonian History Museum. The other museum cases should be read against this backdrop to a certain extent. Due to changing political powers, all four museums have been renamed several times along with changing actors. Though missing in the summary table, those details are provided in the Annex table at the very end of the article.

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Summary table, Estonia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Estonian History Museum	1864	1842	Civil society	Civil society (original) Independent state agency (present)	Archaeology, Numismatics, Social and Political History	Territorial representation	8000 BC to the present.	Various existing buildings, located in the centre of the capital, the Old Town of Tallinn.
Estonian National Museum	1909	1860s 1907	Civil society	Civil society (original) Independent state agency (present)	Ethnographic collections	Territorial representation	12 th c. to the present.	Various existing buildings located either in the city centre or in solitary location (Raadi Estate), in Tartu.
Art Museum of Estonia	1916	1911	Civil society	Civil society (original) Independent state agency (present)	Visual Art	Territorial and universal	13 th c. to the present.	Various existing buildings, most prominent the Kadriorg Palace. Post-modern building (2006), Tallinn.
Estonian Open Air Museum	1957	1913/1925	State	Ministry of Culture (original) Independent state agency (present)	Rural Architecture, Ethnography	Territorial representation	19 th and 20 th c. rural architecture.	Park area by the sea, complex of re-located rural buildings, Tallinn.

Introduction

In the nineteenth century, Estonia was part of the Baltic Provinces of the tsarist Russian Empire, in its northwestern corner. At the time, present-day Estonia was administratively divided into two provinces: *Estland Provinz* (*gouvernyia* according to the administrative term in Russian) in the northern half, and *Livland Provinz* in the southern (which extended to modern Latvia). These provinces were integrated by the Baltic *status provincialis* (*der baltische Landesstaat*) that recognised and preserved the Baltic German nobility's (feudal) rights in Estonia and Livonia. The ruling landowning and administrative power was in the hands of the Baltic German minority, while the ethnic Estonian majority were rural peasants who only gradually emancipated from landless serfdom during the first half of the century. Thus, the commencement of the museums occurred understandably in the Baltic German setting and carried the label of ethnic identities and political contradictions: first in the context of Baltic German identity under the administratively dominant Russian rule, then of the burgeoning ethnic Estonian identity to contest either of them, with an aspiration to gain cultural and eventually political independence. The 'Estonian national awakening' cultural movement that sprang forth in the second half of 1800s advanced the aspiration of national statehood in concurrence with the turbulent years of Russian Revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The independent Republic of Estonia was proclaimed in the turmoil of the First World War in 1918. Although the two-year War of Independence followed this declaration, after the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920, Estonia became a democratic parliamentary republic. This new state underwent a number of economic, social and political reforms; the Baltic nobility lost their privilege, their large estate holdings were redistributed among the peasants and War of Independence volunteers. The Estonian national claim was made predominant, ensuing a period of cultural advancement, including the proliferation of museums, both as civil society or public office initiatives. Notwithstanding, the historical division of territory had brought about a rivalry between two cities, the intellectual centre and university town Tartu in south-central Estonia, and the economic draw and established capital Tallinn on the northern shore. This is also reflected in the location of museums of national merit and scope in Estonia, while the re-imagining of the centre–periphery tension has continued.

Prior to the Second World War, Estonia was occupied under the aegis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Stalinist regime, and annexed (together with Latvia and Lithuania) by the Soviet Union in 1940. During the war, Estonia was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1941, and then reoccupied by the Soviet Union in 1944. The alternating occupations meant, by 1945, the total reorganisation of the museum system according to the Soviet rule and ideological agenda, where everything 'national' was substituted by 'state' (nation and state were not considered equivalent), and administered by the pattern set in Moscow. During the Soviet period, the previously predominant national arguments disappeared from the official discourse, glossed over by a different ideological rhetoric; the organisation of agriculture into collective farms and the centralised Soviet industrialisation programme with forced population shifts denoted radical change in the representation of the socio-economic history; along with everything else, cultural activities became subject to the total political control of the Communist Party. This meant a complete 'rewriting' of the narrative in the museum

representation, alongside transformations and relocations of museum collections. However, for the local institutions the significance of ‘national’ became unofficially equated with ‘ethnic Estonian’, with a particular agenda of preservation and safeguarding regardless of the official façade.

The end of the 1980s saw the rise of civic movements, the earliest being those of environmental and cultural heritage protection, which included popular rallies with mass singing. This process, which worked towards the goal of the reinstatement of democracy and independence, was dubbed the ‘Singing Revolution’.¹ Estonia succeeded in regaining independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. Initially, the transition was difficult, but the economy rebounded and showed a level of stability among other post-Soviet or Eastern European countries. Estonia transformed its status and political standing upon entry to the European Union in 2004.

In the last two decades, the status and function of the national museums radically changed again. They have both thrived as repositories of heritage and memory, but also struggled with economic difficulties. On the other hand, all four museums under scrutiny in this report have made considerable effort to transform themselves into modern institutions of culture, and also to become memory institutions for the independent state of Estonia. And yet, the national narrative presented in these museums mainly continues to bring forward the imaginary, based more on exclusions than inclusions, reflecting the historical traumas of ethnic Estonians, although the discrepancies of the representation and target audience are gradually being acknowledged.

National museums and cultural policy in Estonia

The process of institutionalisation denotes, in essence, relocation from the margins to the centre – the establishment of canons, the conceptualisation of paradigmatic truths and the fixation of socio-cultural practices or products in a meaningful, manageable and celebrated format. The formation of a cultural/academic institution – both from the perspective of matter and practices – involves categorisations, exclusions and inclusions in identifying the knowledge to be sought and the representations created. This process is never neutral or impersonal; it is inspired by socio-political agendas as well as reverberated personal histories. In knowledge, we are dealing with human concepts and their deployment, which depend on judgements made by an agent, and applications determined by particular legitimations. The making of museums, i.e. the establishment of depositories for past repertoires, and for records of past cultural practices and artefacts, has inherently served the purpose of creating a national cultural heritage. However, the value-laden conceptualisation of heritage depends on the historical context and a particular socio-political situation.

The origin of national museums in Estonia is related to the developments of nineteenth century interests in collecting as part of cultural or learned societies, following the previous private collections of curiosities, minerals, archaeological findings, samples from nature, etc., assembled mainly by (amateur) scholars or university intellectuals.

The division of the Baltic Provinces into the *guberniyas* of Estonia, Livonia and Courland (from north to south, covering roughly present-day Estonia and Latvia) meant for these territories the administrative distribution into Estland and Livland Provinces, which gave rise to the historical rivalry of two cities: Tallinn (then Reval) as the ‘economic capital’ of Estland Province; and Tartu

(then Dorpat) as the intellectual hub of Livland Province, the ‘capital’ of which was actually Riga. These divisions also criss-cross the national narratives of later times.

In Tallinn/Reval, the first public art exhibit was organised in 1798, and the first public display of curiosities and antiquities dates back to 1822, when local pharmacist Johann Burchard arranged an exhibition of his collection, called *Mon Faible*. The first museum initiatives of Tartu/Dorpat were related to academic settings and learned societies. The earliest academic collections were founded with the University of Tartu/Dorpat as the *Naturalien Cabinet*, or (*Akademische*) *Naturhistorische Museum* in 1802 and *Museum der Kunst der Universität Dorpat* in 1803, although access to them was limited until their opening to the general public in 1862. Nearly all learned societies found in the Baltic provinces declared interest in collecting antiquities from their native region, while an important role was played here by the *Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands zu Riga* (Riga Society for the Study of History and Archaeology in the Baltic Provinces of Russia), founded in 1833.

In 1838 in Tartu/Dorpat, the *Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft* (Learned Estonian Society, GEG) was founded with the goal of establishing an ‘Estonian’ museum. Considering the socio-political situation of Baltic German domination in the administration and social functions in urban settings as well as in intellectual initiatives in general at the time, it is important to point out that the GEG practised a membership policy that allowed intellectuals of ethnic Estonian origin to join. In 1843, the university setting also gave rise to the *Central-Museum vaterländischer Alterthümer* at the University of Tartu/Dorpat, but their collection was joined with the GEG collection of antiquities in 1860 to establish a more substantial *Das vaterländische Museum zu Dorpat*. Eventually, the Estonian National Museum was founded in Tartu, in the early twentieth century.

In the north, in Tallinn/Reval, these initiatives were paralleled by the founding of the *Estländische Literärische Gesellschaft* (Estonian Literary Society, ELG) in 1842. This regional society of learned men was, however, in contrast to the more liberal approach in Tartu, exclusively for the members of Baltic German origin. Among its founders were public servants, lawyers, doctors, pastors, artists and most of all teachers, whose activities were channelled through several (initially six) departments dedicated to the study of history, local lore, literature, art, nature and healthcare. According to the first annual report in 1844, the ELG immediately started a collection of historical and natural objects as well as art, while the idea of the museum was already formulated in the first statutes, which encouraged the society ‘to foster a profound study of our homeland through its history, arts, manufacturing, technology and nature research’ (cf. Kuldna 2002: 12).

On the other hand, the ethnic identity of the Baltic Germans started to gain particular weight during the last decades of the nineteenth century because of the administrative Russification policy of the tsarist authorities, which put special pressure on both the Baltic German - as well as ethnic Estonian self-representational agendas and their dedicated cultural institutions - by making them manifest their ethnic background in a more pronounced way. The role of cultural societies also grew rapidly among the ethnic Estonians, which led to initiatives of collecting ethnographic material from rural areas and initiation of an Estonian museum (distinct in the ethnic origin of objects, though universalist by concept). However, these Estonian initiatives could only materialise in the twentieth century, by which time this community had acquired enough economic sustainability to start public collections and establish dedicated societies for the formation of museums. At the same time, these undertakings were inherently related to the

process of imagining a political autonomy and self-government because they formed a social arena for the exchange and expression of ideas about an independent state formation. On the other hand, Estonia was an agrarian country, and the wave of museum initiatives likewise corresponded with the general modernisation period starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

When the Republic of Estonia was established in 1918, museums presenting a particularly ethnic Estonian narrative could obtain certain state support, though the predominant activities were related to governing and registering collections. As all the major museums were initiated, and continued to be managed by particular museum societies or foundations, the state apparently did not want to intervene in the question of ownership because of the fear of losing public financial support, as the young state lacked the means of providing the required subsidies to these cultural institutions. However, in every respect, the Estonian National Museum undoubtedly held the highest priority and position both for the state and for the national narrative.

The devastating results of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact at the end of the thirties led to the *Umsiedlung* (resettlement) of the Baltic Germans, which left a mark on the national narrative that has only recently been addressed from various aspects. In 1940, the sly manipulation of the accession of Estonia to the Soviet state saw the abolition of all societies and the appropriation of museums to state ownership; institutions were closed, redistributed and reorganised: private bodies or foundations governed by respective societies were nationalised while 13 museums (out of a total of 39) whose scope did not match Soviet ideology were liquidated (Kukk 2009: 692; Raisma 2009a: 790). The Soviet museum system, which initiated the status of a central state museum (*riiklik keskmuuseum* in Estonian), was meant to erase or censor the previous historical (and particularly national) narratives, purge collections of ‘suspicious’ material and introduce a centralised system of museum governance and management (including ideological monitoring) in order to introduce a new, Soviet narrative of state and nation. This was particularly obvious in history museums, thus making them into specialised propaganda institutions in the Soviet cultural and academic sphere. On the other hand, it raised the status of those museums that focused on purely ethnographic research and collection. The reception by the public was ambiguous towards such manipulations: history museums were not consolidating institutions in the Soviet period as such institutions were mainly visited under the obligatory visiting programme (introduced in schools, factories, enterprises, for tourist groups), while an ethnographic museum exhibition enjoyed ardent public interest due to the presentation of relatively uncensored ethnic (peasant) history. An art museum would likewise denote a place for acquiring cultural information with more option to avoid Soviet propaganda by its focus on the aesthetic. The second half of the 80s saw a strong shift in the self-narrative of the Soviet state that allowed the ideas of secession to emerge in the public arena, turbulently in the Baltic countries, Estonia included. This phase brought a strong affirmation of the national narrative and a manifold reclaiming of national history that foregrounded all museum institutions as retainers and narrators of the previously forbidden.²

By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, museums acquired newly found significance as places for the representation of the national narrative and the recovery of the previously hidden or censored national memory. Thus, they also played an important part in the restoration of the independent state. On the other hand, due to the collapse of the previous economic system, as

well as cultural regulations and management, museums found themselves facing tremendous hardships in the early 1990s. During the long 1990s, all museums had to learn to re-invent themselves to a certain extent, to fight for their existence, to acquire new skills and principles of modern museology. Their role in public activism increased tremendously. The Estonian Museum Association was established in 1988 as an NGO to acknowledge and value the work of professionals preserving and protecting cultural heritage in museums; today, the membership of the association exceeds 300. It organises regular seminars, conferences and fieldtrips and publishes a professional magazine *Muuseum* (Museum).

Eventually, the Museum Act was passed in 1996 (with minor changes in 2001 and 2003, to correspond more with current administrative and legislative conditions). The Act provides the bases for the activities of museums and the organisation of museum collections. It regulates the activities of state-owned museums, municipal museums and museums of legal persons in public law. A state-owned museum is a state agency in its particular field and is administered by the relevant ministry. The functions and organisation of management of a state-owned museum, the rights and obligations of its director, the structure and other important matters relating to the organisation of activities of a museum are provided for in the statutes, which are approved by a minister. Museums are then free in planning their activities and in replenishing their collections. The Museums Board, an advisory body in shaping museum politics in Estonia and operating within the Ministry of Culture, consists of representatives of museums and founders of museums. The Board can make proposals and express opinions concerning all issues arising from the Museum Act. The Museums Board has the right to examine the activities of a museum and the condition of museum collections on-site.

Today there are 13 central museums, 4 city museums and 14 district museums, with the total number reaching 200. At present, the cultural-historic discourse seems to prevail without an explicit national narrative for museum professionals. However, at the highest administrative level, national arguments have been made central in the contemporary development of Estonian museums in general. The most prominent aims of the strategic plan for the development of Estonian museums are: to support the sustainability of the Estonian national identity and culture, to develop and adapt Estonian culture to world culture, and to prevent the disappearance of the Estonian nation (*21. sajandi Eesti muuseumid 2006-2015; Estonian museums in the 21st century, 2006–2015*). In conclusion, this seems still to reverberate with the agenda of the 1990s: in the newly established independent state, a particular kind of national narrative had to be reaffirmed and re-instated before it might start creating room for a new, more inclusive narrative in which ‘Estonian’ could stand for a multitude of experience and expressions.

Case studies in chronological order

The Estonian History Museum

This is a museum that was founded by a politically dominant ethnic group on a territorial principle in one of the provinces of a large empire, to present a Universalist collection. When the Baltic German domination ended with the establishment of the Estonian Republic, the museum became relatively marginalised without being incorporated into the national imaginary due to its linkage to the previously ruling German minority, although the collections were acknowledged as

outstanding. Under Soviet rule, the museum was transformed into a propaganda institution in order to rewrite history from the Marxist-Leninist perspective of communist socio-political progress, including previous economic strife and class struggles, with the clear goal of erasing the memory of an independent Republic and an attempt to introduce a teleological narrative of making the ‘new Soviet nation’. When the Soviet Union fell and independence was re-established, the museum quickly re-invented itself in the framework of presenting an Estonian national narrative (which testified to the superficial success of the Soviet agenda), and found its goal in re-instituting itself as a memory institution of the Estonian state. Thus this museum continues to enjoy an important political function.

This museum was initially conceived as an undertaking by the *Estländische Literarische Gesellschaft*. From the very beginning, the learned society took the initiative to establish a local history museum with a manifold profile. Their collections were systematised according to the eighteenth century *Kunstkammer*-type museal division: antiquities and rarities, including art and ethnography ('proper cabinet of art'); coins ('cabinet of coins'), and natural objects ('cabinet of natural history'). The scope of the collections was not, however, limited solely to findings from the territory of Estland Province, but was, from the very beginning, quite diverse, incorporating curiosities from places like Greenland, Alaska, Kamchatka, China, Japan, etc.

After these were finally systematised and proper space was found in the medieval St. Knut Guild Hall in the centre of Tallinn/Reval, where the ELG eventually started to rent rooms for a display of its collections and library, the *Estländische Provinzial-Museum* opened its doors to the general public in 1864. In arranging its activities and structure, the *Provinzial-Museum* apparently followed the example of the National Museum in Nuremberg, presenting a universal collection content-wise (Kuldna 2002; Raisma 2009a). Soon after the opening, the museum began to organise informative lectures and exhibitions, bearing in mind the educational role of the museum in disseminating knowledge to the local community (i.e. the Baltic German citizens of the Estland Province). For example, the *Provinzial-Museum* initiated a series of art exhibitions that proved to be a sign of the commencement of public ‘art propaganda’ in Estonia. The museum also carried out archaeological excavations, and organised restoration and conservation of important pieces of ecclesiastical art and architecture. The scope of the museum gradually became more concentrated on the so-called *Heimat*-region (i.e. Estland Province) in its collection activities in order to support a particular territorial identity, while the display of curiosities from far away countries served the purpose of sharing knowledge about universal values (an educational function).

In addition to financial donations from ELG members, the city government, the Chivalry of Estland Province (*Estländische Ritterschaft*) and the Great Guild of Tallinn, which were all institutions run by Baltic German nobility, sponsored the *Provinzial-Museum*. It was mainly members of the ELG that donated new items to the museum, although public appeals were also published in newspapers to collect, for example, ethnographic items. The largest contributions turned out to be personal archives and collections of outstanding antiquarians and scholars like those of pharmacist Johann Burchard³, academicians Karl Ernst von Baer, Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann, and others. The first (partial) catalogue of the museum collections was published in 1875; the second, a complete catalogue, appeared in 1892, reflecting the wide scope of the deposits that were divided at that time into 19 collections (including archaeological items from

Estonia, the Baltic Provinces, Russia, and abroad; antiquities from Egypt, Greece and Rome; ecclesiastical objects; items of clothing and household items; ethnographic items from ethnic Estonians or other peoples of the world; historical objects; coats of arms and seals; bank notes, coins and medals; collections of portraits and other works of art; documents and autographs and objects of natural history). The items collected from Estonia were kept in a separate collection from those acquired from abroad, while ethnographic items collected from ethnic Estonian peasants were regarded as remaining outside of ‘the Baltic German cultural domain’ (cf. Raisma 2009a: 784).⁴ The *Provinzial-Museum* hosted sizeable holdings of natural history: geology, entomology and botany, although remarkable prominence in the ELG was given to the study of history and cultural heritage; the largest and fastest growing collections were those of archaeology and numismatics thanks to systematic activities in this field (cf. Tvaari 2005). The *Estländische Provinzial-Museum* was an institution promoting territorial identity, but at the same time it focused on the Baltic German narrative interpretation of regional history in one of the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire, with the majority ethnic group relatively marginalised. It similarly lacked specific rendering to the Empire, leaving it as only a backdrop to the sites of origin of collection items.

In 1911, the *Provinzial-Museum* was transferred to another location, a large nobleman’s town house at Toompea (Domberg), bought by the *Estländische Literärische Gesellschaft*, an act that boosted the museum’s activities. It had managed to become an important centre of city cultural life with its exhibitions and educational lectures, and developed into the major museum in Estonia. For example, in 1912/13 the ELG had 760 members and the respective museum society ca. 100 members. Many outstanding scholars became eagerly engaged with collecting and the collections, considering the expanded space for public display. Yet the fate of the museum was seriously threatened in the course of the First World War and the turbulent changes in the Russian Empire, although luckily its collections survived and remained intact when the ELG refused to transfer their museum collections to Russia when the state authorities so demanded in 1917.

After the establishment of the independent Republic of Estonia in 1918, at which time Baltic Germans lost their privileged status and this museum enterprise lost its donors, the museum and its founding society reorganised themselves: it was renamed first the EKÜ⁵ *Provintsiaal-Muuseum* (the ELG Provincial Museum), and then the Museum of the Estonian Literary Society, in 1926. It continued to be an essentially Baltic German institution that at first, struggled under the condition of the reduced means of that community, but the museum managed to regain its position and stability by the 1930s. The museum became a symbol of Baltic German ethnic identity (Kuldna 2002: 59), i.e. the identity of the minority group in the newly born Republic of Estonia, where earlier hierarchies were turned upside down. After the successful War of Independence, Estonian authorities confiscated most of the landed property of the Baltic Germans and cancelled their feudal privileges, making them ordinary Estonian citizens who were granted legal cultural autonomy. Consequently, all cultural institutions acquired special meaning to this minority ethnic group, as they had lost their previous political and economic status.

The museum continued to be governed by the *Estländische Literärische Gesellschaft* while additional financial support was acquired from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. The Ministry of Education registered the collections of the Museum and the Museum had to compete with

other new museums, established as national institutions. In the 1930s, the Museum display was rearranged according to chronological and thematic principles.

This development was interrupted by the consequences of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact, which led to the *Umsiedlung* of the Baltic Germans, among whom most of the ELG membership left the country, which was soon followed by the Soviet nationalisation of all institutions and the liquidation of volunteer societies.

In 1940, the Museum of the Estonian Literary Society was appropriated by the Soviet state and, on the basis of its historical, ethnographic and archaeological collections, the State History Museum of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (*Eesti Nõukogude Vabariigi Riiklik Ajaloomuuseum*) was founded.⁶ According to the introduced Soviet museum system, the reorganised institution was granted the status of a central state museum (*riiklik keskmuseum*)⁷, which also entailed regulation and distribution of ideological and institutional guidelines to other local historical museums. With the obvious aim of destroying the previous museum system, as well as of eradicating the national narrative of independent Estonia, museum collections were rather substantially re-distributed between the central museums (with little regard to museum professionals or local interests). The History Museum received some collections of the former Museum of the War of Independence, the Estonian Police Museum, the Estonian Postal Museum, the Estonian National Museum, etc. (Rosenberg 1961: 52; Raisma 2009a: 790). Substantial parts of its previous collections were divided between other museums, in order to build up the Soviet system of thematic museums. For example, the *Provintsiaalmuuseum* collections of sculptures and paintings were taken over by the State Art Museum, while the impressive Natural Science collections were transformed into a separate State Museum of Natural Sciences (*Riiklik Loodusteaduste Muuseum*), founded in 1941 (cf. Kukk 2009: 698–699). This redistribution of the museum collections was continued after the Second World War with the return of Soviet rule.⁸ After the Baltic German specialised museum personnel had left in 1940, a new staff of Estonian scholars was recruited who also took care of the museum holdings during the war and German occupation, as well as participating in the re-evacuation of the collections after the war and attempting to adopt the demands of Soviet ideology in their museum displays. Nevertheless, in 1945–46 the whole administrative and scholarly staff of the History Museum were arrested and repressed by the Soviet regime (Annist 2002). This was followed in the early 1950s by an additional political repression of the personnel, and by the purge of politically sensitive objects, which included documents and items that referred to independent statehood, as well as items deemed insignificant, i.e. without relevant historical or artistic value according to the Stalinist ideological or aesthetic norm. For example, 185 paintings, 307 graphic sheets and 46 plaster sculptures were destroyed, and more than 400 kg of artefacts made of precious metal were melted down in 1951, while in 1953 more than 14 kg of photographic negatives were smashed (Peets 2005; Raisma 2009a: 789–790). In addition, the document archives were newly systematised and censored, so that, by 1960, more than 111,500 items had been handed over to the State Central Archive (Rosenberg 1961: 53). Thus, the memory deposit of the museum was changed drastically, mainly in respect of the Estonian national narrative concerning the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1946, the History Museum and the Museum of Natural Sciences were incorporated into the system of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, which followed the Soviet model of

centralised research, museum and archival institutions. Between 1946 and 1963, museums were under the control of the central government and financed by the state through the Academy of Sciences. In 1963, the status of museums changed again: since then they have been national institutions governed by the Ministry of Culture.

In 1952, the museum moved to its present location into the Great Guild Hall in the medieval old town of Tallinn where the first permanent display was opened in 1956.⁹ The Soviet agenda in museum policy was to establish an ideological norm, to centralise and systematise all collections, and eventually to present a politically edifying and standard-setting display of historical processes and events. A Soviet museum had to rely on the Marxist–Leninist concept of ideology and history, determined by ‘dialectic materialism’ and ‘historical materialism’. This ideological frame caused the development of a permanent exhibition inherently focused on means of production, positioning as the centrepiece the economic history and (inequalities of) social class (Raisma 2009b: 89–90). The display was based on revolutionary changes, struggle, wars, uprisings, etc., in order to render world history as a dialectic development guided by the idea of progress, leading to the communist future of the proletariat state. Therefore national history had also to be retold in this new teleological format, presenting collective public events and officially recognised moments of strife, where personal memories played no role whatsoever.

In the Soviet framework, museums became institutions of ideology in the clearly hierarchical and highly centralised cultural policy system; the displays presented to the public were controlled by the central government through *Glavlit*¹⁰ (Raisma 2009b: 72). However, regardless of the relatively large number of visits, which were attained by including them on the itinerary of regular tourist routes for visitors from all over the Soviet Union and organising obligatory visits for schools and workers’ collectives, the reception of this new narrative remained ambiguous, and never actually succeeded in eradicating the history that had been censored.

On the other hand, the displays reflected, to a certain extent, shifts in the political focus in the course of time, being related to the interpretation of history in concurrence with the ideological issues highlighted by the Communist Party (who guided the ideological interpretations of the state). In the 1950s and 1960s, the permanent exhibitions set primary emphasis on the Great Socialist October Revolution and its guiding force for the following decades. But in 1974, the new permanent display found its central event in ‘the incorporation of Estonia within the USSR’ in the years 1940–1941 (see Raisma 2009b: 85).

The museum was affiliated with subdivisions over the course of years, apparently also related to the relatively limited space for permanent display. In 1957, the Workers’ Cellar (*Töölöste Kelder*) was established as a small subdivision of the museum, to document and commemorate mainly the labour movement of the ‘oppressive and capitalist bourgeois Republic of Estonia’ (Rosenberg 1961: 62; Sillaots 1982: 66).¹¹ In 1970, the first steps were taken to start a sub-project, the Museum of the Comsomol as a subdivision of the History Museum, although no permanent exhibition was ever opened (Raisma 2009a: 791).

In 1975, an additional exhibition hall was affiliated to the museum at Maarjamäe (Orlov¹²) Palace, where, after a long period of planning, renovation and preparation, the Estonian SSR History and Revolution Museum (*Eesti NSV Ajaloo- ja Revolutsiooni Muuseum*) was opened in December 1987. With this acquisition of space in a coastal park area outside the city centre, the medieval and pre-twentieth-century history display was planned to remain intact in the Great

Guild Hall in the old town of Tallinn. The new subdivision was originally meant, in the 70s, to be dedicated to ‘the Friendship of Nations’, according to the official Soviet slogan of developing unification of the different nationalities in the USSR in the course of the process of forming the new, Soviet, nation. The project was intended to interpret ‘the rise of the Soviet proletariat, multinational working class, the revolutionary movement, the Great Patriotic War, as well as the technological revolution and the friendship between the nations forming the Soviet Union’ (Raisma 2009c: 107). However, the profound changes in the ideological atmosphere over the period of 1985-87 determined the inclusion of the presentation of radically different recent events by the end of 1987. For example, the initial scheme was supplemented with displays presenting the public rallies against the Moscow-planned phosphorite mining in northeastern Estonia, the movement supporting the National Heritage Society and the official recognition of the 1949 mass deportations to Siberia (*ibid.*: 108). Thus, it may be concluded that this revolution museum was eventually opened when another, actually happening revolution, i.e. the Singing Revolution, was sweeping across Estonia. The quick response to the changing political climate on behalf of the museum staff (and relevant state officials in the Ministry of Culture) testifies to their aspiration to tell a different story of history to that previously planned by administration officials. It became obvious that the poignant and pressing narrative that the museum wanted to tell was that of the Estonian nation, their loss and suffering in recent history.

Following the turbulent change in the late 1980s, the museum was renamed the Estonian History Museum (*Eesti Ajaloomuuseum*) in 1989, while the opening of such new exhibitions as Three-Coloured Estonia (1989)¹³ and Stalinism in Estonia (1990) testified to the general socio-political transformation. During the course of just a few years, the narrative presented in the permanent exhibition transformed into a representation of the Estonian national paradigm, aimed at re-establishing the previously erased and suppressed collective memory and demonstrating and re-affirming national identity in the public domain.

At present, the Estonian History Museum is a state agency governed by the Ministry of Culture (*Kultuuriministeerium*), being one of the 13 central museums of Estonia. The task of a central museum is to represent a particular field of cultural heritage in its entirety, and to supervise other museums in that field. The Estonian History Museum is financed from the state budget. In its mission statement, the museum promotes itself today as the only museum in the country that presents a comprehensive narrative of Estonian history, while the museum sees its task as being ‘to preserve the memory of the Estonian State, the land and the different nations who either have lived or are still living here, to interpret the historical past and to maintain a cultural identity’ (*Eesti Ajaloomuuseum*). The museum has, on its agenda, a focus on political, social and cultural history with an aspiration of establishing links between local and general European history.

The Estonian National Museum

This museum is inherently intertwined with the narrative of nation-building and state-making, as it was envisioned and eventually founded by the aspiring Estonian nationalists, who first dreamt of cultural autonomy in the period of ethnic Estonian ‘national awakening’ at the end of the nineteenth century. This museum was to represent exclusively the narrative of ethnic Estonians and their cultural expressions. The physical founding of the museum was closely linked to the

burgeoning idea of an independent Estonian state, and hence its prominent status during the period of the pre-WWII republic. Under Soviet rule, the museum lost its facilities and was mutilated into an ethnographic museum-cum-archive in the process. However, it retained a powerful presence in the collective (substantially anti-Soviet) memory of Estonians, which has secured it a prominent position in the national imaginary that has retained the museum in the focus of the national narrative even without other presumed attributes of a national museum.

The Estonian National Museum (*Eesti Rahva Muuseum*, ENM) is today officially considered and venerated as a ‘memory institution’ that had been created as part of a national movement, and has served the cause ever since, although ambivalently under the Soviet regime. However, this definition is problematic when posing the question of whose memory is represented and what does ‘institutionalised memory’ mean. First, it is not located in the capital city Tallinn, but in the university and intellectual hub Tartu in central Estonia. Even the name of this museum is ambivalent – the correct translation of *Eesti Rahva Muuseum* based on modern standard Estonian should be ‘Estonian Folk Museum’, which would better convey its substance and rationale because it has become essentially an ethnographic museum. Notwithstanding this, the name has carried a strong connotation into the present. When the Soviet administrative ruling changed the name to Ethnographic Museum in 1952, there were attempts to restore the original at the end of the 1950s (and occasionally later) with final success only in 1988. And yet there continues to be a significant contradiction in the museum content and the name in English.

The initial idea to establish a museum as a representation of ethnic Estonian culture was formulated in the 1860s by intellectuals of Estonian origin in concurrence with the Estonian national awakening movement. The eventual ENM grew out of the collecting initiatives of mainly two scholarly societies in Tartu: the *Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft* (Learned Estonian Society)¹⁴ and the *Eesti Üliõpilaste Selts* (Estonian Students Society, founded in 1870) that collected artefacts of Estonian origin alongside poetic and narrative folklore. These active intellectuals of the period were greatly inspired by similar activities in Finland. The direct incentive for the foundation of the museum came in 1907 with the death of Pastor Dr. Jakob Hurt, whose extremely large and prominent folklore collection needed a permanent repository. The Museum Statutes, written in 1908 (confirmed by the Livland Province governor), prevision the museum to be a grandiose institution that houses documentations of folklore, of language, material artefacts, folk music and art collections, a library etc., with a focus on the Estonian peasant culture that appeared to be rapidly changing under the pressures of modernisation and urbanisation at the turn of the century. The first official meeting on April 14, 1909 signified the inauguration date of the new museum named *Eesti Rahva Muuseum* (the Estonian National Museum). Tartu was the intellectual centre of the Estonian national movement in the Baltic German ruled province of the Russian Empire.

The main focus of the museum fell on collecting ethnographic objects and repertoires, which was carried out with the assistance of volunteers: schoolteachers, pastors, artists, writers and students. In the first seven years, about 170 volunteers collected ca. 20,000 material objects from all over the country. In order to introduce the museum idea and raise money for the ENM, the Museum activists gave talks, organised exhibitions, and arranged different donation collecting events for the benefit of the museum; all finances for the support of the museum came from private initiatives. As the ENM did not have its own building, the first temporary exhibitions

were held in rooms at *Vanemuine* Theatre in 1911 and in an apartment acquired from the city authorities in 1913.

The situation improved radically for the ENM with the establishment of the independent Republic of Estonia. In the 1920s, it went under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education; the state started to support the museum financially, but not sufficiently for the construction of a new building. Instead, the state assisted the museum obtaining the property of the Raadi Manor estate, which offered a large mansion for exhibiting Estonian folk culture and where the permanent exhibition was opened in 1927. The comprehensive institution of the ENM (reorganised as a state funded foundation in 1931) comprised other collections of mainly the Estonian Student Society, which formed four autonomous subdivisions: the National Library, the Bibliographical Institute, the Folklore Archives, and the Cultural History Archives. These four were housed together in a separate building. This division was materialised substantially when the Soviet regime, according to the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the Estonian SSR, nationalised the Estonian National Museum in 1940 and divided it into two distinct institutions: *Eesti NSV Riiklik Etnograafia Muuseum* (the State Ethnographic Museum of the Estonian SSR), which became profiled more narrowly into the preservation and research of material culture; and *Riiklik Kirjandusmuuseum* (the State Literary Museum), which houses the sub-units focused on collecting verbal lore, written documents and books. Raadi Manor was destroyed during the war, though the collections that had been evacuated from the military zone remained largely intact. Thus, in the course of the Second World War, the ENM lost its impressive and rather vast museum facilities, and the majority of the qualified staff fled Estonia in fear of persecution from the re-established Soviet regime.¹⁵

In 1945, the Ethnographic Museum moved into the former courthouse in Tartu city centre with considerably limited display facilities. The war and the following Stalinist period of persecution and oppression meant the loss of this building, as well as severe problems for museum personnel: those who did not flee were forced to resign, particularly in the 1950 political purge campaign following the 1949 mass deportations, and in connection with the forced collectivisation of farms and rural private property. The positions of museum directors and researchers became heavily politicised in general, being censored until the second half of the 1950s. The status and quality of academic ethnographic studies were considerably reduced due to being labelled a 'nationalist' field. The topics Estonian ethnographers focused on were: farm architecture, agricultural tools and traditional costume, all of which celebrated past peasant society. The defined historical perspective on material objects also provided a more comfortable level of evolutionistic descriptive approach, which gave an opportunity to avoid the ideological manipulation related to social contextualisation in the present. Since the end of the 1950s, the development of the State Ethnographic Museum was restored within the framework of the Soviet political and scientific system. Institutionally, it went first under the jurisdiction of the Estonian SSR Academy of Sciences, but by the 1970s it lost its status as a research institution when it became subordinated to the Ministry of Culture (Viires 1993). Consequently, the museum staff was expected to put considerably more effort into the amassing of artefacts or the popularisation activities of temporary or travelling exhibits, with less attention to the study of ethnographic material or the publication of research results, which was in rather sharp contrast to previous scholarly practice. On the other hand, in the 1960s the then ENM director (now again a

professional ethnologist) commenced a campaign to carry out fieldwork among the Finno-Ugric peoples on Soviet territories, which resulted in rather substantial artefact collections in stock; by the 1980s it had also turned the museum into one of the major institutions - in respect to the representativeness of the Finno-Ugric¹⁶ culture - in the whole Soviet Union. For Estonians, research in the field of Finno-Ugric affinities provided certain cultural agency outside the official Soviet framework as well as versatile ethnographic material.

Despite the active collecting, and mainly due to the lack of display facilities, the Museum was ironically unable to exhibit a comprehensive display of Estonian folk culture during the Soviet period; the permanent display had closed in the 1970s (Konksi 2009). Thus the museum became a kind of archive, with distorted capacity to interact with the public – visitors were shown, with pride, the neatly organised depositories. During the period of re-independence in 1991 - the period of ‘the second national awakening’ and the concurrent substantial reforms - the museum’s predominant aspiration was to build its new facilities. Actually, the initiative and rallies to restore Raadi Manor in its historic form had been an important part of the Singing Revolution. The name ‘Estonian National Museum’ was restored in 1988, and eventually a new permanent exhibition was opened in 1994, when the museum was donated additional facilities in the abandoned Soviet-period Railway Workers’ Club. In 1996, the Estonian Parliament adopted a proposal to support the building of three cultural institutions: the Art Museum of Estonia, the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Music Academy. The plan was to build them one by one; only starting the next once the previous was finished, with the construction of the Art Museum supposed to start in 1999 and of the ENM in 2002. However, even with governmental endorsement, for the latter it still continues to be a project without physical manifestation in the form of construction. First, the decisions regarding these buildings were made in the early 1990s, when, due to turbulent changes, the economic situation was far from favourable to such initiatives. Dedicated efforts to sustain cultural landmarks closely related to the national imaginary were shown, but the priorities were apparently determined by success in the media, and government lobbying by the then directors of these institutions. Finally, the national gallery construction was finished several years later than planned, impairing the efficiency and distribution of financial aid. Today international competitions have been held and blueprints drawn up, and thus the work and the whole development of the Estonian National Museum in the twenty-first century is strongly influenced by the planning of the new museum facilities. In 2008, the ENM Construction Foundation was established and chaired by the Minister of Culture.

The initial idea to restore the one-time museum at Raadi, and the gradual shift in favour of designing a modern building for the ENM also means that conceptualisation of the museum and its social purpose is undergoing change. On the one hand, there has been the necessity to define identities at a time of rapid change by locating and ‘securing old values and repaying history’s debts’ (Runnel et al. 2010). The reinvention of the museum has been closely connected to the questions of collective memory and collective identity, which have, in turn, also been affected by the perceived ‘return to Europe proper’. Because of its fate and its significance in the national imaginary - the historical meaning of the museum in the initial nation-building process, its collections, the site of the magnificent building being substituted by the Soviet airfield – the ENM became part of the negotiations of the wider historical framework of negotiating European and Estonian recent post-war history.

Today, the ENM is one of the thirteen central museums of Estonia, governed by the Ministry of Culture. The ENM is financed from the state budget. ENM collections serve as the bases for the activities of the museum in the field of research and exhibitions. The collections of artefacts are divided into five major groups, containing the largest ethnographic collection in Estonia (more than 100,000 objects), mainly ethnographic artefacts of Finno-Ugric cultures (ca. 10,000 objects) and the items representing more distant cultures (ca. 3,000 objects). The cultural history collection (ca. 20,000 objects) and that of the works of art (more than 1,000 objects) form separate assemblies (Evaluation 2010). The systematic collection activities started directly after the foundation of the museum a century ago, when priority was given to the preservation of the fading peasant culture, with accompanying interest in cultural-historical and archaeological material. The foundation for the Finno-Ugric collection was laid in the 1920s, mainly with objects representing the Livs (a Finno-Ugric ethnic group in Latvia) and Ingrians (in the northeastern border zone with the St. Petersburg region of Russia). Since the 1960s, and with particular efficacy in the 1970s and 1980s, regular annual expeditions were organised to different Finno-Ugric peoples, dispersed in Russia around the Volga region and in the Arctic zone extending behind the Ural Mountains. The basis for the collections representing the peoples of the world was constituted of objects handed over to the museum by the *Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft*, as well as the ones donated by the explorers and missionaries (representing mainly Siberian peoples, but also peoples from China, Africa and elsewhere).¹⁷ The objects currently collected are mainly connected with everyday life in Estonia, as well as those representing the Finno-Ugric peoples and ethnic minorities residing in Estonia.

The ENM has a manuscript archive (2,700 volumes with over half a million pages) of mainly field notes by the staff of the museum, by other researchers, and including also materials sent by the ENMs voluntary correspondents.¹⁸ The ENM collections also comprise ethnographic drawings (over 50,000 items), a collection of photographs (200,000 photographs) and a collection of ethnographic film and video footage.

The 1994 ENM permanent exhibition 'Estonia: Land, People, Culture', being developed and opened in the aftermath of the Singing Revolution in Estonia and represents discourse about ethnic identity, presenting a response to the public expectations of the time when it was compiled in the early 1990s. The display primarily covers different aspects of Estonian folk culture in the past: everyday life, holidays and festivities in peasant life and regional aspects of it. Everyday life and livelihood practices are displayed as dioramas or reconstructed interiors to present a span from life in a barn dwelling (household tools and farm equipment from the nineteenth century mainly) to some aspects of life during the Soviet period (interiors through the twentieth century). Part of the exhibition presents mental life and worldview, explaining different dimensions of the concept of the sacred, starting from sacrificial stones and patterns on textiles and costumes with special meaning, and ending with explanations of various rituals related to the farmers' folk calendar.

In addition to Estonians, Coastal Swedes (inhabiting the western coast and islands between the fourteenth century and 1944), and the Russian-speaking Old Believers in the Lake Peipsi region (on the eastern border) are briefly introduced within the framework of regional differences in traditional folk culture, especially clothing. Their representation is embedded in distinct geographic regionality without direct reference to the national narrative. However, the

ethnographic study of Coastal Swedes is more thoroughly internalised into the ethnographic imagery of national past, whereas the folk culture of Lake Peipsi Russians gained attention only recently, since the 1990s.¹⁹ The permanent display refers to the Baltic Germans only indirectly. They are part of the discussions about the economy of the past rather than the ethnic diversity of the country. The permanent exhibition includes a Baltic German manor interior with the remaining parts of the furniture from Raadi Mansion used to introduce an economic unit and styles in furniture history without focused reference to ethnicity. The framework of nation-building is dependent here largely on a class distinction: the Swedish and Russian Old Believer communities have been considered socially equal to the majority group of ethnic Estonians, while the Baltic Germans represented 'landlords', the suppressing upper class and nobility, and therefore inherently alien outsiders to the national imagery.

As the exhibition was opened soon after the nightly singing rallies and newly re-established statehood, part of the display is dedicated to the national identity and patriotism issues under the title 'To Be Estonian Feels Proud and Good' (a quotation from the lyrics of a popular pop-rock song composed in the late 1980s and widely performed during the independence movement). This exhibition was designed, to begin with, with the hope of replacing it within a few years with a bigger and more balanced display (in the new facilities), but it has served visitors now for more than fifteen years without any extensive changes. In its approach to the visitors, it is monological and didactic and although the curators have attempted an approach to the history of mentalities, the collections and available resources apparently limited their choices considerably (Reemann, n.d.). Topics remaining outside the prevailing discourse are presented and tackled with the help of temporary exhibitions, while trying to introduce both cultures from abroad and unravel and interpret different aspects of the modern Estonian society. Since 2004, the ENM has organised an annual film festival called Worldfilm/*Maailmafilm*, presenting anthropological documentaries with rigorous analytic approaches to world cultures. During recent years, the museum has apparently consciously tried to promote new projects related to temporary exhibits, while providing participatory opportunities and information to all kinds of audiences rather than the single target audience of the early 1990s.

The Art Museum of Estonia

This is a museum that initially grew out of the wish to establish a branch of the Estonian National Museum in the capital Tallinn, but due to lack of support for such duplication on the part of the state, eventually focused on art collecting. Its relatively weak position is reflected in its loss of prominent facilities. During the Soviet period, it became a central art institution with major collections and rather strong public recognition when, from the 1960s, the Estonian art scene managed to somewhat distance itself from the Soviet political agendas. During the re-established Estonian state, this museum had gradually received substantial subsidies from the state, including the first original museum building in Estonia. The narrative of the museum, in relation to the narrative of acquiring or losing facilities, likewise reflects the social position of an art institution over time.

In 1911, an idea circulated to set up a distinct art museum in the medieval Town Hall of Tallinn after the building of a new hall, which eventually never happened. In 1915, the Tallinn Department of the Estonian National Museum (*Eesti Rahva Muuseumi Tallinna Osakond*) was

founded by the initiative of a young art student and ENM collaborator August Pulst. The museum managed to open to the public in a few rooms in 1916, despite the ongoing World War. The ENM Tallinn Department aspired for independence, and in 1919 they reorganised into a sovereign *Eesti Muuseumi Ühing Tallinnas* (Association of the Estonian Museum in Tallinn) with their respective Estonian Museum (*Eesti Muuseum*),²⁰ creating thus another museum housing both ethnographic collections and art collections apart from the ENM. This caused rivalry between the two in obtaining the position of primary national importance and in acquiring state subsidies. In the 1920s, the Ministry of Education advocated the idea of establishing the state (national) museum in Tallinn and thus supported the museum in the capital, but the ENM managed to prove itself as the ethnographic and cultural-historical museum. The Estonian Museum gradually concentrated more on collecting works of art of different kind and was therefore affiliated to the Ministry of Education. The art collections were initially started in 1912-1913 when 80 sculptures by renowned Estonian artist August Weizenberg were purchased. During the 1920s, foreign art collections were acquired mainly from nationalised manor houses previously owned by the Baltic Germans, while artworks were also bought from the Baltic Germans and from Estonian artists.

In 1921, the Estonian Museum was housed in Kadriorg Palace, a former summer residence of the Russian Tsars,²¹ where now prehistoric collections, folk costumes, wooden vessels, quilts, art history and cultural history were displayed. A renewed and modernised exhibition opened in 1927, exhibiting a variety (Estonian, Baltic German, West European, etc.) of art as well as ethnographic items on a smaller scale. However, shortly afterwards, the museum was moved to another, less impressive and less spacious building, when Kadriorg Palace was claimed by the Estonian government as the President's residence. Evidently, this museum had not yet managed to establish a relevant social position with their rather small Estonian (art) collections and was unable to hold on to these facilities of historic significance (Kalm 2010: 245). In 1928, the institution was renamed the Art Museum of Estonia (*Eesti Kunstimuuseum*, AME), and its ethnographic collections were handed over to the ENM in the 1930s. During that decade, the museum society of the AME continued to purchase modern Estonian as well as Western European art.

In 1940, in a similar way to the transformation of other museums, the AME was nationalised and renamed the State Art Museum (*Riiklik Kunstimuuseum*). As well, two consecutive museum directors were arrested and deported to Siberia in 1941 (Kukk 2009: 695). During the Soviet bombing of Tallinn in 1944, the museum facilities were burnt down along with a substantial part of the applied art collections and museum library, although fortunately most of the art collections were saved (Kirme 2007: 25–26). After the Second World War, the museum was reorganised into the Tallinn State Art Museum (*Tallinna Riiklik Kunstimuuseum*), and Kadriorg Palace, which had served as a seat for administrative power (Estonian, Soviet and Nazi-German) and was given to the Art Museum once again.²² However, first the museum had to share the building with the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Estonian SSR, which entailed the removal of displays for government receptions (five times in 1946, seven in 1947, and eleven in 1948). In addition, the wings of the Palace were divided into apartments, which left less space for the growing collections. This situation ended only gradually by the turn of the 1950s/1960s.

Museum personnel were oppressed in the 1950 political purge campaign, while the best part of the Estonian art from the first half of the twentieth century was firmly closed into the

repositories. The first exhibitions after the war were still able to present national elements, but since the early 1950s onset of Stalinist repressions, museum display emphasis was laid on Estonian art preceding the October Revolution (for example, it limited to a few artists who had studied in St. Petersburg), and works of art of the so-called Socialist Realist style. In this period, applied (decorative) art began to thrive because of the possibility of focusing the artistic skills and expression solely on the aesthetic; at the same time the style of the 1930s was reintroduced. From the end of the 1950s and the following political thaw onwards, Estonian art has worked out its ‘protective mechanism’ via applied art (attributed the lowest rank in the hierarchy of art ideology) against the Sovietising trends of Socialist Realism (Helme, Kangilaski 1999: 141). From the 1960s onwards, art and museum policy became more liberal, there were exhibitions on previously forbidden and new modern, more avant-garde, artists. In 1969, when the museum celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, it was renamed the Estonian SSR State Art Museum (*Eesti NSV Riiklik Kunstimuuseum*).

If, in 1952 the Museum possessed 16,000 artworks, the collections had grown to 20,000 by the early 1970s, and 120,000 visitors were registered per year. Art life was rather dynamic in Estonia in the 1960s and 1970s, considering the circumstances, while artists from all over the USSR came to Estonia to see exhibitions and to be in contact with local artists. However, the regulations for collecting and exhibiting in museums continued to be strict: the policy of art purchasing followed the general ideological trends of the time; the whole process was subjected to the rigid control of the Art Deposit of the Estonian SSR (*ENSV Kunstifond*). Although from the end of the 1960s the Museum was allowed to arrange exhibitions on Estonian art from diasporas, there was a gradual tightening of borders in the 1970s, so that many works significant in the history and development of Estonian art could only be obtained after 1991 (cf. Helme 2006: 28–29).

An important role in negotiating policies between the authorities and the art institution was played by museum director Inge Teder, who held the post for decades between 1966 and 1991. She was the main initiator of various developments in the Art Museum: a new exhibition policy reaching out to tourists in the summer period, while the winter season was intended for local people. The pride of the museum was a display of international and local applied art that became a calling card of Estonian culture (Polli 2010). This led to the establishment of a special institution for applied art in 1971, and eventually the Museum of Applied Art was opened as a branch of the AME in 1980 (Ajamustrid 2008: 7).²³ This was followed by other specialised branches of the Art Museum in Tallinn (Niguliste and Adamson-Eric) in the 1980s, and also in Kohtla-Järve and Narva in northeastern Estonia, bordering with Russia.

The socially turbulent end of the 1980s and turn of the 1990s did not see a substantial shift in the role of the Art Museum of Estonia in the national imaginary, over and above its already relatively well-established reputation. However, its economic situation deteriorated with the commencement of extensive restoration of Kadriorg Palace, due to which the AME was moved to the Knighthood Building²⁴ in the medieval centre of Tallinn in 1991. Regardless of the severe limitations imposed by these conditions, the museum started to develop new directions in research, namely of Baltic German art, and Estonian avant-garde art of the 1910–20s, of the 1960s, as well as of the Estonian diasporas, with corresponding exhibitions (cf. Levin 1995: 7). In 1993, the new permanent exhibition was opened at Knighthood Building depicting artworks from Estonia dating between the nineteenth century and the 1940s. The collecting process turned

out to be relatively continuous and rather steadily financed during the decade of the 1990s, and consequently the Art Museum of Estonia may possess the most comprehensive collection of recent art in the Baltic countries (Komissarov 2010a: 160). The AME possesses jointly the largest collection of Estonian art through history, which comprised in total approximately 58,000 items in 2009: paintings, the graphic arts, sculptures, plastic arts, precious metal, photographs and video. In 1996, parliament adopted the decision to start the process of constructing a new building for the AME, which eventually took more than ten years due to insufficient state subsidies. The KUMU (*KUnsti MUuseum*) opened in 2006 as the new main building of the AME, an impressive architectural achievement that has granted the museum an opportunity to arrange exhibitions in size unthinkable in any of the previous periods.²⁵

Today, the AME is also one of thirteen central museums in Estonia, governed by the Ministry of Culture. There are five active branches of the museum: Kadriorg Art Museum, Niguliste Museum, Adamson-Eric Museum, and the KUMU Art Museum. Kadriorg and the KUMU are housed in separate buildings, though closely situated, in Kadriorg Park green to the west of Tallinn city centre (and in the neighbourhood of the President's Palace); the two other branches, Niguliste and Adamson-Eric stand on either sides of the same street in Tallinn's old medieval centre. Niguliste²⁶ Museum houses ecclesiastical Medieval and Baroque art from between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. The Adamson-Eric Museum houses a varied personal collection and temporary exhibits.

The long years of restoration and construction of the new facilities allowed the AME to reorganise its structure and collections: foreign art has been given a section in the Kadriorg Art Museum, while the national gallery and contemporary art have been given sections in the KUMU Art Museum. The permanent exhibition of the Kadriorg Art Museum presents West European (Dutch, German, English, French, Italian) and Russian art from the period between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. The permanent exhibition at the KUMU Art Museum is divided into three parts: the historical classics of Estonian art (from the eighteenth century until WWII), the exhibition of Estonian art from 1945 until 1991, and contemporary art. The first part, what could traditionally be called a national gallery, 'tracks down changes in the Estonian mentality as well as in art styles' (*Eesti Kunstimuuseum*). It seeks to overcome the historical dichotomy between national and Baltic German and to stress the importance of territoriality and plurality (see Abel 2010), whereas the previous national imaginary concerning art history continuously compartmentalised and drew a sharp distinction between pre-twentieth-century Baltic German art and that of the first professional ethnic Estonians, starting from the end of the nineteenth century. The second part of the display deals in depth with the relationship between the Soviet state and art, showing the dramatic changes in society that took place after the Second World War and introducing different artistic styles and movements that evolved during the decades, juxtaposing them and putting them in context of the developments in Western Europe (Komissarov 2010b). A gallery of contemporary art that presents the more recent major works in Estonian art forms the third part of the museum (Komissarov 2010a). To meet these purposes, the exhibitions are temporary and try to expand the understanding of the aspirations of contemporary art among the general public. Since its opening, the KUMU Art Museum has turned out to be the most visited museum in Estonia.

The AME is considered the most important art institution in Estonia today, and plays an active part in cultural life by organising various exhibitions and different cultural events. The statutes of the AME (2005) state: ‘The main purpose of the AME is to collect and preserve Estonian professional art and foreign art, as well as to study, promote and publish relevant materials. The AME enhances Estonian professional art as a part of national cultural heritage.’ (*Eesti Kunstimuuseumi Põhimääärus*, 2005). The AME aspires to participate in the international communication of visual culture and to mediate its multicultural aspects. The most important of which, for territorial and ethnic identity, are the permanent exhibitions in the Kadriorg Art Museum and in the KUMU Art Museum. The KUMU states its wish to address groups that do not normally visit art museums via its various activities. The AME tries to reach out to the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia by organising special museum events and regular guided tours.

The Estonian Open Air Museum

This museum reflects substantially the Estonian national narrative that relates ethnic history to the rural peasant environment in past centuries. It was founded during the Soviet period, in the 1950s, to represent the agendas of salvation ethnography via authentic examples of historical rural architecture. The museum’s origin dates instrumentally to the pre-war independence period, and through its pre-twentieth century focus created a reservoir of ethnic history outside the scope of Soviet ideological manipulation. Today it continues to be a particular knowledge format that disseminates an ideology supportive of Estonian identity and memory, and is still predominantly exclusive in its ethnic scope.

The genesis of the *Eesti Vabaõhumuuseum*, the Estonian Open Air Museum (EOAM), dates back to visits of Estonian intellectuals to the open-air museums in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark from 1910. In 1913, the Estonian National Museum initiated the preparatory work required to establish an Open Air Museum near Tartu. However, in 1919 the Association of the Estonian Museum in Tallinn introduced the idea of establishing the EOAM in Tallinn instead. The Estonian Open Air Museum Society operated between 1925 and 1931, continuing to promote Tallinn as a prospective location for the EOAM. Although it didn’t materialise in those decades, the idea of creating the EOAM was publicly promoted by prominent ethnologists working at the ENM.²⁷ They claimed the need to introduce a holistic ‘picture of the people’s past’ to a wider audience (including tourists), so that everybody could ‘enter the past across the threshold of modernity’ (Manninen 1925). Thus, they basically followed the founding trends of such institutions in other European countries, though a lack of resources prevailed. After the Soviet occupation in 1940, a plan to open the Pirita Park-Museum in the coastal area of Tallinn took shape in 1941, but this undertaking was cancelled because of the Second World War.

In 1950, the Union of Estonian Architects re-introduced the plans and preparatory works for the EOAM; the role of enthusiastic architects in the process was remarkable. In 1956, the co-ordination of the preparatory process was taken over by the Ministry of Culture, and the EOAM was officially established a year later in 1957. The design, rationale and construction of the museum-in-making relied substantially on pre-war plans by ENM ethnologists, as well as on their current research for locating suitable buildings all over the country. The Estonian State Open Air Museum (*Eesti Riiklik Vabaõhumuuseum*) opened to the public at the historical Rocca al Mare

manor and estate by the northwestern seashore in Tallinn in 1964. The exhibition of rural peasant architecture with a complex of household equipment was methodologically framed using the ICOM declaration (1957). The Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum and the EOAM, as the first open air museums in the Soviet Union, became prototypes for the other open-air museums across the USSR.

The Open Air Museum was an ambiguous project both in its political reference and in the national discourse carried through the Soviet period, although in a slightly hidden form. This museum fit relatively well into the official Soviet narrative of history: it was focused on farming economy, and provided room for presenting the relative deprivation that the Estonian peasantry of the past had had to endure. The economic aspect in this village museum could be promoted according to the ideological requirements of the day: ‘The display is based on the Marxist–Leninist methodology of the study of history, by showing peasant farmstead architecture in its historical development and by reflecting the class conflicts of the village society’ (Saron 1984: 33). At the same time, the museum collected and presented elements of Estonian history that dated back centuries and therefore could not be censored according to Soviet rules or aesthetics, thus creating a physical space for rendering a narrative of ethnic Estonian history. It was a promotional institution for international and Soviet tourists, and served also as a favoured recreational area for the locals. For example, in 1980 the number of visitors reached a record 151,000 people. The EOAM was considered a site relatively free of Soviet ideology, as the objects exhibited were considered self-referential and so provided with minimal written text (Lang 1996: 58). The collections of the EOAM are basically focused on ethnography and cultural history, representing farmsteads from different cultural-geographic regions of Estonia, displaying reconstructions of peasant lifestyle of the previous centuries. The EOAM is the central museum of rural architecture in Estonian.

Today, the EOAM is subordinated to the Ministry of Culture as one of the state-owned central museums in Estonia. In their promotional texts, the EOAM refers to its collection as representing Estonian ‘national’ (other terms used as synonyms are ‘peasant’, ‘folk’ and ‘rural’) architecture. The EOAM collects and displays traditional farm complexes representing different ethnographic regions of Estonia (northern, southern, western Estonia and the islands on the western coast of Estonia). The EOAM envisions its role as a memory institution whose task is to preserve, study and display Estonian rural architecture and the peasant way of life, mainly from the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the museum claims in its promotional material that elements of their display may refer to the Stone Age, thus arguably reflecting at least a thousand years of history, in order to create a direct continuity with the most ancient traditions of peasant Estonians.

The collection displays about 80 rural buildings (12 farmsteads usually comprising a number of adjacent facilities, and several single dwellings or public buildings). Other objects (ethnographic tools, household equipment and folk art items) supplement the collection and help to demonstrate the living environment of the peasants’ past. The display is made up of original buildings transported to the museum grounds usually by first being dismantled under the scrupulous care and supervision of museum experts, and then reconstructed precisely. The museum grounds are vast, today covering today a territory of 84 hectares located in a forest and park area on the seashore relatively close to the centre of Tallinn and nearby residential areas.

A more holistic impression of a traditional Estonian village scene is achieved by combining the nineteenth century peasant farmsteads with other houses of certain social functions and public buildings: wind- and watermills, a tavern, a Lutheran chapel dating from the seventeenth century, a Herrnhut prayer house, a village school, fishermen's huts and fishnet cabins. Some of these buildings function as re-enactment facilities, both for edifying and entertaining purposes, mainly in summer, but also in periods according to the seasonal calendar during the rest of the year (autumn fairs, Christmas and Easter celebrations). The village tavern serves food and functions as a concert venue for music and dance performances. At the village school, courses on rural lifestyles and activities are regularly arranged, as well as crafts classes.

Some newer objects of rural architecture (fire station, a farm building from the 1930s) have now also been included in the exhibition to reflect twentieth century changes in rural life. Though notably lacking in the context of the present display so far, there are plans to include several buildings that reflect rural architectural diversity and the modernisation processes alongside more recent developments (a Baltic German summer house, a smithy, a communal warehouse, a village store, a municipal administration building, a house of culture, and an apartment building from a *kolkhoz* village) in the near future.

The modern EOAM explains its goals through the need to collect, to study, and to represent authentic historical rural architecture from all over Estonia, including traditional ethnic minority groups, although so far this is far from apparent. The EOAM has a defined national dimension in its research as well as display agenda, while being predominantly exclusive in its ethnic scope with only the ethnic Estonian narrative presented. It is a particular knowledge format disseminating a particular ideology that supports ethnic Estonian identity and memory. The rural architecture represents values of folk life reflecting the initial phase in Estonian national discourse, and this demonstrates the living conditions and farm landscapes of the period in which the national movement was initiated by teachers and pastors of Estonian origin and spread among the Estonian peasants who constituted the social basis for national awakening in the second half of the nineteenth century. In order to address the multi-cultural dimension, the EOAM plans to open displays to represent the lifestyle and facilities of the historical (rural) ethnic minorities and regional groups in Estonia: the Baltic Germans and the Coastal Swedes, the Russian Old Believers and the Seto. The museum has acquired a number of buildings already, but the lack of state subsidies has so far prevented their reconstruction.

Notes

¹ In Estonia, there was remarkably no bloodshed in the course of this process.

² Cf. the current project's report on Latvia. The general outline of political history is largely concurrent with Latvia, particularly concerning the Soviet period.

³ His Mon Faible collection forms an integral part of the self-narrative of the present Estonian History Museum.

⁴ Eventually, in their project to create a museum that represented ethnic Estonians, the Estonian nationalist activists considered the *Provinzialmuseum* to be completely German.

⁵ EKÜ= *Eestimaa Kirjameeste Übing*; literal translation of ELG into Estonian.

⁶ A Revolution Museum initially established separately was merged into the Estonian SSR History and Revolution Museum for the short period of June only, in 1941.

⁷ In Russian, a difference was made between reference to *gosudarstvennyi* (state) and *natsional'nyi* (national). The Estonian term *riiklik* conforms here with 'state'.

⁸ In 1950 the former library of the ELS was given to the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, and in 1961 the older and more valuable part of the numismatic collections were given to the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR with the aim of making them accessible for research.

- ⁹ The Museum of Natural Sciences was established in the former premises of *Provintsiaalmuseum*, the History Museum was housed and exhibited in temporary facilities after the war.
- ¹⁰ *Glavlit* = the Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the USSR Council of Ministers.
- ¹¹ This museum, with a focused pro-Soviet and manipulated political agenda, was closed by the newly established independent Republic in 1991.
- ¹² A prominent family summer residence before the First World War.
- ¹³ The title is an allegoric reference to the national flag of independent Estonia, the three stripes of which are blue, black and white. The flag was not yet officially re-acknowledged at the time, making thus a strong statement to reclaim national history.
- ¹⁴ Cf. the information provided on GEG on p. 5 of the current article. This organisation continues its activities in Estonia, though it turned into an Estonian-language-based organisation after 1918, known today as *Õpetatud Eesti Selts*.
- ¹⁵ The ENM's former director was imprisoned and shot by the Soviets in 1942.
- ¹⁶ Finno-Ugrian affiliation is based on linguistic ties, historically defined by language research. This language family joins Estonians, Finns, Hungarians, dispersed groups in northern Russia and Siberia (e.g. the Komi, the Mari, the Udmurt, the Khanty, etc.), who were mainly rural or semi-nomadic. In the Soviet period, it provided subtle political agency also via the imaginary trajectory outside the Soviet borders to Finland and Hungary, being thus instrumental for Estonians in their self-positioning in several dimensions.
- ¹⁷ In 1937, objects were exchanged with the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin, as a result of which the museum obtained items for their collections on the peoples of Australia, Oceania and Africa.
- ¹⁸ In 1931, the ENM established a permanent network system of correspondents (*korrespondendid*), that is, volunteer collaborators among the general public. Their task was mainly to respond in writing to printed and publicised questionnaires, by which scholars sought detailed local information on the use and making of farm tools, work practices, etc., to complement the artefacts collected. Except for a hiatus in the 1950s, this system of networking with the audience continues today.
- ¹⁹ The history of relations between ethnic groups in this border region was studied by academics (cf. Moora 1964).
- ²⁰ The name 'Estonian' referred to the ethnic Estonian origin of both objects and initiators of the institution, in contrast to other, Baltic German initiatives.
- ²¹ The building (with the surrounding park) is said to be the most impressive ensemble of Baroque architecture in Estonia and was constructed in the 1720s as a summer residence for the Russian emperor Peter the Great and his consort, Catherine (Ekaterina); hence also the name of the site, *Katherinenthal* (Catherine's Valley, i.e. Kadriorg in Estonian).
- ²² Kadriorg Palace has been important as a backdrop to state affairs in the political history of the country. In 1938, an administrative building was constructed next to the Palace, and this today serves as the President's residence. The whole complex has become an important element of the national narrative.
- ²³ Since 2004 the Museum of Applied Art has been an independent state-owned museum under the name the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design (www.etdm.ee).
- ²⁴ *Rüütelkonna hoone*, originally *Ritterschaft Haus*; this building was housed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia between 1920 and 1940, and by Estonian National Library between 1948 and 1992.
- ²⁵ The KUMU was awarded the European Museum of the Year award in 2008.
- ²⁶ Niguliste being the one-time Baltic German St. Nicholas Church that was severely damaged in the Soviet bombing of Tallinn in 1944, restored only in the 80s as a museum-cum-concert hall and today housing one of the most famous works of art in Estonia, *Der Totentanz* by the Lübeck master Bernt Notke (accomplished in the fifteenth century).
- ²⁷ They were supportive of creating this institution in Tallinn, while arguing that the Estonian National Museum had to focus on academic research and that an open-air museum would have to serve the general public, thus being better placed in a larger city like Tallinn (cf. Saron 1984: 31).

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Annex table, Estonia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Estonian History Museum								
<i>Estländische Provinzial-Museum</i>	1864	1842	Civil society (<i>Estländische Literärische Gesellschaft</i>)	Civil society (<i>Estländische Literärische Gesellschaft</i>)	Archaeology, Natural Objects, Numismatics, Ethnography, History, Art	Territorial and universal representation (Estland and Livland Province, Russia, and the world)	8000 BC to the present	Existing building, in the centre of the capital, Old Town of Reval (Tallinn).
ELS Provincial Museum (renamed)	[renamed 1918]		-“-	-“-	-“-	-“-	-“-	-“-
State History Museum of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (renamed and reorganised)	[renamed 1940]		Soviet of People's Commissars of the Estonian SSR; since 1950s Academy of Sciences; since 1963 Ministry of Culture	Expropriated by the Soviet state	Archaeology, Numismatics, Ethnography, Social and Political History	Territorial representation (historical territory of Estonia)	-“-	Existing buildings in the centre of the capital, Old Town of Tallinn. Current location since 1952, branch facilities since 1975.
Estonian SSR History and Revolution Museum (renamed and reorganised)	[renamed 1987]		Ministry of Culture	State	-“-	-“-	-“-	-“-
Estonian History Museum (renamed)	[renamed 1989]		-“-	Independent state agency since 1996	-“-	-“-	-“-	-“-

Estonian National Museum								
Estonian National Museum	1909	1860s/ 1907	Civil society (Estonian Students Society)	Civil society (Museum Society)	Ethnography, Archaeology, Art, Social and Political History	Territorial (ethnic) representation (Estonia)	12 th century to the present	Existing buildings in city centre of Tartu. Raadi Estate in solitary location in 1922-1944.
State Ethnographic Museum of the Estonian SSR (renamed and reorganised)	[renamed 1940]		Soviet of People's Commissars of the Estonian SSR; since 1950s Academy of Sciences; since 1963 Ministry of Culture	Expropriated by the Soviet state	Ethnographic and Cultural Collections	Territorial (ethnic) representation (Estonia; Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia)	-“-	Existing buildings in city centre of Tartu since 1945.
Estonian National Museum (renamed)	[renamed 1988]		Ministry of Culture	Independent state agency since 1996	Ethnographic and Cultural Collections	-“-	-“-	-“-
Art Museum of Estonia								
Estonian Museum	1916	1911	Civil society (Tallinn Department of the Estonian National Museum)	Civil society (Museum Society)	Cultural History and Art	Territorial (ethnic) representation (Estonian)	19 th and 20 th century	Various existing buildings, most prominent being the Kadriorg Palace.
Estonian Art Museum	[renamed 1928]		Civil society	Estonian Art Museum Foundation	Visual Art	Territorial and universal representation (Estonian, Baltic German, Western European)	-“-	-“-

State Art Museum	[renamed 1940]		Soviet of People's Commissars of the Estonian SSR; later Ministry of Culture	Expropriated by the Soviet state	-“-	Territorial and universal representation (Estonian, Baltic German, Western European, Russian)	13 th century to the present	Kadriorg Palace
Art Museum of Estonia (Kadriorg Art Museum, Niguliste Museum, Adamson-Eric Museum, and the KUMU)	[renamed 1991/2006]		Ministry of Culture	Independent state agency since 1996	-“-	-“-	-“-	Kadriorg Palace and post-modern building in 2006.
Estonian Open Air Museum								
Estonian Open Air Museum	1957	[1925] 1950	[Estonian National Museum] Civil society and state (Union of Estonian Architects; Ministry of Culture)	[Open Air Museum Society] State	Rural Architecture, Ethnography	Territorial representation (Estonia)	19 th and 20 th century rural architecture	Park area by the sea in the capital, complex of re-located rural buildings.
-“-			Ministry of Culture	Independent state agency since 1996	-“-	-“-	-“-	-“-