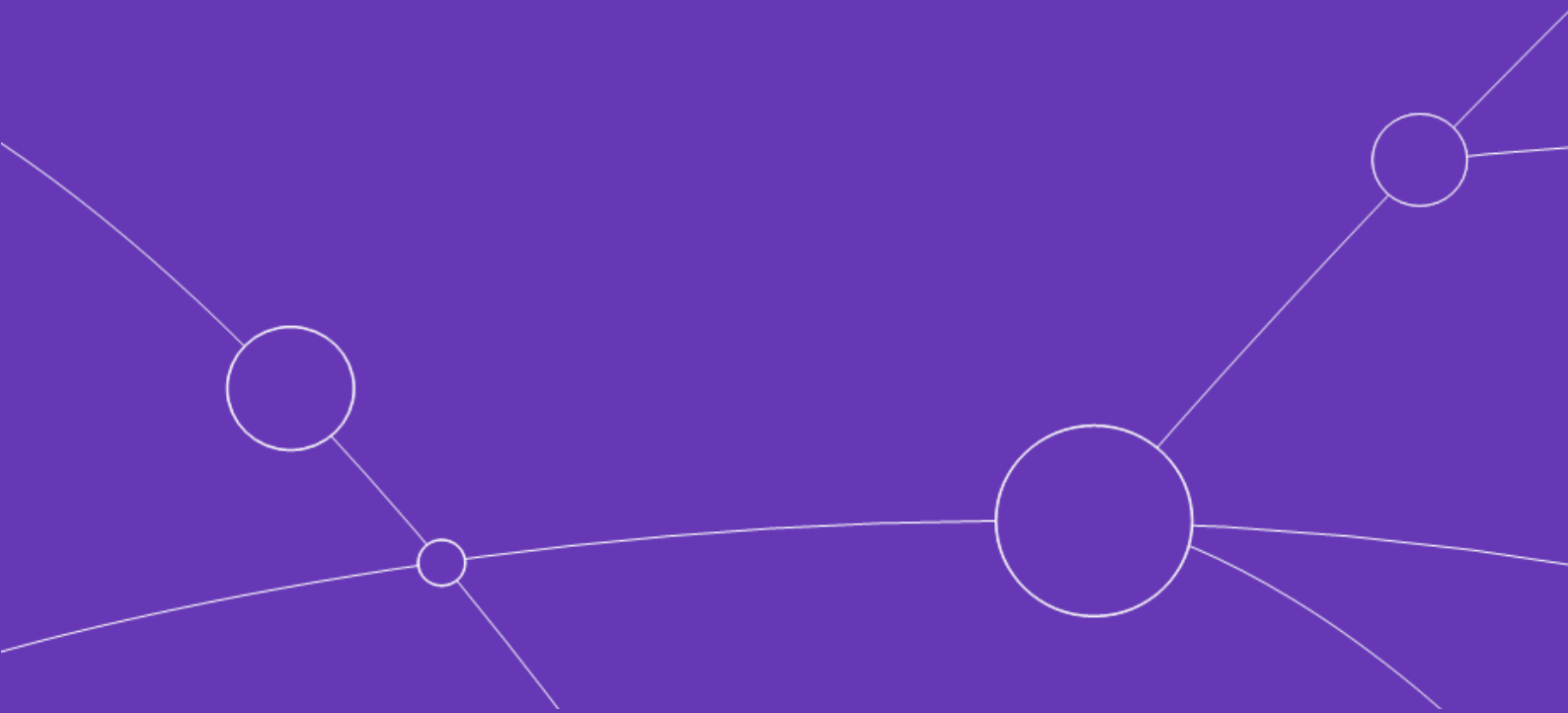


# **TARGETED EVALUATION OF PROFESSORSHIPS OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU**

Evaluation Report 2025



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## Introduction

This report presents the results of the targeted evaluation of the Professorships of National Significance at the University of Tartu. The evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and conducted by the Estonian Research Council (ETAG) in accordance with Ministerial Decree No. 1.1-2/24/72 of March 2024, which confirmed the subject, participants, responsible institution, and organisational framework of the evaluation.

The Professorships of National Significance were established in 2012 with the objective of preserving and promoting the Estonian language and culture, ensuring the provision of higher education in Estonia, safeguarding national cultural heritage, and delivering related public services. Since 2016, these professorships have been part of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Tartu. The evaluation period spanned the years 2016–2023. The present evaluation covered eleven professorships:

- Professorship of Modern Estonian Language (prof. Liina Lindström)
- Professorship of History and Dialects of Estonian Language (prof. Karl Pajusalu)
- Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language (prof. Birute Klaas-Lang)
- Professorship of Estonian Literature (prof. Arne Merilai)
- Professorship of Estonian and Comparative Folklore (prof. Ülo Valk)
- Professorship of Semiotics of Culture (prof. Peeter Torop)
- Professorship of Estonian History (prof. Tõnu-Andrus Tannberg)
- Professorship of Intellectual History (prof. Pärtel Piirimäe)
- Professorship of Art History (prof. Anu Mänd)
- Professorship of Archaeology (prof. Valter Lang)
- Professorship of Ethnology (prof. Art Leete)

The Professorships of National Significance are funded through a dedicated allocation from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, based on national strategic priorities. This funding is governed by a framework agreement between the Ministry and the University of Tartu and is earmarked for supporting academic staff positions in fields deemed vital for the preservation and advancement of Estonian language, culture, and national heritage.

The focus of the evaluation was to assess the scientific impact, sustainability, and societal relevance of the professorships, as well as the fulfilment of the statutory obligation of the University of Tartu to support the development and continuity of Estonian language and culture. The evaluation also considered the effectiveness and impact of the funding allocated to these professorships. Its overarching aim was to provide expert-based

information to the University of Tartu, policymakers in research and higher education, funding bodies, the research community, and the wider public, in order to inform science policy, the design of support measures, and the strategic development of the field.

The targeted evaluation followed a peer review process. The resulting expert report is qualitative in nature and does not include numerical ratings. The assessment focused on three core criteria: scientific impact, sustainability, and societal relevance, each examined through three aspects: strengths and positive features, areas for improvement, and recommendations for further development. The evaluation also reviewed the extent to which the recommendations of the 2016 targeted evaluation had been implemented. In order to address the alignment of the professorships' research directions with national priorities (e.g. the objectives of the "Cultural Policy 2021–2030"), global trends, the needs of the creative sectors, and societal expectations, the Estonian Research Council commissioned a separate expert opinion from a qualified Estonian scholar.

The evaluation panel consisted of six international experts and one external Estonian expert, all of whom had prior experience in the assessment of research and development activities. The panel's work commenced in the summer of 2024 and included two virtual meetings, held in June and August, during which the evaluation framework was clarified, expectations discussed, and the division of responsibilities agreed. Prior to these meetings, panel members reviewed the University of Tartu's self-evaluation reports, and the contextual overview prepared by the Estonian Research Council.

The on-site visit took place in Tartu on 17–18 September 2024 and included meetings with university leadership, professorship representatives, and doctoral students, as well as an introduction to relevant infrastructure. Following the visit, the panel began drafting the final report. The first version was completed in early 2025. It was submitted to the University of Tartu for comments and factual verification in the spring, and the final version was submitted to the Estonian Research Council in early summer 2025.

This evaluation is part of a broader framework of Estonian research policy, aimed at the strategic development and funding of nationally significant research areas. The results of the evaluation provide valuable input for the University of Tartu, science policy makers, funding agencies, and the general public.

## Assessment of individual professorship

### Professorship of Modern Estonian Language (prof. Liina Lindström)

#### Scientific Impact of Research

##### Positive aspects

The research spearheaded by Liina Lindström, and her team has profoundly impacted linguistics, particularly in the study of Estonian language structure, grammar, and sociolinguistics. From 2016 to 2023, the team achieved remarkable scholarly output, producing 12 monographs, 151 peer-reviewed articles, and 67 book chapters. The publication of three seminal monographs on Estonian grammar solidifies their role in modernizing and expanding the linguistic understanding of Estonian.

The professorship's corpus-based and quantitative methodologies have advanced grammatical and dialectological studies, with tools such as the Corpus of Estonian Dialects and the Estonian Universal Dependencies Treebank becoming important resources for researchers. Additionally, the interdisciplinary collaboration fostered by their involvement in digital humanities and computational linguistics has placed them at the forefront of integrating traditional linguistics with digital techniques. Notable projects include building resources such as the Seto Corpus and conducting psycholinguistic experiments, demonstrating their innovative approaches. Their participation in international collaborations and projects further amplifies their influence, ensuring Estonian linguistics has a global presence.

Both foundational and emerging areas of linguistic research are represented. Alongside other notable contributions to Estonian Linguistics, we find a general focus on morphosyntactic variation and areal linguistics and a healthy mix of interdisciplinary and emerging research topics.

The publication of comprehensive volumes on the structure of the Estonian language - including a handbook, morphology, and syntax - exemplifies the success of the professorship in executing long-term, strategic planning of foundational resources for both national and international linguistics.

Research on the morphosyntactic variation of Estonian and its structure within the wider Uralic, Finnic, dialectal, and areal linguistic context is prominently featured in the professorship's international publications. The professorship demonstrates a commendable openness to interdisciplinary and emerging topics, such as digitalization, texts and corpora, computational linguistics, intersubjectivity, psycholinguistics, learning,

and gender. Their contributions show that the team has a tangible impact on contemporary linguistics.

The professorship's academic outreach efforts further amplify the impact of its research.

The scientific achievements of the professorship are fully aligned with internationally recognized standards.

### **Areas of development**

While the publication record of the professorship is strong in addressing foundational matters and diverse in covering new areas, there are several points where further development could enhance its impact and breadth:

While the professorship has embraced emerging topics and the foundational research on the structure of the Estonian language, ensuring consistent progress in and re-evaluation of both domains would strengthen the overall impact of its work.

Expanding collaborations with international and national research groups and institutions could amplify the global impact. More joint projects or co-authored publications with leading scholars in these areas might also foster the cross-pollination of ideas and methodologies.

While the professorship has a strong record of publishing high-ranking articles, increasing the proportion of papers published in top-tier, internationally renowned journals would further enhance the impact of its research.

Certain aspects of Estonian linguistics may be underrepresented in the current publication portfolio. Exploring ways to expand research into these areas could complement the existing strengths and fill gaps. Developing a systematic approach to measuring the impact of publications that belong to different linguistic research traditions could provide valuable insights for future planning. Increasing efforts to make research findings more accessible – such as by creating more open-access publications, multilingual resources, or interactive online platforms - would be beneficial.

### **Recommendations**

To further enhance their scientific impact, the team could consider extending their comparative linguistic studies, perhaps with a particular focus on Uralic and Baltic languages. Strengthening applications for EU-level funding and similar large-scale grants could enable the continuation and expansion of their work. The work of the professorship could continue in the same spirit, maintaining a strong commitment to both foundational research on the Estonian language and innovative topics. The following recommendations are proposed to further enhance its impact and scope:

Balancing foundational and emerging research, interdisciplinary aspects: Expanding into new research directions could benefit from closer engagement with other disciplines, supporting an interdisciplinary approach. With an increasing number of Estonians residing and working abroad, a growing range of decentralized academic and non-academic initiatives related to the Estonian language has been emerging globally. In

addition, major centers focusing on the Estonian language exist in Estonia outside the framework of national professorships, while the national professorship is uniquely positioned to serve as the official scholarly anchor for both national and global efforts—providing a venue in Estonia and online. These efforts could be more visibly and systematically integrated into the strategic agenda of the professorship.

**Expanding collaborations:** Broaden collaborations with both national and international research groups and institutions, as more joint projects and co-authored publications with leading scholars can amplify the global impact of the professorship's research.

**Targeting high-impact journals:** Increase the proportion of articles published in top-tier, internationally renowned journals to enhance the visibility and influence of the professorship's work.

**Exploring underrepresented areas:** Investigate ways to expand research into underrepresented aspects and methodologies of linguistics in Estonia.

**Measuring impact:** Develop a systematic approach to assess the impact of publications across different linguistic research traditions to provide insights for future strategic planning and to improve the alignment of research with the priorities of the professorship.

**Enhancing accessibility:** Increase efforts to make research findings more accessible by creating open-access publications, multilingual resources, and interactive online platforms to present the results in an engaging and user-friendly format.

**Mentorship and diversity:** Promoting the mentorship of early-career researchers and fostering diversity within the team will help ensure the sustainable growth of the research group while maintaining its international standing as a hub for linguistic excellence.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

Liina Lindström's professorship has demonstrated exemplary sustainability in research, underscored by robust outputs, strategic collaborations, and consistent mentorship. The team's focus on creating long-lasting resources - such as the Corpus of Estonian Dialects and the Estonian Universal Dependencies Treebank - has significantly contributed to the infrastructure of linguistic research. These resources not only serve immediate academic needs but also promise continued utility for future research. The team's active involvement in training early-career researchers, including the supervision of 12 doctoral dissertations and organizing international workshops and summer schools, ensures the cultivation of a new generation of scholars equipped with advanced methodologies. Their integration of digital humanities and computational linguistics has placed their research in a forward-looking framework, leveraging technology to address complex linguistic questions. Furthermore, the group's participation in international collaborations and EU-funded projects, such as the MEDAL initiative, highlights their commitment to fostering



global partnerships and methodological innovation, strengthening their long-term research impact.

They have clearly succeeded in building on the solid support provided by the University of Tartu within the framework of the funding scheme. The university is fulfilling its obligations very well and will need to provide more tailored support measures in the future.

The sustainability of the Professorship of Estonian is ensured through a comprehensive strategy combining intergenerational knowledge transfer, curriculum development, research innovation, and national and international collaboration. The professorship demonstrates a strong intergenerational balance, actively involving professors of various levels, as well as doctoral and master's students in research and teaching, with 12 defended theses during the review period, ensuring the continuity of expertise.

The professorship has expanded into various previously underrepresented areas of Estonian linguistics, such as language and gender, language planning, and quantitative linguistics. It also leads the integration of digital humanities, introducing minors, elective modules, and advanced methodological training in computational linguistics, corpus studies, and digital methods.

International engagement is a hallmark of this professorship, with workshops, summer schools, and collaborations, including the MEDAL EC consortium. Events like the Societas Linguistica Europaea and MEDAL summer schools, along with training in methods, empower early-career scholars and enhance the global visibility of Estonian linguistics.

Through close partnerships with institutions like the Estonian Language Institute, the professorship contributes to internships, knowledge transfer, and co-supervision. Its curricular contributions include a new MA program in linguistics, BA courses on Academic Estonian, and specialized programs like micro-credentials in language editing.

By fostering innovative research, practical skill development, and international collaboration, the professorship has created a sustainable framework for advancing Estonian linguistics. Additionally, the professorship cooperates with other professorships to recruit motivated and bright new students in high schools. Its adaptability to modern academic challenges ensures its continued relevance and impact.

### **Areas of development**

Despite these achievements, certain areas require attention to bolster the sustainability of the research program. The team could enhance its efforts in securing more long-term and large-scale international funding to mitigate potential resource constraints and ensure the continuation of key projects. Although the group has made strides in training and mentoring, the retention of talent within Estonia remains a challenge, especially for postdoctoral researchers. Strengthening institutional incentives and career development opportunities could help address this issue. Additionally, while their digital humanities initiatives are commendable, further integration of emerging technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, into their research framework could enhance the scalability and adaptability of their projects. Similarly, focusing on more public-facing

initiatives and translational applications could increase the societal visibility and utility of their work, thereby reinforcing the research program's relevance and support from stakeholders.

Although much of the Professorship of Modern Estonian Language research is already available online, expanding and refining digital content for diverse user groups—teachers, students, and the broader public—would enhance its research sustainability through accessibility and international reach. The closure of the Estonian Institute, which played a key role in promoting Estonian language and culture abroad, particularly affects this professorship. As a central authority on contemporary Estonian, the professorship is well positioned to take a leading role in ensuring the continued promotion and visibility of the Estonian language globally. A coordinated strategy among national professorships will be essential to support the sustainable dissemination and long-term impact of research on modern Estonian.

### Recommendations

To enhance the sustainability of the research program, the team could prioritize securing larger and more diverse funding sources, including EU-level and industry partnerships. Developing strategic plans for talent retention and career progression, such as offering competitive fellowships and creating research continuity positions, could help mitigate brain drain. Expanding the integration of advanced technologies like AI and machine learning would further future proof their methodologies, enabling more scalable and interdisciplinary research. The team could also consider establishing structured mechanisms for public engagement, such as open-access repositories, citizen science projects, and interactive platforms that involve the broader community in their research. Finally, reinforcing their role in policy-making and societal initiatives, particularly in areas like language planning and education, would strengthen their research's societal impact and institutional support, ensuring long-term viability and growth.

While the professorship's efforts in knowledge transfer, foundational works, and research innovation are commendable, addressing potential gaps and exploring new opportunities can further enhance its sustainability and impact. The following recommendations provide some strategies to ensure the professorship remains resilient and forward-looking in the face of evolving academic and societal demands:

**Expand research into underrepresented areas:** Broaden focus to include less explored aspects of Estonian linguistics to complement existing strengths and align with global linguistic trends.

**Intensify national and international collaborations:** Strengthen partnerships with academic and research institutions, fostering joint projects and co-authored publications. Aim to publish in top-tier journals to enhance the global reach and visibility of Estonian linguistics.

**Enhance accessibility of research findings:** Develop open-access publications, multilingual resources, and interactive platforms to engage a wider audience, including non-academic communities and global diaspora groups, increasing societal impact.

Systematically evaluate research impact: Establish methodologies to assess the impact of research across diverse linguistic traditions. Use these evaluations to guide strategic planning and align research with emerging academic and societal needs.

Balance foundational and innovative research: Ensure the continued production of foundational works while embracing interdisciplinary and innovative projects to sustain growth and preserve the core mission of the professorship.

Leverage digital humanities and AI: Utilize advancements in digital tools and AI to streamline workflows, enhance data analysis, and improve dissemination of findings. Address potential biases in and shortcomings of AI applications to ensure the goals of the professorship are clearly in sight for long-term planning.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The research has had a societal impact particularly in the domains of language planning, cultural preservation, and education. Their work on the structure and grammatical variation of the Estonian language, including the development of comprehensive resources like the Corpus of Estonian Dialects, has contributed to the preservation and advancement of Estonian as a national and cultural identity marker. The team's involvement in language policy, through advisory roles in the Estonian Language Council and contributions to debates on language use and education, underscores their commitment to making research findings relevant to state-level decision-making. The group's research on South Estonian dialects has also addressed the urgent need for cultural preservation, providing tools and recommendations to support the intergenerational transmission of these languages. Furthermore, their initiatives in digital humanities, including collaborations with the National Archives and National Library of Estonia, demonstrate their innovative approach to blending research with practical applications, such as digital preservation and accessibility. Their outreach through educational resources, workshops, and public campaigns, including improving Wikipedia content in Estonian, has further amplified their societal engagement.

In the area of educational contributions, the professorship supports the MA teacher training program for Estonian language and literature and supervises students across multiple curricula. Since 2019, it has played a pivotal role in advancing digital humanities at the University of Tartu by introducing a 60-ECTS minor at the BA level and an elective module at the MA level. It incorporates the Centre of Academic Estonian, ensuring that all BA students complete a course in Academic Estonian, and has also delivered a micro-credential degree on language editing, open to external trainees.

As for language policy and planning, two professors serve on the Estonian Language Council, advising the government on language-related policies and participating in state-level debates on Estonian's status and use in higher education. The professorship organizes open seminars and publishes research-based discussions on language planning and norms.

The report highlights research on socially relevant topics, such as studies on language, gender, and sexuality, with students and faculty contributing to media discussions and national projects, such as LGBT+ terminology and gender-related research. Collaboration with the Emergency Response Centre has led to practical training programs to improve communication during emergency calls.

For minority languages, research on the South Estonian Võro and Seto has included documenting interviews, compiling corpora, and promoting intergenerational language transmission.

Public outreach and Wikipedia engagement have been obtained through editing campaigns and research into its educational use in schools.

The report provides evidence of efforts to bridge academic research with societal needs via an impact on education, policy, and cultural preservation.

### Areas of development

The Professorship of Modern Estonian Language demonstrates commendable societal impact through its contributions to education, research, and public engagement. Building on these strengths, the following areas of development could further enhance its social impact and reach:

While the research on South Estonian dialects has been commendable, expanding similar efforts to other minority languages and underrepresented linguistic communities within Estonia could broaden their societal reach. The team could also amplify its engagement with the public, particularly through more accessible dissemination of their research findings. While their work with digital humanities is forward-thinking, the integration of these outputs into primary and secondary education curricula or more widespread public use remains limited. Additionally, the team's focus on linguistic diversity and inclusivity could be further strengthened by actively involving community stakeholders, such as language activists and local cultural organizations, in their projects.

**Enhancing educational outreach:** While the professorship has successfully incorporated digital humanities and delivered micro-credential programs, there is potential to expand these initiatives to include more diverse topics and audiences. For example, offering online or hybrid courses in Academic Estonian or language editing in various languages could reach broader domestic and international learners.

**Increasing collaboration with schools and teacher training programs** could strengthen ties between academic research and secondary education, ensuring that insights from research are integrated into Estonian language instruction.

**Strengthening language policy and planning initiatives:** The professorship plays an influential role in language policy, but expanding its engagement with stakeholders beyond academia and government—such as NGOs, cultural organizations, and diaspora communities—could broaden its societal impact.

**Diversifying socially relevant research:** While the research on dialects, gender, sexuality, and emergency communication is impactful, the professorship could broaden its focus to

integrate modern language topics with other professorships' topics such as multilingualism

## Recommendations

The Professorship of Modern Estonian Language demonstrates significant societal impact. The following targeted strategies are recommended to further enhance its societal contribution.

To enhance the societal impact of their research, the team could consider scaling their outreach initiatives to reach a wider audience, particularly through collaborations with schools, community organizations, and media outlets. Developing open-access platforms and interactive resources, such as language-learning tools or digital archives, could make their findings more accessible and practical for public use.

Expanding research and preservation efforts to include other underrepresented linguistic and cultural communities in Estonia would further demonstrate their commitment to linguistic diversity and equity. The team could also explore partnerships with technology companies and policymakers to apply their computational and psycholinguistic research in creating advanced language technologies.

Expand educational outreach: Broaden the scope of digital humanities initiatives by offering online or hybrid courses in Academic Estonian and language editing to reach a wider domestic and international audience. Strengthen partnerships with schools and teacher training programs to integrate research insights into Estonian language education at secondary levels and outside of Estonia.

Broaden engagement in language policy and planning: Extend collaboration with stakeholders outside academia and government, such as NGOs, cultural organizations, and diaspora communities, to increase societal impact. Develop a method to evaluate and track the implementation and outcomes of policy recommendations.

Diversify socially relevant research by expanding it to include both global and local issues such as multilingualism, child language, and accessibility for differently abled language users.

Deepen support for minority languages: Strengthen partnerships with local communities, cultural organizations, and international networks to amplify the impact of work on South Estonian Võro and Seto. Explore innovative approaches to intergenerational language transmission, such as digital storytelling or community-based workshops.

Enhance public outreach and digital engagement: Develop interactive online resources, such as virtual engagement possibilities with the corpora and databases or language learning tools, to engage a broader audience and support public education. Increase the professorship's media presence through podcasts, blogs, and social media campaigns to disseminate research findings and encourage societal discussions on language-related topics.

Finally, strengthening community involvement in projects, such as participatory research models or citizen science initiatives, could ensure that their work aligns with the needs

and aspirations of the communities they serve, thereby maximizing societal relevance and impact. Establishing a structured mechanism for the existing efforts is recommended.

## Professorship of History and Dialects of Estonian Language (prof. Karl Pajusalu)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

The impact of the research output of the Professorship of History and Dialects of Estonian Language (2016–2023) is impressive. The number of scholarly articles and books, as well as academic public outreach, has been excellent, including 17 published books, 125 high-ranked articles, and 105 chapters.

The books on the history of the Estonian language and the pronunciation of Estonian constitute solid evidence that the stability provided by the professorship and its infrastructure at the University of Tartu has been well utilized for planning, coordinating, and executing long-term, cooperation-based projects of national significance and international impact.

The team of the professorship is strong and, especially, in the area of phonetics and phonology, the citation index of the team members has skyrocketed. The work on the history and variation of Estonian has also garnered recognition. Cornerstones have been laid for further work on phonological typology and the typology of kindred languages and dialects; data has been collected, spoken language corpora developed, to name just a few impactful results.

The feedback from the doctoral students on supervision, provided during the live meetings between the doctoral students and the panelists, was also positive, and we can see many dissertations and publications as evidence of success. The professor belongs (has belonged) to centers of excellence as well as to the Academy of Sciences. These networks have been effectively used to advance the scientific impact of the research, often in cooperation with other professorships.

The impact of the research on the roots of Estonian is evidence of the success of these cooperations, as well as individual efforts. The members of the team have held or participated as contributors in many prestigious general as well as specialized research grants, all of which have contributed to the scientific impact of the research of his professorship.

The scientific achievements of the professorship are fully aligned with internationally recognized standards.



## Areas of development

The priorities of this Professorship of Estonian History and Dialects have been carefully designed and successfully executed. However, with changing times, development and diversification of research trends and available sources, constant rethinking of goals and self-evaluation are needed.

While numerical success is very important, the scientific impact of the professorship should be evaluated in terms of the successful integration of ideas in emerging and expanding academic fora and networks. The professorship is an authoritative institution that could potentially work as a hub for many new but marginal research agendas related to Estonian historical linguistics and dialects.

This professorship is also a position of soft academic diplomacy, excellent for connecting various trends in academic thought and diverse researchers. This potential is used well, but much could be planned to create and nurture links between fragmented and dispersed forces that could contribute to promoting the scientific research on the history of Estonian and its dialectal variation.

Perhaps it would be wise to rethink whether the institution could focus less on numerical success, and instead, tie its success to different metrics related to well-planned efforts to increase the scope of participation, followed by a plan for integrating the collective work and ideas created.

On the other hand, as feedback: large-scale single-authored monographs are less visible in the report. This suggests that the trend towards collective research is a fruitful direction for the development of impactful work.

## Recommendations

The main recommendation is to continue with well-planned collective work, discovering and integrating new research areas, sources, fora, and academic networks.

It may be useful to include among the aims to focus on where the existing study of the history of the Estonian language and its dialects can contribute to general and theoretical linguistics in a way that could lead to greater integration and generalizations at a global level in the field of linguistics.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

Research conducted within this professorship model can be considered sustainable. The support provided by University of Tartu has proven to be a solid foundation for further



development. The professorship relies heavily on knowledge transfer between generations of scholars, where detailed subject knowledge accumulated over long periods is passed on to younger scholars and laypeople.

The number and quality of doctoral students are likely to guarantee the growth and impact of the research within this professorship. Various locally based institutions are involved in the work of the professorship, supporting a sustainable research network.

There is a strong network of knowledge transfer maintained via the involvement of senior scholars from other professorships within language-related disciplines and outside of linguistics as well. The work on dialects and history of the language, phonological typology, the typology of kindred languages, data collection, and corpus development has laid the foundations for further growth of research impact.

The promotion of the team members who belong to the professorship is fast. The fact that the professor is a member of the Academy of Sciences also contributes to the interdisciplinary maintenance of sustainable research ties. The work with the large number of doctoral students guarantees that the research directions of the professorship are continued.

It is an advantage for the sustainability of the research in this area that the professor, by character or temperament, is a natural educator and an excellent science communicator. This professorship has created popular scientific and study materials that are available online for wider use around the world, which means that the contributions by the professorship are applicable in secondary and tertiary level of education.

Major volumes on Estonian and substantial journal articles guarantee the higher quality of research in this area of the Estonian language research.

### **Areas of development**

During the presentation of the professorship, it was mentioned that a separate professorship of Estonian phonetics/phonology alongside with the Professorship of the History and Dialects one would be useful. Semantics also emerged in the discussions following the presentations as an important linguistic area for Estonian.

The professorship indeed has many tasks, and fragmentation is easy to emerge. The research strengths of the professor - but not the professorship design in itself - combines two research areas: phonetics/phonology and Estonian dialects/the history of the Estonian language. This combination is a clear asset for the institution of national professorships, but possibly not sustainable after some decades.

It would be useful to allocate time blocks for research as well as for planning (for sustainability). Would a refocus or a reorganization of the professorship benefit the areas combined successfully by the present professorship? Would it be more beneficial to focus

more on history, dialects, phonology, phonetics, semantics, or other combinations of areas within the Estonian language?

Given the technical nature of phonetics and the socially and organizationally challenging nature of dialect research, which are successfully combined now, splitting them may provide a solution for future sustainability.

Additionally, creating more professorships in various areas of Estonian or in combinations of Estonian research areas would be beneficial for resilience during challenging times for research in small fields, such as Estonian linguistics.

For the sustainability of the research within this professorship, it would be wise to plan further strategies.

While a substantial amount of research on the history and dialects of Estonian is already accessible online, expanding and adapting this material for wider and more diverse audiences would strengthen its sustainability via international reach and relevance. The development of interactive online applications that engage users in exploring their own regional linguistic characteristics—such as variants of the partitive plural, perception of pitch accent, or phonetic variation in the vowel represented by “õ”—could serve as an effective means of promoting public visibility and scholarly awareness of dialectal and historical dimensions of Estonian linguistics. With the closure of the Estonian Institute, the Professorship of History and Dialects of Estonian Language is well positioned to assume a leading role in preserving and promoting Estonia’s linguistic heritage. As part of a coordinated effort among national professorships, it can help ensure the sustainable dissemination and lasting global impact of research on Estonia’s linguistic history and regional diversity.

## Recommendations

Each national professorship has its own networks and good practices for sustainable research. Many of these networks and practices are shared and similar, but some could be applied within this professorship of history and dialects of Estonian as well.

One area especially suited for dialects seems to be the emerging citizen science trend. For the history of the Estonian language, it may be useful to explore the role of language contacts throughout its history, complementing the interdisciplinary study of its origins. In phonetics and phonology-related research, progress in LLMs has been useful in testing theories based on other small languages.

As the Estonian language and its dynamics are central to the national professorships, it may be wise to split or create more professorships in this area. As emerged from the discussions following the presentation, it would be useful to plan blocks of focused time for research, preferably spent at a university or research institute with resources relevant to the professorship’s areas. This could lead to syntheses that promise significant

contributions to general and theoretical linguistics, based on the rich data and analysis already achieved, which would increase the impact of the professorship.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

Due to its nature and the focus, the dialects and history of Estonian, this national Estonian professorship is central to its social relevance. The strength of this professorship lies in its societal impact, as documented through various items in the report package.

The societal impact of the Professorship of the History and Dialects of Estonian Language is clearly stronger in the area of dialects. This may be attributed to the somewhat diverging nature of dialect research and the research of the history of the language.

The institutions and networks available for engagement are also useful for research on dialects, partly involving current generations, groups attempting to revitalize the local variants, or those in search of a local language-bound identity.

The societal impact related to the part of the professorship that deals with the history of Estonian tends to be more related to prehistoric times via archaeology and genetics, often referred to as 'the roots of Estonian.'

### Areas of development

Among the most significant areas of development is a void that has recently emerged because of the closing down of another state funded institution with similar but partly non-academic activities (such as exhibitions and receptions). This institution, called Eesti Instituut (the Estonian Institute), produced and distributed materials for promoting the Estonian language and culture worldwide. It was active and funded for decades, but now there is a void to be filled. The promotion of the Estonian language and culture internationally could possibly be taken over by the national professorships. Since Estonian language is a more academically centered area than for instance fine arts, the language related professorships are also more suitable for assuming some of the more academically based tasks. The national professorship of the history and dialects of Estonian will most likely need to cater for this changing context more than other professorships. This professorship also covers many cultural aspects and has a good network of local institutions. Thus, it is probably also easier to expand to cover the void, perhaps by splitting the tasks of the professorship in the long term.

For this professorship, next to adjusting part of its orientation towards filling the gap described above, it would be wise to publish more internationally visible research in linguistics in journals that combine the history and the dialects of the Estonian language.

One international trend that could be recommended for combining the areas in linguistics under the professorship of the history and dialects of Estonian, typology and theoretical linguistics, is linguistic variation. This would also mean having societal impact beyond Estonia.

The initiatives that targeted the recent societal crises related to language could have been somewhat more impactful with faster coordination; here, increased cooperation between the Estonian language professorships could be useful in the future.

### Recommendations

As with all professorships, topics that are relevant to individual speakers of Estonian and their needs could be explored further. The communities of speakers and those interested in Estonian have diversified, and the use of citizen science and AI would help organize the work more efficiently, with greater impact in various social areas within Estonia and beyond.

While AI is good for customizing messages and planning, one should critically consider the biases that may be inherent in AI, as these biases are not useful for small minorities, superdiversity, or for planning long-term projects of national importance.

Given the language-related nature of this national professorship, it would be advisable that some of the language-related tasks of the closed-down Estonian Institute were covered by another national language-related institution. Assuming new tasks would come with an extra workload, but given the overall organizational setup, it might be a more feasible option to give the History and Dialects of Estonian professorship a coordinating role in the academic areas that were previously covered by the Estonian Institute.

## Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language (prof. Birute Klaas-Lang)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

Professor Birute Klaas-Lang's contributions to the field of linguistics, particularly in Estonian as a foreign and second language, are profound and far-reaching. Her professorship from 2016 to 2023 was marked by an impressive output including three monographs and 99 peer-reviewed journal articles. These achievements demonstrate her ability to produce impactful research that resonates both nationally and internationally. Key areas of her research—such as language policy, sociolinguistics, and the sustainability of Estonian in a multilingual academic environment—reflect her commitment to addressing complex linguistic and societal challenges.

Professor Birute Klaas-Lang's leadership in research initiatives, exemplified by her participation in projects totaling over €5 million, underscores her ability to secure funding for significant academic pursuits. Furthermore, her focus on applied linguistics has led to the development of tools and resources, such as the Digital Gateway for Estonian Language Learning, which bridges the gap between academic research and practical language education, an area where she also has a crucial impact. Moreover, publications of her team appear to be groundbreaking, and her work is a solid reference in the field.

Over the years, she has built an impressive team of young scholars whose research continues to attract funding, and their research activities are on top of international standards.

#### Areas of development

Since the achievements of the professorship are notable, the main aim should be to maintain this high level of performance. However, certain areas could benefit from enhanced focus. One such area is the diversification of methodologies to include more interdisciplinary approaches that integrate advancements in technology, such as AI-driven language acquisition tools.

Additionally, language policy recommendations could gain even broader traction through collaborations with policymakers and community leaders. It is important that such collaborations already exist, as the professorship's activities could further deepen engagement with underrepresented linguistic communities, ensuring that all voices are included in discussions of multilingualism and education policy.

## Recommendations

To build on the clear existing strengths and address areas for growth, the research team could pursue additional collaborations with international research networks to integrate global perspectives and practices into the study of Estonian language education and policy.

Fostering greater interdisciplinary partnerships, particularly with fields such as computational linguistics and educational psychology, would also enhance the breadth and depth of research outputs. Indeed, expanding outreach and policy advocacy through targeted workshops and seminars could help bridge the gap between academia and practical implementation, especially in the context of Estonia's transition to Estonian-medium education.

Finally, prioritizing the development of younger researchers through scholarships, international exchange programs, and hands-on project involvement will ensure the long-term sustainability and dynamism of the field. These efforts would further solidify the professorship's position as a leader in applied linguistics and language policy research.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

The sustainability of research under the Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language has been exemplary, characterized by a strategic blend of academic excellence, collaboration, and practical application. One of the most striking aspects is the team's ability to secure substantial funding, having received over €5 million in research and development grants between 2016 and 2023 — a testament to the group's credibility and relevance in the field. This additional financial support has enabled the team to pursue long-term projects such as the transition to Estonian-medium education, studies on multilingualism, and the sustainability of the Estonian language. The basic funding is provided by the university, which has fulfilled its obligations.

Another notable strength is the diversification of the research portfolio, which spans sociolinguistics, education policy, language technology, and cultural studies. This broad scope not only enhances the team's resilience but also ensures alignment with evolving academic and societal needs. The active involvement of 17 members of the research team, including professors, junior researchers, and PhD students, further underscores the group's commitment to fostering a collaborative and multidisciplinary research environment.

The emphasis on applied linguistics and partnerships with policymakers and educational institutions has also strengthened the practical impact of their work, making it a cornerstone of Estonia's language policy initiatives.

## Areas of development

Despite the significant achievements, there are areas where the sustainability of the research could be improved. It seems clear that everything relies on Professor Birute Klaas-Lang's work, which is quite normal. However, the reliance on a relatively small number of senior researchers for leadership roles could pose a risk to continuity as projects evolve.

This challenge is compounded by the limited integration of cutting-edge technologies, such as machine learning and big data analytics, into the team's research methodologies, which could otherwise enhance efficiency and scalability.

Another area for growth lies in strengthening the global visibility of the research outputs. Although the team is active in international networks, the dissemination of findings could be expanded through high-impact publications, global conferences, and media engagement. Finally, the mentorship and development pathways for junior researchers must be structured to ensure that younger members are fully equipped to take on leadership roles in future projects.

While a considerable share of research on Estonian as a Foreign Language is available online, there is a clear need to further develop and adapt materials for international learners and educators. One of the core missions of the now-closed Estonian Institute was to promote the learning of Estonian abroad—a goal that directly aligns with, and significantly affects the sustainability of this professorship. Considering this, the Professorship of Estonian as a Second Language is uniquely positioned to take a leading role in ensuring the continued global promotion and accessibility of the Estonian language. Strategic collaboration among national professorships is essential to sustain and expand the international reach and long-term impact of the Estonian language learning and teaching initiatives. With an increasing number of Estonians residing and working abroad, a growing range of decentralized academic and non-academic initiatives has emerged globally. The national professorship is uniquely positioned to serve as the official scholarly anchor for these efforts, offering venues, coordination, visibility, and intellectual support. In addition, nationally led collaboration with Tallinn University—traditionally more focused on the pedagogical aspects of Estonian language teaching—could be more visibly and systematically integrated into the strategic agenda of the professorship.

## Recommendations

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the research, the development of a formal succession plan for leadership roles — including mentorship programs for junior researchers and PhD students — will be crucial for maintaining continuity. Strengthening the integration of emerging technologies into research processes, such as AI-driven language analysis tools, would also help future-proof the team's methodologies.



Diversifying funding sources by engaging with private enterprises, international organizations, and philanthropic entities can provide additional financial stability and opportunities for innovative projects. To enhance global visibility, the team could increase participation in international academic and non-academic forums and consider launching an open-access digital platform to share research findings, tools, and resources with a broader audience.

Finally, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations with experts in technology, education, and cultural studies would enrich the team's research and ensure its alignment with global academic and societal trends. These steps would strengthen the sustainability of the research while amplifying its impact on both national and international stages.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The societal impact of the Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language is highly commendable, with their work contributing significantly to Estonia's linguistic and cultural landscape. A standout achievement is their pivotal role in supporting the transition to Estonian-medium education, an effort that addresses both national identity and integration challenges. Their research has directly informed policy recommendations, training programs, and resources that are instrumental in ensuring the success of this transition.

Additionally, the development of innovative tools, such as the Digital Gateway for Estonian Language Learning, demonstrates a commitment to making language education more accessible and effective for diverse audiences, from school students to adult learners. The team's focus on applied linguistics—particularly in the context of multilingualism and language policy—aligns closely with the needs of Estonian society, ensuring that their research yields immediate and tangible benefits.

Their contributions extend beyond academia, fostering greater understanding and appreciation of the Estonian language among international students, immigrant communities, and the broader public. Collaborative initiatives with schools, government bodies, and international networks further amplify their reach and relevance.

### Areas of development

There is not much to say on that; this professorship is the reference in its field within Estonia. One area that could be deepened is the integration of marginalized linguistic communities, whose unique challenges and perspectives may not yet be fully addressed in the team's projects.



While the transition to Estonian-medium education is a major focus, there could be more nuanced studies on how this shift affects specific groups, such as non-Estonian-speaking parents and rural communities, to ensure equity in educational outcomes.

Another area for growth could lie in evaluating the long-term effects of their initiatives, such as the sustainability of Estonian language use among young people, or the success of language policy interventions in fostering integration.

These assessments could provide valuable insights for refining ongoing efforts and for demonstrating the lasting value of their research.

### Recommendations

The main recommendation is to continue the excellent work being done. To further enhance the societal impact of their work, the professorship and team could consider increasing engagement with underrepresented linguistic groups through participatory research and community-based projects ensuring that their voices are included in language policy and education reforms.

Developing a comprehensive framework for evaluating the long-term outcomes of their societal interventions—such as the effectiveness of Estonian-medium education or the integration of immigrant communities—could provide valuable feedback for future initiatives.

Furthermore, strengthening collaborations with international experts and organizations on topics such as multilingualism, language rights, and cultural diversity would position the team as a global leader in these areas. By pursuing these recommendations, the team can not only solidify its impact within Estonia but also contribute valuable insights to global discussions on language and society.

## Professorship of Estonian Literature (prof. Arne Merilai)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

Research conducted in the Professorship of Estonian Literature is well balanced between national literature, its European context, and literary theory. The professorship practices methodological pluralism, and has several research directions — for example poetics, literary language, literary history, comparative literature, reception studies, narratology, gender studies, life writing, science fiction, (post-)postmodernism, and didactics. This variety reflects the academic freedom and long-standing traditions of the professorship.

The leader of the professorship, Professor Arne Merilai, has developed a personal theoretical and methodological approach to literature, which he calls ‘pragmapoetics,’ influenced by, for example, poetics, linguistics, structuralism, and philosophy of mind and language. He also speaks on behalf of a “Unified Literary Theory” — a metatheoretical perspective that could integrate all various research directions. These visions are ambitious but remain somehow vague and abstract as such, and his analysis of DNA with the terminology of pragmapoetics is entertaining but will probably be not very convincing for a geneticist. Pragmapoetics makes more sense when applied to actual poetic texts, as Professor Merilai does in the article “Deictic Close Reading.”

While Professor Merilai’s approach is somehow idiosyncratic, Velsker, Käosaar, Tomberg, and Kraavi work in more established fields such as comparative literature, life writing, science fiction studies, and postmodernism. Research in didactics (Org) is also of importance.

Research output has been good, especially in Estonian-language publications. The professorship has launched and participated in numerous projects on various topics. It maintains a steady production of PhDs, with many promising dissertations being produced. The professorship has good national networks and collaborates with all major literary research institutions in Estonia. The achievements are hence according to international standards.

The English-language Estonian Writers’ Online Dictionary (<https://sisu.ut.ee/ewod/>) has made basic data about Estonian literature available internationally, and this is an important contribution to the broader understanding of Estonian culture.

## Areas of development

The professorship has not been successful with many grant proposals. This reflects a global problem – state funding is becoming increasingly insecure, and too much energy is being wasted in writing funding proposals.

While the variety of research topics might be an asset, it is also true that the profile of the professorship is not as clear as it could be. While the publications in Estonian are highly important for national culture, research output in global languages — especially in the most prolific journals and with leading publishers — could achieve even greater visibility.

With digitalization and new transmedia narrative forms, literature is undergoing profound changes and challenges globally, which will affect — or are already affecting — Estonian literature as well. These new developments in the global literary scene could be more strongly represented in research.

## Recommendations

In the future, more attention should be paid to the latest developments in literature and literary markets. Collaboration within the University of Tartu, as well as with other research organizations both nationally and internationally, is recommended.

Although the variety of research areas is understandable in a small national context, some effort to develop a clearer research profile with more recognizable spearheads might be profitable in the long run, especially at the international level.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

The PhD program appears to be functioning well. The students the commission spoke with seemed to be satisfied with their supervision. Many promising research directions are represented in the upcoming doctoral theses. Scholarly retreats, such as 'Liinakuru Spring School' create a sense of community. National and international cooperation helps to maintain the international standard of research.

### Areas of development

According to the self-evaluation report, regular state funding has not kept pace with inflation, meaning that sustainable resources have declined. At the same time, the professorship has not always been successful in gaining grants, which has made it difficult to recruit new staff.

While the professorship seems to have a well-functioning BA program, the low number of MA graduates raises some concerns. Although the PhD program attracts students

internationally, it is worth asking where future Estonian doctoral students will come from. Given the number of available supervisors, the number of completed PhDs is relatively good, but as noted in the self-evaluation report, it could be higher.

The number of state-funded PhD students at the Institute of Cultural Research is relatively small. Although PhD students were mostly satisfied with the supervision and organization of their studies, they expressed concern that the system of funding conference travel and research materials has become more complicated. In a small discipline, it has also been difficult to find supervisors for new, formerly unresearched areas.

Although a significant portion of the professorship's research on Estonian literature is available online, more could be made accessible in formats adapted to diverse audiences—including educators, students, and the broader public—which could contribute to long-term sustainability. With the recent closure of the Estonian Institute, the responsibility for disseminating Estonian literary culture increasingly falls on nationally funded institutions. National professorships are well positioned to take on a leading role in this area. The professorship of Literature is hereby crucially central in connecting writers, readers, initiatives, museums, organizations such as the Writers' Union, and scholarship in various institutions worldwide and in Estonia for online. This shift also presents an important development opportunity, calling for a coordinated strategy involving this and other national professorships to ensure the continued visibility and relevance of Estonian literature both nationally and internationally.

## Recommendations

We suggest increasing international cooperation so that those researching less-studied areas can have proper networks to collaborate with. It is also recommended to the funding bodies that state funding for the Professorship of Literature should be more secure and account for the effects of inflation. The university fulfilled its obligations in this case as well. Given the varying levels of openness to and success in funding across disciplines, the leadership might consider providing additional support for a field that is highly relevant to national identity—whether by supporting basic research and dissemination or by offering grant counseling.

At the same time, the professorship should, if possible, pay more attention in writing research proposals that could better convince the funding organizations, including at the EU-level. In this regard, international cooperation is of high importance.

To secure the number of PhD students in the future, the MA program could be developed to be more inviting to students.

The forthcoming retirement of the current professor always creates new challenges. The transition period between the current holder of the professorship to his follower should begin sooner rather than later.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The Professorship of Estonian Literature has long-standing traditions and clearly recognizes the fundamental value of literature for the Estonian nation. In practice, the team members have created and participated in various literary events. The professorship has collaborated with nearly every literary institution in Estonia.

The professorship has also initiated courses in creative writing, inviting practicing literary authors to teach. It is also notable that team members have produced and published literature themselves. As a result, there are strong connections between literary scholarship and actual literary production in Estonia.

The public role of professorship in Estonian literary and cultural life has been considerable in many ways. The number of books, articles and talks addressed to non-academic audiences is high, and active participation in literary events, festivals, and competitions demonstrates that the professorship and its staff take their public role and societal impact seriously.

The Compilation of the English-language Estonian Writers' Online Dictionary has helped Estonian literature gain international visibility.

### Areas of development

The small number of MA degrees raises concerns about the future: will Estonia have enough literature teachers in the coming years? This question is of utmost importance – not only to the professorship, but also to the Estonian school system and, more broadly, to the development of the Estonian nation.

The considerable work that the professorship has clearly done to enhance public visibility and societal impact is not always recognized by administrative and funding bodies. There is a risk that this visibility is acknowledged with flattering words, but not with meaningful financial support.

### Recommendations

The considerable work that the professorship does for Estonian literary life and its public visibility should be more fully recognized, particularly in terms of funding.

The idea of forming an Open Access repository is recommendable, although it should ideally take place at the university level rather than by a single professorship.

The aim of developing creative writing into an open micro-credential degree program, as stated in the report, is highly recommendable. Moreover, creative writing could be developed towards serious artistic research in the spirit of the so-called Vienna

Declaration, thus narrowing the gap between traditional literary scholarship and literary production and creativity.

## **Professorship of Estonian and Comparative Folklore (prof. Ülo Valk)**

### **Scientific Impact of Research**

#### **Positive aspects**

The Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore is a long-established and thriving aspect of the University of Tartu's academic portfolio, offering subject expertise across all levels, from BA to PhD. The team associated with the professorship is active in both Estonian and international folklore, is involved in international networks and projects, and publishes in English.

The Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore is impressive, with a long list of publications that are methodologically and theoretically diverse. Altogether, the team has published 30 monographs, 279 research articles in peer-reviewed journals, and 174 research articles and books. These are truly impressive numbers. They publish in Estonian, as well as in English and other languages. A monograph in Chinese by Ülo Valk deserves special mention. Additionally, they have secured over five million euros in R&D funding, which is remarkable. Definitively, they are fully aligned with internationally recognized standards.

The team addresses classical topics such as folk songs, fairy tales, religious narratives and storytelling, identity formation, folk beliefs and vernacular religion, as well as the history of the discipline itself. Estonia appears to be their primary focus, although many studies have a comparative angle or offer comparative perspectives on the aforementioned topics in other societies. Equally important is their research on ethnic and national minorities.

#### **Areas of development**

An area for further development is increasing the focus on international publishing of both staff research and PhD findings, which would enhance the global visibility and impact of the professorship's work.

#### **Recommendations**

Additional focus should be placed on developing and supporting PhD networks and the international dissemination of research.

Networking opportunities for PhD students should be further strengthened, and postdocs should be given the opportunity to take advantage of research stays abroad.

Access to translation assistance could serve as a positive incentive for publishing in international journals.

Regarding the impressive results, one wishes the team to continue the successful path they have chosen. Additionally, it would be desirable to see more of their research published in English; hence, their publication strategy should become more international. In this regard, they might aim for publishing houses with the highest reputation in the UK and the USA, which does not appear to have been the case so far.

In general, it does not seem ideal that PhD monographs are mainly published in Tartu-based series (for university-based PhD publications, this appears to be a rule in Estonia), as the most innovative results are not easy to discover from outside. It might be worth reassessing this tradition or encouraging/obligating the PhD researchers to publish at least one international peer-reviewed journal article in English.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

An impressive five former PhD students have joined the faculty since 2016, demonstrating an open, sustainable and dynamic research culture.

During the reporting period, 17 PhD projects were successfully completed. Some graduates continued their research at the University of Tartu, while others moved on to universities abroad or entered various cultural, political, or educational institutions.

Surely, the broad international network across different countries fosters this development. The young folklorists' conference, organized jointly by Tartu, Vilnius, Riga, and Helsinki, seems to be a very effective tool for establishing networks for younger scholars. In general, the team members appear to be well-networked both within and beyond Estonia's borders.

Through the English-language MA programme, the Chair contributes to the in-depth education of international students, who usually study their native countries and cultures. Hence, they make a sustainable academic impact beyond Estonia's borders in this regard.

### Areas of development

The importance of folklore to an understanding of Estonian culture is evident, both internally and externally, making University of Tartu a prime candidate for partnership within large international funding bids. It would be sensible to support workshops to develop additional key partnerships in relation to external funding opportunities. Possible means could include support for a postdoctoral role in bid development.

Given its importance and long historical tradition, the panel suggests that the university expand its funding for outreach activities. In general, the funding obligations have been fulfilled.



Although a considerable portion of the professorship's folklore research is accessible online, there remains significant potential to expand and tailor this content to diverse audiences, including scholars, educators, and the general public. Following the recent closure of the Estonian Institute, the responsibility for disseminating knowledge related to Estonian cultural heritage—particularly in areas such as folklore and traditional knowledge—now logically shifts to other nationally funded institutions. Where academic content is concerned, national professorships are especially well positioned to assume a leading and authoritative role in this effort. This presents a substantial area for development, requiring a coordinated strategic plan that includes this national professorship and its counterparts to ensure the continued visibility and accessibility of Estonian folklore on both national and international levels. An online app relating to the professorship strengths could be beneficial, such as a comparative tool for those interested how the Estonian culture compares to others, leading the more interested users to further information, could be an example of increasing online visibility.

### Recommendations

Networking opportunities for PhD students should be further strengthened, and postdocs should be given the opportunity to benefit from research stays abroad.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The Professorship of Estonian and Comparative Folklore supports various social media initiatives, including Facebook and Instagram accounts managed by students in collaboration with faculty. It has also launched a series of folklore lectures on the University of Tartu's TV website, featuring approximately 85 video lectures that enhance awareness of the research. Team members are frequently invited to participate in a wide range of events, engaging deeply with local communities.

The important relationship with the Estonian Folklore Archives, the Department of Folkloristics, and the Estonian Literary Museum is exemplary.

The team's engagement in schools is notable, particularly in addressing the challenges of fake news and disinformation in Europe during and after COVID-19 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This work is extremely valuable for societal cohesion and democracy.

Another research topic on gender relations (and gendered inequalities) has been presented on the ground in smaller and mid-sized communities, as well as through various forms of media. This is public outreach at its best, as it addresses not only a small elite through leading journals but also connects with wider society.

The professorship has strong international ties, particularly with the USA and the Baltic/Nordic regions. The links with the Indiana University, which have included a visiting professor, are notable, as are Professor Valk's guest lectures at the University of California, Berkeley.

### Areas of development

The team engages in various formats of societal outreach: on the one hand, they share their findings through modern media that they curate themselves (Facebook, Instagram, audiovisual recordings). This is impressive but could also be too great a task for a student. Staff involvement would require more time and funding but would be worthwhile. The researchers engaged in this form of outreach invest an immense amount of time – hopefully, they are in tenure-track positions.

### Recommendations

The university is advised to find ways to support the expansion and sustainability of the social networking initiatives emanating from this professorship.

External links with international folklore research could be further encouraged through support for international project development and bid writing to relieve the currently overburdened staff.

Those who engage in highly active outreach work need relief from other responsibilities. The university could support the entire professorship scheme by providing positions to assist with outreach, including social media, as this cannot be sustainably managed by students over the long term. This could present an opportunity to enhance their societal impact.

## Professorship of Semiotics of Culture (prof. Peeter Torop)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

Professor Peeter Torop's contributions to the field of cultural semiotics have been significant, both in terms of academic output and practical applications. From 2016 to 2023, his leadership has resulted in the publication of six monographs, 65 peer-reviewed journal articles, and 43 book chapters, highlighting his dedication to advancing semiotic research and mentoring. His work on transmedia studies and digital learning environments stands out as an innovative approach to understanding and mediating cultural memory and education. These efforts have been supported by substantial funding, reflecting the trust and recognition from both the academic and cultural sectors.

Furthermore, Professor Peeter Torop's collaboration with colleagues on projects such as digital platforms for Estonian cultural heritage has exemplified the integration of theoretical insights with practical tools, strengthening cultural memory and identity. Part of his work has been internationally recognized, as seen in his leadership of publications such as *"The Companion to Juri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture"*, which underscores the global relevance of his research.

The mentorship of young scholars is another highlight, with seven doctoral degrees supervised and several experimental digital platforms providing empirical material for doctoral theses.

Since this is the last professorship of this kind introduced in Estonia, the quality and quantity of the scientific work done seem both important and appropriate.

#### Areas of development

While the achievements are considerable, especially when we take into account the fact that this is the last professorship of national significance introduced into the Estonian system, some areas warrant further development to sustain and expand this impact.

First, the accessibility of cultural semiotics research could benefit from more translations and publications in widely spoken languages to ensure a broader global reach. Although the professorship has emphasized Estonian culture, more active dissemination to non-Estonian audiences can amplify the significance of this research internationally. The same thing can be said for Lotman's heritage, which is also very popular outside Europe.

Second, the integration of cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, into cultural semiotics research could open new possibilities for analyzing digital archives and semiotic processes. Currently, while digital learning

environments have been a focus of the professorship, incorporating emerging technologies could enhance these platforms and strengthen the potential of cultural semiotics for developing transmedia and digital cultural analysis.

Lastly, a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration with fields such as cognitive science, linguistics, and digital humanities might further enrich the theoretical framework and applications of semiotic studies. This expansion would also help attract additional funding and partnerships, which seem to be some kind of issue, if compared to other professorships.

## Recommendations

To maximize the impact and sustainability of the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture, a few strategic recommendations can be made.

First, establish an international consortium or network dedicated to cultural semiotics, bringing together scholars, practitioners, and institutions to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and the exchange of ideas. This could lead to joint research projects, conferences, and publications, elevating the global profile of the Tartu semiotics school.

Second, prioritize the development of digital tools and platforms that integrate AI-driven analytics to analyze semiotic patterns in large datasets, such as cultural archives, social media, and multimedia content. Such tools would not only advance theoretical understanding but also provide practical applications in education and policymaking. Semiotics is excellent for qualitative analysis, but in the future, semioticians have to take AI mediation into account and keep together their qualitative methodology with quantitative analysis.

Finally, consider launching a dedicated outreach initiative to popularize semiotic research among broader audiences, such as educators, policymakers, and cultural organizations, to ensure that its practical applications are widely recognized and utilized. These steps would reinforce the global standing of cultural semiotics while maintaining its strong ties to Estonian cultural heritage.

Additionally, placing more focus on publishing in international semiotic journals, both European and American, could enhance the visibility of the research group.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

With its decision to establish the Professor of Semiotics of Culture as an additional professorship of national significance, the university leadership visibly affirmed its

obligations of this funding scheme. Given the historical significance of this field for the university, this appears to be an important decision.

The sustainability of the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture and the research team is underpinned by a robust foundation of academic achievement, collaborative networks, and innovative initiatives. Over the years, the team has successfully bridged tradition and innovation, ensuring the continuity of the Tartu school of cultural semiotics. The production of high-quality publications demonstrates strong and consistent research output.

Additionally, the team's interdisciplinary projects, such as the creation of 14 digital platforms, have not only contributed to the preservation of cultural memory but have also showcased the practical applications of semiotic research, which is a key aspect. These platforms have provided valuable tools for education and cultural mediation, supporting both national and international audiences.

The integration of young scholars into research activities, evidenced by seven doctoral theses and numerous master's theses supervised during the period, highlights the team's dedication to cultivating future researchers. This mentorship, combined with opportunities for empirical work and co-authorship, fosters a sustainable research environment.

### Areas of development

Despite its significant achievements, the sustainability of the professorship and research team faces challenges that warrant attention. The relatively limited admission to doctoral programs has constrained the capacity to train a larger pool of semiotic scholars, potentially impacting the long-term growth of the field. While the professorship has made efforts to balance national and international goals, there remains a need to increase visibility and engagement on a global scale. For example, some digital platforms and publications are still primarily focused on Estonian materials, which may limit their reach to broader international audiences.

Another area for development lies in technological integration; although the team has made strides in digital mediation, a more comprehensive utilization of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics could further enhance their research methodologies and outputs. Currently, all of this seems lacking.

Additionally, while collaboration with institutions such as the Estonian Film Institute and international partners has been fruitful, there is potential to establish more long-term, formalized partnerships that extend beyond project-based cooperation. Strengthening such networks could provide greater resilience and continuity for the team's research endeavors.

While much of the research produced by the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture is available online, further tailoring for diverse audiences would enhance its international visibility and engagement. Given the background of Russian Literature for this professorship, it can be also uniquely positioned in helping other professorships in creating content for increasing the visibility of the national professorships areas in Russian and in connecting to scholarship in other universities working on the heritage of Lotman. With the closure of the Estonian Institute, a clear opportunity arises for the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture to take a leading role in sustaining and promoting Estonia's academic and cultural expertise in semiotics. By actively contributing to a coordinated strategy across national professorships, it can help ensure the long-term global dissemination and impact of Estonian research in semiotics and beyond.

The Professorship will need ongoing support from the University of Tartu to sustain these successes.

### Recommendations

To ensure the sustainability of the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture and the research team, several strategic recommendations can be proposed.

First, expand doctoral program admissions and introduce targeted scholarships or grants to attract and support more students specializing in cultural semiotics. This can be done by obtaining grants or seeking funding from private stakeholders. Semiotics can be very helpful in the communication market, and it is not difficult to build strategic partnerships if the semiotic research in fields like audio-visuals or digital learning environment is disseminated in the right way. This would help address the generational gap in semiotics research and ensure a steady influx of new scholars.

Second, prioritize the internationalization of research outputs by increasing the number of publications in major global languages and journals, and by enhancing collaboration with non-Estonian institutions. Establishing or joining an international semiotics consortium could provide a platform for sharing resources, conducting joint research, and hosting conferences, thereby elevating the global impact of the Tartu school of cultural semiotics.

Third, invest in the integration of advanced technologies into research workflows, such as employing AI tools to analyze cultural artifacts, develop dynamic digital platforms, or exploring interactive educational technologies.

Finally, formalize long-term partnerships with cultural, academic, and technological institutions to create a resilient network of collaborators and funding sources.

These measures would not only enhance the sustainability of the professorship but also position it as a global leader in the field of cultural semiotics, ensuring its legacy for years to come.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The Professorship of Semiotics of Culture team has significantly contributed to preserving and promoting cultural memory through innovative digital platforms, such as “Literature on Screen” and other transmedia tools, which integrate traditional and digital literacy. These platforms serve as educational resources that enhance cultural awareness and foster engagement with Estonia's cultural heritage.

Their collaboration with schools and cultural institutions, including workshops for educators and the creation of curriculum-aligned materials, has extended the reach of their research into both formal and informal education. Furthermore, the team's focus on Juri Lotman's legacy has enriched cultural and semiotic studies globally, extending even beyond academia.

Recognition through awards, like the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, and partnerships with institutions like the Estonian Film Institute underscores the societal value of their research. The team's efforts to combine semiotics with digital technology have not only made cultural analysis more accessible but have also addressed pressing issues, like cultural sustainability in a digital age.

### Areas of development

Despite the notable societal contributions, there are areas where the impact of the professorship could be expanded.

One key challenge lies in making the digital platforms and tools more inclusive and accessible to international audiences, may also through a redesign thought for international audiences. Indeed, many of these platforms, while innovative, are tailored primarily to Estonian cultural contexts, limiting their global applicability and reducing their potential for cross-cultural engagement.

Another area for improvement is the depth of public outreach and engagement. While the team has conducted workshops and collaborated with cultural institutions, a more sustained presence in public discourse—through media, public events, or social campaigns—could further enhance societal impact. Also, because the topics they are working on are of general interest, also beyond academia.

Additionally, while the integration of semiotics into education has been impactful, extending this approach to address broader societal issues - such as multiculturalism, social integration, and digital ethics - could elevate its relevance in contemporary societal challenges.

Finally, the sustainability of these initiatives remains a concern, as some projects rely heavily on short-term funding, which may hinder their long-term societal influence.

### Recommendations

To enhance the societal impact of the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture, several strategic actions are recommended. First, internationalize the digital platforms by incorporating multilingual support and expanding content to include global cultural contexts. This would make their innovative tools more relevant to a broader audience and foster cross-cultural dialogue.

Second, intensify public engagement efforts by leveraging social media, podcasts, and interactive webinars to popularize semiotics and its applications. Such initiatives could raise public awareness of the discipline's relevance to everyday life and societal issues.

Third, integrate research insights into policy discussions, particularly on cultural preservation, digital literacy, and education reform, to influence broader societal frameworks. Establishing partnerships with policymakers and think tanks could further amplify their societal impact.

Finally, secure long-term funding and institutional support for key projects to ensure their sustainability and scalability. By focusing on these areas, the team could strengthen the bridge between academic research and societal needs, solidifying their role as a catalyst for cultural and educational transformation.



## Professorship of Estonian History (prof. Tõnu-Andrus Tannberg)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

During the evaluation period, the Professorship of Estonian History fulfilled an impressively wide range of tasks.

Further, they published extensively on the mentioned topics, which are important for Estonian national history and thus for the country's self-understanding. Among the 26 monographs, an enormous number for one professorship was a survey of Estonian history, which is also intended for use in schools. This was also published in Russian, which is very positive given the linguistic composition of society.

Other publications in the fields of military, political, and urban history from the 17th to the 20th century complete the positive picture of an intensive publishing activity in the country, which has been confirmed by various awards. The books are mostly detailed studies based on comprehensive source materials. Hence, the professorships achievements meet internationally recognized standards.

#### Areas of development

The professorship has a strong track record in the fields of political, military and urban history from the 17th to the 20th century, and impresses with a high number of monographs in the Estonian language. Its members also publish journal articles in different languages. While fully acknowledging the team's many responsibilities in outreach and societal dialogue, as well as its important publishing activities in Estonian (and occasionally Russian) aimed at directly engaging Estonian society, the international visibility of their research could still be strengthened.

Furthermore, the most recent trends in historiography seem to be not prominently present or missing in the professorship's portfolio. Women's and gender history as well as cultural history had been presented as innovation in research and teaching, which are indeed important perspectives. To open up to an increasingly interdisciplinary research landscape, one might consider integrating additional perspectives, such as memory culture, environmental history, or digital history. Some of these would offer interfaces with other professorships within the funding scheme and could support the development of a more integrated programme — if this is a political objective at all. They would certainly enhance the international reception of the researchers' work.

Further, stronger theoretical or methodological frameworks might help to connect even more intensively with research abroad.

## Recommendations

In general, the professorship certainly impresses with the volume of its research and, judging by the awards received, the positive reception of its work in Estonia. It addresses important events, figures and structures in Estonian history and frequently publishes on these topics in books and journals.

An important next step would be to introduce the research more broadly in a transnational discussion, which would not only require translation and copy-editing but sometimes a shift in how questions are posed. It is definitely important for Estonian society to read in detail about the military history — and to read this in Estonian — but it could also be valuable to explore the story of a military organization in a small country, with comparative aspects, guided by a more sociological-historical approach and with fewer details.

The professorship might therefore consider applying a two-step strategy for its main publications: one book aimed at the Estonian audience and a more concise, more theoretical one for the international audience. In particular, early-career researchers should find guidance within the professorship or department on how to pose questions differently, and they will need assistance with copy-editing.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

The professorship impresses with its career development outcomes: more than 20 doctoral theses were completed during the period under review, and another 10 are in progress. After their PhD studies, graduates seem to obtain, on average, very good positions in academia, culture, and politics. This can be considered a huge success. The team also trains future teachers and therefore a main group of multipliers in society: This is a big responsibility, especially given the fact of different narratives of history in different groups of Estonian society. One path taken, to write a survey that might be used in school, seems to be an important one.

The professorship also communicates its academic findings to a wider audience, which is a clear indicator of sustainability. It has received sufficient support from the University of Tartu, which has thereby fulfilled its role.

### Areas of development

The research of memory culture was not regarded as a task of the Professorship of Estonian History, but ethnology. Given the fact that different narratives of some Estonian historical events in different groups of society play(ed) a big role in public debate (e.g.,

the removal of monuments) this seems a somewhat traditional approach. Especially regarding the education of future schoolteachers, the power of narratives should be discussed within historical education. This could also connect the research to a broader international and comparative debate. Updating online information on Estonian history in Russian, Ukrainian, other languages spoken by larger waves of recent immigrants, as well as in simplified English or Estonian, could also be a potential area for development.

### **Recommendations**

Altogether, the research, teaching, and student and PhD education are well integrated and develop a long-lasting, sustainable impact. To further strengthen this, the professorship can think about bringing the most important results in other forms to the international level, to strengthen its efforts in history teacher education—which has a long-term impact on society—and to open up theoretically to public history.

## **Societal Impact of Research**

### **Positive aspects**

The staff is well connected to all relevant actors in the fields of history education, historical memory and state institutions in Estonia, and sees national networking as its main task. The number of involvements in national juries, committees, and boards is impressive and serves as clear evidence of national importance. The professorship also maintains a network abroad.

Numerous transfer and outreach activities, mainly concerning modern and contemporary history, are immediately apparent. The anniversaries of the founding of the Estonian Republic, the Tartu Peace Treaty, and other significant events led to a strong media presence for the staff.

Most team members are frequent guests in the media, especially around anniversaries. Historians of the Professorship of Estonian History therefore play an important public role, providing historical insights to a broader audience. Their books in Estonian underscore this contribution.

### **Areas of development**

The Professorship of Estonian History performs tremendous work on many levels. Its team members seem to work constantly to bring their expertise into society, and this cannot be appreciated enough. From an outsider's perspective, however, one wonders whether there is a history beyond the anniversaries of state building awaiting — a history with failures and disruptions, a history of marginalized perspectives and groups. And if such a history writing could not integrate society in the long run.

## Recommendations

On a more abstract level, one could reflect on the role of historiography in society: Is it to provide orientation about (national) history and offer a foundation for identity formation? Is it to reflect different interpretations of the past and the way those narratives were built? Or is it also to offer perspectives on history?

In fulfilling all three tasks, historiography needs to integrate different perspectives and move away from the long-dominant trajectory of political history. How does contemporary Estonian history look when written from the perspective of women? Or how did believers in state socialism deal with new realities after 1991? The international peer-reviewed journals would surely welcome such contributions.

## Professorship of Intellectual History (prof. Pärtel Piirimäe)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

Pärtel Piirimäe and his team's contributions to the field of intellectual history have been substantial and multifaceted. Their research spans a vast range of topics, including early modern intellectual history, the history of political philosophy, and the methodology of intellectual historiography.

They have published extensively, with 14 monographs, 52 research articles in peer-reviewed journals, and 58 chapters in edited volumes between 2016 and 2023. These outputs reflect a sustained commitment to advancing scholarly discourse at the intersection of European and Baltic intellectual traditions. Notably, the contributions to high-impact publications, such as "The Cambridge Companion to Pufendorf" and Brill's series on early modern natural law, showcase the role of this in both contributing to and shaping international scholarly debates.

In terms of the professorship of Intellectual History, the period of evaluation is different as in 2016 the professorship did not yet exist. The professor was elected in 2017, in 2018 the work began, and the Chair of Intellectual History was officially established only in 2022. In a relatively short time, however, the professorship has developed a remarkably strong profile of its own.

The Professorship has a clear vision: to study Baltic and Estonian intellectual history in the European context. Most research programs in this professorship follows that vision, maintaining a balance between national and international perspectives.

In the report provided, five main areas of research are defined: (1) Early modern intellectual history of the Baltic region; (2) European early modern intellectual history, particularly in political history and ideas on natural law and law of nations; (3) the history of philosophy in Estonia from the 19th century to the Soviet period; (4) the history of German and French philosophy from the 19th to the 21st century; and (5) the methodology and historiography of intellectual history. All areas are in line with the basic vision.

From an international perspective, the contribution to the research of early modern European intellectual history—for example, work on Pufendorf, Vettel, early modern dissertations and historiography—is indeed valuable. Participation in the research project "*Natural Law 1625-1850*" and the articles by Professor Piirimäe (highlighted in material) are good examples of international cooperation.

Considering the small staff size and the short evaluation period, the professorship produced solid research outputs. It has gained external funding and participated in many funded collaborative projects. The professorship has also established strong international networks and contributed to many international research projects and publications. Its PhD program has already resulted in several completed dissertations.

All in all, in a relatively short time, the professorship has done impressive work in many areas. The scientific achievements of the professorship fully align with internationally recognized standards. The allocated support has yielded demonstrable impact, and the University of Tartu has met its commitments with distinction.

### Areas of development

It should be noted that evaluating Intellectual history separately from the other activities of the Philosophy department is not easy, as the cooperation between Intellectual history and, for example, History of philosophy, is so close. The division of work between these two chairs is not entirely clear. Furthermore, while the research outputs are prolific, expanding the diversity of publication venues—especially in top-tier journals outside the Baltic and Scandinavian contexts—could amplify the global visibility of Piirimäe’s work, which currently appears somewhat local.

Finally, exploring more comparative studies of intellectual traditions across regions and time periods could provide fresh perspectives that resonate with the interests of younger students.

As the only professorship of intellectual history in Estonia, the chair carries the responsibility of ensuring that the field as a whole is represented in both research and teaching. However, the professorship clearly has some strong well-defined fields of expertise—particularly in the history of key political concepts such as Natural Law, the State, and Freedom in Early Modern European thought—which are essential for raising the international visibility of the discipline.

These themes are also important from a national perspective, as their key concepts have played a significant role in the development of independent Baltic nation-states. If the goal is to cover all European influences on Estonian thought, there are certainly noticeable gaps in the range of researched topics. While German and, to some extent, French philosophy are well represented, British, American, and even Russian influences receive considerably less attention. Given the small number of researchers, this is understandable—but in some cases, it may nevertheless become a limitation.

While the early 20th-century intellectual history is covered, the materials contain no mention of late 20th-century or contemporary intellectual history in Estonia.

While publishing in Estonian is nationally significant and enhances the societal impact of the research, it appears that some of the work would also merit attention from a broader

international audience and could therefore be published in English, German, or another global academic language.

## Recommendations

To build on these strengths and address areas for growth, several strategic steps can be recommended. Establishing partnerships with institutions that possess complementary strengths in digital humanities could facilitate methodological innovations and open new avenues for funding. Additionally, expanding collaborations with scholars from diverse regions—including those outside Europe—would enrich the research group's comparative studies and enhance its international profile.

Professor Piirimäe and his colleagues might also consider forming an editorial collective to develop a high-impact journal or publication series focused on intellectual history, further solidifying their role as leaders in the field. Strengthening interdisciplinary collaborations within the University of Tartu and beyond could also enhance the group's impact, particularly in addressing contemporary societal challenges through a historical lens.

While the undergraduate curriculum should offer a balanced overview of intellectual traditions developed across the world (as appears to be the case), the research should aim for cutting-edge advancement in selected areas where clear strengths already exist, or where the most promising new initiatives are being driven by young researchers and PhD students. Although some attention has been given to the philosophy of history, greater focus could be placed on the theory and methodology of intellectual history as a discipline—particularly during the formative stage of the chair.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

The professorship's integration of research into teaching, exemplified by the development of the "European and Estonian Intellectual History" curriculum, ensures that research activities are deeply embedded within the academic framework of the university. Additionally, the group's international collaborations and participation in global research networks provide a broad base for academic exchange and the cross-fertilization of ideas, which is essential for sustainable growth.

In a relatively short time, the professorship has succeeded in developing a well-functioning research community with a clear vision and profile, supported by strong international networks. Several doctoral dissertations have already been completed, with others currently in progress.

The focus on mentoring and developing young scholars is another significant strength, as demonstrated by the successful supervision of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, many of whom have secured academic positions or fellowships. The number of supervisions is still small compared to other chairs, but this is one of the last ones that have been established and a well-structured approach to cultivating the next generation of researchers, ensuring long-term continuity in the field, must be one of the main aims of future work. The chair has strong networks both nationally and internationally, and PhD students benefit from opportunities to receive supervision from other institutes. Postdoctoral researchers have been able to move to foreign institutions. As they maintain their connections with Tartu, these researchers are well positioned to further strengthen international networks.

### Areas of development

Although the professorship has achieved significant results, sustainability may pose a challenge due to the lower number of students and doctoral candidates compared to other professorships. One of the main concerns is securing stable and diversified funding, as several recent, particularly international, grant applications have been unsuccessful. Therefore, greater attention should be given to proposal preparation to better align with international funding priorities. Here, the university leadership that included the professorship in the funding scheme, might offer additional support during its first crucial decade. Given the innovative and highly international nature of the research, expanding funding opportunities—or providing other forms of support, such as recommendation services for third-party funding applications—could be an important means of ensuring long-term stability.

Another area requiring development is the expansion of the research portfolio. While the focus on European and Baltic intellectual history is strong, greater investment in comparative and transdisciplinary research could open new collaboration and funding opportunities while also attracting new students. Additionally, incorporating innovative methodologies, such as digital humanities and computational approaches, into research programs could further enhance the field.

Dependence on a small core group of researchers may threaten the long-term sustainability of the professorship. It is therefore essential that young researchers gradually assume leadership roles and that the professorship consistently attracts new talent to ensure continuity and growth in research activities. Moreover, it is important to enhance the measurement and documentation of the impact of public engagement initiatives, which would strengthen the professorship's position both within the university and in securing external funding.

Despite the notable achievements, certain areas could benefit from further development. The self-evaluation highlights that while international collaborations and grant applications have been pursued, some key proposals were unsuccessful. This may be an



issue, especially in terms of future sustainability. Strengthening grant-writing strategies and aligning projects more closely with international funding priorities could enhance the success rate of these endeavors. The University of Tartu will need to support this new professorship in an appropriate way.

The number of young researchers and doctoral candidates is currently lower than what is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the research community. The professorship's minor program is a step in the right direction, but the absence of an independent master's program may make it difficult to recruit a sufficient number of doctoral students. While the professorship has successfully secured project-based funding, ensuring more stable and long-term financial support is crucial for sustainability. Excessive reliance on external funding could result in valuable research projects ending when funding periods expire, thereby hindering the long-term development of the field.

### Recommendations

To enhance sustainability, the team should prioritize diversifying its funding sources by targeting both European Union programs, such as Horizon Europe, and private foundations with a focus on humanities and cultural studies. Hosting workshops or consulting with grant-writing experts could improve the quality and competitiveness of future proposals. Additionally, forming strategic alliances with other research institutions, particularly those excelling in underrepresented methodologies such as digital humanities, could facilitate access to new tools and frameworks while expanding collaborative opportunities.

Expanding the team's scope to include more interdisciplinary and comparative research themes would not only enrich the academic output but also appeal to a wider range of funding opportunities and scholarly communities. The research group could benefit from targeted workshops on grant proposal development, with a focus on aligning research objectives with the priorities of major international funding bodies.

Continuing to cultivate partnerships with non-academic stakeholders, such as cultural institutions or policymakers, would strengthen the group's role in addressing societal challenges, ensuring that the research remains relevant and impactful for years to come.

To develop a critical mass for a scholarly community, the professorship should find out means to recruit more doctoral students and young researchers. Given the limited number of students and available career opportunities, this is not easy. One possible way to proceed could be to invite more visiting scholars. Also, other kinds of international networking is needed, both for EU or other international funding, but also for recruitment of PhD students from abroad. It is also recommended that the professorship is given enough regular state funding. While external funding is needed for launching new research areas and initiatives, the continuity of the discipline should not be dependent on that only.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

As a nationally significant professorship, Intellectual History has a responsibility to communicate its research findings to the broader public, a task in which it has excelled. The professorship's researchers actively participate in public discussions by publishing articles in newspapers and popular science journals, appearing on radio and television programs, and delivering public lectures to diverse audiences. Additionally, doctoral students have contributed to increasing the field's visibility by organizing a podcast series on intellectual history, further expanding its reach.

One of the most significant achievements has been the establishment of the Center for Intellectual History, which has become a hub for disseminating research findings through public lectures, intellectual history seminars, and events. Notable initiatives, such as the biannual colloquia and the 300th-anniversary celebrations of Immanuel Kant, have helped broaden audience engagement and deepen public interest in historical ideas and their contemporary relevance.

The team has contributed to the accessibility of research findings by publishing popular science essays and translating key intellectual works, making complex academic ideas more comprehensible to a wider audience. The integration of research and teaching further strengthens the professorship's societal impact, particularly through the "European and Estonian Intellectual History" curriculum, which provides students with a deeper understanding of historical ideas and their influence on contemporary issues. The professorship's collaboration with schools, gymnasiums, and cultural institutions, as well as its podcasts and educational materials, has helped expand the reach of their work.

A particularly important aspect is the professorship's ability to connect historical analysis with contemporary debates, such as nationalism, freedom, and human rights, ensuring that their research remains relevant and impactful in today's world.

### Areas of development

While the societal impact of the professorship is commendable, certain areas present opportunities for growth. One challenge is the measurement and documentation of the impact of public engagement activities. Although the team has participated in numerous outreach initiatives, a more systematic approach to evaluating their effectiveness and reach would help in refining their strategies and demonstrating value to stakeholders. Additionally, while the group has made strides in engaging Estonian audiences, expanding their outreach to international non-academic audiences remains an untapped opportunity.

Another area for development is the use of digital platforms to further enhance public engagement. While podcasts and online materials are a step in this direction, more

innovative uses of digital technology, such as virtual exhibitions, interactive tools, or online courses, could significantly extend the reach and accessibility of their work. Moreover, while the professorship's work often addresses contemporary societal issues, deeper collaboration with policymakers, educators, and cultural organizations could ensure that research findings are actively integrated into public policy and educational practices.

The chair has been active in popularizing its historical research in Estonian. However, some contemporary issues in Estonian politics and social development could merit from the long perspective of intellectual history, and the role of the members of the chair in these discussions did not become entirely clear from the material we were given. After all, concepts like 'state', 'nation' or 'freedom'—developed during the early modern period, as research in intellectual history clearly demonstrates—remain highly relevant in today's political debates.

### Recommendations

We can only recommend that the members of intellectual history maintain the active role they have played so far in Estonian public discourse. It is important that Intellectual History continues to make the public aware how the Estonian intellectual life has developed in the European context.

To enhance their societal impact, the professorship should adopt systematic evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of their public engagement activities. Feedback mechanisms, audience surveys, and impact studies could provide valuable insights into how their initiatives are received and areas for improvement. Expanding the use of digital tools and platforms is also recommended. For instance, developing interactive timelines, digital archives, or augmented reality experiences could bring intellectual history to life for broader audiences.

The team should also prioritize collaborations with non-academic stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, NGOs, and schools, to translate their research into actionable insights for public policy and education. This could involve hosting workshops for educators, creating curricular resources for schools, or providing expert input on public debates related to historical or ethical issues. Additionally, internationalizing their outreach efforts, such as by translating key resources into other languages or participating in global public history initiatives, could enhance their visibility and relevance on a larger scale.

Lastly, fostering a culture of co-creation with the public—where societal challenges are addressed collaboratively through historical perspectives—could further embed the team's work into broader societal frameworks. By continuing to prioritize accessibility, relevance, and collaboration, the professorship can amplify its societal impact and

strengthen its role as a vital conduit between historical scholarship and contemporary public life.

It is also important that the funding bodies find instruments that could take into account also the societal impact - both in Estonia and on an international level.

## Professorship of Art History (prof. Anu Mänd)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

The Professorship of Art History, currently led by Professor Anu Mänd, has achieved impressive results. Between 2016 and 2023, the small team has produced 17 monographs, 44 peer-reviewed articles, and 90 contributions to books and published works. The connections with external cultural institutions are commendable and could be further exploited if more resources were available in terms of staff and fellowships. The professorship has been led with dedication and commitment, maintaining a clear focus on the demands of international relevance within the context of broadening understanding of Estonian art history.

The evaluation panel is confident in asserting that the work of the professorship represents an important place for scholarship in relation to Estonian visual culture. The links with national museums and archives are very important and need continuing support, as they evidence a vital use of art historical research within an applied context that reaches wider audiences and expands the understanding of Estonian culture to the general public. The University of Tartu fulfilled its funding obligations towards the professorship.

The change in staff within the small department has been well managed and is indicative of promising future development, with new work building on the foundations of predecessors. The new generation of scholars working in the department is bringing different and relevant perspectives to the discipline, and it is particularly notable that group members have curated several exhibitions at the Art Museum of Estonia and the University of Tartu Museum. Within the context of curation as a research practice, there could be even greater recognition if the current criteria for research used internationally were applied. The impact and role of curation in delivering the stated aims of the professorship could be further emphasized. Overall, the achievements are according to internationally recognized standards.

#### Areas of development

The current team that forms the department is relatively small, and all members seemed very committed in terms of research time and departmental roles. Increasing bids for collaborative external funding and a rise in the number of PhD students would be of great benefit, but considering the recent staff changes, such growth will need time to develop without extra institutional support. The visible positive impact of partnerships with museums and galleries could be more fully exploited in the way the department and the

professor project their subject areas, and the potential for doctoral work in curation could be further explored.

Increasing the international visibility of research into Estonian culture through this type of activity is also possible, particularly regarding issues of identity and nationalism in the visual arts. Working comparatively in relation to other adjacent geographies, or even with diasporic Estonian artists and locations where Estonian culture has resonance, could be fruitful. There is evidence of shared project activities, but they could be enhanced and expanded with a bit less focus on the time-intensive scholarly monograph and more attention to outward-looking impactful research outcomes. Possible collaboration with artist-researchers to develop exhibitions that reflect both history and contemporary practice in the arts and curation could help build new networks with major European and North American institutions. Thematic cross-disciplinary research is a strength, but it could be further expanded through such international partnerships.

### Recommendations

1. It is recommended increasing the number of PhD students working within the Professorship of Art History (possibly as multidisciplinary students from other subject areas) and to encourage a greater diversity of students and topics to expand the scope of departmental research.
2. Further support the existing partnerships with Estonian museums and cultural venues, recognizing the importance that visual culture plays in the public understanding of national identity and history.
3. Explore ways to support the existing collaboration between the University of Tartu and the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn, strengthening the recognition of the importance of art history and the arts to Estonian culture.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

The recent transfer of the professorship from Professor Juhan Maiste to Professor Anu Mänd has demonstrated a department in transition, but all indicators suggest that this has been successfully managed and that the department's ethos has been effectively sustained. New subjects and methodologies are being explored and applied.

While the small scale of the department means that staff changes can cause dramatic shifts in the available expertise, they have continued to make important contributions to the public understanding of Estonian arts and culture. The university might balance this situation by granting additional positions. The new generation of staff coming through the

system has demonstrated an understanding of the need to remain abreast of contemporary disciplinary debates and cultural shifts.

There is clear evidence that the research produced within the Professorship of Art History is important and needs continued support; few other institutions are producing work of this caliber in relation to the specific context of Estonian culture. The multidisciplinary research work of the art history professor, in collaboration with colleagues from other departments, is also to be lauded and demonstrates a promising way forward for the subject area in general.

It is evident that Professor Anu Mänd leads a small, well-coordinated, and coherent group of researchers working effectively within the University and externally with partners, and this is to be congratulated.

### **Areas of development**

To sustain work in this area, it would be strategically sensible to open PhD and post-doctoral research opportunities to a wider group of researchers, encouraging non-Estonian applicants to study within the context of this nationally important department. Elements of the work could be seen as overly inward-looking and not using the admirably detailed scholarly knowledge to understand more generic human issues and historical shifts that would find interest across the subject field.

One way could be to encourage more staff exchanges with international partners or to open existing programmes to outside short-term visiting researchers through an advertised scheme. Finding the balance between the focus on Estonian visual culture and proactively representing the best in terms of art history as a discipline is essential. With a small department, the need to stay current is even more important, and it is probably not possible without a commitment to confronting new people and new ideas on a regular basis.

Residencies, visiting research fellowships, staff exchanges, international project collaborations, and major conferences are all vital elements needed to maintain the dynamism of the subject and should be incentivized. There also needs to be a balance between work on long-term projects and work that can expand recognition of the subject area's value but has a faster turnaround in terms of impact.

Although significant parts of the research of the professorship are available online, more could be there, tailored for various types of audience. As the Estonian Institute was recently closed down, logically, some functions of the dissemination of Estonian art history now fall upon the shoulders of other nationally funded institutions that cover the topics. If academic themes are involved, the institution of national professorships should most likely assume an authoritative role in covering the dissemination tasks of the closed-down Estonian Institute. This means a large area of development that needs to be dealt with in a strategic plan that encompasses this national professorship as well as others.

The professorship needs ongoing support by the university to be able to fulfill the roles in the future. It is especially important to keep in mind that not all disciplines have an equal possibility to receive third party-funding.

### Recommendations

1. The university seeks ways, with the help of Estonian Research Council, to incentivize and support a flow of challenging ideas and diverse ways of thinking within the discipline of Art History, such as by hosting Fulbright scholars and similar initiatives.
2. Increase support for postdoctoral research and residencies with museums and archives.
3. Encourage staff to work on traveling exhibitions and curation taking Estonian culture to the outside world not just defining it for an internal audience.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The strong relationships with external partners, referred to in earlier parts of this report, indicate a positive societal impact of the work of Professor Anu Mänd and her team of researchers. The major element of this work is the writing of a comprehensive volume on art in Estonia from the 12th to the 16th century, which stands as the key text in understanding the art of this period. It grew from a collaborative effort of Estonian art historians, archaeologists, and historians from the University of Tartu, the Estonian Academy of Arts, and Tallinn University. In that sense it represents a truly central work of Estonian scholarship.

The team, and in particular Professor Anu Mänd, has also produced collaborative research on Estonian heritage sites and worked with the National Heritage Board to safeguard Estonia's cultural artefacts.

In other forms of impact, wider audiences for art history have been created by Tõnis Tatar, who has curated exhibitions and popularized art history on Estonian TV. Noteworthy is the role of Kadri Asmer as editor-in-chief of the top-rated Baltic Journal of Art History. Many of the members of the group working with Professor Anu Mänd have curated exhibitions at both the Art Museum of Estonia and the University of Tartu Museum. This outward-facing work is a commendable aspect of the Professorship of Art History.

### Areas of development

The areas defined above as strengths are, to a certain extent, also an element of weakness, as the team seem primarily focused on internal impact, with their individual research



reaching wider non-Estonian audiences through articles and reviews. There is evidence of recognized publishers and work reaching a wider audience through publications in academic journals, edited volumes, and exhibition catalogues. However, the international reach of existing research is modest and could be enhanced by encouraging staff to work on traveling exhibitions and curation taking Estonian culture to the outside world, not just defining it for an internal audience.

Partnerships on larger EU projects are understandably hard to achieve, but it could make a major impact and is worth pursuing. Focusing support and development on how to make successful bids takes time, but the team shows potential for future positive outcomes in this area, possibly more likely in partnership with one of their key Estonian cultural partners. The move towards the digital aspect of project work such as the "Digital Livonia: For a Digitally Enhanced Study of Medieval Livonia" shows a good start in this direction, and Professor Anu Mänd should be encouraged to develop this thinking further.

### Recommendations

1. Involvement of art historians in research bid development training and support for work with Estonian cultural partners on larger EU bid collaborations, with specialist bid-writing support.
2. Further supporting and incentivizing the recognition of aspects of research impact on external audiences outside the academic sector.
3. Aid in the development of mechanisms for documenting and evaluating the impact of the work of departmental researchers.

## Professorship of Archaeology (prof. Valter Lang)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

University of Tartu is the only scientific institution in Estonia that is engaged in broad-based archaeological research and teaching at all levels of higher education. Its curriculum covers the entire prehistory of Estonia up until the 13th century and then runs until the early modern period.

A very important aspect of the work of the professorship is the interdisciplinary cooperation between archaeologists, geneticists, and linguists within an established center of excellence. The professorship is particularly strong in reaching the broader audience via interesting and intelligently presented news about archaeology and doing interdisciplinary high-grade science that combines Estonian and local themes. Since 2016, there have been 13 monographs, 117 chapters in books, and 244 peer-reviewed articles. Nine doctoral defenses have been successfully held. Staffing levels have grown, and the department appears to be thriving. The professorship is clearly of fundamental importance in allowing for a greater understanding of the forces that led to the existence of a specifically Estonian culture. Teaching is well supported by research and delivered at all levels.

There are also very good examples of applying research to practical issues such as with their "Heritage Tourism in Estonia: Potential, Capacities and Possibilities" (awarded the Estonian Cultural Endowment's annual recognition prize in 2021), which recommends marketing of archaeological sites for tourism development purposes. Again, noteworthy is the zooarchaeological research which has helped preserve native livestock breeds, recognizing their importance as part of cultural heritage.

The scientific achievements of the professorship are fully aligned with internationally recognized standards. The members are very active, and the results are of extraordinary quality.

#### Areas of development

The panel discussions led to suggestions that the value of the Professorship's contribution to Estonian historical understanding could be enhanced by greater use of new media to disseminate its research findings. The 2018 book *Finnic be-comings* is a landmark, but as mentioned in the meeting, the materials presented in it become outdated very quickly. It is recommended to consider other media, such as a blog, to provide updates. Since the book is vital for teaching purposes, keeping it updated is all the more important. Developing a strategy for expanding the existing website ([www.eestijuured.ee](http://www.eestijuured.ee)) and increasing its academic audience potential could be one approach.

There are even more possibilities for development in cooperation with some other supporting subject areas. Growth and expansion of case studies are limited by the funding and opportunities for archaeological digs, as well as the time frame of such projects. Working alongside other disciplines would allow for tangential growth and application of existing research findings. Even though determining new subject areas with which to collaborate takes time, it is a logical way forward and could lead to increasing success in terms of external funding.

## Recommendations

The existing collaborations with other non-humanities subjects could be expanded further as they have been very successful and are a model of interdisciplinary research. Such developments would increase the scientific impact of the research; additionally, they could offer solutions to the limited job opportunities within the field of pure archaeology mentioned in the self-assessment report and lead to new ways of sharing findings and methodologies across subjects while increasing societal impact.

Workshops held with other disciplines at all levels of research (from senior staff to student) could help expand the existing excellent interdisciplinary work of the professorship to other fields and point the way for further external funding.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

Lecture courses are delivered in Estonian, but since the spring of 2024, MA students have started with a new course, *Archaeology for Non-Archaeologists*, taught in English, which supports international students in other institutes who are interested in Estonia's past.

The foundational works made possible by the national professorship scheme — for example, Kriiska, A., Lang, V., Mäesalu, A., Tvaauri, A., Valk, H. (2020). *Eesti ajalugu I. Eesti esiaeg*. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, and Lang, Valter (2018). *Läänemeresoome tulemised*. Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus — provide a solid basis for subsequent work within the discipline and from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Parts of the research of the professorship are available online, which contributes to its sustainability, as new generations will have easy access to the necessary materials on the topic.

## Areas of development

Systematic partnerships and collaboration with both national and small regional museums could be planned to look for post-doctoral opportunities, which would help increase PhD numbers, currently solely by academic subject needs.

The participation in the INNOVE project "Unifying and Improving the Quality of Practice in the Field of Humanities and Arts at the University of Tartu", which aimed to involve practitioners from the National Heritage Board, museums, and archaeological excavation companies in teaching, is a good indicator of the possible ways to further develop this area of activity.

Although significant portions of the research conducted under the Archaeology professorship are already accessible online, there remains considerable potential to enhance this presence through a more strategic, audience-specific approach. Foundational works, while widely referenced, often attract comments and updates that suggest a need for regular revision. A forward-looking strategy could involve presenting these updates online, linked directly to specific sections or pages of the original works, allowing new facts or corrections to be integrated dynamically as they emerge.

The Archaeology professorship has distinguished itself by effectively translating complex academic knowledge into formats suitable for various audiences. Given this success, it is well positioned to support other national professorships in developing similar dissemination strategies, while also refining its own practices.

A further opportunity lies in coordinating the efforts of archaeologists outside the core national professorship team. Many talented experts operate beyond this framework, and a national strategy could be developed to involve them in dissemination activities. The professorship, given its mandate, could assume a central coordinating role. One particularly promising area is the engagement of young people through summer excavation programs. These "digging camps" could be enriched with organized, interdisciplinary activities—linking archaeology with literature, language, art, and emerging fields like AI—thereby fostering young talent and strengthening national networks.

Finally, an urgent area for development stems from the recent closure of the Estonian Institute. With its functions in cultural dissemination no longer operational, the responsibility for promoting Estonia's academic and cultural heritage increasingly falls on other nationally funded institutions. National professorships, particularly where academic themes are involved, are well-placed to assume this role. A strategic, collaborative plan is needed to address this shift, positioning the Archaeology professorship—and others—as key actors in the dissemination of Estonian culture on both national and international stages.

## Recommendations

In many ways this professorship is doing everything right and the panel recommendations are more to do with taking confidence in the direction of travel and to expand existing trajectories to enhance further the work currently being undertaken. It is important that the professorship receives continuous support for the broad range of activities.

Strategic workshops to encourage finding new ways of applying archaeological research to the public domain could be integrated into the annual planning cycle. Junior staff could be encouraged to brainstorm ideas with counterparts in other disciplines.

Working more with outside institutions to support doctoral level research within the wider museum and cultural conservation sector could expand the sphere of influence and partnership pool for further funding bids and shared projects at national and international level.

Build on the success of the professorship to develop funding bids in relation to other scientific disciplines that complement archaeology to reproduce the success of the existing model.

Increase the potential for growth of PhD student numbers through work in these interdisciplinary areas expanding the understanding of the discipline in new and innovative ways.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

The Professorship of Archaeology and its team have been effective in developing well-planned and impactful translations of university research findings into the public arena. The popular scientific magazine *Tutulus* is published annually and is impactful and has also led to other articles in newspapers and magazines. Their research also underpinned involvement in TV programmes in Estonia and Sweden.

The professorship has joined forces with other national professorships in creating contemporary study materials and popular scientific presentations, which is laudable. One might even suggest that this cooperation could take the initiative to establish models for filtering academic content for different recipient groups—whether specialists, educators, students, or the general public—which in the end could significantly enhance the societal reach of research across disciplines.

One very outstanding publication to be mentioned here is the first volume of the academic *History of Estonia* (2020), edited by Professor of Archaeology Valter Lang, where the

whole prehistory of the Estonian nation has been described, from approximately 11,000 years ago to the beginning of the 13th century. This volume completes the publication of the long-prepared academic history of Estonia in six volumes. This work is central to the national priorities of Estonian culture.

The *Research into Ancient Times (Muinasaja teadus)* publication series, published since 1991 in cooperation with the Institute of History at Tallinn University. Each issue focuses on specific topics. The series includes both monographs and collections of articles.

There was participation in the development of several exhibitions, including a permanent exhibition (2016) and a temporary exhibition *Right Body, Wrong Body* at the Estonian National Museum; a traveling exhibition *Vikings before Vikings* at the Saaremaa Museum and Maritime Museum; and the temporary exhibition *Why Estonia Is not a Kingdom?* at Tartu City Museum and Estonian History Museum.

The publications of the two books, *Estonian Prehistory* and *Finnic Be-Comings*, led to wide press coverage and author interviews. Several staff members are also on the archaeology expert panel of the Estonian National Heritage Board, helping to shape national policy on heritage management. The earlier mentioned work on archaeological evidence in relation to native livestock breeds has also had an important impact on the understanding of historic farm husbandry.

### Areas of development

Building on existing museum partnerships and further developing residencies and staff exchanges could be a useful approach to expanding the societal impact of archaeological research. Working with these existing partners could also support the enhancement of Estonia's tourist capacity and quality of output.

Sharing the existing in-depth knowledge across the Nordic region and developing stronger relations with international partners beyond Russia would also seem a sensible way forward.

Further application of existing research insights to the development of national tourism plans would be a good direction to work towards as there is potential for substantial growth in this area.

The existing model of work on DNA could be used as a case study for other comparative research projects in alternative fields. International partnerships looking at varying approaches to tourism development in relation to ancient history could expand possible chances of EU funding and other international open calls.

Find ways to explore the possibility of developing jointly taught courses that reflect new knowledge emerging from the cross-disciplinary work of the existing collaborations with geneticists, linguists, geologists, geographers, and chemists.

The collaboration with the National University's *Century* TV series shows that the recognized scholarly track record of the professor and other staff in the subject area could be further leveraged through a focus on more popular media such as television, publishing and other media. Time could be spent finding a balance between initial research and its dissemination and the application of such knowledge in the wider public context.

## Recommendations

Look for ways to expand beyond the detailed knowledge of the national by developing existing experience in comparative models of cultural development that could find novel applications of the Estonian context in different geographic locations.

Further project work with governmental departments aimed at expanding public knowledge of Estonia's archaeological heritage and making that heritage more accessible could be explored through partnerships and possible sponsorship.

Enhance existing partnerships with museums by developing staff exchanges and academic residencies. These initiatives can serve to amplify public engagement and enrich Estonia's cultural and educational offerings, particularly in the areas of tourism and heritage.

Strengthen ties with institutions across the Nordic region and establish new partnerships outside the current network (beyond Russia). This would increase scholarly exchange, diversify research perspectives, and improve access to international funding.

Apply archaeological findings more directly to support the growth and quality of national tourism. Use existing models—such as the integration of DNA research—as examples for other applied and interdisciplinary initiatives.

Explore joint course development that builds on current collaborations with other scientific fields (e.g., genetics, geology, linguistics, chemistry). Such programs can help disseminate cross-disciplinary knowledge and foster educational innovation.

Leverage the scholarly reputation of the professorship and its team by increasing their involvement in public media, including television, publishing, and digital platforms. Strategically balance research, dissemination, and societal application.

Create a strategy to involve archaeologists across Estonia in outreach and public education. This professorship could take a central coordinating role, given its national mandate. Use summer excavations as a platform to engage young people and/or local communities, and link archaeology with other disciplines represented in the professorships (e.g., art history, folklore, ethnography, linguistics, literature) through creative and educational after-work activities.



## Professorship of Ethnology (prof. Art Leete)

### Scientific Impact of Research

#### Positive aspects

The professorship has published popular scientific articles in Estonian, mediating the cultures and stories of smaller linguistic relatives of Estonian in northern Europe and Siberia. The research focus, which includes Ob-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples, is laudable.

It is notable that work produced within the professorship is published in multiple languages—not only Estonian and English, but also French, Russian, and Italian. The research on Roma culture and Latin American religion is particularly noteworthy.

The professorship team is remarkable and talented, comprising scholars who are also active in creating high-quality, sustainable tourism opportunities. The professorship has produced a thriving and productive environment, with research disseminated across a wide range of journals.

The number of publications, examinations, and public engagement events is unequivocally satisfying, as are the quality and breadth of the types of publications and journals. Overall, the panel agreed that the scientific achievements of the professorship are fully aligned with internationally recognized standards.

#### Areas of development

While the meeting with doctoral students evidenced a thriving environment, it was difficult to get an overall understanding of the approach to ethnology of the national Estonian area from the written reports and the interview with the national professor. The panel found the presentation of future plans was somewhat limited and the past achievements evident in the documentation could have featured more prominently as a basis for discussion with the panel.

A more outward-looking approach to self-evaluation in this area should be encouraged, possibly by expanding interaction with other research fields within the discipline.

#### Recommendations

The recommendation would be to make the existing study materials more widely available. Some areas of focus that appear in the publications could be further applied in understanding or enriching modern Estonian society and culture — such as sustainable tourism, relationships between religions and authority, resilience in trying times, mass media and beliefs, power dynamics and ritual, or alcohol use and addiction.



The panel noted the possibility of working on new methods for extracting ethnographic data from archival materials is an opportunity that could be productive for both the institute's scholars in Estonian research and those engaged with the eastern Finno-Ugric groups.

As was discussed within the session, international collaboration and exchange with other institutes in the same situation could also be a means of making limited access productive.

## Sustainability of Research

### Positive aspects

The professorship has a very sustainable structure in the sense that the type of ethnology practiced covers both social life and popular culture in the nation and, on the other hand, a social anthropological type of ethnology rooted in the study of Indigenous societies. This is very positive, as these two perspectives enrich each other – theoretically; methodologically; as well as in ethics; general outlooks, and many other less tangible ways. This combination of perspectives is often desired, yet in practice, it is mostly lacking outside of Estonia.

The university fulfilled their obligations also towards this professorship. Given this positive assessment by the panel, they might consider supporting the professorship additionally in making this approach more visible on an international level.

### Areas of development

The research based on fieldwork among Finno-Ugric and Ural indigenous groups, which is well represented through Professor Leete, has suffered from the impact of the war in Ukraine on academic work. The lack of access to the field — specifically Finno-Ugric, Ural and Arctic peoples and groups located in regions in Russia — has made some of the department's activities impossible to carry out. This situation, of course, calls for the renewal and development of alternative methods, which, regardless of the war, might be a good strategy for an uncertain future.

It is noted, however, that the written report states the department has switched to remote data collection methods and is currently in the process of developing an adequate research methodology.

Although a substantial part of the professorship's ethnological research is already available online, there is significant potential to broaden this presence and adapt it more effectively to different audiences, including academic peers, cultural practitioners, educators, and the wider public. There is a gap left behind after the closure of the Estonian Institute. When it comes to academically grounded content, the institution of national

professorship is a natural choice. There is a potential area for development that calls for a strategic, collaborative approach involving this national professorship and others, to ensure that the transmission of Estonian ethnological knowledge remains robust, accessible, and internationally visible. A special focus of this professorship (with so much experience with small cultures in Russia), could be developing online presence on these cultures in Russian, aiming at replacing the reproduction of the traditional cultural stereotypes with more acknowledgment of superdiversity. On the other hand, the current challenges and solutions being formulated for fieldwork during changing political circumstances could be seen as experience that would be valuable at an international level.

## Recommendations

The parts of the discipline engaged in research on related linguistic groups outside Estonia have ended up in a kind of—hopefully temporal—yet existential, crisis. This is, in short, caused by the current political situation, including the European societal responses to the war in Ukraine and the consequential lack of access to the field in regions located in Russia.

It is hard to make recommendations on how to deal with this situation, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the situation could be used to increase integration between fieldwork research and material collection both within and beyond Estonia.

It may be useful to examine resilience and recent cultural changes in the culture of the peoples of the North, if it is, of course possible without causing harm. How is the war experienced at the intersection of personal loss and mass media? Does the North differ from the South in the Russian Federation? What methods can be used to collect and interpret such materials? After all, this integration is the long-term reason for the two parts of the discipline to be in the same institute.

## Societal Impact of Research

### Positive aspects

Important areas where the professorship and public interest intersect, showcasing a strong and positive scholarly profile and outreach, include conceptions of heritage, post-communist societies, memories of communism and Soviet society, youth culture, feminism, environmental issues, and indigenous cultures, to name only the most salient examples. Public interest in contemporary Estonian everyday life remains a key focus of the professorship's research activities.

The professorship meets public interest effectively through its media outreach on the radio, where the documentation of outreach efforts is impressively extensive. There are

also very interesting film projects in which knowledge and art are expressed in a unified form. The department has a deep connection to the work of museums and other public heritage institutions and participates in the production of documentaries, radio, and podcasts. Minor projects such as "The Impact of Visual Arts on the Work Environment of Estonian Companies" also demonstrate an in-depth readiness to engage practically involved in various aspects of Estonian everyday life.

Research within the professorship on Estonia seems to concentrate mainly on museums, heritage and memory cultures. More general studies on everyday life do exist but seem to be somewhat less prominent or abundant. A notable and commendable strategy is that many projects are carried out in collaboration with museums and, alongside scholarly publications, have a museum exhibition as a final goal. This is, of course, an advantage in terms of outreach, funding, and job opportunities for students on different levels, thereby contributing positively to the evaluation of the professorship. The recognition of the value of this work might not be clearly articulated, despite questions raised during the interviews.

### Areas of development

Ethnology as practiced at the University of Tartu is of obvious interest to society and the public, as it tends to be in most modern states. The public and the press tend to have a strong interest in phenomena addressed by ethnology, such as popular culture, annual and life cycle celebrations, etc. It is of utmost importance that there is a body in society where this interest can be met with high scholarly standards and the interests of the public can be placed in a broader social context.

The discussion had with the panel around the developing of new methods for extracting ethnography from archival material presents an opportunity that could benefit both the institute's scholars conducting Estonian research and those engaged with the Eastern part of the Finno-Ugric groups. The gap left behind after the closure of the Estonian institute is partly covered by the topics of this professorship, so more funding could go in this area to compensate for the rearrangements. International collaboration and exchange with other institutes facing similar challenges could also help make these gaps in access as well as dissemination productive.

### Recommendations

The panel commended the fact that the research group that focuses on other peoples, mainly in Russia, has gained new interest due to the more recent international awareness of Russian imperialism and colonialism. It was recommended this focus be supported and the professorship continue to develop its research on Estonian everyday life to reinforce both public interest in ethnology and public self-awareness and self-reflection.

## The overall assessment

### **1. To what extent and how have the professorships fulfilled the obligation arising from § 2 paragraph 4 of the University of Tartu Act to advance the research that studies Estonia and its people, and education in the Estonian language for the purpose of preservation and development of the Estonian language and culture, preserving the national cultural heritage and offered related services to the public?**

The eleven professorships under review have to fulfill several tasks, within Estonia and beyond the country's borders. They are required to educate students on all levels and present their research findings on both national and international levels just as would be expected of other professorships in Estonia. Additionally, the University of Tartu Act ascribes to them a specific role in preserving the national heritage and even developing the country's culture and language.

All professorships clearly dedicated themselves to these goals and invested an impressive amount of energy into researching key questions of Estonian culture, history, and language. They further impressed with public outreach activities.

Most, if not all, navigate the different expectations regarding the research impressively well and publishing regularly on a national level in order to preserve Estonian as a language for research and to be able to communicate directly with the Estonian society, as well as increasingly in English in order to be visible on an international level. The sheer number of published monographs in Estonian and English, as well as the number of graduated PhD students, speaks to these successes in quantitative terms.

The quality is proven by the latter's follow-up careers as they hold key positions of Estonian politics, public and cultural institutions, and many publications have been published with high-ranking journals and/or publishing houses. An overall strategy regarding the expectations for internationality and responsibilities on a national level - and definitely further support - to help them walk this fine line might be helpful for the next evaluation period.

Their valuable input for the national and international academia is beyond all doubt, and the University of Tartu should not only continue, but systematically expand its funding of these professorships in order for them to compete with the relatively well-funded natural sciences, as well as the medical and social sciences. State-implemented and financially supported professorships of national importance have proven their value. A next step could be to provide them with the means to address, firstly, the desirable expansion in the direction of, for instance, expanding international networks and the reach of the publications, more out-of-the-box thinking within the disciplines and across disciplines; most importantly, it is desirable to build an even stronger common ground for outreach into Estonian society and internationalization.

The university leadership expressed their support for the professorships, although the allocation of positions and finances seems to differ. One might think about a clear strategy of incentives that values not only R&D-funding-successes - which might be easier in some disciplines involved (e.g, linguistics) - but to value also time-consuming, in-depth-interactions with groups of society.

## **2. What is the connection of the research of the professorships with what is happening in the society, including the impact on contemporary creative works and cultural life?**

All professorships under review were very engaged with the broader society, and had, at times, explicit strategies and, at other times, rather hands-on approaches to connect their research activities with the public. Both professorships for history - e.g., the Professorship of Estonian History and the Professorship of Intellectual History - were considering important annuaries in their research plans and could therefore serve as experts for Estonian media of all sorts. They also started to research ambivalent or controversial topics in Estonian history – e.g., the role of Konstantin Päts, but also broader questions of the reception and development of different political and moral ideas in the Baltic provinces - which is a very important contribution to society, and its democratic composure. The panel would encourage the professorships to continue further along this path.

The Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language is involved in shaping language policy in Estonia and, more recently, has been concerned with the primary and secondary education plans for introducing Estonian language education. Linguistics professorships integrate topics that have emerged in society recently such as gender linguistics, reviving dialects, and teaching Estonian to foreigners. They, along with other professorships, had close links with Estonian museums, so that many exhibitions during the period under review were significantly influenced by the University of Tartu professorships.

The Professorship of Modern Estonian Language collaborates with citizen science networks, which increases public participation in the professorship's area. Other examples in the overall outstanding outreach activities include working with filmmakers, producing their own podcasts, and organizing public readings. The Professorship of Literature, for instance, has held presentations and performances at various public events. The panel was impressed by the energy dedicated to the outreach activities that seemed altogether very important for Estonian society. However, it sometimes had the impression that financial support for the time-consuming outreach activities could be higher. The visibility of the professorship scheme could also be enhanced if they had a common platform. Why, for example, not install — on the basis of the University of Tartu — a common podcast series for all professors of national significance, to present the different topics to a wider audience under a shared label, and, in a second step, even offer a limited selection in different languages: in English for an

international audience, and maybe even in Russian to address those who haven't fully fulfilled the linguistic expectations — in order to inform them about academic research?

The latter aspect might be one to think about: while some professorships - especially the one for Estonian as a Foreign Language - had impressive activities in the group of Russian-speakers in order to build bridges and lower inhibitions, others seem to address mainly those who are fully literate in Estonian. The language-related professorships have been active in organizing the creation and establishment of new words for talking about new phenomena, mostly in the sciences. The professorships are in contact with teachers and local or national specialist learned societies.

Interactions with all parts of society are, of course, always a utopian vision, but might be strengthened in the future. Further, it became evident that early-career researchers participated intensively in outreach. It seems that they managed to finish their PhDs and postdoctoral research on time despite this, but surely the expectations regarding outreach should not be fulfilled in addition to the academic work but understood as an integral part of it and accordingly supported.

**3. To what extent has there been a significant change or developmental leap in the research directions of the professorships during the evaluation period? Whether and to what extent have the recommendations and suggestions presented in the 2016 evaluation report on the targeted evaluation of the Estonian language, culture and history professorships of the University of Tartu been considered in the professorships' activities during the evaluation period?**

The panel of experts interviewed all eleven professors leading the professorships of national importance at the University of Tartu and convened discussions with students and senior managers. The richness and depth of the research work being produced was consistently evidenced across all eleven subjects. The scale of achievement in each of the areas was largely reflective of the different levels of staffing and workload of the supporting teams around the individual academics occupying the professorship roles, and so was not always comparable. Overall, however, the high level of achievement of the staff supported by the scheme was tangible.

Large comprehensive works on Estonian language, culture, and history have been compiled and published. Noteworthy is the outreach: the joint interdisciplinary efforts of the linguistics and historical fields, for instance, have led to excellent study materials and popular scientific publications. Particularly noteworthy is the project "The History of the Ethnogenesis of the Estonian People in Light of New Scientific Research," whose results are presented on the website "Estonian Roots." This project, which provides a comprehensive overview of the cultural, linguistic, and genetic development of the Estonian people, was recognized with the 2023 research award by the Rector of the University of Tartu. The integration of research across archaeology, genetics, and linguistics serves as an exciting and potentially fruitful model for future developments.



Wider audiences for art history have been reached by curating exhibitions and popularizing art history on Estonian television. Art historians have curated exhibitions at both the Art Museum of Estonia and the University of Tartu Museum. Ethnographers and archaeologists have also worked with external partners to communicate with the wider public, including the traveling exhibition “Vikings before Vikings” at the Saaremaa Museum and Maritime Museum, and the temporary exhibition “Why Estonia Is Not a Kingdom?” at the Tartu City Museum and the Estonian History Museum.

A recommendation from the 2016 report concerned the need for flexibility in light of upcoming and unforeseeable challenges. This recommendation has been followed excellently: next to using classical on-site formats as exhibitions, more international and online research presentations and conferences being part of online organized committees or programs have provided evidence of that. Some professorships have even developed their own podcasts.

The most important change, however, concerns the professorship areas and their number. Some professorships have been rearranged; the Professorships of Semiotics of Culture and Intellectual History have been added to the original ones, replacing the professorship of the History of Estonian Philosophy (Ülo Matjus). Several new professors have taken up their positions. Anu Mänd and Liina Lindström have replaced the previous professors Juhan Maiste and Helle Metslang. Pärtel Piirimäe and Peeter Torop have been appointed to lead the new national professorships.

Sometimes, one could still imagine a more embracing stance towards global trends. For example, being prepared for a more intense integration of gender or large groups of arriving refugees on the social side, and the use of modern media on the technical side.

Further, even if all professorships address the audience in Estonian as well as other languages, the professorships differed in their interconnectedness with global academia, and in their output in English and other languages. The linguistic professorships, as well as those in archaeology, intellectual history, cultural semiotics, and ethnology, excelled in publishing in English, while others focused more on Estonian—among them the professorships in art history, Estonian history, and Estonian literature.

In all cases, the decisions about the publication languages were reasonable. It is laudable that the professorships also strive for linguistically diverse outlets, as, for instance, the Professorship of Ethnology has chosen for reputable Western and English language outlets such as Routledge (the chapter “Missionaries in the Russian Arctic: Religious and ideological changes among Nenets reindeer herders. In: *The Siberian World*”) as well as the Estonian language Q1 ranked journal *Keel ja Kirjandus* (“Teadus ja sugulus. Soome-ugri etnograafia kujunemine teadusliku kolonialismi taustal”) and also in well suited outlets such as museum publications in other smaller languages (Finnish, *Meno-paluu: Nykytaidetta Itämeren alueelta* = *There and Back Again: Contemporary art from the Baltic Sea region*. [Helsinki]: Kiasma).

The panel is very aware of the fact that it is challenging to fulfill all tasks on both a national and international level equally, given the sometimes rather limited personnel capacities. Still, all professorships should develop a strategy of internationalization. This might include decisions about where and in which languages to publish, but also reflection on how their research questions are embedded. Questions that might at first sight be of interest mainly to Estonian society might have a methodological aspect that is interesting to a broader audience. While English has become the primary language in international academia, it is of utmost importance to preserve the variety of languages used for publication.

In all areas the progress of academic work since 2016 shown a clear awareness of the aims and objectives of governmental support, and in several instances, a positive approach to changes in staffing and shifts in academic policy. There was evidence across all subject areas of a diversification of publishing strategies, and of research work being adapted to reach wide audiences through a range of popular media. Staff and PhD students had worked effectively with external institutions to convey the importance of work in their subject areas to schoolchildren, students, and the wider public. There were also good examples of work in television and multimedia.

It was evident that, since the review in 2016, cross-departmental collaboration has been encouraged, and there were excellent examples of this approach. In particular, the Collegium for Transdisciplinary Studies in Archaeology, Genetics and Linguistics has achieved notable success and recognition, and its team forms the core of “Estonian Roots: Centre of Excellence for Transdisciplinary Studies on Ethnogenesis and Cultural Diversity” (2024-2030). The panel noted the strength of the long-term planning behind this initiative and was impressed by its creation of new interdisciplinary thinking. This path should be continued. One could consider forming working groups that bring together linguists working on minority languages, historians researching multiethnic empires or nation-states, and folklorists studying minority cultures, in order to build a common ground for further research and to enhance trans- and interdisciplinary thinking among PhD and postdoctoral students.

The support given to the subject areas that form the foundations of Estonian culture is an example of a targeted and effective intervention in the development of a geographically and historically vital space for cultural growth. The work at the University of Tartu is a unique and valuable contribution to the preservation and sustainability of Estonian cultural practices.

#### **4. What is the scientific impact of the research and development activities carried out within the professorships?**

All professorships under review impressed by the quantity and quality of research. In a country with two universities with humanistic profiles, all professorships play a crucial role in research, also offering different approaches and maintaining multiperspectivity.



The eleven professorships under review are an integral part of the humanities research in Estonia, that is so crucial for societies to understand and deal with complexities, ambivalences, and therefore the democratic composure. The impact is very high on the national level.

On an international level, easier to access for the panel, we noted outstanding examples as well. In the area of Intellectual History, there were contributions to high-impact publications, such as "The Cambridge Companion to Pufendorf" and Brill's series on early modern natural law, showcasing the role of this in both contributing to and shaping international scholarly debates. Events like the Societas Linguistica Europaea and MEDAL summer schools, along with training in methods, empower early-career scholars and enhance the global visibility of Estonian linguistics. The Professorship of Estonian and Comparative Folklore trains doctoral researchers from several parts of the world, especially Asia, and publishes partly on a very high international level. The language-related professorships have researchers from various European countries and the former USSR, securing a multinational presence for both perspective and quality.

Further, most professorships seem to be well connected transnationally, providing their PhD and postdoctoral students with multiple examples for networking. This resulted in some impressive examples of international careers, with graduates of the University of Tartu continuing their paths even outside of Europe, such as at the University of Toronto, Canada.

Most graduates obviously went into different institutions in Estonia and hold positions in the cultural, political, and educational sectors. The professorships made an impact on different levels of society.

The review panel, after a detailed comparison of the Self-Evaluation Report provided by the national professorships with the globally acknowledged benchmarks and the insights gleaned from the field overview, concluded that the scientific output and impact are of an exemplary standard and motivate further internationalization.

### **5. To what extent is the activity of the professorships sustainable, including what is the volume and structure of the funding of the professorships, the ability to obtain additional funds and the connection with the strategic goals of the University of Tartu, and the use of the institution's own funds?**

Most professorships mentioned rising personnel costs and inflation as challenges to their budgets. The success rates in attracting external funding have been quite different between the disciplines (Linguistics has achieved considerable success in securing external funding, while Literature has experienced less success in this regard), which seems to be connected with dynamics, interdisciplinary collaboration or external partnership, but also with accessibility for different disciplines. While initiative should be clearly rewarded in the future, as well as interdisciplinarity, university leadership should also balance systemic disadvantages by guaranteeing that smaller research groups can

fulfill their societal mission. Because, despite these successes, the financial model of funding based on student numbers would not, in itself, support all the existing areas of national importance, meaning that funding remains vital for the continuation of research in the chosen disciplines. Where external funding is not being raised, there is usually a larger dependence on teaching and greater student numbers to balance resources.

In most instances, the sustainability of the existing professorships was well articulated, with younger staff being developed and integrated into the overall teaching and research programs of the university. Smaller research groups, such as Art History or Intellectual History, could be further supported by a greater emphasis (and funding) on cross-departmental thematic research and better cooperation within Estonia with the professorships at Tallinn University.

In some cases, the panel wondered whether additional state funding was needed. The Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language seems to face a particularly challenging period ahead in the context of language policy. Their staff was already very engaged with Russian language communities and could surely broaden this engagement if additional funding were given.

## **6. What is the national and international cooperation in the research and development activities of the professorships, and what is the impact of the cooperation in achieving the goals set for the professorships?**

The eleven professorships under scrutiny have solid networks. While some excel predominantly on a national level with less visible internationality, being connected to a broad range of cultural, educational and political institutions in Estonia (even though Tallinn University has sometimes been missing from the picture), others have intense relations with higher education institutions in the broader areas of the Baltics, Central and Western Europe, Central Asia, or the transatlantic realm, thus offering graduates and postgraduates significant opportunities for international exchange (e.g., the format of the young folklorist's conference, organized between Tartu, Vilnius, Riga and Helsinki). Russia's total invasion stopped some of the networks that were especially important for some professorships, among them ethnology.

Given the overall very impressive level of proficiency in English, the panel recommends further expanding the networks strategically and motivating graduates and postgraduates to undertake research stays in different European countries. This would further assist in achieving the ascribed goals for the professorships to popularize Estonian history and culture, and to give the younger generation further inspiration on how to write about a smaller country's history and culture in a way that can be read beyond specialists.

While national and international networking seems to be intense, the panel wondered if internal cooperation within the University of Tartu could be strengthened to expand competitiveness. While some professorships seem to collaborate, which has become the

foundation of third-party funding successes, others seem to be rather hesitant when it comes to transdisciplinary and the boundaries of their own discipline, even though the international discussion has moved on. In order to further increase visibility, one might consider forming common working groups or outreach activities.

### **7. What is the contribution of the professorships ensuring the sustainable development of young researchers in the field, including contribution to conducting doctoral studies?**

All the professorships under scrutiny demonstrated an ability to support and develop a younger cohort of staff through PhD research and postdoctoral research. The University of Tartu contributes significantly to the education of PhD students in the humanities in Estonia. There are possibly more growth opportunities and scope for the cross-fertilization of the disciplines by encouraging doctoral students from outside the university's own master's programmes and increasing the number of international students working within funded research partnerships.

A large percentage of new staff have moved through the education system at the University of Tartu, which, on one hand, shows a laudable commitment to encouraging students to progress from BA to post-doc, but, on the other hand, runs the risk of creating a closing in of thinking in terms of the subject areas. Avoiding the internalization of research ambitions and academic norms through a diversified cohort could only be helpful in sustaining the dynamic growth of subject disciplines.

### **8. To what extent is research and development of the professorships related to the provision of higher education and the development of its quality at all levels?**

The professorships contribute significantly to teaching in the humanities, generally providing high-quality higher education. The (PhD) students the panel met showed themselves satisfied with the teaching offers, and many decided to follow their entire academic path at the University of Tartu. Further, some professorships under scrutiny demonstrated a rather traditional approach to their subject area. On the one hand, this guarantees the student a basic education on which they can later build transdisciplinary approaches; on the other hand, there might be a certain danger of missing connections to international trends. The Professorship of Estonian History just recently opened to questions of gender, one of the basic categories of a social history beyond class, ethnicity and age. Memory studies are still seen solely with ethnology, although this is one of the internationally booming fields.

In order to avoid a closing in thinking, exchange within the country – with professorships in the humanities at Tallinn University, which were sometimes missing in the picture – and beyond the country's borders is essential. The staff should be systematically encouraged to participate in exchange programs (and be given the possibility to realize such exchange visits as well). Further, language education has to be constantly

reconsidered. While the level of proficiency in English has been impressive, in some subject areas, other language education is also important, such as Russian and German for historians. A broad offering seems to be of utmost importance to keep the quality of higher education at the highest standard.

**9. To what extent are the research directions of the professorships aligned with national priorities (goals set in the "Cultural Development Plan 2021-2030"), global development trends, needs of the creative fields and the society? This question is answered by an external Estonian expert competent in the relevant field. The expert assessment is added to the targeted evaluation report.**

In answer to the question of to what extent are the research areas of professorships aligned with: (A) national priorities; (B) global development trends; (C) the needs of the creative fields; and (D) the needs of society?

The items A-D are closely linked to each other, as the national priorities (A) can only be implemented within the framework of global development trends (B), and the needs of creative fields (C) cannot diverse themselves from the needs of the society (D). The aim of the development plan is to ensure the vitality of Estonian culture, to prevent and mitigate risks related to the development of the culture and increase the effectiveness of the management of the cultural field. The research areas of the professorships of national importance at the University of Tartu are well aligned with (A) Estonian national priorities, such as the multi-volume academic *History of Estonia*, prepared by the Professorship of Archaeology in 2020. Also, the research areas are well aligned with (B) global development trends, which, for example, support the research of local matters in a more global perspective, such as the study of Estonian history as an integral part of European and world history, as carried out at the Professorship of Estonian History. (C) The needs of the creative fields are also covered by the work of the Professorship of Art History, effectively supporting the needs for high-quality work in the field of the arts. In relation to (D) the needs of society, the most influential fields of activity are the teaching of Estonian to non-Estonians at the Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language, and the highly charged social that are continuously addressed by the Professorship of Semiotics of Culture.

It can be concluded that the research areas of the eleven professorships are well aligned with national priorities, the global development trends, as well as with the needs of Estonian society and its creative fields.

**10. What are the recommendations for increasing the scientific impact, sustainability and societal impact of the professorships?**

There is evidence that cross-disciplinary thematic project work has yielded very successful results, and this approach could be further incentivized and encouraged. Such

an approach could also improve the positioning of international funding and partnerships.

Following the success of the existing transdisciplinary working groups, the university could look to foster similar models across other subject areas, encouraging cross-departmental PhD supervision and the development of external bids.

To increase visibility for the agenda of the professorships, the Estonian society would profit from supporting them in a common outreach strategy, be it a podcast series or TV films, made available to Estonian- and Russian-speakers in the country, and partly in English to a global audience. The outreach activities are time-consuming and need additional support.

The professorships should continue their path of internationalization, developing a strategy for publications to become more visible on an international level, and aim for the mobility of graduates and staff. This might foster transnational perspectives on the subject area, even if its core is the question of Estonian culture, history and language, and therefore help to further inscribe it into global academia. Part of this would be to develop stronger international partnerships to increase awareness of the areas of national importance clustered around the professorships.

Looking to diversify and expand the subject areas by bringing in students and staff from outside the University of Tartu, helping to stay up to date with trends in the subject areas.

While initiative regarding third-party funding applications should continue to be clearly rewarded, as well as interdisciplinarity, university leadership should also balance systemic disadvantages in guaranteeing also the smaller research groups to fulfill their societal mission.

The Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language seems to have a special position to address societal challenges — including unforeseeable ones — and to assume leadership roles in advancing recent national linguistic interests. Given Estonia's ongoing transition to Estonian-language education, the professorship could play a pivotal role in facilitating this shift and might therefore need additional support.

## **The alignment of professorships' research directions with national priorities, global development trends, the needs of the creative fields, and societal expectations**

*Toomas Kiho*

### **GENERAL PART**

I have been asked to give an answer to the following question.

Namely, to what extent are the research areas of professorships aligned with:

(A) national priorities (the goals of the "Cultural Development Plan 2021-2030").

(B) global development trends.

(C) the needs of the creative fields.

(D) the needs of society?

The items A-D are closely linked to each other, as the national priorities (A) can be implemented only in the framework of global development trends (B), and the needs of creative fields (C) cannot diverge too greatly from the needs of society (D). They must remain in close contact with the vibrant development of modern society. Otherwise, they would be unable to speak to the people of the country or to speak in their name. If the connection between society and its creative fields were to be interrupted, the latter would receive no funding from society or the government, which would also impact universities and all professorships.

The above-mentioned "Cultural Development Plan 2021–2030" is the document that sets out the strategic goals of the field of culture in Estonia during the period under review. The aim of the development plan is to ensure the vitality of Estonian culture; to prevent and mitigate risks related to its development; to increase the effectiveness and transparency of cultural governance; and to keep cultural development in balance with that of other fields. The document was approved by the Government of Estonia in November 2021. The strategic goals mentioned in the development plan must, of course, align themselves to the national priorities that derive from the constitutional foundations of the Republic of Estonia. This provides them with a solid basis, and it is also the reason why the question I have been asked is of fundamental importance.

The research areas of the professorships of national importance at the University of Tartu are well aligned with (A) Estonian national priorities — for example, the completion of the multi-volume Academic History of Estonia, the last volume of which was prepared by the professorship of archaeology in 2020. The research areas are also well aligned with (B) global development trends, which, among other things, support the study of local

matters from a global perspective — a good example being the study of Estonian history as an integral part of European or world history, as carried out by the professorship of Estonian history in close international cooperation.

(C) The needs of the creative fields are also well covered — for instance, the work done by the professorship of art history effectively supports the development and study of high-quality contemporary art.

Finally, (D) when it comes to the needs of society, the most influential areas of activity are perhaps the teaching of Estonian to non-Estonians by the professorship of Estonian as a foreign language, and the addressing of complex social issues by the professorship of cultural semiotics.

The professorships of national importance are vital to the university as they provide a foundation for the nationally significant humanities, enabling them to compete with the relatively well-funded natural sciences, as well as with the medical and social sciences.

For the University of Tartu as a national university, the existence of professorships of national importance is of the highest value — they cover and research subjects specific to Estonia, such as Estonian history, language, and literature. This reflects a clear position of the university leadership, which has consistently emphasized that these professorships are definitely important.

Professorships of national importance support and help preserve Estonian identity — a task that stems from the Constitution. Globally, the humanities tend to rank low in academic evaluations, and this is also the case in Estonia; thus, professorships of national importance represent Estonia's way of partially addressing this issue.

Estonian culture has developed under the influence of various foreign dominant cultures, and thus, throughout history, culture has played a central role in building the Estonian nation — just as it has served as the foundation of the Estonian nation-state for more than a hundred years. Therefore, the teaching and research of national humanities is nothing less than the natural course of action for Estonians as the indigenous people of this land. In Estonia's case, the professorships of national importance can be viewed within the framework of post-colonial discourse (specifically post-Soviet discourse after 1991), and they should be presented to the world as such.

In purely academic terms, the purpose of the national professorships is to preserve knowledge important to the Estonian nation in various areas of the humanities. The most important task is the education of young people and the emergence of new, highly educated generations in nationally significant academic fields.

At the same time, there is a natural expectation: if you provide education, does society not also have an obligation to offer students a viable career perspective? Students in nationally important professorships are sometimes concerned about their chances of finding employment in their field.



To address this, a new career model has been introduced within the university, which is intended to help solve the issue. It is still in its early stages, so its potential benefits remain to be seen.

## **SPECIAL PART**

**This section outlines the main research areas and activities of the professorships of national importance during the period under review, which are aligned with and support objectives (A) to (D).**

### **Professorship of Archaeology**

One particularly outstanding publication worth mentioning here is the first volume of the Academic History of Estonia (2020), edited by Professor of Archaeology Valter Lang. This volume covers the entire prehistory of the Estonian nation — from approximately 11,000 years ago to the beginning of the 13th century — and completes the long-prepared six-volume academic history of Estonia, the foundations of which were already laid in the 1930s. This work undoubtedly stands at the core of Estonia's national cultural priorities.

Other notable publications include the Tutulus yearbook of Estonian archaeology, published since 2012, which brings archaeological news, annual excavation overviews, and book introductions to a wider audience. Another important series is Research into Ancient Times (Muinasaja teadus), published since 1991 in cooperation with the Institute of History at Tallinn University. Each issue focuses on a specific topic, and both monographs and collections of articles have been released in the series.

A very important aspect of the professorship's work is intensive interdisciplinary cooperation between archaeologists, geneticists, and linguists (see: eestijuured.ee, meaning "Estonian roots"). A successful Centre of Excellence has been established, bringing together archaeology, folkloristics, linguistics, paleoecology, archaeozoology, and other fields through international collaboration.

### **Professorship of Estonian History**

The aim of the research carried out at the professorship is to study Estonian history as an integral part of European or world history. This approach fully aligns with contemporary global development trends.

The research content of the professorship focuses on traditional fields of history, with one of the key areas being the specific study of the history of the Republic of Estonia (founded in 1918). Gender studies also mark a link to current global trends.



Researchers at the professorship have published several important monographs (26 in total), including some particularly influential works such as Estonian Military History (2021) and a monograph on Konstantin Päts (2018), one of the founders of the Republic of Estonia and its first president.

A key goal is to increase international visibility and engage with the global academic arena. One challenge is a slight decline in students' proficiency in German and Russian, both of which remain essential for the study of Estonian history.

Reaching a wider audience through television and radio programmes, popular newspaper articles, and similar formats is also crucial, as public education is an extremely important aspect of the professorship's mission.

### **Professorship of History and Dialects of Estonian Language**

The task of the professorship is to study the history and dialects of the Estonian language. Estonian phonetics and phonology are also examined in depth. The richness of the Estonian language lies not only in its structure but also in the diversity of its dialects, including the distinct South Estonian language. High-level scientific research on these varieties, as well as their preservation, is of great importance to national culture as a whole.

In addition to Estonian and South Estonian, the languages of other national communities in Estonia are also studied — for example, the Swedish dialects spoken along the Estonian coast, such as on the island of Runö. Research topics range widely, from Uralic prosody to isolated Estonian language islands and the Livonian language.

The professorship also participates in the work of a Centre of Excellence together with archaeologists — notably, it is the only Centre of Excellence in the humanities in Estonia. Among the professorship's most significant publications are dialect textbooks, The Treasury of Estonian (Eesti keele varamu), and other works of broader cultural relevance.

### **Professorship of Estonian as a Foreign Language**

Estonian as a foreign language is an important and highly practical field of research that addresses some of the most pressing issues in applied linguistics in Estonia. The Estonian government has recently launched a language reform in Estonian schools where Russian has previously been the language of instruction. Starting in the autumn of 2024, all instruction in grades one and four will be conducted entirely in Estonian, with full transition across all grades expected by 2030.

This reform places a significant academic responsibility on the professorship of Estonian as a foreign language, including targeted work with schools, children, and their families.

The number of professors in the professorship has doubled, and the number of doctoral defences has increased by 160%, reflecting the fact that language and education policy are clearly part of the applied sciences: society as a whole needs the Estonian language to be taught to non-native speakers.

Another responsibility of the professorship is to provide Estonian language instruction within the university. Academically, the professorship also supports the teaching of Estonian in universities around the world.

### Professorship of Ethnology

The purpose of the professorship is to research and develop Estonian and Finno-Ugric cultural history and traditional culture. This also includes the preservation of the cultural memory of Finno-Ugric peoples. To this end, active academic publishing is undertaken to help maintain scholarly language and terminology, especially in Estonian.

In addition, it is important to disseminate the results more broadly — for example, by publishing popular science articles in newspapers and online, organizing exhibitions, and similar outreach activities. Ethnological and anthropological films produced by members of the professorship have received awards.

A significant challenge following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine is the difficulty — or rather the impossibility — of reaching Finno-Ugric kin peoples living in the territory of Russia.

Another nationally important research area of the professorship is oral history.

### Professorship of Art History

At the professorship, the long history of art is studied — not only contemporary art. A number of important publications, both domestic and international, have appeared, including the *Baltic Journal of Art History*, a biannual peer-reviewed academic journal covering the art history of the Baltic countries. The professorship has also contributed to the multi-volume academic series *Estonian Art History*, most recently to volumes 1 and 3.

The scope of research is broad, ranging from medieval Baltic art to the architecture of the University of Tartu's buildings. There is close cooperation between the professorship and other national institutions such as the National Heritage Board, Tallinn University, the Estonian Academy of Arts, and various Estonian museums.

Art exhibitions are actively curated and prepared, often accompanied by catalogues and lectures. Public lectures are also given, both in person and via television.

Some exciting recent topics include: the development of a digital database of medieval animals in art, and several books on Baltic German manor houses in Estonia.

### Professorship of Modern Estonian Language

Modern and consistent language research is a self-evident task for any developed literary language. In the case of Estonian, this work is conducted at the professorship of Modern Estonian, where the grammar of the language — including syntax and morphology — is studied in depth.

It is evident that our understanding of grammar evolves alongside the development of society, and today, language planning has become a socially significant issue. In addition to Estonian, the South Estonian language is also under sociolinguistic observation.

This year, a major work — Grammar of Estonian, comprising more than 1,000 pages — was published. It summarizes various levels of the language, covering pronunciation, inflection, word formation, and the teaching of written and spoken sentence structures.

A dozen monographs have been published, and as many doctoral theses have been defended. From the perspective of society and the development of written Estonian culture, various language corpora — such as the dialect corpus, teenage language corpus, and others — play a crucial role.

### Professorship of Semiotics of Culture

The professorship became one of national importance only in 2017. It originates from a unique Estonian tradition, with its foundations laid by the world-renowned semiotician Professor Juri Lotman at the University of Tartu. Accordingly, the exploration of Lotmaniana is one of the professorship's responsibilities.

However, its central aim is to analyze national culture and introduce it to the world. Today, some of the key topics include the semiotics of culture in the digital world; digital imagery in reading and comprehension; and the semiotics of translation — particularly so-called “total translation,” which constitutes a significant portion of the professorship's work.

The preservation of national memory is supported through the study of Estonian translation history and cultural mediation processes.

Other specific research areas include: the visual expression techniques of graphic art; the composer Arvo Pärt's manuscripts as inner speech conveyed through sound, word, and image; culture as a form of education; and the application of intersemiotic logic to culturally significant cult texts (such as books, films, etc.).

An important social contribution of the professorship is that its semioticians are frequently asked to interpret the meanings of symbols and signs in real-world social environments — contexts that are often politically and ideologically charged.

### **Professorship of Intellectual History**

The Professorship of Intellectual History is a relatively new but culturally and socially significant academic position. It focuses on the intellectual, social, and political history of Estonia and the Baltic region, placing these within a broader European context. At the same time, contemporary Europe is examined through a historical lens, and the development of the Estonian nation and state is explored in terms of its intellectual evolution.

In 2021, the first volume of the eight-volume History of Baltic Literary Culture, titled Centers and Carriers, was published. It tells the story of the introduction and spread of literacy in the region.

The professorship also addresses issues of wider European relevance, such as the development of natural law in Europe and the conceptualizations of freedom, especially in the Baltic provinces.

A major project that has recently begun is the preparation of a comprehensive book on the history of the University of Tartu, planned for publication in celebration of the university's 400th anniversary in 2032. In 2023 a book about the professorship of the liberal arts was published.

The professorship is also actively engaged in public outreach, including interdisciplinary contributions such as podcasts, programs, interviews, and lectures — both within academia and in broader society.

### **Professorship of Estonian and Comparative Folklore**

The professorship is both unique in a global context and essential for Estonian cultural identity. It maintains close cooperation with Estonian folklorists, many of whom work in Tartu — for example, at the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum, and other institutions.

The professorship has gained wide international attention, with students from Europe, North America, and Australia, and enjoys a strong international reputation. It plays a key role in presenting the scholarly achievements of Estonian folkloristics to the world.

Several applied folkloristics research areas that address societal challenges deserve mention. These include exploring socially relevant taboos; studying conspiracy theories

among the public (e.g., during the COVID-19 period); various publications; and collaboration with the Kodavere Heritage Centre — Kodavere being a culturally unique parish in Estonia.

In support of preserving Estonian identity, the professorship plays an important role in bringing folklore back into schools and introducing it to both Estonian pupils and local Russian-speaking communities.

### Professorship of Estonian Literature

Estonian literature clearly supports Estonian identity — a role that derives directly from the country's Constitution. Throughout history, Estonian literature has upheld national identity during difficult times, including the Soviet era.

Contemporary central topics in literature are explored at the professorship, such as structural metrics, living writing, and close reading. An online dictionary of Estonian writers is currently being prepared — it will also be available in English (EWOD).

Poetics is understood as the combination of figurative thinking and figurative writing; the concept of pragmapoetics has also been introduced.

A central mission of the professorship is to protect Estonian as a unique language in the world. Numerous publications have emerged from the professorship, including monographs, many articles in the cultural press, and the scholarly periodical *Methis: Studia humaniora Estonica*.

The professorship is also actively engaged in public outreach — for example, by contributing to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the national university.

### CONCLUSION

State-implemented and financially supported professorships of national importance have proven their necessity. First, they ensure the continuity of academic expertise by training a sufficient number of new doctoral students. Second, the high-level research conducted within these professorships — often highly interdisciplinary and extending well beyond the faculty of humanities — helps to guarantee the sustainability of the humanities and the development of national humanistic thought in Estonia. The latter is a key issue for the country's future.

It can be concluded that the research areas of the eleven professorships are well aligned with national priorities, global development trends, and the needs of Estonian society and its creative sectors.

Remark: One might additionally ask whether, in a small cultural society like Estonia, all academic research areas should be designated as professorships of national importance in order to preserve Estonian-language higher education and scholarly thought across all fields.

