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**Representation of the Soviet Past in Estonian Regional
Museums**

Master's thesis

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Abstract

This thesis will explore how Estonian regional museums represent the Soviet past through a content analysis of the museums' exhibitions. In this study, three museums will be examined: the Pärnu museum (*SA Pärnu muuseum*), the Saaremaa museum (*SA Saaremaa museum*), and the Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda. Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda is a state museum and other two are state founded-foundations. All of them have long been a part of the Estonian museum landscape.

The research will draw upon the multifaceted concept of cultural memory, its media, and practices in constructing the theoretical framework. Drawing on observations at museums and during guided tours, this study will discuss the role of museum in cultural memory representation and Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture as well as the main discourses of meaning-making of the Soviet past. This theoretical background will be used in examining which fragments of the past are chosen to be represented in regional museums, and how the past is presented to the public through the objects, texts, and displays. Moreover, attention will be given to the local history of the region and its influence on the perspective of the representation of the Soviet past in regional museums.

Thus, these three museums will provide a comparative study on approaches towards representation of the Soviet past.

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Introduction

Museums have evolved into significant landmarks, playing a crucial role in determining which elements of history should be remembered, displayed, recounted, and transformed into heritage.

Central and Eastern Europe is a region marked by its shared encounter with the former Communist system and its subsequent reconciliation with this history. Museums in this region have presented a range of viewpoints, reinterpretations, and narratives concerning the Soviet past. Themes such as trauma in the form of surveillance and deportations, the totalitarian nature of previous Communist regimes, economic setbacks and collapses, and a sense of nostalgia for days gone by have all found representation within museums in Central and Eastern Europe. (Iordachi 2021) This thesis focuses on the representation of the Soviet era in Estonian regional museums.

The idea behind my choice of topic emerged gradually. I got interested in cultural memory studies during my Bachelor's. My bachelor thesis focused on the role of cultural memory in identity building in Milan Kundera's novels. The Czech-born writer Milan Kundera often touches on life under Communism in Czechoslovakia and the Prague Spring events in his novels. During my Master's studies in Tartu, I got acquainted with the concepts of «difficult» (Macdonald, 2008) and dark heritage (Thomas et al., 2019), which in turn, led me to the idea of exploring how the difficult Soviet cultural heritage should be dealt with. Since I was also interested in museum representation, I chose to research the representation of the Soviet past in Estonian museums.

This research aims to analyze the main tendencies in displaying the country's Soviet past through the content analysis of the museum exhibitions: to explore what aspects of the past museums include in exhibitions and how they present them to the public through objects, texts, displays, and signs.

The aims of this research are:

1. To define what narratives are used for the representation of the Soviet era in Estonian regional museums.
2. To analyze what elements of the past are being displayed.
3. To observe what methods and representational strategies are used in exhibitions.
4. To investigate how the local history of the region influenced the perspective of the representation of the Soviet past in regional museums

In order to answer these research questions I visited each museum under study twice. The six visits took place between January 2022 and January 2023. During first visits I documented the exhibitions by myself, and the second visit was conducted together with a museum guide. The fieldwork and the writing process were delayed and disturbed first by the global pandemic and then by Russia's escalation of the war in Ukraine, which puts the Soviet era in yet a different perspective, also in Estonia.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. To begin with, chapter 1 outlines the methodology of the study. The chapter explains the concepts used in the thesis and describes the cases and the fieldwork methods employed in the study.

Chapter 2 establishes relevant concepts for the research. This chapter delves into the broad concept of memory and its relation to history and culture, focusing on the multifaceted concept of cultural memory, its media, and practices as described by scholars such as Jan and Aleida Assmann and Astrid Erll. Then it discusses the role of museum in cultural memory representation. Lastly, the chapter draws upon the Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture and the main discourses of meaning-making of the Soviet past.

Chapters 3 and 4 center around the fieldwork and the analysis of the permanent exhibitions in the Pärnu Museum and Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda, respectively. Attention is given to the parts of exhibitions dedicated to the Soviet period.

Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of the Saaremaa Museum. The chapter has three subchapters dedicated to the museum's three exhibitions related to the Soviet era, respectively: the commemorative exhibition of a communist massacre in Kuressaare Castle,

the permanent exhibition on Contemporary History, and the temporary exhibition «Life in a milk container» about the Forest Brothers.

The discussion part provides concluding comments to clarify the narratives found in analyzed museums and provide comparative remarks on differences and similarities. The conclusion summarises the findings of the study based on the aims of the thesis and reflects the significance of the research.

CHAPTER 1: Fieldwork and case studies

In this chapter I will outline the methodology of the research. The chapter explains the concepts used in the thesis and describes the cases and the fieldwork methods employed in the study.

1.1 Methodology

The aim of this subchapter is to reflect on the methods I used for the research.

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, observations and participant observations, at exhibitions dedicated to the Soviet period at three regional museums: the Pärnu museum, the Saaremaa museum, and the Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda. The aim of fieldwork was to create data for content analysis, which includes the analysis of objects, texts, images, and of the exhibition spaces. Excerpts of wall texts and images of displays will be included for visual context to the fieldwork. Besides that, attention is given to other aspects of representation at the museums such as guided tours, audioguides, museums' websites and social media accounts. Additionally, I used some articles published in *Postimees* and *Pärnu Postimees*.

The analysis is based on the observations made in the aforementioned museums. During the fieldwork, I visited each museum twice. During the first visit, I got acquainted with the museum and the exhibition and generated photo and video material. For the second visit I booked a guided tour and took an audio guide where it was possible. Overall, during the fieldwork I made six separate visits to chosen museums in the period between January 2022 and January 2023.

The critical viewing of the exhibitions' analysis is based on «The Critical Museum Visitor» framework provided by the art historian Margaret Lindauer. Lindauer suggests that a contemporary museum visitor can also be a «critical museum visitor» who «notes what objects are presented, in what ways, and for what purposes [...] explores what is left unsaid or kept off display [...] asks, who has the most to gain or the most to lose from

having this information, collection, or interpretation publicly presented». (Lindauer, 2006: 204)

The selected cases allow one to analyze how the Soviet past is presented at regional museums. The Soviet era has been studied and represented in Estonian mnemonic discourse from different perspectives, from «the rupture» to «good old Soviet times». (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2016) Among other cultural texts that reflect on the Soviet period the museum exhibitions are special because they can reach a large number of people. (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2016: 144) From this point of view, museums as agents in the construction of cultural/collective memory are particularly interesting and significant sites of research. Compared to the Estonian National Museum (Seljamaa, 2021) or the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom in Tallinn, (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2021) regional Estonian museums are yet to be studied.

The choice of cases was furthermore based on how well the given historical period is represented at the selected museums and whether it is represented at all. Moreover, the local features of each of the museums make it possible to analyze how much of the local Soviet history is displayed and how it is connected to the national level of history.

The history of the development of Estonian regional museums has gone from complete subordination to the Ministry of Culture, when during the Soviet era, museums were mainly managed by the ministry, to greater autonomy due to the reorganization of the museum network. (Roht, 2020: 18) The concept of the county museum firstly appeared in the 1996 Museum Act. The county museum was established as a state museum under the administration of the local government, the collections of which comprehensively represent the history, nature and human activities of this county.¹ After the Museum Act, the reform of the museum network was implemented in 2013. As a result, the changes in the form of museum ownership affected several Estonian museums, including county museums. State museums were transformed into foundations or placed under the jurisdiction of local governments. (Roht, 2020: 3) The same transformations affected museums analyzed in this research: the Saaremaa Museum and the Pärnu Museum are state-founded foundations, and

¹ Museum Act, 1996 <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/742417>

only the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda is a state museum. It is also worth mentioning that the regional museums were built on earlier museums and collections that go back centuries.

In connection with reform, the concept of community becomes relevant for regional museums, since their role and position are based on the local community. The community in the case of museums can be defined as a population that belongs to the area of museum activities and collecting. (Roht, 2020: 20)

I will next give a detailed overview of the three museums that constitute the case studies of this thesis.

1.2 Case studies

1.2.1. Pärnu Museum

Estonia's fourth-largest town Pärnu is located in southeast Estonia on the shores of the Pärnu bay. The Pärnu Museum (*Pärnu Muuseum*) is situated near the city centre, on the banks of the Pärnu river at Aida Street 3. The museum has undergone many changes over time, as stated on its website. Initially, it was a small collection opened in 1896 by the Society of Archeology (*Pernauer Alterthumforschende Gesellschaft*) to study, present and preserve local history.² Then the collection increased and became available to the general public. Still, during World War II, the building where the collection was located burned down, and many of the exhibits were damaged. In 1940 museum was nationalized by the Soviet government. Since then the museum has changed its location several times and the museum's collection has grown. Eventually, in 2012 the museum opened to visitors in a reconstructed 19th-century storehouse, which you can see in the photo below.³

Pärnu Museum is a foundation museum established by the state.⁴ It is the main museum in the Pärnu County. Museum has two branches - the Memorial Museum of Lydia Koidula, the Estonian poetess during the national awakening of Estonia, and the Red Tower. The Red

² Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/parnu-museum/history>

³ Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/parnu-museum/history>

⁴ Kultuuriministerium <https://kul.ee/kultuurivaartused-ja-digitaalne-kultuuriparand/muuseumid/muuseumid-eestis#riigi-asutatud-siht>

Tower is Pärnu's oldest building (early 15th century) turned into a museum with a panorama cinema, where visitors can watch an animated film about 15,000 years of Pärnu's history.⁵ Here I concentrate only on the main building at Aida street.

The Pärnu Museum has a permanent exhibition, «11,000 years of history. Experiences from the past», part of which I will analyze further in this research. The exhibition was opened on May 25, 2012.⁶ In addition to the permanent exhibition, the museum has spaces for alternating temporary exhibitions of art and history. At the time of both of my visits, it was the anniversary exhibition «Pärnu Muuseum. 125. Retrospektiiv» dedicated to the museum itself, the history of its creation, its various locations, expositions, museum policy, and exhibition activities at different times.



Image 1: *The Pärnu Museum, front doors, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

⁵Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/parnu-museum/history>

⁶ Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/parnu-museum/museumist>

The permanent exhibition is bilingual, all textual materials of the exhibition are available in Estonian and English. The museum also offers audio guides in Russian, which I used during my second visit after the guided tour. However, the museum's audio guide doesn't bring additional perspectives to the museum's narrative and mostly just repeats the written on the text panels. The audio guide equipment was acquired by the museum in cooperation with the Integration Foundation as a part of the European Social Fund project «Activities supporting integration in Estonian society».⁷

The museum cafe can also be perceived as a part of the museum exhibition since it offers guided food tours, which introduce visitors to the authentic food culture from different historical periods represented at the permanent exhibition.

The Pärnu Museum has a website and social media accounts in Facebook⁸ and Instagram.⁹ I explored the museum's website before going there for the first time, and observed social medias after my first visit when I started to make notes for the exhibition analysis.

The home page of the museum's website provides basic information about the museum's working hours and affiliates as well as requirements regarding the government's COVID-19 regulations. The site also has sections dedicated to various branches of the museum: the Pärnu Museum, the Memorial Museum of poetess Lydia Koidula (1843–1886), and the Red Tower. The site is available in Estonian, English, and Russian. The most comprehensive information is presented in Estonian. It includes both information about the exhibitions for visitors and about the museum's archive collection, which may be of interest to researchers. There is also a section with a schedule of events in the museum and its branches, information on the services provided, such as renting out the museum's premises for events, seminars, presentations, etc. In addition to all these details, there is a 3D model of the museum itself, making it possible to take a virtual tour of the museum. I took the tour after the visit, and it was helpful in recollecting the setting. In English, only basic information is available that could be useful for tourists regarding the museum's history, exhibitions, opening hours, and prices. The most abbreviated version of the website is in Russian. The sections with the list

⁷ Integratsiooni Sihtasutus <https://integratsioon.ee/kultuuri-ja-sportitegevused>

⁸ Facebook https://www.facebook.com/parnumuseum/?locale=et_EE

⁹ Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/parnumuseum/>

of the upcoming events and information for events' organizers are missing in the English and Russian versions.

As a more dynamic structure, social networks serve the purpose of informing, updating, and attracting the public's attention. As of the February 2022, The Pärnu Museum Facebook page has around 3,9 thousand followers. Through Facebook the museum communicates with potential visitors or those who have visited the museum before, informing them about upcoming events, new exhibitions, and the museum's agenda in general. During the period of observation, in January and February 2022, the Pärnu Museum's Facebook page posts were pretty regular. Unlike the website the language of posts is exclusively Estonian. Most posts have minimal basic information, such as an announcement about a current exhibition or lecture accompanied by a few photos or a link to a Facebook event.

The museum has an Instagram account. The page content consists of aesthetic photos of exhibitions, items, objects from the museum's collection, the view of the museum itself, and its visitors. The advantage of Instagram are stories that enable the museum to share with subscribers what is happening in the museum in real-time and partially demonstrate the exhibits, thus making visitors interested and involved. The account also has the hashtag [#pänumuuseum](#), which encourages users to interact and share their photos and impressions of visiting the museum.

In addition to the exhibition space, the Pärnu Museum offers a varied cultural program within the Museum Club *Musse*. As Maarja Padari-Kallit, the museum's development manager, noted in a newspaper article, *Musse* is a cultural club that was opened in 2019 with the aim of building a friendly community around the museum and also attracting those people who are more interested in cultural events than museum exhibitions.¹⁰ As it is said on the museum website, the club was created in memory of the first community in Pärnu - *Müsse-Gesellschaft*, one of the many such communities of educated citizens established in the cities of Livonia at the end of the Enlightenment. In Pärnu such community appeared in 1790 and was organized by officer corps, being originally called «Men's Club»: «The name could not survive because it was associated with the French revolutionary clubs, which were banned in Russia by Emperor Paul I in 1800. The new name «*Musse*» meant free time spent

¹⁰ Pärnu Postimees <https://parnu.postimees.ee/6840076/linnas-seab-end-sisse-muuseumiklubi-musse>

on self-development».¹¹ Various activities, such as readings, dancing, theatrical plays, musical evenings, took place within the community.

Now the club is a place for workshops, lectures, seminars, trainings or even birthdays. The museum offers additional opportunities and activities for citizens so they can actively participate in the cultural life of the city. The Pärnu Museum also pays attention to the educational aspect by offering museum lessons for children based on the museum's permanent and temporary exhibitions. Such lessons can be combined with creative activities like workshops of making jewelry, ceramics or clothing, which are accompanied by commentary on the historical background of the objects.¹²

1.2.2. Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda

The Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda (Võru County Museum) (*Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda (Võrumaa Muuseum)*), is located in Võru, a small city in the southeastern part of Estonia, an hour's drive from Tartu. The museum is five minutes' walk from the city's main square near the Katariina alley. It is built on the foundation part of the former Krümmer school (1832–1866), one of the oldest and largest stone buildings in Võru. The school was demolished in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³ The surviving entrance doors of that building are now on display in the museum. The Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda brings together an art gallery on the first floor and a museum on the second floor. It also shares premises with Võru Sports School located in the other part of the building. On the first floor, there are three museum storages which according to the guide is rare for the old museums and is one of the prides of the museum.

It is a state museum, which is a part of the museum department of the Võru Institute, a research and development agency focused on the historic region of Võrumaa or *Vana-Võromaa*. Its museum department Vana-Võromaa Museums also includes Dr. Fr. R.

¹¹ Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/muuseumiklubi-musse>

¹² Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/parnu-muuseum/koolidele/tootoad>

¹³ Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/muuseumist/ajalugu/>

Kreutzwald Memorial Museum, Mõniste Rural Life Museum and Karilatsi Open Air Museum.¹⁴

The museum's mission, as stated on the museum's website, is «to collect, preserve, research and mediate culturally valuable objects related to the Vana-Võrumaa and their stories. Special attention is paid to the history of the Võru city and the people who worked in and came from Vana-Võrumaa and the Võru language».¹⁵ The museum originates from the Võru Local History Foundation (created in 1961), where objects, documents and photos related to Võru County were stored. In 1966 by the directive of the then Minister of Culture it became a branch of the Kreutzwald Memorial Museum (founded in 1941), the Võru Local History Museum.¹⁶ Over time, the museum collection increased, requiring more space. Since 1983 the museum has been operating in the current building, built by Katariina Allee company. It was the only building specially designed for a museum during the Soviet era. (Raisma, 2022) In 2013 the grey walls of the building were painted with murals by artists Margus Loki and Olivia Parmasto. Images depicted on the walls are related to the cultural history of the Vana-Võrumaa.¹⁷

¹⁴ Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/muuseumist/ajalugu/>

¹⁵ Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/uurijale/>

¹⁶ Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/muuseumist/ajalugu/>

¹⁷ Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/muuseumist/ajalugu/>



Image 2: *Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda*, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko

The first exhibitions in the newly opened museum were «Industry and agriculture of Võru County» and «Estonian national costumes», which were prepared by the Estonian National Museum.¹⁸ According to Tiia Haug, the manager of Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, the Võrumaa Museum permanent exhibition was completed in 1985. It was designed by the artist Marika Laretei and realized by the ARS Art Products Factory. (Raisma, 2022) Since that time, except for a modernization of the part related to the 20th century, the museum has maintained much of its original design as it used to be in the 1980s. So the museum introduces not only the history of Võrumaa but also Estonian design and and serves as an example of Soviet approaches to museum representations. (Raisma, 2022)

The permanent exhibition on the second floor of the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda gives an overview of the history of Võru County from prehistory to 20th century. As for the language of the exhibition, the inscriptions on the text panels are written in Estonian. In the part of the exhibition up to the 20th century, they are also duplicated in Russian. In the 20th century part, texts are written exclusively in Estonian. And the new part of the exhibition about the Smoke Sauna tradition is represented both in Estonian and English. In this way, one can see

¹⁸ Ibid.

how the exhibition and the linguistic orientation of the museum have changed. Some parts have remained unchanged since the 1980s, some have been updated in 1992, and the newest additions are accompanied by English texts.

The museum also offers educational programs and activities for kindergartners and schools, for example classes and theme studies, which introduce ancient traditions and holidays of Vana-Võrumaa.¹⁹ There is a gallery in the museum, which occupies two halls on the first floor of the building and is available for rent. As stated on the museum website the main goal of the gallery of the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda is to introduce and promote artists related to the Vana-Võrumaa region.²⁰ Exhibitions are updated every two months. Both personal and group exhibitions are organized at the gallery, with the focus on design and applied art, and also on foreign art and culture.²¹

The website provides quite extensive information about the museum, its history, exhibition and events mostly in Estonian. Only the main page of the website is available in other languages (English, Russian and Spanish).²² The website is divided into theme sections, such as the history of the museum, news, information for guests, artists, researchers, and gallery section. There is a YouTube video with an overview of the permanent exhibition, giving future or potential visitors an approximate idea of the exhibition' contents.²³ The video has no verbal component, which increases its accessibility.

In addition, visitors can get 24/7 access to the museum's collections online through the MuIS database (muis.ee).²⁴ It allows one to get acquainted with the collections of the Estonian museums that have joined this system. Some old photos from the Võrumaa Muuseum collection are posted in the virtual gallery on the museum's website.

In the Estonian version of the website, the main page contains the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda Facebook page widget, which makes it possible to view the latest posts and current events of the museum without going to the Facebook page itself. As of October 2022,

¹⁹Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/kulalisele/muuseumitunnid/>

²⁰ Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/kunstnikule/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² It remained unclear to me why Spanish was among these languages

²³ Vana Võrumaa Kultuurikoja muuseum 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SukSzhhDCFs>

²⁴Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/uurijale/>

the Facebook page²⁵ with 2 thousand followers is updated few times a month (about 4-5 new posts per month). The gallery seems to be one of the more popular topic of posts since exhibitions there change in every two months. Sometimes some thematic events in the museum, like Music Day, Scientists' Night Festival, or Archeology Days, are highlighted. But usually, posts on the page refer specifically to exhibitions in the gallery, which gather an artistic community around the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda.

1.2.3. Saaremaa Museum

The Saaremaa island is the largest island in Estonia. The capital of the island is Kuressaare, the largest city and the administrative center. Saaremaa Museum (*Saaremaa Muuseum*) is located at the Kuressaare Episcopal Castle, a Gothic style convent building which was built in the 14th century as a residence of the Bishopric Saare-Lääne.²⁶ It is a popular picturesque touristic site and draws visitors from all parts of the island.

The castle went through four main periods in its history: the period of the bishops (first half of 14th century–1559), the Danish period (1559–1645), the Swedish period (1645–1721), and the Russian period (1721–1918).²⁷ Since 1985 the Kuressaare castle houses the Saaremaa Museum.²⁸ Besides the cultural and scientific significance of the museum, the castle itself is a historical site and is one of the most well-preserved fortification structures in Estonia. And the museum is definitely making use of that: besides housing exhibitions, the castle also serves as a venue for various cultural events, from concerts and festivals to conferences and seminars, as well as for private events like parties and wedding ceremonies.

²⁵ Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/vanavoromaakultuurikoda/>

²⁶ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/history-of-the-castle-and-fortress/>

²⁷ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/history-of-the-castle-and-fortress/>

²⁸ Ibid.



Image 3: *Saaremaa Museum, courtyard, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

Saaremaa Museum was founded on February 17, 1865, together with the establishment of the Research Society of Saaremaa. Today, it is a state-founded foundation museum (*sihtasutus*).²⁹ The statute of the Saaremaa Museum Foundation says that its aim is «to collect, preserve, research and mediate the cultural heritage of Saare County for educational, scientific and experiential purposes through the management and use of its property and to strengthen the cultural, educational and tourism competitiveness of Saare County».³⁰

The core of the museum's collection was based on antiquities found during archaeological excavations organized by a Kuressaare Gymnasium teacher, J. B. Holzmayer.³¹ Like the other two analyzed museums, Saaremaa Museum has undergone several changes during the

²⁹ Kultuuriministeerium <https://kul.ee/kultuurivaartused-ja-digitaalne-kultuuriparand/muuseumid/muuseumid-eestis#riigi-asutatud-siht>

³⁰ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/muuseum/dokumendid/saaremaa-muuseumi-pohimaarus/>

³¹ Ibid <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/museum/history-of-the-saaremaa-museum/>

first quarter of the 19th century. The museum was relocated from the Kuressaare Gymnasium to Kuressaare Castle and endured two World Wars and finally, the castle's reconstruction.³² The museum has three branches: the Archival Library of Saaremaa, Johannes and Joosep Aavik's Memorial Museum and Mihkli Farm Museum.³³ In my research I am focusing on the exhibitions in the Kuressaare Castle.

In addition to temporary exhibitions (up to 30 per year),³⁴ Saaremaa Museum has an extensive permanent exhibition, consisting of several departments. After the reconstruction of the castle in 1985–1987 the department of History was opened³⁵ the exhibition of which covers the history of Saaremaa from the 14th to the beginning of the 20th century. It is a part of the permanent exhibition that was completed during Soviet period and has been preserved since that time. The Nature department (1993) tells about the climate, bedrock, flora and fauna of the island.³⁶

Besides the History department there is a modern exhibition dedicated to the second half of the 20th century. The exhibition on Contemporary History is the most extensive one in the museum. It occupies four floors of the Defence Tower and consists of two parts: Saaremaa from 1939 to 1949, launched in 2005, and Saaremaa from 1950 to 1994 (2011).³⁷ And lastly, the commemorative exhibition of a communist massacre in Kuressaare Castle in 1941, was opened on 26 September 2011 in the Gunpowder Cellar where a mass grave was found.³⁸

The text panels at the permanent exhibition are in Estonian and English. The exception is the History department the exhibition of which was completed during the Soviet era and therefore has Estonian and Russian texts. Later in the 1990s, introductory texts explaining the topics in English were added. (Raisma, 2022)

Among museums analyzed in this research the Saaremaa Museum website seems to be the most content-rich with sections on museum and castle history, news, exhibitions and events.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/branches/>

³⁴ Ibid <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/museum/history-of-the-saaremaa-museum/>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/loodusosakond/>

³⁷ Ibid <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/lahiajaloo-osakond/>

³⁸ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/commemorative-exhibition/>

There are also sections aimed at different visitor categories – visitors, researchers, and students. The site has four versions, being available in Estonian, English, Finnish and Russian languages. A lot of the information given in the Estonian version of the site is translated into other languages, but if one wants to know more, one should explore the Estonian version. For example, here one can take a virtual tour of the castle's surroundings from a bird's eye view as well as of the rooms and halls inside the castle. Besides the virtual tour, there is a section with a live broadcast from two public security cameras located on the territory of Saaremaa Museum. As stated on the website the purpose of this broadcast is «to popularize cultural heritage and tourist attractions».³⁹

Although the museum website doesn't give any links to the museum's social media pages, the museum is active on social media through Facebook⁴⁰ and Instagram⁴¹. As of July 2022 the Facebook page has 3,3 thousand followers and posts almost daily. There are informative posts promoting upcoming events and exhibitions and educational content. For example, the «urban history» section has posts on the urban history of Kuressaare accompanied by archival photos. From time to time, it also shares articles or TV programs featuring the Saaremaa Museum.

The Museum Instagram page posts are published less frequently, few times a month. Posts are usually related to the opening of a new exhibition or some important holiday or event, such as World Heritage Day or the birthday of Kuressaare city. Sometimes archival photographs, documents or objects are uploaded to draw attention to the museum collection.

Besides the main Instagram account, the Saaremaa Museum also has an account of the museum shop.⁴² It has less outreach than the main page but three times more posts. The page is usually updated around twice a week with photos of souvenirs that can be purchased in the shop, accompanied by a short text description of the goods. It's interesting to look through the page even without the intention to buy anything because of the variety of souvenirs. However, the shop does not have souvenirs related to the Soviet period in its assortment. The assortment also changes depending on the season and time of the year.

³⁹ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/kulastajale/vaata-otse/>

⁴⁰ Facebook https://www.facebook.com/kuressaarecastle/?locale=et_EE

⁴¹ Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/saaremaamuuseum/>

⁴² Museum shop <https://www.instagram.com/kuressaarecastleshop/>

Account moderators smartly coincide souvenirs with the upcoming holidays, like a gift set with medieval wine and glasses for Father's Day or heart-shaped jewelry for Valentine's Day.

Overall, the museum makes use of its website and social media to shape visitors' expectations and in general, actively promotes its own brand. It seems that it has something to do with the state-supported project on modernization of the Saaremaa Museum (2021–2023). The project includes some changes in interior design of the first floor, creation of a part of a new exposition and besides that, updates in the museum's visual identity and website.⁴³

1.3 Fieldwork

I visited the Pärnu Museum twice, first on January 20th, 2022, observing the exhibition by myself, and then on October 29th, 2022, when I took a guided tour. The guide who conducted the tour wasn't a museum's guide but a city guide, specializing primarily in Pärnu tours but also tours at the Pärnu Museum. There are no guides among the museums' employees, so when visitors book a tour (this must be done in advance), the museum cooperates with city guides who completed training courses at the Pärnu museum.

My first introductory visit to Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda was on September 1st, 2022 and the second one on January 6th 2023. The second visit was originally planned for November, but on the planned day, I couldn't complete the guided tour because of miscommunication. At the beginning of the week, I contacted the museum regarding the tour, and they told me that I could come any day during the week. Since the museum also works on weekends, I arrived on Saturday. However, I didn't think that on the weekend, most likely, there would be no one to ask for a tour from. The receptionist explained that only the exhibition is open on weekends, but museum workers aren't available.

As I found out, there are no guides at the museum, and unlike the Pärnu Museum, the museum in Võru does not cooperate with city guides. So, tours are conducted by the museum

⁴³Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/linnus-kindlus/projekt-saaremaa-muuseumi-kaasajastamine-i-etapp-sissepaasu-ja-i-korruse-valjaarendamine/>

staff themselves. In my case, it was Karin Tohvri, the museum's collection keeper. She told me that museum visitors rarely book guided tours, especially in Russian. In 2022, she was asked to give a tour in Russian only once and during my visit used old printouts of a text she had prepared for that tour. Usually, excursions are ordered in Estonian, for schoolchildren, as part of the museum's educational program in Võrumaa schools.

I visited the Saaremaa Museum in summer, on June 24th 2022. It was the first time I saw the island and the castle. And perhaps it was the right timing because I was impressed by the beauty of the islands' nature and the towering medieval castle. At first, the Saaremaa Museum can easily overwhelm one with the scale of its territory, and the variety of exhibitions. During my first visit, I observed the exhibition on Contemporary History, which will be the focus of my research. The second visit was on 28th of August 2022. That time I also visited other permanent exhibitions and the temporary exhibition «Life in a milk container» about Forest Brothers of Saaremaa.

The museum provides guided tours by prior arrangement. I booked a tour focused on Soviet period in Russian language.⁴⁴ The museum guide, Heino Joandi, kindly accompanied me to all mentioned exhibitions except the nature department and the temporary exhibition. Also, after the tour, I used the audio guide because I thought that the information would relate specifically to exhibitions, however it only tells about the history of the castle and its living conditions. The option to use audio guides in Saaremaa Museum appeared not so long ago, in 2020 as a part of the project on «Increasing the ability to present information in foreign languages» in cooperation with the Integration Foundation.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ I would like to thank museum director Rita Valge, who organised the tour and the tour guide was provided by the museum. I also take an opportunity to thank all guides who worked with me.

⁴⁵ Ibid <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/linnus-kindlus/projekt-muukeelse-info-esitamissoimekuse-suurendamine-sa-saaremaa-muuseumis/>

CHAPTER 2: Conceptual framework

In this chapter I will establish relevant concepts for the research. The chapter focuses on the multifaceted concept of cultural memory, its media, and practices. Then it discusses the role of museum in cultural memory representation. Lastly, the chapter draws upon the Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture.

2.1. Cultural memory theoretization

Memory studies (individual, collective, national, cultural, historical), which became relevant in the second half of the XX century, is now one of the most actively researched and popular areas of humanities. The study of cultural memory, in particular, is promising in terms of its integrative nature the possibility of involving various methodologies and theories in its research.

Ideas of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on the social nature of memory are important to the concept of cultural (as well as national, collective, historical) memory. According to Halbwachs, individual memory becomes a part of the collective memory, and social frameworks become a means of reconstruction of the past, the image of which depends on the dominant narratives in society. Halbwachs also contrasts history and collective memory. (Halbwachs, 1992) Thus, the researcher identified the field of memory as a separate subject in humanities, which gave impetus to further research.

The decisive factor in the study of cultural memory was the refusal to oppose individual and collective forms of remembrance and to study what shapes these types of memory. Modern research on cultural memory is consequently characterized by interdisciplinarity and a wide range of approaches. An integrative definition of cultural memory involves various phenomena as objects of its study, says German literary and memory scholar Astrid Erll. She proposes to define cultural memory as «the interaction of the present and the past in socio-cultural contexts». (Erll, 2008: 2) Cultural Memory does therefore *not* describe all

manifestations of «memory in culture; rather it represents a subset of this: the societal construction of normative and formative versions of the past» (Erll, 2011: 30).

This approach allows one to explore memory at different levels (collective, individual) and different ways of remembering (intentional, unintentional, non-narrative forms of memory). It should also be noted that in this case, the term «cultural memory» is considered in a sense, that culture has a three-dimensional framework which includes social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities). (Erll, 2008: 4) In this way «cultural memory» is considered as the umbrella term comprising social, cognitive and medial memory. (ibid)

Erll notes that there are two levels of intersection between culture and memory: individual (culture as a subjective category) and collective (culture as patterns of publicly available symbols). (2008: 5) Thus, culture and memory interact differently at these levels. The individual (cognitive) level is related to the influence of sociocultural context on the individual's memory. The collective (social, media) level is related to the symbolic order, media, institutions, and practices through which communities reconstruct the past. (Erll, 2008: 5) According to Erll, these two levels of memory must constantly interact in practice and are a condition for each other's existence. The individual is influenced by sociocultural context, and the memory represented by institutions needs to be updated at the expense of community members.

Also of crucial importance has been the shift of emphasis from the opposition between history and memory to the notion of different modes of remembering. This approach is based on the understanding that «the past is not given but must instead continually be reconstructed and re-presented». (Erll, 2008: 7) What is important is not only what is remembered, but also how remembrance is performed.

One of the significant approaches to cultural memory is the one developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann. They distinguish between such types of collective memory as cultural and communicative memory. Researchers are substantiating the theory of cultural memory (*kulturelle Gedächtnis*), which is based on symbolic cultural objectification. Jan Assmann was one of the first to introduce the concept of cultural memory that: «comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation

seems to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity». (Assmann, Czaplicka, 1995: 132) So it is about cultural and institutional forms that support the memory of significant events of the past. These events are specific «fixation points» of cultural memory, somewhat similar to the «social framework» of Halbwachs. By communicative memory, Jan Assmann means memory within three to four generations who have witnessed the past events, which reflects the group members' ideas about their past, which are transmitted through everyday interaction. (Assmann, Czaplicka, 1995: 127)

Aleida Assmann denotes cultural memory as being «based on institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, monuments, institutions of education and of arts as well as ceremonies and commemorative dates and practices». (Assmann A., 2008: 56) In her book *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* from the year 2011 Assmann investigates the functions of cultural memory and the means by which it is preserved.

The author explores how societies remember and construct their identity. According to Assmann, the connection between memory and identity is actualized during the distinction between such concepts as memory «ars» and «vis», i.e., memory as accumulation, storage of knowledge, and memory as recollection, reconstruction. (Assmann, 2011: 27) This distinction reveals two traditions of memory discourse: rhetorical mnemonics, which focuses on the organization and formal structure of knowledge, and the psychological tradition, which considers the interaction of memory with imagination and mind. (Assmann, 2011: 27) In addition to the mnemonic function, attention is paid to other functions of memory, which actualize the relationship between memories and identity, such as cultural acts of remembrance, perpetuation, and forgetting.

Aleida Assmann sees museum collections and archives as a part of potential memory or storage (*Speichergedächtnis*) and exhibitions as functional memory (*Funktionsgedächtnis*)—where the past is re-created and represented. (A. Assmann 2006: 54)

Assmann proposes an integrative approach to studying the functions and features of cultural memory, emphasizing the interconnection of its phenomena, rather than their opposition.

Thus, in recent decades, the relations between culture and memory have become a key topic in interdisciplinary research. Cultural memory is a multifaceted concept, and its media and practices are very diverse. This diversity reveals the connection between different forms and acts of memory in a socio-cultural context.

2.2 Museums and their role in cultural memory representation

When analyzing cultural and social practices by which a sense of the past is created, it is necessary to define the concept of memory that is being applied and to formulate relevant conceptual frameworks. For the purposes of this research it is particularly beneficial to use the framework of cultural memory as it is heavily influenced by the mediums through which it is conveyed, shaping both individual and collective memories. The concept of cultural memory is grounded in the idea that «memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time». (Erlil, Rigney, 2009: 1)

This memory-making process relies on «media of all sorts—spoken language, letters, books, photos, films». (Erlil, Rigney, 2009: 1) Museums, in turn, serve as an important part of this process due to their role as repositories of cultural artifacts. Delving into the matter of a museum display, the study of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is worth mentioning. In *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (1998), Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explores the agency of display in diverse contexts, including museums, historical recreations, memorials, and tourist attractions. She discusses how objects and people are made to perform their meaning by the very fact of being collected and exhibited, and about how specific techniques of display convey messages. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998)

According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the essential feature of museums is their high density, which distinguishes them, for example, from tourist attractions. The mission of museums is, with limited space and time, to demonstrate the best they have to offer for visitors to attract them (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 7) Therefore, in order to compete with other attractions, museums cannot rely only on the exhibited objects as the attention drawers and are becoming

more dependent on the art of installation. Unlike the low-density life world, both museums and tourism industry compress or even displace the life world, «thereby escalating the process by which a way of life becomes heritage». (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 7)

Speaking of the «art of installation» Kirshenblatt-Gimblett defines such modes of display as in-context display and in situ display. (1998: 3) In-context display as particular techniques of arrangement of objects based on «taxonomy, evolutionary sequence, historical development, set of formal relationships»⁴⁶. The aim of in context approach is to exhibit, demonstrate, offer explanation and framework. Context is created through classification and arrangement of objects, by setting them in relation to one another, providing with comments and interpretation through labels, audio guides, booklets, guided tours, lectures educational programs etc. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 21)

In situ display is about performing rather than demonstrating. The life world itself is the ultimate in situ installation, but it also has a low density «for not everything of interest to the visitor is close at hand». (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 7) In situ museum approach is experience-oriented approach that is called to recreate a life world into which the visitors immerse. In situ approaches tend toward environmental displays in a sense that they place objects into settings from which they were excised. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 20) Thus, the ethnographic object is considered in a relation and as a part of a whole that is recreated, be it the environment, room, the village, or the ritual. But it is worth to mention that these cultural «wholes», no matter how realistic they are, should not be considered neutral and given because they are always created and constituted. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 20) It is about meanings, the emergence of which is possible not in the original context, but only in the context of the exhibition, where, by the intention of the exhibition's creator, artifacts, that have never been directly in the same context, can be brought together and their relationships showed.

Exhibited objects are not ethnographic objects initially either, but become such «by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers». (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 18) Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also highlights fragmentary nature of the

⁴⁶ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

ethnographic object that allows to physically detach, excerpt the object and show it to viewers, providing also principles for viewing it. It is the mediation of a display that turns shown objects into heritage.

Cultural memory can be viewed as a process of remembrance and forgetting (Erll, Rigney, 2009; Assmann, 2012). Media plays an active role in this process by «mediating between readers, viewers, listeners and past experiences, and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society». (Erll, Rigney, 2009:3) Museums, as institutions that select and present specific artifacts, play a significant role in deciding what is remembered and what might be forgotten within a cultural context.

Returning to the notion of different modes of remembering and the point that the past is determined by how it is remembered and represented (Erll, 2008:7), museums contribute to shaping visitors' understanding of the past and the culture being represented. Museums embody and present cultural memory in tangible forms through selection and display: «In selecting what to collect, they define what is or is not history [...] In the way they display and interpret that material evidence, they construct and transmit meanings». (Black, 2011: 1) Thus, museums manifest as more than repositories; they emerge as dynamic interpreters, engaging in the interplay between tangible artifacts and intangible memory. Therefore, «museums become places where culture, history and memory meet [...] in a form mediated through the process of selection, collection, preservation and display». (Black, 2011: 5)

Furthermore, visitors also are a part of this interpretation process and not merely passive recipients. As they interact with collections and displayed materials, they contribute new content to their knowledge and comprehension. Such involvement allows them to construct their own meanings. (Black, 2011: 1) Museums select, construct and transmit history and then, visitors through by experiencing and perceiving it getting an individualized grasp of the past.

The importance of the visitor figure leads us to the concept of community, which in the case of local museums becomes relevant, as their role and position are based on the local community. According to Crooke community can be associated with such characteristics as a sense of place, social network, shared characteristics (history, place of residence, values), and a motivation to identify as a community member. (Crooke, 2011:173) For museums, the

community is a population that belongs to the area of museum activities and collecting, and in case of county museums, it mostly remains within the county. (Roht, 2020: 20) So it can be assumed that regional museums' most important exhibit is the locality it serves, its culture and history. On a local level that could mean an ambition to be a center of community engagement and play an important role in the everyday life of the locality.

2.3 Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture

Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture refers to the various ways in which Estonian society has engaged with and remembered its history after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of Soviet rule in 1991 marked a significant turning point for Estonia, as it regained its independence and continued the process of nation-building and identity formation that has started in the late 1980s.

After decades of Soviet rule, Estonia had to navigate the transition from being under Soviet influence to reestablishing its national identity. This process involved confronting the trauma, repression, and cultural suppression that were characteristic of the Soviet era. Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture is a complex and evolving landscape that involves coming to terms with a difficult historical period, acknowledging its impact on the nation's identity. Estonian society grappled with how to remember and acknowledge the experiences of the Soviet era, which included deportations, political repression, and Russification policies.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the concept of «difficult heritage», which, as developed by Sharon Macdonald, addresses how museums and cultural institutions engage with and represent historical events, narratives, and objects that are associated with trauma, conflict, and contentious memories. (Macdonald, 2009). Macdonald formulated the «difficult heritage» as a «past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity» (Macdonald, 2009: 1) Macdonald has also talked about the return to «difficult heritage» which signifies an effort by museums, cultural institutions, and society to revisit and confront

sensitive and painful aspects of history that had previously been marginalized or overlooked (Macdonald, 2015).

The Soviet period in Estonia is often associated with oppression and foreign domination. Post-Soviet remembrance culture involves critiquing communism as a destructive force in the nation's history while celebrating the resilience of the Estonian people in overcoming it. In the remembrance cultures of Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic states stand out for their denial of the socialist past, which contrasts with the ambivalent approaches in other post-socialist nations. (Jõesalu; Kõresaar, 2013:1)

As time has passed, younger generations born after the Soviet era have come of age. Their perspectives on remembrance might differ from those who experienced Soviet rule first-hand, leading to ongoing discussions about how best to remember and represent this period of history. During the 1990s, the Soviet era was mainly interpreted through the concept of «the rupture», which originated in the 1980–1990s, and signified the period of the Stalinist era in Estonia. (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2016:134) The «rupture» discourse is used to represent such collective events of the 1940s-1950s as «repression, ideological pressure and persecution, nationalization, and collectivization, repressive political actions etc». (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2016:134)

Then the focus from traumatic collective events started to shift to the everyday life and quotidian experiences of mature socialism. This turn was marked by the feeling of nostalgia towards socialist past and is more relatable for the 1940s generation. (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2016: 140) However, the nature of nostalgic feelings also differs depending on the age group. For instance, in case of 1940s generation nostalgia is seen as an attempt to create a narrative about their own life under the dominance of the nationalist discourse of remembering. For younger generation of 1970s, the way of remembering the late socialism period, described by a term *nõukaaeg* (good old Soviet times) and characterizes by a childhood nostalgia. (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2016:146)

It follows from this that although in Estonian post-Soviet remembrance culture, «the rupture» discourse prevails in the assessment and understanding of the Soviet period as a whole, it also co-exists with the everyday life discourse used for the informal and private sphere.

CHAPTER 3: Pärnu Museum

This chapter provides the analysis of the permanent exhibition «11,000 years of history. Experiences from the past» at the Pärnu Museum. The analysis is focused on the parts of the exhibition dedicated to the Soviet period.

Pärnu Museum's permanent exhibition «11,000 years of history. Experiences from the past» introduces visitors to the history of Pärnu County, the life and conditions of the various eras. The exhibition also includes a mini-cinema showing archival films. The exhibition covers a considerable period, from the Stone Age to the Soviet era. The exhibition has several sections representing a particular historical period, so visitors get acquainted with the material in chronological order. The exhibition is divided into five areas which correspond to historical periods: Early Mesolithic settlement, Stone Age, Baroque era and period of University town, National awaking and start of the curort Soviet period, and the last part of the exhibition is devoted to the Soviet period. The Soviet period constitutes the specific focus of my analysis. Each section represents a long historical period, so it can be assumed that the presentation of a particular period required careful material selection because fitting centuries of history into one exhibition hall is a challenging task.

The museum website notes an attempt to combine traditional forms of museum representation with interactivity: «Pärnu Museum offers both traditional and interactive solutions to enable visitors to go through all 11,000 years of Estonian history».⁴⁷ This can be viewed as an attempt to find a balance between the need to pay attention to historical facts (for example, through textual descriptions and explanations of the exhibits, which are somewhat reminiscent of passages from history books), while also bringing in an element of interactivity, interaction and immersion of visitors into historical settings.

In the permanent exhibition, one can see a combination of two modes of display: in context display and in-situ display. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998:7) In the former case, objects, photos, documents and other items are removed from their original physical and cultural

⁴⁷ Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuuseum.ee/parnu-museum/history>

settings and placed in the context of the exhibition, while in the latter case examples of environments or historical settings are recreated.

I will next proceed by describing and analysing the permanent exhibition «11,000 years of history. Experiences from the past», focusing on the Soviet era part. By doing it I will take a position of critical visitor (Lindauer 2006). In the analysis, besides my observations and wall texts, I will also refer to the museum guide who gave me a guided tour of this exhibition.

The exhibition on the 20th century hall ends with a photo panorama of the old city destroyed by bombings in 1944. Several fragments of destroyed buildings lie on the floor next to the panorama. This picture abruptly immerses the visitor into the horrors of war that contrasts with the previous theme of national awakening and the foundation of the Republic of Estonia. The permanent exhibition continues with the depiction of the Soviet period from 1940 to 1990. The represented period covers the beginning of the occupation and the guerrilla war, different aspects of private and public life in the Soviet Union.

It is worth noting that the design of the Soviet period hall differs from that of the several previous halls. It doesn't catch the eye immediately, in fact I noticed it later while exploring the museum's interactive map once again. Instead of white plaster, there is orange brickwork on the walls, alternating with pieces of old broken plaster here and there. This effect fits well into the theme of destruction and disasters during Soviet occupation depicted in the first half of the exhibition hall. I don't know if the decision to leave the brickwork was intentional and carries an additional meaning, or if it was rather done to preserve the original look of the storehouse walls where possible. But in terms of visitor's perception, it may cause some associations. The Stone Age and the Middle Age halls also have brick walls, so I can assume that the brick was untouched in those museum's halls where it suited the style of represented period.

On the right there is a copy of the deportation railway car and the reconstructed scene of deportations in 1941 and 1949. Deportees were transported in railway cattle carriages. With the reconstructed deportation carriage begins the representation of the Soviet period of Estonian history, because in order to enter the exhibition room, one must step into the darkness of the carriage and pass by the human sculptures representing deportees. Leaning against the walls of the makeshift carriage are women and children who were transported

separately from men: «The men were placed in carriages designated with the letter A (arrested) and the women and children in cars with the letter B. This moment was the last time most of the woman would see their husbands and the children their fathers».⁴⁸



Image 2: *The Deportation Railway Car in the Pärnu Museum, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

The role of the carriage as a certain transitional space in which people were forced to be in is shown in the context of the exhibition space. The fact that every visitor inevitably passes through this carriage metaphorically recalls that 32,300 people who were deported from Estonia during two deportations in 1941 and 1949 passed through it.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ «Deportation Railway Car», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The deportation wagon is a popular motif in Baltic post-communist memory culture. The same setting, borrowed from a Holocaust exhibit in Berlin, can be seen at the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom in Tallinn, where the wagon interior, complete with the sensory experiences of sound, movement and a multimedia game *A Minute for Leaving*, serve as a passage to the exhibition room. (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2019: 57)

This tendency to place the deportation carriage at the beginning of the exhibition hall can be viewed as a memorial strategy of initiation: «those who were not there cannot truly know; to understand the Holocaust they must be initiated, however symbolically, into the community of those already initiated, represented by the entrance through the boxcar». (Stier, 2005:101)

The carriage itself, as also in the case of the exhibition at the Vabamu, can be seen as a symbol of inhumanity under the Soviet regime. (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2019: 57) The use of artificial human figures for recreation of the deportation carriage is designed to bring the image as close to reality as possible. Including humans in an installation is a typical feature of the in situ approach, because the aim of the mimetic display is to create a realistic effect that shows the identity between representation and represented. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 20)

Recreation of the wagon itself would make no sense, because what is remarkable about the recreated setting is precisely the purposes it was intended for and who was there: «It is one thing, however, when ethnography is inscribed in books or displayed behind glass, at a remove in space time, and language from the site described. It is quite another when people are themselves the medium of ethnographic representation...when they become living signs of themselves». (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 18) Placed into inhuman conditions, people are deprived of any subjectivity and are controlled by an absolute power of the totalitarian regime.

The exposition continues at the exit from or on the other side of the carriage. The hall is visually divided into two parts because the carriage separates one part from the other. The first smaller part of the hall is dedicated to the resistance movement during the Soviet occupation. On the left are exhibited pieces of bronze relief leaning against the wall. These

are parts of the Pärnu Memorial dedicated to the Fallen Soldiers of the Estonian War of Independence (Est. *Eesti Vabadussõda*).



Image 3. *Pieces of the Pärnu Memorial to the Fallen Soldiers of the War of Independence, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

The monument was blown up in 1945 by the representatives of Soviet power. It was restored and re-inaugurated in 1993.⁵⁰ The statue of the boy with a garland on the museum's windowsill is the original piece that belongs to the monument. It survived the explosion and was buried in the ground next to the monument's foundation by four local high school girls trying to preserve at least some pieces of the destroyed monument.⁵¹ As the museum's guide

⁵⁰ «Pärnu Memorial to the Fallen Soldiers of the War of Independence», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁵¹ «Pärnu Memorial to the Fallen Soldiers of the War of Independence», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

mentioned, the fragment was found many years later, when one of these girls, who by that time was around 80 years old, revealed the hiding place.⁵²

Another personal story related to this monument is mentioned in the text panel and was brought up also by the museum guide. The monument was modelled by sculptor Amandus Adamson. The sculptor himself wasn't from Pärnu, but his grave is located here at the foot of the restored monument. On one of the sides of the monument, there are statues of a woman, a girl, and the boy mentioned earlier. These statues were made after the sculptor's wife and children, and he wanted to be buried next to them «in the warm sand of the Pärnu». Thus, the fate of the monument is told through the stories of people whose life paths crossed at a certain point in history. The same approach is used for three next display cases.

Under the glass case on the wall near the window are letters of Konstantin Päts, President of the Republic of Estonia in 1938–1940, and a handmade chessboard. In this chessboard, he hid letters addressed to Estonians and the League of Nations.⁵³

Nearby are objects and documents that belonged to concrete individuals, victims of repression. Every object's identification label tells a short story about the owner: about Linda Noorsalu and a piece of a lace dress that she knitted in Patarei Prison in Tallinn from a sweater yarn; Andrei Kalda, a prisoner of war, and his flask with engraved names of cellmates; Aleksander Kuningas's Siberian prison camp diary; and Ossip Targu's letter that he threw out of the deportation train window in the hope that his wife would be notified that he had been deported.

The display on the right is dedicated to Forest Brothers (Est. *metsavennad*). The text panel contains background information on the Forest Brothers and on their resistance against the Soviet regime. On display is a black-and-white photograph followed by brief information about Heino Leesment or Ants the Terrible, one of the most (in)famous Forest Brothers in Pärnu County. The guide referred to him as «a symbol of freedom for Estonians». There are also several other items on display: «Eastern Watchman» (Est. *Idavalvur*) or a wooden statue carved by Heino Leesment, coins that belonged to the Forest Brothers, a bullet from the pelvic bone of a killed man, and a lock of Heino Leesment's hair cut off after his death.

⁵² Museum guide, 29.10. 2022

⁵³ «Chessboard», wall text, Pärnu, Estonia

These objects are followed by a few descriptive lines and references to their owners' fate. The mentioned display cases don't take up much space or immediately draw attention, as they exhibit several small items. But having learned what these objects are, one involuntarily slows down and thinks about the thoughts and feelings of those who lived at that time. Thus, without giving any other interpretation in textual form, the museum itself can convey a message and influence the visitor's perception through the choice of exhibited objects.

In this regard, it makes sense to talk about such a representational strategy as universalization through individualization, when «individualized stories, either told in first- or third-person mode, convey an idea of the universal story of suffering, death, survival, and hope rather than a personal history». (Koresaar; Jõesalu, 2019: 58) In the stories mentioned in the exhibition, the emphasis is not so much on the individuals themselves as on the life circumstances and the realities of that time. The exhibited objects are wordless expressions of that reality. It also made me think of how objects that once belonged to people, were used by them, even being a part of them (as with hair and bullets), become independent artifacts, the value of which is universalized, overshadowing the figures of the owners, although they are inextricably linked to them.

As Silke Arnold-de Simine notes, «The histories of persecution, migration, and violence on which memory museums concentrate are usually object-poor because the people, whose plight is exhibited, were dispossessed and the traces of their existence have been eradicated». (Arnold-de Simine, 2013: 10) Indeed, the exhibited objects are likely the little that remains of people being deported and imprisoned. These are the traces of their existence that miraculously have been preserved and didn't go into oblivion. In this context «the few authentic objects on display risk acquiring the aura of icons or even relics but they also function as material anchors and as proofs of historical events». (Arnold-de Simine, 2013: 10) The representation of such objects allows visitors to look into the past through personal stories that these objects represent.

The next exhibit took me by surprise because turning my back I stumbled upon a stuffed wild boar. The museum guide added some context by mentioning the corn campaign, when in the 1950s, at the direction of Nikita Khrushchev, at that moment the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, mass cultivation of corn began throughout the Soviet Union.

This attracted a population of wild boars to Estonia, which, although they are now considered native, appeared here only after World War II.⁵⁴ Although this clarifies the exhibit's meaning, it's not entirely clear how it resonates with the rest of the surrounding exhibits. As for me, it would fit more into the next part of the hall, elaborating on the agriculture theme, for example.

A gun cabinet used by the Soviet army garrison in Pärnu and the Forest Brothers' weapons completes this part of the hall. Also, there are some items that used to belong to the Forest Brothers: a cast, an iron pot, an axe, an aluminum cup, a milk jug, and a glass bottle.

The main themes of the next, larger part of the hall are Pärnu resort, industrial production, ideology and everyday life during Soviet times. The first thing that catches my eye is a sculpture of a man in a straw hat and sunglasses in the center of a hall. It's a typical worker who would visit Pärnu resort with a trade union pass. So the Pärnu resort theme, which got its start at the end of the 1920s, as was shown in the XIX century hall, continues during the Soviet period, gaining scope and greater popularity. In the 1950s and 1960s, Pärnu again became a recognized year-round health resort of all-Union significance and a popular summer vacation destination. Countless tourists and resort patients were coming to Pärnu from nearby major centers like Tallinn, Riga, and Leningrad.⁵⁵ Next to the figure of a vacationer there is a bathtub used for water treatments and scales for measuring patients as part of a treatment course in a resort.

⁵⁴ «Wild boar», description, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁵⁵ «Holidaymaker», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

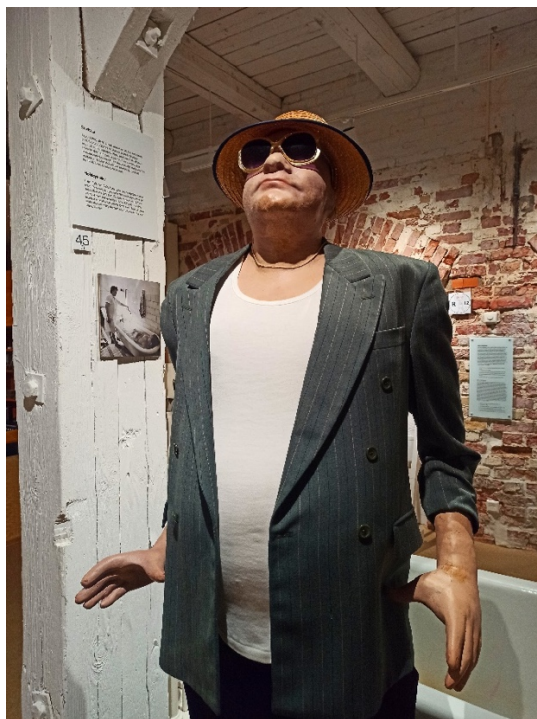


Image 4: *Holidaymaker*, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko

From the center of the hall, I explore the exposition moving along the perimeter. On the stand in the right corner of the hall are a red fire-fighting axe, a fire extinguisher, a bucket, and a shovel serving as reminders of youth riots in the summer of 1973. This exhibit seems to be out of the chronological sequence of the exhibition as it takes visitors to the events of the 1970s, a period that is represented by few exhibits later.

This stand sheds light on oppositional sentiments in society during the late Soviet period, as well as on the difference in the mentality between generations. According to the museum: «The secret anger and resentment of older people was relatively suppressed, but there were solitary incidents where teenagers started rioting and publically demonstrated their opposition to the ruling power».⁵⁶ The protests culminated in crushing a militia station as a representative of an alien government. The conflict ended in mass protests in Pärnu, which

⁵⁶ «Youth riots», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

were suppressed with help from Soviet army soldiers. Some people were arrested and later sentenced to incarceration.⁵⁷

The next showcase introduces Pärnu Soviet-era seafaring and fishery. After World War II, the Pärnu Maritime Port became a Fishing Port. A fishery base was formed here, and the largest fish salting plant in the Baltics was built.⁵⁸ Besides the Resort, the Combine was another major infrastructure centre of the Pärnu city. In the middle bottom case are samples of the Pärnu Fishing Combine products such as canned herring in tomato sauce (according to the museum guide it was considered the best), sardines, sprats, pate. According to the guide, canned products have been very popular and were delivered not only throughout Estonia and the entire Soviet Union, but also to Czechoslovakia, Finland, and Cuba.

In the center is a model of the «*kakuaam*», a typical motor boat of Pärnu coastal fishermen. At the top right is the work clothing of Pärnu Fishing Combine workers, consisting of a smock, a kerchief, a rubber apron, and gloves. Next to it are the fisherman's waterproof clothing and rubber boots. Also hanging in the middle of the display case are two black-and-white photos picturing the production process at the Fishing Combine, similar to footage from a typical documentary chronicle about industry development in the USSR.

To the left of the fishery display case examples of the Pärnu ski production starting from the 1950s are exhibited. They are wooden and plastic Visu skis, the products of the Viisnurk Ski Factory. According to the museum it was the most successful industrial enterprise in Soviet Estonia, which gained even greater popularity after the collapse of the Soviet Union by becoming the largest ski factory in the world at the end of the XX century.⁵⁹

The mentioned displays of the development of Pärnu resort, fishery and ski industry represent the «bright side» of life in Soviet times marked by certain economic and industrial growth after World War II. The local example of Pärnu shows the post-war course towards the restoration and development of industrial production. It was the period when the top priorities were «restoration, expansion, construction and establishment».⁶⁰ At the same time, there is mention of the impermanence of such industrial success and plans that were never

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ «Soviet-Era Seafaring and Fishery», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁵⁹ «Pärnu Ski Factory», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁶⁰ «Soviet-Era Seafaring and Fishery», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

implemented like, for example, building a fishermen's clubhouse and childcare facilities at the Combine.

Thereafter, everyday life comes to the fore of the exhibition. In the left corner of the hall, there is another example of the in situ display, which is a period room, a recreation of a Soviet-era housing interior. Visitors can explore Soviet domestic reality through typical living room in «Khrushchevka», small apartments that were mass-built during Khrushchev-era, the slogan of which was «a home for many as possible with limited resources». ⁶¹ In the text panel next to the display, the discrepancy between expectation and reality, the idea and its real implementation is ironically noted, since such apartments were extremely small with six square meters per family member considered as enough space. ⁶²

In this room, in comparison with exhibits behind the glass, a freedom of action is given. One can sit on a sofa and watch looping records of Estonian television programs provided with English subtitles; look in all the drawers, cabinets and shelves filled with mundane objects like books, magazines, record player, checkers, tea set; sniff perfumes on a dressing table and touch a woman's dress hanging on a closet.

I caught myself thinking that such freedom of action turned out to be somehow paralyzing, not even because of the fear to damage exhibits, but because you seem to intrude someone else's private space rummaging around while the owners are not at home. At the same time, this feeling is inexplicably exciting: «The task of creating fissures that offer evidence that the ordinary is really there propels the fascination with penetrating the life space of others, getting inside, burrowing deep into the most intimate places, whether the interior of lives or the innermost recesses of bodies». (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 48)

As the everyday life of others comes into focus it suddenly turns from the usual, taken for granted, into the subject of an exhibition, which removes the stamp of routine and «one man's life is becoming another man's spectacle», when the observer is unexpectedly gets inside of the set. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 48)

⁶¹«Soviet Domestic Reality», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁶² Ibid



Image 5: *Soviet domestic reality, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

An even more immersive experience can be provided by «a guided tour for gourmets» where, in addition to an overview of Pärnu's 11,000-year-long history, visitors are introduced to the food culture of different eras. Soviet era is represented by food that were popular among vacationers at the Pärnu resort at that time.⁶³ According to the museum guide, the tasting is usually presented with a grain coffee, rolls with cheese and ham, or a sandwich with sprat, and for a dessert - ground cookies with butter and marmalade, i.e. a dessert made of ingredients that were available at that time.

Being in such setting can bring some nostalgic memories from the past to some visitors, a feeling of recognition, remembering the once familiar realities. To others, on the contrary,

⁶³ Pärnu Museum, <http://www.parnumuseum.ee/parnu-museum/giidituur-gurmaanidele>

such an interior will seem alien and strange, or completely unknown and interesting. To refer to the concept of «ideal visitor» – a person «who would be ideologically and culturally at home in the exhibition or politically comfortable with the information that is presented». (Lindauer, 2006: 204) – the ideal visitor of this Pärnu Museum's exhibition would be a person who lived during Soviet era and kept memories of that period.

The next stand displays items characterizing another side of the everyday life in Soviet Estonia. At the top right one can see a map that visions the future Pärnu by 1966. The plan was to rebuild the city destroyed by the war during the five years from 1946 to 1950, although the dream did not come true and «only 15 buildings were built in ten years».⁶⁴ The plan took into account the help of the «fraternal peoples» promised by Soviet propaganda but could not be realized because of a shortage of labor throughout the USSR.⁶⁵

On the left are some samples of clothes and underwear among which is a girls' school uniform, an essential attribute of which was a red pioneer tie and a pioneer badge.

A set of scarce goods are displayed nearby. Scarce goods is a concept from the 1960s - 1980s and refers to often foreign products of a better quality than the Soviet ones. It was impossible to buy such products in the stores, but only through familiar shop clerks «under-the-counter».⁶⁶ Among the displayed scarce goods are luxury soap (Ger. *Luxus Seife*) «Elana» produced in GDR; Ukrainian electric shaver model «Kharkiv» (Ukr. «Харків»), «Sokol» radio receiver.

The black-and-white photo shows people standing in a long line at the counter for such goods. Seeing this queue, one immediately recalls the stories of older relatives about how common this phenomenon was and how queues became a strong association with Soviet times. Where there is a shortage of goods, there are queues, which became a social phenomenon in the Soviet Union. Also on display are samples of food and industrial goods coupons used to receive a certain product in the conditions of a shortage. Thus, the prioritization of industrial production in previous display cases is juxtaposed with a cut for food production and social welfare.

⁶⁴ «Map», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ «Scarce goods», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

Another interesting item exhibited here is a strange-looking lamp, a jammer «used to disrupt foreign radio broadcasts such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, BBC, China's and Albania's Russian-language broadcasts, etc».⁶⁷ It was a form of censorship in the Soviet Union. Radio jamming as a violation of the freedom of information represents another side of totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime, its ubiquity which also works at the invisible level of radio waves, shrouding people in a thick veil like the fog machine numbing the minds of psychiatric hospital patients in Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). The last display case is dedicated to the Soviet planned economy. Estonia was included in the five-year cycle of this planned economy. One of the dogmas of this communist society was collectivization, another form of control: «work collectives were supposed to achieve the assimilation of the individuals into collective life and exercise control over them».⁶⁸ The social competition was created to motivate the workers to fulfill the plan. The reward system for the winners of the socialist competition was based more on the moral than the material aspect. Reputation in the eyes of the rest was important in such a collective form life.: «Instead of material inducements, exemplary workers...were constantly acknowledged with entries into the collective's honour rolls, and enterprises...with travelling red flags».⁶⁹

⁶⁷ «Jammers», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁶⁸ «Socialist Competition and the Collective», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁶⁹ Ibid.



Image 6: *Socialist Competition and the Collective*, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko

On display are travelling red flags and letters of commendations issued to collectives and workers for exceeding socialist norms. On the screen to the left of the showcase, one can watch documentary footage telling about Soviet industry and the affairs of the working people.

The endpoint of the exhibition is marked by an Estonian flag symbolically mounted on the wall outside the Soviet period hall. The flag marks the end of the Soviet period and the beginning of a new era in 1989. The explanatory text on the panel next to the flag says (exclusively in the Estonian language, so I used a translator) that the Estonian national flag was raised in the center of Pärnu on February 24, 1989, the anniversary of declaration of

independence in 1918, as a sign of the end of the Soviet regime.⁷⁰ The flag also acts as a symbol of people's power. By the beginning of 1989, power passed into the hands of the Popular Front of Pärnumaa, the local heritage protection society, and other social movements.⁷¹ The flag on display hung on the square in 1989, replacing the first one stolen a few days later, while also participating in such significant historical events as the defence of the Toompea castle from the Interfront in May 1990, the Baltic Way (*est. Balti kett*) in August 1989, and Popular Front events at Tallinn Song Festival Grounds.⁷²

The exposition ends on a rather solemn note. On the pedestal next to the flag is the gold medal of the Estonian cyclist Erika Salumäe, the winner of the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. It is the first gold medal won by the newly independent Estonia and the Baltic republics. This choice of exhibit again connects the local context with the national, since Erika Salumäe is originally from Pärnu.

The exhibition in the Pärnu Museum depicts the entire Soviet period. The representation in the museum space involves the coverage of different stages of the Soviet era as well as different memory experiences, both private and public. Therefore, we see how the representation of the Soviet period combines two coexisting dominant discourses about the Soviet past in Estonian remembrance culture. There are both a representation of the Stalinist period interpreted through the discourse of «the rupture» and a nostalgic portrayal of everyday life during the period of late socialism.

⁷⁰ «Eesti Rahvuslipu heiskamine Pärnus 1989», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² «Eesti Rahvuslipu heiskamine Pärnus 1989», wall text, Pärnu Museum, Pärnu, Estonia

CHAPTER 4: Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda

This chapter analyzes the permanent exhibition at the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, with a special focus on the part dedicated to the Soviet period.

The permanent exhibition of the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda (Võru County Museum) gives an overview of county life from its first settlement 5000 years ago until the mid-20th century. Archeological findings, ethnographic objects, documents, photos, and items from different eras are displayed.

According to Tiia Haug, the manager of Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, the Võrumaa Museum's permanent exhibition was completed in 1985. It was designed by the artist Marika Laretei and was executed by the ARS Art Products Factory, the leading institution producing designs for permanent exhibitions during the Soviet era. (Raisma, 2022) Since that time, except for a modernization of the part related to the 20th century, the museum has remained much of its original design from the 1980s. So the museum introduces not only the history of Võrumaa but also Estonian design and the style of museum representation during the Soviet era.

One seems to step into the past as soon as one enters the museum. And not in the sense that the exhibition tells about bygone times. The building's interior, its design, the arrangement of the exhibition space, and the narration indicate that this museum, to some extent, has conserved its original form. The museum reflects how museums looked back in the 1980s rather than the historical period it is dedicated to. Therefore, it can be called a museum of a museum. (Raisma, 2022)

Here one can see what the interior design trends were like in the 1980s: massive and heavy wood furniture, and dark brown tones, which creates a strict and slightly oppressive atmosphere. The museum uses many documents, maps, photos, tables, and diagrams under traditional glass cases. All the texts are written by hand on the blackboard with ink. The display focuses on wars, battles, and revolutions, since during the Soviet period, regional museums' expositions were based on the Marxist approach to history that foregrounded

grand narratives. (Raisma, 2022) Also in the center of attention were economy and class struggle, while culture and education tended to receive the least attention. However, in Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, 19th-century culture, and education topics are represented extensively.

The exhibition hall is divided into two wings. On the right side is a part covering the period from prehistory to the 19th century. It is represented by archeological findings from the Ice Age to Middle Ages. This is followed by the feudal period representing Estonia during the Livonian War (1558–1583), under Polish and Swedish rule, the foundation of the Võru and Võru County, and Estonia in the Russian Empire. There is also a thematic exhibition dedicated to the history of the Võru language, which outlines the cultural and linguistic boundaries of the Vana-Võromaa region.

The more extensive left wing covers the Modern period, which is represented by the late 19th-mid-20th century and is divided into such periods and thematic categories as 1905–1918 and the Russian Revolution of 1905, 1918–1920, and the Estonian War of Independence, culture and education in the 1920-1930s, the Second World War, and the Forest Brothers movement.

Apart from this chronological narrative stands a new display case dedicated to the smoke sauna tradition in the Võrumaa region. It is a new exhibition created since, in 2014, UNESCO listed this tradition as representative of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.⁷³

If we consider specifically the Soviet era (1940–1991), it is represented rather poorly. When I told the guide I was interested in this particular period, she immediately warned me that it occupies a small part of the exhibition. It is represented by several display cases representing the themes of World War II, Forest Brothers, and the Free-Independent Column No. 1, a non-formal oppositional youth organization established in 1987. Although the last two topics were recently created (2020–2021), the text panels at these displays are written exclusively in Estonian so that I couldn't understand the text. During my visit, I counted on the guide's explanations, and later while analyzing my fieldwork data, used a translator.

⁷³ Smoke sauna tradition in Võrumaa <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/smoke-sauna-tradition-in-voromaa-00951#:~:text=The%20smoke%20sauna%20tradition%20is,smoking%20meat%20in%20the%20sauna.>

A small stand relating to World War II is a part of the exhibition that was created in the 1980s. In 1992 it was updated due to the modernization of the collection. The parts of the permanent exhibition related to the 20th century were re-exhibited, and the design and the principle of chronological presentation remained, but the content and subject of the exhibition were updated. (Raisma, 2022)

In general, the type of narration is a dry chronological presentation of historical facts. The text is laconic, indicating the date and the corresponding event, and the objects are described in a few words. The history of World War II is told from the perspective of Võrumaa region's local history, emphasizing the destruction and disaster brought by the war Estonia was forced into. Events mentioned are the occupation of Estonia by Soviet troops (June 1940) and the capture of the town of Võru (August 13, 1944). During the hostilities and due to a fire in the city, 84 houses were burned down, 123 were damaged, and the number of inhabitants decreased by almost half⁷⁴. After the war, only 67% of the population of Võru County remained, and the region's economy was damaged significantly.



Image 7: *World War II corner, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

⁷⁴ «World War II», wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

Among the exhibited objects are shoes, utensils, and other personal items of German and Red Army soldiers as well as other «war heritage» from Võrumaa, such as helmets, shells, ammunition, and grenades. As for the pictorial material, some images are enlarged and placed at the top of the stand in a uniform row that looks like archival newsreel footage: «German bombers over Warsaw», «burning Võru», «on the ruins of Võru», «war refugees returning back home». Thus, the style of representation is characterized by factuality, descriptiveness and density – features of the museum in Soviet times.

Next to the World War II corner there is an empty display case. During my first visit, this case was occupied with a temporary exhibition «Twenty-one lamps light, twenty-one colorful objects» (2022) by Ulvi Haagensen, which was part of the «Color Go-Go!» exhibition at the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda gallery.⁷⁵ At first glance, I thought it was part of the main exhibition depicting Soviet everyday life since the exhibited items were taken from the museum's collection, many of which belonged to this period. Items such as a telephone from the 1970s, a silk dress from 1964, an enamel jug from the 1950s, and typical blue Soviet scales used in cooperative meat shops were on display. The artist chose objects by their appearance, and then museum workers provided details about the history of these objects.

The guide explained that earlier, the stand was dedicated to the Soviet period, namely industrialization with samples of factory products. This exposition was removed long ago, in the early 1990s, since, as the guide said, this part of the exhibition was created in Soviet times and had a propagandistic nature. Some items from this stand are kept in the museum's collection on the first floor but are no longer on display. According to the guide, there are still plans to fill this stand but to rethink the 20th century in a new way. For now, private exhibitions are located here.

The next stand is dedicated to the Forest Brothers movement. Here the guide stays longer and talks about the exposition in more detail. The story is personalized and represented through local history meaning that the focus is on specific individuals associated specifically with Võrumaa. The text panel, «Forest Brotherhood. Resistance to Soviet terror», provides historical background about the Forest Brother movement that began as a response to the

⁷⁵Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/uudised/page/2/>

forced Soviet mobilization in 1941, which later, with the re-establishment of Soviet power in 1944, fully transformed into a resistance movement.⁷⁶ The subjectivity of the Forest Brothers in this confrontation is emphasized as well as the inequality of forces in the fight against «overwhelming enemy forces».⁷⁷ According to the wall text: «The Communist Party enjoyed killing hidiers by any means. The Forest Brothers responded by executing spies and kidnappers».⁷⁸

The first text panel on the left tells us about a famous Võrumaa Forest Brother, Alfred Käärman (1922–2010), who went to the forest as a young man after the beginning of the second Soviet occupation in 1944. During years of resistance, he was wounded and lost his left hand. He was poisoned and caught by an KGB agent and sentenced to twenty-five years of forced labor.⁷⁹ The active participation of Alfred Käärman in the political and social life of Võrumaa after his release is also mentioned.

According to the guide, Alfred Käärman was also directly involved in creating the exposition in Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda. According to his instructions, the reconstruction of the Forest Brothers' bunker displayed here was made. And although it is a sample of an in situ display, the glass wall stops visitors from immersing themselves in settings.

The museum also offers a museum lesson, «Forest brother Alfred Käärman and the choices of the 1940s», which reflects on the choices that Võrumaa's youth faced in the 1940s. An introduction of the lesson on the museum website says: «To immerse ourselves in the era, we try to step into the shoes of several real people, be it Alfred who went to the forest, Karl who escaped to Sweden or Aleksander who stayed at home. We think about their choices and what we would do in their place. The distance of 80 years from these events allows us to know the consequences of these choices».⁸⁰ Such museum lessons on historical dilemmas serve several purposes. Engaging and thought-provoking by immersing and stepping into other people's experiences, they can stimulate reflection, dialogue, and a deeper understanding of the challenges and complexities of post-war Eastern Europe. And perhaps

⁷⁶ «Forest Brotherhood. Resistance to Soviet terror» wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

⁷⁷ «Forest Brotherhood. Resistance to Soviet terror» wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ «Alfred Käärman», wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

⁸⁰ Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda <https://vorumuuseum.ee/kulalisele/muuseumitunnid/>

it helps to deconstruct an idealised image of partisans by revealing motifs, sacrifices, and moral complexities faced by individuals who joined the movement.



Image 8: *Forest Brothers' bunker, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

The exhibition also displays some personal belongings of the Forest Brothers associated with Võrumaa. For example, the belongings of Simu Pihlapuu, one of the most active Forest Brothers in Võrumaa, his wallet with the moss taken from where Simu died, and a lock of his hair.

My attention is drawn to a piece of wood hanging on the wall under the ceiling with a notch shaped like a gun. It is a weapon cache carved from the wall of a farmhouse in Marga village. Such caches were a widespread thing in Estonian farms after the war. This exhibition reveals the theme of persecution and deportation suffered by the relatives of the Forest Brothers: «On March 25, 1949, the Soviet government again deported people, from infants to old, to

remote regions of Russia for forced labor. One of the target groups was relatives of the Forest Brothers». ⁸¹ The exhibit was taken from the farmhouse belonging to the Sarapuu family, who were forced to leave their home to avoid being exiled to Siberia.



Image 9: *Weapon cache in a farm house in Marga village, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

Nearby hangs a map showing the locations of armed conflicts between the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and the Forest Brothers. The guide adds that about 300 Forest Brothers died in these battles in Võrumaa. The last of them, August Sabbe, died in 1978. He is pictured on a nearby stand. It is the history of this picture that attracts attention, because it was taken by an undercover KGB officer. A few minutes after this picture, the last forest brother was killed. It is not only an exclusive archival photo which serves as historical evidence, but it also can have a huge impact on the viewer. Such «a minute before death» photos can evoke strong emotional reactions, empathy and reflection. It is also one more way to personalize history, make historical events more relatable for visitors. The images humanize the suffering and struggles faced by individuals, making it easier for visitors to connect with the past on an emotional level.

⁸¹ «Forest Brotherhood. Resistance to Soviet terror» wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

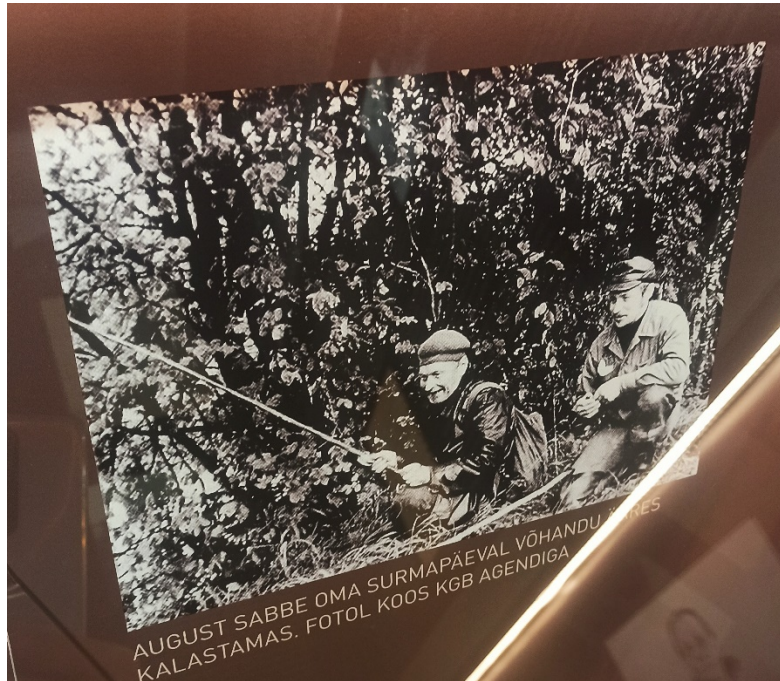


Image 10: *August Sabbe on the day of his death near Võhadu, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

The exhibition also highlights the importance of Võrumaa's gesture of insubordination in Osula on March 13, 1946, when the Forest Brothers managed to occupy the village center for an entire day. After that, on April 1, followed a counterattack by the security forces, known as the battle at the Hindriku farm. It is represented as a fierce resistance despite the inequality of troops and weapons: "Four Forest Brothers and two women who lived on a farm resisted about one hundred and fifty occupiers for eight hours"⁸². In memory of this, a letter is left, a copy of which is presented at the stand. The letter was found during a search of the farm. It was a message from one of the Forest Brothers Avo Pruus to the Estonian people: «...On April 1, 1946, we, the Estonian partisans, fought against the tyrants and the tyrants of the Estonian people. The six of us resisted for about eight hours despite overwhelming odds. Therefore, Estonian people fight tenaciously for the freedom and independence of the Estonian nation!...».⁸³ The Forest Brothers exhibition part ends with

⁸² «Hindriku – Maaritsa farm», wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

⁸³ Ibid.

photographs from recent excavations in 2011–2016 in Võrumaa, including Hindriku farm, where 30 Forest Brothers and their assistants have been reburied.

A display case representing the late Soviet period is located at the beginning of the Modern period. Although chronologically, it is supposed to be the endpoint, it is located at the beginning of the Modern period. It could be because no other place was left, as this part was added later in 1990s, or it was done deliberately to draw visitors' attention to this aspect of the story as one to be proud of.

Here it is worth noting the peculiarity of the narration style. It occurred to me later when, during the analysis, I began to translate the text. However, for those who know the language, this aspect can be one of the first things that attracts attention in this exposition. Sarcastic, cynical, and critical of the Soviet reality, the tone differs sharply from the narration used in the rest of the exhibition. This way of narration corresponds to and, as it were, complements the theme of protest, which is discussed in this exposition. But for example, in the case of the Forest Brother movement, in the description of the fate of the partisans, one feels the cruelty of the struggle, the totalitarian pressure of the Soviet forces, and mortal danger. Here we are talking about a completely different period. And this shift in public sentiment and the intolerability of the current state of affairs at the end of the Soviet era is displayed verbally:

«1987 marked 47 years since the occupation and annexation of the Republic of Estonia by the Soviet Union or as it was called - the 47th anniversary of the USSR»⁸⁴. The ideological agenda is described with a share of absurdity and ridicule: «The history teachers told the children about the inevitability of the June deportation and the liquidation of collectivization-era banditry»⁸⁵ And perestroika announced by Gorbachev is said to have «mainly consisted in the fight against one of the most important entertainments of the Soviet Union – drinking vodka»⁸⁶.

Publicity («glasnost») announced during perestroika was «let out from the so-called bottle» because «...deepening poverty and publicity together turned out to be an extremely explosive cocktail». It led to the creation of the Estonian Conservation Society (*Eesti*

⁸⁴ «Vaba-Sõltumatu Noorte Kolonn No. 1», wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ «Vaba-Sõltumatu Noorte Kolonn No. 1», wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

Looduskaitse Selts) because «...in an over-politicized monitoring society, working with plants and animals was almost the only permitted activity for Estonians»⁸⁷. The creation of such a society did not seem to pose a threat: «It was difficult to politicize Estonian nature because what Lenin quote could the communist have used in the preface of the book «The most important edible and poisonous fungi of the Estonian USSR»?!»⁸⁸. All over Estonia, people who didn't want Estonia to be a part of Soviet Union anymore were gathering in such heritage protection clubs. The same club was founded in Võru on March 27, 1987.⁸⁹

That led to further commemorative and, at the same time, protest events represented here. Commemoration and protest, in this case, are combined phenomena because commemorating certain events is a refusal and protest against the dominant discourse. In this case, we are talking about functional memory: «Collective agents such as states or nations create for themselves a functional identity memory through which they adapt a certain version of the past and define their goals for the future». (Assmann, 2012: 128) One of the forms of application of this functional memory is legitimization and delegitimization. The personification of the officially discredited memory turns into a symbolic figure of counter-memory and a component of delegitimization: «The motif underlying counter-memory, whose bearers are the conquered and the oppressed, is the delegitimization of power that is experienced as tyrannical. It is as political as the official memory, because in both instances it is linked with a claim to power. The counter-memory serves as a foundation not of the present but of the future, anticipating the time that will follow the fall of those currently in power». (Assmann, 2012: 129)

The events of 1987 are arranged on a chronological timeline, highlighting important events and dates. A chronicle of those events is followed by archival photographs, publications, and documents. The high density of the display with all sorts of materials and lots of text makes it overwhelming and echoes the style of representation in the 1980s that was meant to be taken as seriously as possible while using a lot of archival material to legitimize the topic. (Raisma, 2022)

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

On the wall we can see archival photographs with descriptions that allow visitors to trace the sequence of protest events in the late 1980s. It started with cleaning the graves of the fallen in the War of Independence in Kreutzwald park. The opposition of the authorities to the initiative led to a conflict between young people and ruling regime and to the establishment of a non-formal organization called the Free-Independent Youth Column No. 1 (*Vaba-Sõltumatu Noorte Kolonn No. 1*) on December 20, 1987.⁹⁰



Image 11: *Vaba-Sõltumatu Noorte Kolonn No. 1*, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko

Numerous protest actions initiated by this organization followed, the most notable of which was the rally at the October Revolution anniversary demonstration («the most important pillar of the occupiers' identity»), where Estonian activists carried the slogan «Fewer lies,

⁹⁰ «Vaba-Sõltumatu Noorte Kolonn No. 1», wall text, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, Võru, Estonia

comrades!»). The photo of a woman placing a flower basket with a blue, black, and white ribbon at the foot of the Kreutzwald monument in Võru depicts the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia. Next to it is the photo from the rally on the 1st of May with protesters demanding the Estonian independence.

The chronicle ends with a photo of the Estonian flag that was raised for the first time on the tower on top of the Suure Munamägi mountain on July 15, 1988.

CHAPTER 5: Saaremaa Museum

In this chapter, I will analyze the several exhibitions dedicated to the Soviet era at the Saaremaa Museum: the permanent exhibition on Contemporary History, the commemorative exhibition of a communist massacre in Kuressaare Castle, and the temporary exhibition «Life in a milk container» about Forest Brothers of Saaremaa. The structure of the chapter follows that of the guided tour.

5.1 Commemorative exhibition of a communist massacre in Kuressaare Castle in 1941

The museum guide starts the tour outside the castle at the Gunpowder Cellar in the south bastion. There is a commemorative exhibition of a communist massacre in Kuressaare Castle in 1941, opened on 26 September 2011.⁹¹ Entering through the door marked «Red terror in 1941», one enters a dark cellar which in the 18th century was used as a gunpowder storage, but was turned into a mass grave by Soviet military in 1941. Display stands are located around the perimeter of the cellar. The wall texts in Estonian are translated into English.

The first text panel, titled in red letters «Mass murder in Kuressaare Castle grounds in 1941», introduces the exhibition with the following text:

«Dear guest. You are now in the cellar of the gunpowder tower of the Kuressaare castle. On 25 September 1941 the bodies of 31 victims of red terror were dug out from its floor. The first Soviet occupation of Estonia was accompanied by Red Terror, which culminated in summer 1941 following Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. On Saaremaa the most brutal act was a mass murder in the Kuressaare Castle grounds in which at least 90 people lost their lives».⁹²

⁹¹ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/commemorative-exhibition/>

⁹² «Mass murder in Kuressaare Castle grounds in 1941», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

Another stand displays documents and photographs depicting the victims' excavations in September 1941 after the Soviet troops left Kuressaare, the identification process, and funerals. What makes the display even more sensitive are the examples of the victims' inscriptions on the walls of the places of detention.

According to my guide, Heino Joandi, the tortured and murdered were ordinary people such as local farmers, fishermen, schoolteachers, firefighters. Many recognized their relatives among the dead, but there were also unidentified victims because of the mutilation. The German troops that came after the Soviet Army perceived as the lesser of two evils because they helped excavate the victims. The guide also commented that the reason many Estonians fought against the Soviet Army on the side of the German Army was such atrocities done by the Soviet forces. He added that it is noteworthy that in 1944 when the Soviet rule was re-established in Estonia, the authorities began to accuse the Germans of having committed this massacre.

At the center of the cellar is located a stand entitled «We remember!» with photographs of the victims. Next to it is a stand with the red headline «They are responsible», displaying photographs of people who are blamed for the massacre. Among those responsible were the special department of the Coastal Defence of the Baltic Region, a military tribunal in cooperation with the Saaremaa department of the People's Commissariat for State Security, the militia department, and destroyer battalions.⁹³

There is also material evidence of this mass murder found in 2010 during the restoration works in the cellar. These are cartridge cases of murder weapons found near the door pack of trotyl.

As a continuation of the exhibition, not far from the Gunpowder Cellar, there is a memorial tablet with the names of all 90 victims murdered on the Kuressaare Castle grounds. This commemorative exhibition is an example of a dark heritage site. The concept of «dark heritage» refers to a heritage related to certain dark aspects of the past and revolves around places of conflict, death, and suffering, such as battlefields, concentration camps, or disaster sites. (Thomas, Herva, Seitsonen, Koskinen-Koivisto, 2018: 1). Revolving around death,

⁹³ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/commemorative-exhibition/>

dark heritage sites can evoke strong emotional responses. Visitors may feel sadness, empathy, grief, anger, or a sense of loss as they connect emotionally with the stories of those who suffered at the site.



Image 12: *Cartridge cases of murder weapons, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

Visiting this exhibition was emotionally difficult for me. For most of the visit I just listened to the guide's narration. I took photos of text panels to get acquainted with the information later. The guide admitted that talking about this tragedy was emotionally challenging for him. I also perceived the exhibition on a personal level, as I was thinking about the war in my country, Ukraine. At the time of my visit to the museum (August 2022), mass graves left by the Russian military were just discovered in the city of Bucha. And what I learned from the news about the tortures and murders there was very similar to the events described in the exhibition.

5.2 The permanent exhibition on Contemporary History

After leaving the Gunpowder Cellar, my guide and I headed to the Kuressaare Castle, as the next stop was the exhibition on Contemporary History. This exhibition is the most extensive one in the museum and among those analyzed in this study. It occupies four floors of the Defence Tower and consists of two parts: Saaremaa from 1939 to 1949, launched in 2005, and Saaremaa from 1950 to 1994, launched in 2011.⁹⁴ The languages of the exhibition are Estonian and English.

During my visit, I sometimes had a hard time perceiving the exhibition. The dissonance was caused by the discrepancy between the content of the exhibition and the space: the medieval castle housing the exhibition on the Soviet era. The clash of these two different historical periods created a surrealistic eclectic effect. The walls of the castle are full of red Soviet propaganda posters and portraits of leaders. And then I found myself in a Hrustsovka, where instead of having an immersing experience, I felt estranged.

I Saaremaa from 1939–1949: loss of independence and repressions

The first part, Saaremaa from 1939 to 1949, is spread out in three halls in the northeastern wing of the castle. The exhibition covers three themes: Pre-war Estonia 1939–1941, Battles of Saaremaa 1941–1944, and Estonia under Soviet supremacy.

The first hall begins with an exhibit that catches the eye: a wax figure of Konstantin Päts, the first President of the Republic of Estonia, frozen during the last wave of the hat to the people of Saaremaa.

⁹⁴ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/lahiajaloo-osakond/>



Image 13: *A wax figure of Konstantin Päts, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

The figure is located at the stand dedicated to his visit to Saaremaa on 20–21 August 1939, which «has gone down in history as the last large-scale political spectacle in Estonia before World War II».⁹⁵ The quotes on the stand from Konstantin Päts's speech convey the atmosphere of the inevitability of the approaching war: «Let everyone know that occupying our homeland will not be a simple walk to anybody, we shall show that we are worth those dear soldiers who left their lives and health for the independence of Estonia».⁹⁶ Two days later the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty was signed which brought along the occupation of Estonia, and the death of Konstantin Päts.

The rest of the hall displays different materials about the invasion of the Red Army to Estonia in 1939 and the June revolution that followed, when «guided by instruction from Moscow...and relying on the presence of the Red Army,...extreme leftist circles overthrew

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶ «Presidential visit», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

the lawful Estonian government on 21 June 1940».⁹⁷ On the stand are photographs of those from the Estonian Working People's Union who came to power in Saaremaa. Some of the faces I saw at the previous exhibition among the responsible for the mass murder at the Gunpowder Cellar: the chief of the Saaremaa militia, the political police commissar in Saaremaa, the secretary of the Saaremaa Committee of the Estonian Communist Party. The next stand, colored in blue, black, and white, represents the opposition movement to the pro-Communist regime. It displays photos of oppositional candidates, and the captions below indicate their future: deportation, imprisonment, and death.

The nearby stand tells about mass repressions during the first year of the Soviet occupation. The black panel shows the number of deported people by Soviets from the occupied Baltic countries to northern and eastern Russia: 1133 people between June and July 1941. It is also stated that «thanks to the rapid German advance, more than 400 people could return home».⁹⁸ Besides deportations, it also mentions a culmination point of repressions in Saaremaa – the massacre of 110 people in Kuressaare and Sõrve. Nearby are displayed some archival photos of railway carriages, deportees, and shoots from the place of the massacre in the courtyard of Kuressaare Castle.

At the end of the hall, there is also a screen that is supposed to show a newsreel footage chronicle from the Estonian Film Archives of Konstantin Päts' tour in Saaremaa. However, it was out of order during my visit. But instead, on a shelf near the screen, I found Artur Toom's criminal file from 1941. Unexpectedly, reading the crime case was quite an immersing experience. One gets emotionally involved by reading the interrogation recordings and the death sentence that followed them. Artur Toom was mentioned at the stand dedicated to mass repressions. It is stated that he was a public figure in the mid-1930s. He was arrested on June 11, 1941, on accusations of espionage for Germany and died in Solikamsk prison camp.⁹⁹ The display of this criminal case is intended to show that this is just one of many such cases. People were arrested, often based on fabricated charges of conspiracy, sabotage, or counter-revolutionary activities, and their fate was decided in one stroke of the pen.

⁹⁷ «June revolution», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

⁹⁸ «Mass repressions», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

⁹⁹ «Mass repressions», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

The period of World War II is covered in the next hall of the northeastern wing of the castle. In a chronological manner, the exhibition gives an overview of the battles fought over Saaremaa during World War II in 1941 and 1944. The oblong hall has two long stands on either side. The stand on the right, titled «Change of occupants» shows the activities of both invaders in an attempt to represent this period objectively. The fate of the Estonians, who were both in the Red Army and the German side, is emphasized.

Among the materials that display the battles, the exhibition extensively uses large-scale maps of the war activity, comparing data from both sides. In terms of the objects, examples of the weapons of both sides and some rarities associated with the war, such as chemical protection suits, gas masks, photo albums, soldier books, handmade spectacle, and cigarette cases, are displayed. Visitors can also see a ten-minute newsreel from World War II battles in Saaremaa.

Besides the battles, the exhibition also portrays the everyday lives of Saaremaa's inhabitants during the German occupation. This period is represented as counterterror, which replaced the Red terror: «As counter-reaction to suffering during the Soviet occupation period, revenge to the Communists who helped overthrow Estonia's constitutional order and their assistants set the tone in the violence of the German occupation period».¹⁰⁰ As in the case of Soviet occupation in the previous hall, the numbers of victims are indicated, although there are fewer of them. In the first months of German occupation, 294 people were arrested, most of them executed.

The nearby stand depicts the people's life in Saaremaa «in the German rear», focusing mainly on economic conditions and cultural life during the German occupation. According to displayed documents, the rapid reorganization of economic life in Saaremaa following new rules established by Germany's military forces took place.¹⁰¹ This was manifested in establishing sale obligations with extraordinary norms for food and industrial consumer goods producers. The amount of distributed goods did not cover the demand, and the shortage of raw materials led to the lack of industrial goods.

¹⁰⁰ «Counterterror», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹⁰¹ «In the German rear», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

The cultural life during the German occupation represented as a sphere under the ideological pressure. The mass media were under strict control of the authorities, just as during the Soviet occupation.¹⁰² The list of radio stations permitted for listening is displayed next to a radio receiver *Siera* used in Kuressaare. Nevertheless, the role of the Kuressaare theater that continued functioning and supported the local spiritual life is noted.

The third exhibition hall represents the destiny of Estonia and Estonians after World War II. The exhibition describes two main life paths at that time, to stay under the Soviet regime or to go abroad: «For the survivors of World War II both at home and abroad, the end of the war meant a new beginning in totally changed circumstances».¹⁰³ The hall is thematically divided into two parts: Estonia under Soviet supremacy on the right side, and the «outer world» on the left, separated by an imaginary Iron Curtain.

Entering the hall, the first thing that catches my eye is a portrait of Stalin hanging on the wall behind the desk of the chairman of the Viktor Kingissepp Kolkhoz, the first collective farm in Estonia. «Long Live Our Teacher, Our Father, Our Leader, Comrade Stalin!» says the caption under the portrait. As I moved through the hall, I got a disturbing feeling that the «Big Brother is watching you» regardless of the angle. This optical illusion creates a sense of surveillance as if conveying the atmosphere of control in the Soviet Union.

The displayed materials aim to show the variety of people's experiences during that time. For someone, a new beginning meant returning home after forced evacuation to Germany. For others, it also meant facing a new wave of Soviet terror that began in Estonia, as from 1944 to 1948, hundreds were arrested and sent to prison camps.¹⁰⁴ At the display, there are photos of prisoners, their personal belongings such as letters to family and pieces of clothing, as well as some objects of evacuees, like postcards, diary, repatriate certificate, badge of a foreigner.

The nearby stand describes such aspect of Communist ideology as collectivization and its connection to mass propaganda:

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ «Estonia under Soviet supremacy», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹⁰⁴ «Estonia under Soviet supremacy», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

«Propagandistic feints were used to perpetuate Soviet occupation and Communist ideology, the most outstanding of which were the land reform that created a large number of small holdings, as well as seeming support to the development of national culture».¹⁰⁵

Photographs from mass events such as a land improvement bee with 758 participants or Red Transports events are displayed at the stand. They are represented as instruments of propaganda of collective work and fulfillment of sale obligations.¹⁰⁶ Communism's use of national culture can be linked to such a form of functional memory as legitimization. «The typical alliance between power and memory finds expression in the elaboration of detailed historical knowledge, preferably in the form of genealogy, because power needs origins». (Assmann, 2012: 128) Thus the legitimization is carried out through identification and finding points of contact with national tradition. It is also the collective nature of folk culture, which comes in handy in establishing communist kitsch.

The central exhibit on the left side of the hall is a small boat with a mannequin of an exhausted refugee. Such boats were used to cross the Baltic Sea to Sweden in 1943–1944. The exhibited boat is made after the original one used by Hans Suur used to flee to Sweden in 1944 and then take his family there. The exhibit introduces the theme of the refugees' life of the people of Saaremaa who went abroad.

The stand next to the boat shows the different experiences of refugees. The display case titled «New beginning» is dedicated to the outstanding Saaremaa people in exile. For instance, leaders of the Estonian expatriate community, whose service is «preservation and worldwide propagation of Estonian statehood».¹⁰⁷ In terms of materials, refugees' personal belongings and documents along with photographs capturing life moments are displayed: families in front of their new houses, refugees' concerts to local residents, baggage in front of the temporary shelter, refugees' boats, shoots from refugee camps.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ «Collectivization», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹⁰⁷ «New beginning», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia



Image 14: *A refugees' boat, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

Overall, the refugees' life is represented as a challenging and life-changing experience, however Estonians are depicted as strong-willed people who, even in difficult times, far from home, tried to build a new life and to preserve and propagate Estonian identity.

II Saaremaa from Red propaganda to independence: 1950–1994

The next part of the permanent exhibition is dedicated to Saaremaa from 1950 to 1994. It is located on the fourth floor of the Defence Tower. The exhibition covers such themes as: Red propaganda, Soviet economy: fishing and agriculture, Soviet apartment «Hrustsovka», and Independence movement: collapse of USSR.

The «Red propaganda» hall is full of communist slogans, Red banners political advertisements of elections to Soviets of people's deputies. Plenty of content and colorful red colors seem to deliberately create significant visual noise to convey the totality of Soviet propaganda that «crawls in from everywhere». The museum website describes this time in

the history of Kuressaare island as a period of isolation and total control from the Soviet authorities:

«Being a tiny part of ‘one sixth of the whole planet’, life in Saaremaa was lived by the rules of the ‘mighty homeland’[...]The implementation of decisions taken far away from here depended heavily on the eagerness of local leaders or on their sense of responsibility as well as on their ability to manoeuvre in the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Border Troops, which were a part of the Soviet security forces, controlled the life of the people of Saaremaa for almost half a century. The strict border regime applied both to local people as well as to those who came to the island with a special permit».¹⁰⁸ The glorification of the Soviet Border Troop shown in a propaganda film *On the Western Border* (1978).

The stand «Communist upbringing of young people» represents an «attempt to develop a human being of the Soviet type»: Communist activism in the Soviet Union that revolved around promoting the principles, policies, and goals of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Photos of The Young communist league gatherings, Komsomol activists from Saaremaa, and Pioneers’ activities are on display.

The long stand with portraits of chairmen of the Saaremaa Soviets’ of Working People’s Deputies and bronze busts of Communist leaders represents the personality cultism in the Soviet Union, which referred to the extreme glorification of political leaders.

The next hall upstairs is representing economic life during late Soviet period and focuses on local production. Traditional sources of living, such as fishery and agriculture are shown as areas that developed in spite of rather than thanks to the Soviet regime: «They would have given even more, had it not been for union wide limits/funds/norms/obligations that left only as little as one fifth of the products produced over here for the people of Saaremaa».¹⁰⁹ Archival photos of the production process and samples of fishery products are displayed. A promotional film *Fisherman of Saaremaa* (1976) depicts the life of Saaremaa fishermen in a propagandistic manner.

¹⁰⁸ Saaremaa Museum <http://www.saaremaamuuseum.ee/en/castle-and-fortress/permanent-exhibition/lahiajaloo-osakond/>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.



Image 15: *Red propaganda, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

The recreated Soviet apartment «Hrustsovka» occupies the next floor. The interior design of the exhibition hall captures the essence and ambiance reminiscent of a «Hrustsovka», dwelling from the 1960s and 1970s, aiming to evoke feelings of familiarity or nostalgia among visitors.

The display stand that outlining of themes «education», «family», «health» contains almost no text elements and is accompanied by photo material. Here are photographs representing the private sphere of life: photos from weddings, family photos, children's photos in kindergarten and school, in maternity ward of the district hospital.



Image 16: «Hrustsovka» , photo by Anastasiia Avramenko

The exhibition mentions the scarcity of various consumer goods that led to a common phenomenon in the Soviet Union – long queues of people gathering outside shops: «Hope to be able to buy goods that were not on sale daily brought hundreds of people queuing up outside shops».¹¹⁰

The exhibition also shows the contradictions between Soviet propaganda and real life. For instance, next to the banner depicting a smiling man in a car and titled «I collected money and bought a car!» the description says that savings alone weren't enough to buy a car, and besides that one also had to purchase a license issued by Trade Union and party bureaucrats.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ «Services», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹¹¹ «I collected money and bought a car!», banner description, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

The last hall of the exhibition dedicated to the Independence movement. The exhibition restores the chronology of events that ultimately led to the to the rapid changes during the late 1980s and early 1990s and eventually to the restoration of independence of the Republic of Estonia. Alongside the displayed photographs and museum artifacts, a 10-minute film titled «Saaremaa 1998–1993» offers insight into the sudden resurgence of the mentioned rapid political transformations.

5.3 «Life in a milk container»

The temporary exhibition «Life in a milk container» about the Forest Brothers of Saaremaa I visited by myself, because it has been two hours since the beginning of the guided tour and the museum guide was occupied with another group of people already. The exhibition was opened from February 4 to October 30, 2022 in the courtroom of Kuressaare Castle. The curator of the exhibition was Taniel Vares and the exhibition was funded by the Estonian Cultural Endowment (Saaremaa expert group). The languages of the exhibition were Estonian, English and Russian.

According to the introductory poster at the entrance, the exhibition offers «a new look at the Forest Brothers of Saaremaa». The announcement on the Saaremaa Museum's Facebook page says: «Last year, the collections of the Saaremaa Museum were supplemented with seven hidden milk containers and objects contained in them. For the first time, the exhibition will reveal the items stored in these milk containers. These items allow us to take a look at the daily lives of the Forest Brothers».¹¹²

The entrance is decorated with fake fir trees and couple of milk containers. The walls of the display stands are made of logs with small windows reminiscent of the walls of Forest Brothers' bunkers. All this is eclectically combined with stone columns and arched vaults of the castle.

The introductory text panel gives some background information and tells about the rediscovery of seven mostly 40-liter metal milk containers at the Purtsa village in Saaremaa.

¹¹² Instagram post

<https://www.facebook.com/kuressaarecastle/photos/a.683401041759703/4464475960318840/?type=3>

The contents of the containers consisted of various necessary items, from glasses, Russian cigarettes, lighters, bicycle parts, flashlights, a camera, medical supplies, and clothing to patriotic poems and rare shots taken in the forest.¹¹³ Such containers as hiding places were common among the Forest Brothers of Saaremaa, and it is represented as a special feature of Saaremaa compared to mainland Estonia.¹¹⁴

After the war at least 500 Forest Brothers were killed, recruited or arrested in Saaremaa. The groups of Forest Brothers usually consisted of 3-8 people.¹¹⁵ The findings of three-four containers are associated with the Saaremaa's most legendary forest brother Elmar Ilp (1919–1950) and his squad. Two more containers belonged to the Aleksander Tuuling who also was a member of the Elmar Ilp's squad for some time.

So, in the exhibition, the daily life of the Forest Brothers is represented through the discovered items. Connection between objects and life stories refers to the concept of «biographical objects»: things that are related to personal biographies. (Yi-Neumann, 2022: 102). I wouldn't say that this exhibition entirely revolves around objects. They were the starting point, from the discovery of containers came the idea to create the exhibition. These objects are more of a tool used to elaborate on the Forest Brothers in Saaremaa, than the main focus. «Biographical objects provide an «anchor» for storytelling...in which a reflection on the self is deflected through the medium of an object, a possession, a thing that stands for aspects of the person». (Hoskins 1998, 180) Instead of presenting abstract concepts, biographical objects ground the exhibition in the tangible realities of people's lives. These objects provide context and specificity to historical events and cultural practices.

A noteworthy feature of the exhibition's narration style is that apart from the factual information already known about Forest Brothers in Saaremaa now, several text panels have excerpts from a newspaper that talks about Forest Brothers' deeds as if it has been happening just recently. The texts are from Exile Estonian paper, *Eesti Teataja*, from the year 1948. For example, one of the text panels begins with: «In the following, we will continue the story of three fishermen who escaped from Soviet Estonia, which we started in the previous issue.

¹¹³ «Life in a milk container», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹¹⁴ «Rediscovered hiding places», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹¹⁵ «Squad of Elmar Ilp», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

We were interested in the question of whether partisans were still active in Estonia and how their activities manifested themselves».¹¹⁶



Image 17: *The entrance of the exhibition hall, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

In one of these newspaper excerpts, it talks about the image of the Forest Brothers who in the eyes of the people were «medieval knights who punished the evil and helped the unfortunate».¹¹⁷ The Forest Brotherhood is represented as a necessary measure, the natural response to injustice and threat:

«Since the rule of law does not protect the conquered people, and in case of trouble, they are blamed for why they are negligent and do not protect their property, the

¹¹⁶ «Forest Brothers – tough fighters», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹¹⁷ «Forest Brothers – tough fighters», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

people somehow exercise this protection through the forest brotherhood...People turn to them for aid when the cruelty of the authorities gets overwhelming. And the chief of the forest Brothers then often sends a warning to the raging authority. If that doesn't help, they come and do what needs to be done». ¹¹⁸

Another newspaper excerpt mentions that little is known about the Forest Brothers, but nevertheless there are many rumors about their deeds: «Many legendary acts were attributed to this man, as usually in the case during difficult time, when people sometimes want to see heroes and so fantasize on their own». ¹¹⁹ In particular, it is mentioned that it is not always only about noble deeds, but also about lootings and robbings of cooperative shops.

The display case with garments and manufacturer's labels on it, also brings up the topic of lootings of the store property in Saaremaa by the Forest Brothers. As stated in the description, more than a dozen stores were regularly looted between 1948 and 1950. ¹²⁰ The text panel next to the display case elaborate on the reason for such actions:

«Due to the special cruelty of the repressive bodies of the foreign power and the betrayal of local collaborators, the population's support for the resistance movement decreased, as a result of which the first known confiscation of property of a store By Forest Brothers took place». ¹²¹

The exhibited objects also reveal another aspects of the partisans' life that weren't discussed in the Forest Brotherhood context, compared to the Pärnu Museum and the Võru County Museum. For example, one of the display cases shows condoms and photographs with erotic drawings. The description highlights that Forest Brothers were «...mainly young and cheerful men in their 20s and 30s. They participated in communal work campaigns and parties and tried to take part in the usual village life». ¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ «More about Ilp, the chief of the forest brothers», wall text, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹²⁰ «Squad of Elmar Ilp», display case, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² «Squad of Elmar Ilp», display case, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia



Image 18: *Personal belongings of Forest Brothers, photo by Anastasiia Avramenko*

Among displayed cartridges, a uniform of the Defense League, various medals there is a club made of a thick hose that was used to punish enemies. «Sometimes the heads of collaborators of the Soviet regime were partially shaved off, or a half a mustache was cut to stigmatize them in front of the rest of the village». This exhibit contributing to a perception of the Forest Brothers as a threat to Soviet control, who were often engaged in armed confrontations with Soviet authorities.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion

Representing historical narratives within museum spaces is a vital conduit through which societies engage with their past and shape collective memory. Cultural memory is of particular significance for museology in the way that cultural memory is mediated through various symbolic artifacts or media, such as texts, symbols, signs, films, and photos. (Erll, Rigney 2009: 1) Thus, through selecting artifacts and transmitting meanings, museums can define «a community's memories of its collective past». (Black, 2011: 8)

Among the various epochs that have profoundly impacted Estonia's history, which has undergone transformative shifts in its political landscapes, the Soviet era stands as a pivotal chapter marked by its complexities, hardships, and enduring effects. As custodians of local heritage, Estonian regional museums play a crucial role in presenting and interpreting the nation's past to local communities and international visitors. The nuanced representation of the Soviet past in analyzed regional museums reveals the intricate interplay between memory, identity, and the challenges of interpreting a period marked by conflicting narratives and emotions. This exploration delves into how Estonian regional museums navigate portraying the Soviet era, considering the multifaceted nature of this representation and its significance in shaping contemporary perceptions of history and identity.

The display of the Soviet past at the three examined museums appeared to me as a combination of the classical historiographical approach that establishes a unanimous understanding of the past and a more pluralistic approach that considers individual memories and experiences. However, the ratio of these approaches varies depending on the analyzed museum and sometimes within the same exhibition, for example, in the case of Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda.

The difference in the scale of the analyzed museums and, therefore, in the scope of exhibitions makes it remarkable how each museum uses the allocated space and what it chooses to display and highlight. The Saaremaa Museum has the largest area and the most extensive exhibition to represent the Soviet period in detail, touching upon many aspects. The Pärnu and Võru museums do not have this advantage. Thus, the difference in exhibitions' emphasis in the two museums becomes more apparent. The Pärnu Museum

focuses more on the late Soviet period and topics such as Pärnu resort, industrial production, and everyday life during Soviet times. Võru County Museum does not have such themes but instead reveals in detail the narrative of resistance through the Forest Brothers movement and The Singing Revolution.

The unique feature of the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda is that different exhibition parts related to the Soviet era were created with a significant time gap, which directly affects the representational strategies. The part dedicated to World War II was created in the 1980s and thus preserved the style of museum representation during the Soviet era. At the same time, the content of this part was updated, and the war was represented through «the rupture» discourse. The Forest Brothers' part from 2011 is displayed through the personification of history and in an emotionally engaging manner. The part dedicated to a series of events in 1987–1991 that led to the Estonia's restoration of independence represents the late Soviet period in an ironic, sarcastic manner. It indicates the creation of new anti-Soviet mnemonic templates in the 1990s. Also, the representation of the Soviet period is quite selective, focused mainly on the discourses of resistance and opposition to Soviet regime.

Despite the Pärnu Museum's small size, compared to the Saaremaa Museum, the amount of displayed content related to the Soviet period was significantly larger than at the Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda. The exhibition in the Pärnu Museum covers the entire Soviet period. It represents different stages of the Soviet era and experiences in private and public spheres. Therefore, the representation of the Soviet period combines two coexisting dominant discourses on the Soviet past in Estonian remembrance culture. There is a representation of the Stalinist period interpreted through the discourse of «the rupture» and a nostalgic portrayal of everyday life during the period of late socialism.

However, the representational strategies used to display Soviet everyday life in the Pärnu Museum do not necessarily form a coherent whole. On the one hand, the recreated Soviet living room can evoke nostalgic feelings attached to the material display. On the other hand, the text panel next to the display contains criticism of Soviet domestic reality. In comparison, the Saaremaa Museum leaves the reconstructed Soviet apartment without additional textual comments, aiming to create a fully immersive experience and evoke nostalgic feelings.

I noticed a common pattern in the representation of the Forest Brothers movement in all three museums. However, it is less pronounced in the Pärnu Museum because this topic is generally covered little. In general, the history of the Forest Brothers movement is shown through the life stories of the Forest Brothers, which are emotionally engaging and often attached to some material artifacts. In Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, the narrative emphasizes the dramatic nature of historical events, tragic stories, and the heroism of the Forest Brothers. On the other hand, in the Saaremaa Museum, the Forest Brotherhood is revealed from another point of view, reflecting the complexity of resistance movements in a turbulent period of history. The exhibition displays the daily life of the Forest Brothers through their discovered belongings, revealing some rarely discussed aspects in the Forest Brotherhood context.

The narrative of resistance and repression is noticeable in all three museums, and frequently, the chosen artifacts for display align with this narrative. It is most apparent in the representation of everyday life during the late Soviet period and post-war period. Objects are imbued with political significance through the accompanying text. For instance, product scarcity is attributed to economic shortcomings.

Museum guides' narration types also varied. The narration depended on the guide's background, and on the content of the exhibition. For example, in Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, my guide was the museum's collection keeper, and it was clear that she was not very comfortable being in this role. It was also difficult for her to speak Russian, so it did not help in storytelling. The guide relied on my questions for the exhibition. Although it did not bring any new context to the exhibition, I had the opportunity to clarify unclear points that I had after my first independent visit.

In the Pärnu Museum, my guide was a city guide. Her narration style was quite dynamic and engaging, for example, she tried to present the historical information as an interesting fact. Although at the same time, it was clear that she was primarily a city guide, and not specifically this museum, because sometimes she checked the information on the text panels to refresh her memory, and some exhibits were also new to the guide due to some recent changes in the exhibition. The guide focused more on the part of the exhibition related to Pärnu resort, industrial production, and everyday life during the Soviet time.

The Saaremaa Museum's guide specialized in this particular museum and was well acquainted with the exhibitions. Despite the limited time, he was also interested in telling and showing me as much as possible. He also advised me to visit the temporary exhibition about Forest Brothers after the tour. The guide was also willing to share some personal stories, which sometimes created an atmosphere of personal conversation rather than a guided tour, which I enjoyed.

Conclusion

This thesis presented three cases of representation of the Soviet past in Estonian regional museums through a content analysis of the Pärnu Museum, Vana-Võrumaa Kultuurikoda, and Saaremaa Museum.

There has been a «general shift from ‘historiographical consensus’ mediating national narrative toward a more pluralist and inclusive approach to the past in the Estonian museum landscape». (Kõresaar; Jõesalu, 2021). For instance, such exhibits that apply pluralistic methods in displaying the Soviet past have recently been opened in the Estonian National Museum (2016) and in the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom. (2018)

Although analyzed regional museums’ representational strategies generally reflect the current processes in Estonian remembrance culture, the shift to a pluralistic approach is less prominent. The representation often recalls the method used by memorial museums to convey the national narrative of the Communist past.

Analyzed museums use «the rupture» discourse and the everyday life discourse in portraying the Soviet era in their exhibitions. The use of these discourses depends on the period and the sphere of life represented. «The rupture» discourse represents the period of the Stalinist era in Estonia and the official sphere. And the late Soviet period is viewed through the everyday life discourse used for the informal and private sphere.

Museums represent Soviet heritage by selecting objects on display, outlining the historical contexts of each display, and storytelling, although lack of interactivity and multimedia.

The historical experiences, narratives, and collective memory of a specific locality shape the lens through which the Soviet era is perceived and portrayed. This influence can be observed in various ways. Regions that experienced specific events or dynamics during the Soviet period will likely emphasize those aspects in their museum representations. For instance, areas with significant resistance movements, like Saaremaa and Võru County, focus on the Forest Brother movement representation. And economic development and resort theme is highlighted in Pärnu Museum. The cultural preservation efforts are mentioned in Saaremaa

Museum (Saaremaa people in exile) and the Võru County Museum' exhibition (Estonian Conservation Society).

Localities that endured particularly traumatic events under Soviet rule, such as deportations, suppressions, or forced collectivization, emphasize these experiences to ensure the historical pain is acknowledged and remembered. Although traumatic events are common experiences for all three cases, the Saaremaa Museum's commemorative exhibition of a communist massacre in Kuressaare Castle in 1941 stands out.

By exploring these topics in depth, my thesis contributes to the the post-Soviet Estonian memory studies by introducing new cases into the study of museums of the Communist past. While the analysis provides several examples of how museums reflect upon and represent the Soviet past, it could be expanded. Future research could be completed by conducting interviews with museum workers and tour guides, as well as through direct interactions with the museum's visitors.

Resümee

Nõukogude mineviku representatsioonid Eesti kohalikes muuseumites

Magistritöö uurib nõukogude mineviku käsitlusi Eesti kohalikes muuseumites läbi muuseuminäituste kontentanalüüsi. Vaatluse all on kolm muuseumi: pika ajalooa Pärnu Muuseum ja Saaremaa Muuseum, mis on riigi asutatud sihtasutuse muuseumid, ning kultuuriministeeriumi valitsemisalasse kuuluv Vana-Võromaa Kultuurikoda.

Teoreetiliselt lähtub magistritöö mitmetahulisest kultuurimälu mõistest ja muuseumide rollist mälutöös nagu seda on käsitlenud näiteks Astrid Erll, Aleida ja Jan Assmann, samuti uurimustest nõukogudejärgse mälu kultuuri teemadel, mis vaatlevad nõukogude mineviku mõtestamise diskursusi. Selline lähenemine võimaldab vaadelda, millised mineviku fragmendid on kohalikes muuseumites nõukogude mineviku representseerimiseks välja valitud ning kuidas minevikku esemete, tekstide, eksponeerimisviisi ja ruumilahenduste kaudu külastajatele esitatakse.

Nõukogudejärgse mälu kultuuri uurimisse panustava võrdleva magistritöö eesmärkideks ongi

1. uurida kohalikes muuseumides Nõukogude aja representeerimiseks kasutatavaid narratiive;
2. analüüsida, milliseid mineviku elemente eksponeeritakse;
3. vaadelda näitustel kasutatavaid meetodeid ja representeerimise strateegiaid;
4. uurida, kuidas piirkonna kohalik ajalugu mõjutab nõukogude mineviku representatsioone kohalikes muuseumides.

Magistritöö põhineb muuseumikülastustel, mis leidsid aset 2022. jaanuarist 2023. aasta jaanuarini. Muuseumivälitööd toimusid kahes osas. Külastuste käigus dokumenteeriti näitusi ning eraldi külastati näituseid koos venekeelse giidiga. Lisaks muuseuminäitustele endile analüüsitaksegi uurimuses ka giidituure, muuseumide sotsiaalmeediapostitusi ning nende olemasolul audiogiide.

Analüüsist selgus, et vaadeldavad muuseumid kasutavad Stalini aja ja avaliku sfääri esitamisel nõ katkestuse diskursust, samas kui hilisnõukogude ajajärgu ja privaatsfääri

kujutamisel on täheldatav argielu diskursus. Nõukogude mineviku representatsioonides on pöhirõhk ajaloolise konteksti edasiandmisel esemete kaudu; silma jääb interaktiivsuse ja multimeedia võimaluste vähene kasutus. Domineerib kommunistliku mineviku esitamine rahvusliku narratiivi võtmes.

Samas kujundavad vaadeldud muuseumide nõukogude mineviku esitust ka kohalikud ajalookogemused, jutustused ja kollektiivne mälu. Nii näiteks pälvivad Saaremaal ja Võrus tähelepanu ja ruumi metsavennad, samas kui Pärnu muuseumi näitus käsitleb nõukogudeaegset sanatooriumi- ja puhkamiskultuuri.

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«Squad of Elmar Ilp», display case, Saaremaa Museum, Kuressaare, Estonia

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