

SEVERAL IMPORTANT EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL EVENTS RELATED TO CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY HAVE BEEN HELD IN ESTONIA DURING THIS DECADE³²¹

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Introduction

The subject of this paper is topical as many events in Europe and in the whole world are organised by a specific country, with participants from both young and older people from many countries. Also Estonia as a small country has had the opportunity to not only participate in but also to be the main organiser of many such events and to host visitors from also other countries besides our own people and to show them Estonia, our culture and activities.

The aim of this article is to describe and bring examples on the events related to environmental and economic policy held in Estonia which have an impact on the whole complex of economic policy both in Estonia and outside Estonia, both in neighbouring and more distant countries.

The research tasks were briefly as follows:

- description of widely attended cultural events held from 2022 to 2025 which have taken place within just four years, with an emphasis (mainly music and concerts) on Tallinn but also at other places in Estonia;
- Tallinn was also the European Green Capital with its parks, green areas, gardens and all the related developments.
- Tartu as the European Capital of Culture, together with Viljandi and the towns and rural municipalities of Southeast Estonia (music, concerts, theatre performances, exhibitions, etc.);
- Tallinn as the European Capital of Sport;
- and certainly our Song Celebrations with the tradition of more than 100 years (starting from 1934 also the Dance Celebrations) in Tallinn with their audience of about 100,000 people.

³²¹ The full text of this article is on the USB flash drive in Estonian as several materials may not be interesting for readers in other languages. NB! From 2025 we are using USB flash drives (USD sticks) instead of CDs as CDs cannot be used in all newer computers (particularly laptops) (technological development!?).

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It has been a fine tradition in Europe and on the level of UNESCO for a long time already – to organise important and prominent events in many countries and their cities.

Also Estonia has become an active participant in these international events, above all in larger cities which have larger budgets to cover such expenses. For instance, during the four years of 2020s (2022–2025), three events of European and global importance have been held in Tallinn and one event in Tartu (in cooperation with the Viljandi town and the towns and rural municipalities of Southeast Estonia).

We should certainly emphasise the long tradition of organising Estonian Song and Dance Celebrations here. While the larger celebrations are periodically held in Tallinn, celebrations are held also in Tartu,³²³ in county centres and in other Estonian towns and rural municipalities.

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- founder (in 1984) and chief editor (from 1984 to 2006 responsible editor and since 2007 chief editor) of this international scientific journal published in three languages;
 - initiator of the scientific conferences related to this journal (Ship Conference: Tartu-Värskva-Pihkva-Värskva-Tartu, 1984) and their main organiser at Värskva (1984–2012) and at Jäneda (2013–...), further conferences also on Estonian islands (2026–...) and
 - manager of the board and managing director of the Mattimar OÜ publishing and consultation company (since 1993);
 - alumnus of the Faculty of Economics of the Tallinn University of Technology (since 1974) and alumnus of DAAD, Germany (since 1990);
 - founder, first head of the chair and professor of the first Chair of Economic Policy in Estonia at the Tallinn University of Technology (1992);
 - in 1979–1989 (in 2003–2005, 2007, 2010–2012, 2015, 2017–2018 as a citizen of the Republic of Estonia) fellowship programmes in Sochi, Russia;
 - In the period 1989–2016 repeatedly participated in long-term fellowship programmes at many best universities of the Federal Republic of Germany (Kiel, Frankfurt (Main), Osnabrück, Paderborn, etc.), including for several times also at the world-famous Kiel Institute for the World Economy;
 - In July-August 1992, fellowship programme at the Vienna University of Economics and Business in Austria;
 - in 2005–2007 in Crimea (Foros, etc.); in 2008 and 2012 in Türkiye (Belek, Antalya); in 2011 in Greece (Crete); in 2013 in Greece (Chalkidiki, Nea Moudania); in 2014 in Spain (Barcelona; could not participate because I fell ill); all these continuing education workshops were organised by the Ternopil National Economic University (Ukraine).

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³²³ The first Song Celebration of Estonians took place in Tartu in 1869.

Estonian Song and Dance Celebrations are a unique event of global importance, therefore our tradition was included in the UNESCO List of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003. The Song and Dance Celebrations have become international events long ago already as their participants have come from many countries.

1. Since 2022, a number of events of global importance related to economic policy, above all cultural and environmental policy, have been held in Estonia

If we proceed from the three main areas of economic policy – order policy, structural policy and process policy – we can classify environmental policy under order policy, and cultural policy under structural policy (in sources of the main article: Raudjärvi, M. 1995; 1997; 2000).

Greenery in nature is certainly one of the most important factors supporting the existence of people and other living beings on the planet Earth. Culture, music, including songs and dances, sports and exercise, also the long song and dance traditions have an important role in the life of most people besides their daily activities and work. These are daily activities of the Estonian people. And surely not only the activities listed here but often also many other activities and areas of economic policy.

The following events of international importance have been held in Estonia during the third decade of the 21st century:

- Tallinn as an internationally recognised UNESCO City of Music – 2022–2025;
- Tallinn as the European Green Capital – 2023;
- Tartu as the European Capital of Culture – 2024;
- Tallinn as the European Capital of Sport – 2025;
- The important nationwide XXVIII Song Celebration and the XXI Dance Celebration „Iseoma“ (“Kinship”) with many foreign visitors took place in Tallinn – 2025.

Thus, Tallinn has been under the spotlight as the Green Capital, UNESCO City of Music, Capital of Sport and organiser of the Song and Dance Celebration. These events have obviously actually been nationwide events, only most organisers have represented Tallinn.

Tartu has led the organisation of the events of the Capital of Culture but also Viljandi town and the 19 towns and rural municipalities of the Tartu County, Põlva County, Valga County and Võru County in Southeast Estonia (together with the Viljandi Town Government, 20 municipalities in total) were actively involved.

2. Music has accompanied Estonians all their life

Tallinn is the internationally recognised UNESCO City of Music in 2022–2025.

From the very beginning, music has been for Estonians a way to preserve our culture and the sense of unity. Before the spread of literacy, our culture was passed down through generations with oral stories which were often recited as songs. Song celebrations were born during the period of national awakening from the connection with the homeland and from the sense of unity between people which led to the declaration of independence in 1918. Since the time when Tallinn became the site of Song Celebrations in 1928, our city has passed down and preserved our culture in one of the most important ways.

This recurred at the end of the Cold War and during the dissolution of the Soviet Union when hundreds of thousands of Estonians gathered at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds to oppose the regime peacefully, by singing.

Tallinn is also a city of composers and new music and has been at the birth of several new unique music styles. During the years Maestro Arvo Pärt^{324,325} worked in Tallinn, he created his unique *tintinnabuli* style which is why he is the most performed living composer of classical music. Thanks to composer Veljo Tormis, the declining tradition of runic songs acquired a fresh form in classical music. Nowadays, runic songs have influenced several music styles starting from classical music and up to pop and rock music. The year is always full of excellent music events.

Tallinn is the site of prominent international festivals. Jazzkaar which started modestly at the beginning of 1990s has become one of the most important jazz festivals in Northern Europe. Globally recognised music artists gather in Tallinn in spring to perform the best and the very newest jazz music. Annual Tallinn Music Week (TMW) is an international festival which combines a varied choice of concerts with an extensive conference programme. Estonian Music Days presents the best of the Estonian new music.

³²⁴ Arvo Pärt – 90. Maestro was born in Paide on 11 September 1935. At the age of 2.5 years, Rakvere became his hometown. The composer started school at the Rakvere Primary School No. 1 and studied at the Rakvere Secondary School No. 1 from 1950–1954. Arvo Pärt completed the piano course at the Rakvere Children's Music School in 1953. In 1954 he continued his studies at the Tallinn School of Music. The connection with Rakvere remained, however – his home was here and his mother lived here. *Source*: Eesmaa, Enn. (2025). Teekond, mis viis tintinnabulini. *Maaleht nr 37* (1979 11. september 2025, lk. 39–41).

³²⁵ Rakvere declared Arvo Pärt its honorary citizen on his 60th birthday. The town gave him the violin of his teacher Jaan Pakk for his 70th birthday. Arvo had tears in his eyes. When the 75th birthday of the composer was celebrated on 11 September 2010, the sculpture "Young man with a bicycle listening to music" by the sculptor Aivar Simson, dedicated to Arvo Pärt, was unveiled at the centre of Rakvere town, in what is called the market square. *Allikas*: Sikk, Rein. (2025). Kuidas kuulus helilooja lõhki kuivas ja muu hulgas kitseks muutus. *Maaleht nr 37* (1979 11. september 2025, lk. 40–41).

MR. comment: Arvo Pärt is probably the most well-known Estonian in the world, at least among people interested in culture and researchers (this is evidenced by the recognitions, awards and titles by many universities and other cultural and research institutions). He is the Honorary Doctor of many universities (above all in the field of musicology).

Issues 1-2/2022 of our journal on CD contain the works of many Estonian composers (including *Fratres* by Maestro Arvo Pärt³²⁶) and recordings of conductors and music performers (see pp. 20–25 in the printed publication and listen to the CD): in total 11 works, i.e. 52.10 minutes of music.

Licence agreements have been entered into with the following organizations:

- Estonian Public Broadcasting;
- Estonian Authors' Association;
- Estonian Performers Association.

The Estonian Music Information Center was consulted.

The works of music were selected by chief editor of the journal, Matti Raudjärv (the conductors and music performers of these works had been represented already in connection with the works), and he signed the above-mentioned agreements and had the performances on CDs approved by the composers, orchestras, choirs, conductors and music performers, as required.

3. Nature, greenery and its maintenance, i.e. environmental issues have always been held in esteem in Estonia

The Green Capital movement was started in 2006 on the initiative of the Mayor of Tallinn, Jüri Ratas. On 15 May 2006, representatives of 17 European cities signed the memorandum in which they made a proposal to the European Commission to award recognition annually to a city which has not only adopted environment-friendly management decisions and raised general environmental awareness but has also applied principles of sustainable development, improved the quality of public transportation, expanded the area of parks and green areas, introduced modern principles and technologies of waste disposal or implemented innovative and bold solutions for significant improvement of the general living environment of the city. The European Commission supported the proposal in a declaration published in Brussels on 22 May 2008.

Every year this title is awarded to a European city which has significantly improved its living environment and applied principles of sustainable development within the last 5–10 years, where the population, businesses and non-governmental organisations and others have functioning cooperation and which continues the programme of improvement of the living environment that should have a long-term impact on the urban environment, and which is willing to share its relevant experience with other cities.

³²⁶ *Maestro has graduated from the composition course by Heino Eller in the Tallinn State Conservatory in 1963 and has worked as a sound engineer at the Estonian Radio. Since the end of 1960s, Pärt was a freelance composer.*

Both the avant-garde spirit of the early works of Pärt and the religious nature of his works of 1970s led to controversial reviews and caused several confrontations with the officials of that time.

In 1980, Pärt was forced to emigrate with his family – first to Vienna and then to Berlin where they stayed for about 30 years. In 2010, Arvo Pärt returned to Estonia. (Source: Arvo Pärt – Arvo Pärdi Keskus. [https://www.arvopart.ee/arvo-part/] 14/09/2025)

This title demonstrates the readiness and capability of the city to solve its environmental problems.

Tallinn fulfilled the criteria and acquired the title of a Green Capital for 2023. In 2024, Valencia (Spain) was the Green Capital and in 2025 it is Vilnius (Lithuania).

The first public discussion on the Green Capital of Tallinn was held from 7 October to 4 November 2024. The aim was to find answers and solutions together. Inhabitants of Tallinn would like to have slower traffic and more trees in the city.

This public discussion is like mini-Tallinn where randomly selected inhabitants of the city can become familiar with the subject and submit their proposals for the improvement of life in the city.

4. Culture has helped the Estonian nation and state to survive

The European Capitals of Culture in 2024 were Bad Ischl in Austria, Bodø in Norway and Tartu.

European identity is characterised by its rich and varied cultural heritage. This can be found above all in many European cities. Cultural heritage has to be celebrated. Therefore the EU recognises every year two or three cities as European Capitals of Culture which is one of the most widely known and most successful cultural initiatives.

The initiative launched in 1985 places culture to the centre of European cities to celebrate art and culture during the whole year. By now, more than 60 cities have received the award all over the EU and outside, and the cities have been selected by an independent committee of experts.

The cities are selected on the basis of their cultural programme which should have a strong European dimension and should involve local population at all ages and contribute to the long-term development of the city.

Designation of European Capitals of Culture starts with a call for applications six years before the city is officially awarded the title of the Capital of Culture. In the course of the following two years the applications are reviewed before official designation of a Capital of Culture.

In 2025 the European Capitals of Culture are Chemnitz, Germany and Nova Gorica, Slovenia.

5. Estonian sportsmen have excelled among other countries for more than a century

Tallinn was elected as the European Capital of Sport – 2025. We will only mention the sportsmen, Olympic medalists who have represented Estonia, including Tallinn.

Olympic medals won by Estonian sportsmen (from 1920 (Antwerp) to 2020 (Tokyo)): Estonia and sportsmen from Estonia have won 81 medals (27 gold medals, 23 silver medals and 31 bronze medals) from Olympic Games. 71 of them are from Summer Olympics and 10 from Winter Olympics. 44 medals (36 from

Summer Olympics and 8 from Winter Olympics) have been won for the independent Estonian state.

Olympic gold medals won by Estonians (from 1920 (Antwerp) to 2020 (Tokyo)): 22 gold medals have been won from Summer Olympics and 5 gold medals from Winter Olympics, including 14 medals (10 from Summer Olympics and 4 from Winter Olympics) by representing the Estonian state.

Olympic silver medals won by Estonians (from 1912 (Stockholm) to 2012 (London)): 20 silver medals have been won from Summer Olympics and 2 silver medals from Winter Olympics, including 11 medals (9 from Summer Olympics and 2 from Winter Olympics) by representing the Estonian state.

Olympic bronze medals won by Estonians (from 1912 (Stockholm) to 2022 (Beijing)): 26 bronze medals have been won from Summer Olympics and 3 bronze medals from Winter Olympics, including 19 medals (17 from Summer Olympics and 2 from Winter Olympics) by representing the Estonian state.

Estonia and Tallinn have successfully organised also World Championships and European Championships during all seasons. They have been organised both in the category of juniors and adults. This has attracted positive attention among sports governing bodies of the world.

6. Estonians have been a singing and dancing nation for centuries

Song Celebrations have been held already since 1869. The first nationwide Song Celebration took place then in Tartu with approximately 850 performers from 51 choirs. This music event was and has been a celebration both for the choirs and the audience. Together with the Vanemuine Cultural Society, also the journalist, poet and active figure of the Estonian national awakening Johann Voldemar Jannsen was among the organisers of the first nationwide Song Celebration (1819–1890). This celebration played an important role in national awakening and was one of the factors arousing national self-awareness.

In 1896 the Song Celebration was transferred to Tallinn where it has been held until now.

In 1933, Estonia was preparing for the 10th jubilee of the Song Celebration. During the period between wars it became a tradition to hold the music celebrations every five years, and since 1934 also dancers have been included.

The first Song Celebration after World War II was organised in 1947. Starting from 1950, they have been organised every five years again. In the 1980s this tradition started the Singing Revolution. Tens of thousands of people gathered under the

arched ceiling of the stage of the Song Festival Grounds in Tallinn, sang patriotic songs and demanded independence for Estonia.

2019 was the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Song Celebration tradition. Estonian was the first Baltic State to start organising Song Celebrations. In 2019 already the XXVII Song Celebration and XX Jubilee Dance Celebration were held. The tradition which has been continued for 150 years has survived during the most difficult times for our people: wars and occupations. Besides, even during the most difficult times, Song Celebrations had special power to bring Estonian people together through the magic of music, songs and dance and to preserve national identity, waiting for the opportunity to reestablish our independent state.

The Dance and Gymnastics Festival of Estonian Games held in 1934 is considered to be the predecessor of the current Dance Celebration. 1,500 dancers participated in that festival. The second Dance Celebration was held in 1939 with already 1,800 dancers.

World War II broke this new festival tradition, however, and folk dancers gathered for the third time only in 1947. The number of participants was the lowest of all times that year: only 840 people. Since 1950, after which the tradition to organise the celebrations every five years started, the number of participants began to increase fast. This culminated in 1970 when 10,000 dancers gathered in Tallinn. Such a number turned out to be too high and therefore about 8,000 people currently participate at the Dance Celebration.

Organisation of nationwide Folk Music Celebrations originally followed the model of the nationwide Song and Dance Celebrations. Folk Music Celebrations are held at different sites in Estonia and not every year. The nationwide Folk Music Celebration is held for two days. Competitions of playing folk instruments are held and single groups of musicians perform on the first day. The concert of the combined orchestra is on the second day. The combined orchestra consists of many folk music orchestras. The kannel orchestra, fiddle choirs and solo players of folk instruments perform separately.

Since 2011, also a big Folk Music Celebration, also called Instrument Party, has been held as a part of the Song and Dance Celebration. The format was inspired by the Instrument Party held in Town Hall Square in Tallinn in 2009. In 2011, Ando Kiviberg was the director of the folk music concert of the Song and Dance Celebration and concert was held on the arched stage. The Folk Music Celebrations held on a separate stage erected in the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds in 2014, in the Poolamäe Park next to the Kalev Stadium in 2017 and in the Freedom Square in 2019 were directed by Juhan Uppin who the director of the Folk Music Celebration of 2023 was also. Different types of instruments (e.g. accordions, mandolins, kannels, diatonic button accordions, fiddles, etc.) are played at the Instrument Party and a combined orchestra gives a concert.

Now the nationwide XXVIII Song Celebration and the XXI Dance Celebration „Iseoma“ 2025 with many foreign visitors took place in Tallinn on 3–6 July 2025 –

2025. 41,192 performers participated, including 83 groups from other countries. The whole Song Celebration held this year, particularly its last moments, confirmed more powerfully than ever that we can achieve anything together.

We will meet again in Tallinn in July 2028 when the following will be held:

XXII Nationwide Dance Celebration and XIV Youth Dance Celebration in Kalevi Stadium on 1–2 July 2028, and

XXIX Nationwide Song Celebration and XIV Youth Song Celebration on the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds on 8–9 July 2028.

Conclusion

Although we currently (both this year and in the next years) perceive that the cost of living has increased in Estonia – tax increases, increase in prices, inflation, slowing down of economic growth, often irrational decisions of the Government and several other unpleasant economic phenomena, Estonian people are relatively optimistic and support the international projects discussed in this article not only in Tallinn and in Tartu but also in the whole Estonia. The most important events of international importance were:

- Tallinn as an internationally recognised UNESCO City of Music – 2022–2025
For instance, the Saaremaa Opera Festival (22–27 July 2025) can certainly also be linked with Tallinn as a City of Music. The guest theatre of the Saaremaa Opera Festival 2025 was the **Daegu Opera House** from South Korea. In addition to its main activities, the Opera House founded in 2003 organises also the annual Daegu International Opera Festival. In the course of years, the theater has given performances in China, Italy, Germany, Japan, Hungary and Bulgaria.
- Tallinn as the European Green Capital – 2023
- Tartu as the European Capital of Culture – 2024; besides, we have to emphasise that very many so-to-say summer events have been and are currently held all over Estonia with interesting theatrical performances given by professional and amateur theatres and solo performances by actors in cities, rural municipalities and villages; many Estonian music performers give concerts at many Estonian places and stages, several festivals are held.
- Tallinn as the European Capital of Sport – 2025
- The important nationwide XXVIII Song Celebration and the XXI Dance Celebration „Iseoma“ with many foreign visitors took place in Tallinn – 2025

Throughout the year also different local fairs, markets, etc. are very popular in Estonia (more than 1,300 events annually), with very different goods sold (food products, handicraft, clothes, technical appliances, plants (berry bushes, fruit trees, flowers, other plants and seeds for garden beds, ironwork, antiquities, etc.)). Craftsmen, farmers, small producers, local food producers are present there. Local

fairs are intended for whole families. It is a place where both children and parents can have fun, where it is nice to meet old friends and meet new people.

The cultural field can probably be highlighted besides all these undertakings which cover a very broad circle of events. And this year, 2025, can surely also be called the year of Maestro Arvo Pärt as he has very extensively presented and highlighted Estonia and its culture with his work both in his homeland Estonia and in many countries outside Estonia. Naturally, together with all these cultural figures and representatives of other specialities who have worked closely with Arvo Pärt.

As the events related to cultural and environmental policy discussed in this article have had an impact on the life of people in Estonia and even outside Estonia, these events can also be associated with regional policy.