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4.3. Changes in Estonian communities abroad and Estonian language proficiency

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Introduction

Among the world's 7,099 known living languages, in terms of the number of native speakers, Estonian ranks among the 400th largest. (Ethnologue 2017). This ranking includes languages that have at least a million native speakers. The highest number of native speakers of Estonian, of course, live in the Republic of Estonia where Estonian is the official language. Of the total population of Estonia, 886,859 people, i.e. 68.5%, are native speakers of Estonian (REL 2011). According to the data of the last two censuses (2000 and 2011), the Estonian-speaking population of Estonia diminished by 34,958 people (3.8%) over the years in between the censuses: in the second last population census (REL 2000), Estonian was indicated as the native language by 921,817 residents of Estonia. The main reasons for such a decline are emigration and a negative natural population growth.

In recent years, the Estonian language has been introduced to the linguistic landscape of a number of countries. Native speakers of Estonian are found in all countries across the world; they are more mobile, international and multilingual than ever before. For a language, participation in the migration processes means, above all, moving from one language space to another. In other words, state borders are crossed both by the speakers of a language and the language itself. Therefore, while the number of Estonian-speakers falls in Estonia, it increases somewhere else - at least for a while. However, the position of one's native language weakens inevitably in a changed language environment: its previous relevance as a medium of everyday and public communication narrows, fades away or disappears completely until its use is limited to everyday situations, social networks or virtual environments. Language is a means of communication, but not just that. For Estonian communities outside Estonia, the Estonian language has always been the most important signifier of their identity (Ehala 2017), although sooner or later questions arise among speakers about their relations with the native language, the majority language and other languages; about the need to speak their native language; as well as concerning opportunities to preserve and develop the language and pass it down to the next generations.

Preserving one's native language and creating initiatives, actions and structures to ensure its sustainability is not an easy task in any environment. It depends on the community and its structure, the number of speakers and the level of their language skills, local institutions and human resources, support from the institutions back in the homeland (Estonia) as well as on the visibility, position and status of the language in the context of other languages. Above all, it depends on the speakers themselves, their willingness and need to speak, develop and pass down their native language.

This article looks at the potential fate of the Estonian language in Estonian communities. The first section offers a look into how Estonian communities have changed and what this could tell us about the position, development and sustainability of the Estonian language. The second section discusses issues related to language proficiency, usage areas of Estonian and language-choice questions and also examines the linguistic behaviour of

Estonian-language users based on examples of different Estonian communities. Section three touches upon Estonian language learning and measures to support language learning.

4.3.1. Changes in Estonian communities

Estonian communities in other countries emerged as a result of several migration waves (Kumer-Haukanõmm & Telve 2017).

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of the number of Estonian speakers outside Estonia or what their level of proficiency in Estonian is. While the number of Estonian speakers in Estonia can be assessed from the census records (REL 2011) or from the data of Statistics Estonia, it is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the number of Estonian speakers in other countries, because language is not included in the key census variables and the populations of foreign origin are mapped based on clearly identifiable variables, such as nationality, origin or place of birth. The data from different countries and various studies (Praakli & Viikberg 2010; other articles in this publication) suggest that there are more than 50,000 speakers of Estonian in Finland; at least 20,000 in the U.S., Canada, Sweden and Russia; nearly 10,000 in Australia and several thousand in Germany and in the UK. Thus, it can be estimated that the number of Estonian speakers outside Estonia is on the order of 200,000 people.

In numerical terms, the Estonian communities in western countries, in particular those established after the Second World War, have significantly grown after Estonia restored its independence (e.g. in Sweden, Germany, the UK); there are also numerous micro communities (primarily in Finland, see: Ehala 2017). Eastern communities (in Russia) have shrunk in numbers due to the lack of growth, or only marginal increases.

The Estonian language has been introduced to the linguistic landscapes of the countries that in the past were not among the target countries of emigration (such as Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg) or the countries where the functioning or development of post-war communities was hindered by political factors. This was the case in Finland where a couple of thousand Estonians lived and a number of Estonian associations operated already in the early 20th century. There were about 1,000 Estonian speakers in Finland in 1991 and 13,784 before Estonia joined the EU, but now there are some 50,000 Estonians living permanently in Finland (Tilastokeskus 2016). The number of Estonians staying in Finland on a temporary basis is unknown, but it is estimated (by the media) that there could be tens of thousands. The majority of Estonian speakers (30,182) live in the south of Finland, in the County of Uusimaa, most of them in Helsinki or its surrounding areas (Praakli 2017). In terms of age, the Estonian-speaking population in Finland is rather young, in their 20s and 30s. As for the gender breakdown, men outnumber women in the younger age groups; the number of men is the largest in the age group 30–34 (a total of 3,070) and the number of women in the age group 25–29 (2,604). The number of those aged under 19 is also quite large (10,527 people). A key question regarding the fate of Estonian in the near future is the nature of the relations between languages among the youngest age group – the current pre-schoolers and schoolchildren: will they learn to

speak Estonian and at what level? How many of them will potentially maintain their Estonian language proficiency and pass it down to the next generation?

The Estonian diaspora in Germany is also being newly established. Tens of thousands of Estonians fled to Germany in the last year of the Second World War. About 27,000 of them settled in other countries in the early 1950s and only a couple of thousand remained in Germany (Praakli 2016: 15). At of the end of 2014, there were 6,023 Estonian nationals living in Germany – 3,927 women and 2,096 men (data from Praakli 2016: 9, 17-18, see also Destatis 2015). The largest number of Estonians live in Bayern (1,038), Nordrhein-Westfalen (1,069) and Baden-Württemberg (949).

The emergence of Estonian communities in different countries across the world in the period after Estonia regained its independence is also affected by institutional factors, which have shaped the age, gender and educational structure of the communities. Some communities (in Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany) are more homogeneous, while others are more heterogeneous (e.g. in Finland); some communities are open to practically everyone (Finland), while others are much more closed (Belgium, Luxembourg) and where access is restricted by external factors, such as institutional factors. While the concentration of the EU institutions, missions of the Member States and international organisations in Belgium and Luxembourg has created a need for an Estonian-speaking workforce, the requirements for the posts available are very high, i.e. specific skills and qualifications (higher education) and excellent command of foreign languages. Estonian communities in Belgium and Luxembourg have emerged mainly due to the demand for personnel by various EU institutions. The majority of the couple of thousand Estonians living in Belgium work at EU institutions, the Permanent Representation of Estonia to the EU, or other international organisations. The same applies to the newer Estonian communities in the U.S. and the UK (in particular the Greater London area). New additions to these communities are mainly 20-30 year old young people who work in international organisations and companies (in particular in the field of IT) or pursue their studies at universities. However, it should be pointed out that Estonian communities in Belgium and Luxembourg are characterised by high turnover of members and constant changes as many people live in those countries only temporarily due to the nature of their employment or studies. The communities in Belgium, Luxembourg and certainly in Finland are, on the other hand, quite distinct from all other communities in that they have closer linguistic links with the core territory (Estonia), as there is constant rotation of members or influx of new additions from the core territory. Estonian as an official language of the European Union is probably more visible in institutional communication in Belgium and Luxembourg than anywhere else.

Institutional factors cannot be overlooked also in the cases of Australia and Canada. The Estonian communities in both countries have been supplemented by 18–30 year old (Australia) and 18–35 years old (Canada) Estonians. In 2005, an agreement on working holiday visas for citizens of Estonia was signed with Australia. In 2010, Estonia and Canada agreed on a youth exchange program which enables 125 young Estonians to travel each year to Canada for study or work experience. Since 2005, Australia has issued 9,204 working visas to young Estonians aged 18 to 30. In 2015, 1,270 young people were staying in Australia on the basis of a working visa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). According to

the Estonian media, about 400 Estonians travelled to Canada with a work visa in the period 2010-2013. As both Australia and Canada offer easy opportunities for entry and stay, their popularity as target countries is understandable. Although both Australia and Canada have established strict time limits for staying (one or two years), many young people have settled down permanently to study or work or for family reasons. The younger Estonian communities in Australia and Canada are apparently the most varied in terms of backgrounds and people have often moved to these countries immediately after graduating from upper-secondary or vocational school or university. The communities where in addition to (or instead of) Estonian, the main language of communication is English and whose identity is based on global and cosmopolitan attitudes, are likely to be most multilingual in their choice of languages.

Nearly all clusters of Estonians are located in cities (except for Russia). Concentration in cities has strengthened cooperation with Estonian embassies and missions. On the other hand, for many Estonian-speakers the emotional links with their heritage and national affiliation have changed and they prefer to see themselves as global citizens. In the countries with larger numbers of Estonians (Finland) or longer geographical distances (Germany, the U.S.), the Estonian-speakers, rather than forming a single Estonian community, are divided into smaller communities based on regions (including cities, city areas, towns and villages) or fields of activity. Thus, there may be a number of clusters of Estonians in one country.

Emigration has had a twofold effect on the functioning of Estonian communities and the preservation of the Estonian language. In some countries, newcomers have joined the structures created by previous generations of emigrants by adopting and continuing cultural, educational and social traditions developed and established over decades. The U.S., Canada and Sweden are good examples of consistent and well-functioning professional structures (associations, schools, kindergartens) whose activities are guided by common objectives, values and an understanding of the development and management of the Estonian language. However, smooth assimilation of newcomers has not been the case everywhere, or has even failed, which has led to new structures emerging alongside the existing ones (e.g. in Finland, Germany and the UK). This is particularly true for Finland where, alongside institutional cultural promoters, there are also privately-funded groups that have started to actively operate, organising Finland-wide events (Midsummer celebrations, club events, etc.) and bringing Estonian artists and performers to Finland.

Alongside the traditional communities, virtual communities have arisen, in which the Estonian-speakers in different countries or different regions of a country gather in social media groups (in particular, Facebook groups). For instance, the main communication and information channel for the Estonians living in Finland is a 33,000 member Facebook group (Fin-Est Eestlased Soomes). Virtual communities play an important role in supporting the use of the Estonian language: they provide a platform for communication in Estonian and increase and support opportunities for using Estonian, including writing in Estonian. The open nature of such networks ensures the diversity of language use. Web-based environments facilitate new contacts and help to maintain existing ones by narrowing the spatial and temporal distances with Estonia and the Estonian language.

However, while Estonia and the Estonian language are just one click away, it requires access to the internet and computer literacy at least at some level.

The communities have also expanded. Estonian communities include not only people of Estonian origin, but also Estophiles (for instance, in Finland, Canada, Germany and the UK) and those otherwise linked to the communities, such as officials, translators, interpreters, etc. in Belgium and Luxembourg, who are fluent in and use Estonian to communicate with their colleagues. While the main languages of communication are English, French and German, the use of Estonian in this role (e.g. as a working language) is not uncommon. With this, we arrive at the problem of estimating the number of Estonian language users: it cannot be done on the basis of language statistics only; an Estonian language user or a person who associates themselves with the Estonian language may also be someone for whom Estonian is a foreign language.

Naturally, the position of Estonian differs by country. For instance, in Germany, amongst hundreds of immigrant native languages, Estonian is an immigrant language with one of the smallest number of speakers. In Finland on the other hand Estonian is among the languages that have the largest number of speakers as it receives more support from numerous Estonian-speakers than the communities that are geographically further away from Estonia. Although the Estonian communities in Belgium and Luxembourg are geographically distant from Estonia, the Estonian language is better protected there – while the number of speakers is smaller, they have close contacts with the core territory both workwise and through different social networks. Estonian is most visible and audible in the public space in Finland, in particular in Helsinki. A very clear sign of the fact that the Estonian language and its speakers have become firmly established in Finland was the presence of the Estonian Social Democratic Party's general election posters in Estonian in the centre of Helsinki in 2015.

4.3.2. Estonian language proficiency and choice of languages

At the individual level, the development of language skills depends on the existence of and access to Estonian-language networks, the availability of Estonian-language education and cultural events, personal contacts with Estonia as well as on general attitudes towards Estonian. There is no clear answer to the question regarding what is or ought to be the level of Estonian language proficiency among Estonian speakers outside Estonia, because it entails a number of further questions: at what level and for what purpose is Estonian language proficiency necessary? Should an Estonian-speaking person living outside Estonia be familiar with different varieties, dialects and professional lingos?

The Estonian language skills of Estonian emigrants have been studied in detail in Estonian communities in Sweden (Raag 2010 and his referenced sources), Germany and Finland (ELDIA 2010–2013; www.eldia-project.org; see: Praakli 2016, Praakli 2017).

The ELDIA survey had 171 Estonian-speakers participate in Finland and 71 in Germany. While the majority (over 90%) considered Estonian to be their mother tongue, it was not always easy for the older generation to define themselves linguistically on the basis of

their native language, due to the temporal and geographical distance from the core territory. Many respondents who were born and raised in Germany or Sweden had significantly stronger links with Estonian than their actual level of Estonian proficiency – while the respondents spoke the language of their country of residence (German or Swedish) better than Estonian, they determined their linguistic identity through Estonian. Thus, Estonian can be a part of one's identity even if it is not spoken as the first language (see: Praakli 2016: 47-49 and the examples and comments from interviews).

To determine the respondents' level of Estonian language proficiency, they were asked to rate their Estonian language skills on a five-point scale. The options were: *fluently, well, fairly, poorly and not at all.*

For each skill – understanding, reading, speaking and writing – responses were rated individually and separately. The respondents were also asked to rate their proficiency in the official language of their country of residence (Swedish or German) as well as in English and other foreign languages.

The majority of the respondents believed that they spoke Estonian *fluently* or *well.* This applied to all skills. Proficiency in understanding was rated highest, while writing skills were rated somewhat lower.

Nearly all respondents said that they understand Estonian *fluently* (92% in Finland, 94% in Germany) or *well* (8% in Finland, 1% in Germany); only a few respondents said they understand *poorly* (4% in Germany). Speaking and reading skills were also rated higher. The majority of the respondents reported that they read (90% Finland, 94% Germany) and spoke Estonian without any difficulties (89% Finland; 94% Germany). Writing skills were rated lowest, although even here the majority of the respondents believed that they wrote *fluently* (82% Finland; 84% Germany) or *well* in Estonian (14% Finland, 13% Germany).

Table 4.3.1. Finland: Self-reported language competence in Estonia

Estonian	**Fluent**	**Good**	**Moderate**	**Poor**
Understanding	92,0%	8,0%	–	–
Reading	90,0%	9,5%	1,0%	–
Speaking	89,0%	10,0%	1,0%	–
Writing	82,0%	14,0%	4,0%	–

Source: ELDIA (2010-2013) study

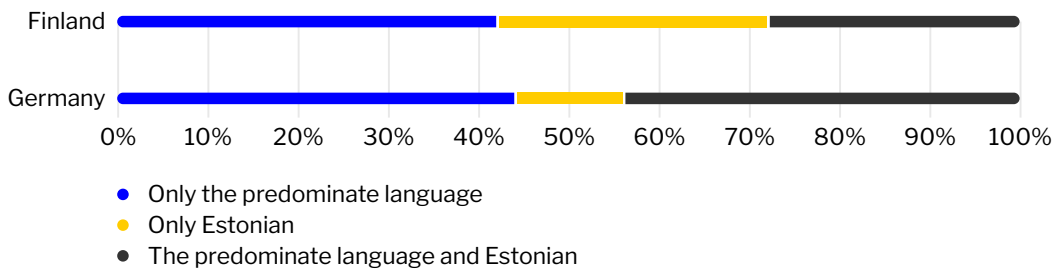
Table 4.3.2. Germany: Self-reported language competence in Estonia

Estonian	Fluent	Good	Moderate	Poor
Understanding	94,0%	1,0%	–	4,0%
Reading	94,0%	3,0%	–	3,0%
Speaking	94,0%	3,0%	–	3,0%
Writing	84,0%	13,0%	–	3,0%

Source: ELDIA (2010-2013) study

Moving from one language environment to another and the need to learn the language of the country of residence sooner or later inevitably raises the question of the personal meaning of the individual's mother tongue and the choices related to it: whether and how to ensure the transmission of the language to the next generation, and whether it is even worth the effort. According to the ELDIA survey, nearly half (42%) of the Estonians in Finland speak only Finnish or another foreign language with their partner (spouse), while more than a quarter (28%) use two languages (mainly Estonian and Finnish) and 30% speak only Estonian. Nearly half (44%) of the Estonians in Germany use at least two languages, one of them being German and the other mainly Estonian (to some extent or for certain purposes); the same percentage (43%) use only German or another foreign language and only 13% exclusively used Estonian to communicate with their partner.

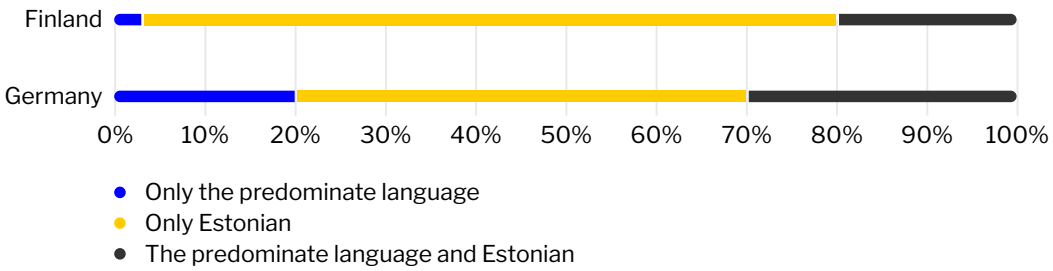
Figure 4.3.1. Choice of the language of communication with the partner



Source: ELDIA (2010-2013) study

Regarding the inter-generational transmission of language, what is most important is which language is used by parents to speak to their children. In Germany, parents communicated with their children mainly in Estonian (approximately 50% of respondents), in both German and Estonian (30%) and exclusively in German (20%). In Finland, 77% used only Estonian, 20% used Finnish and Estonian and five respondents (3%) communicated with their children exclusively in Finnish.

Figure 4.3.2. Choice of the language of communication with children



Source: ELDIA (2010-2013) study

One of the conclusions of the ELDIA study was that while the Estonian speakers in both Finland and Germany consider their oral and written Estonian language skills to be very good, they lack opportunities (where, when, with whom) and means (access to Estonian literature, printed media and learning materials, language learning facilities, cultural events, etc.) to use the language. The study shows that inter-family communication is mostly multilingual in Finland and Germany – exclusive use of Estonian or the language of the country of residence is less frequent than alternating use of two or more languages. However, it is true that in families' choices there is little room for communication exclusively in Estonian.

While the language choices of the members of post-war Estonian communities (in particular in Sweden, the U.S., Canada, the UK and Germany) would provide valuable information on the linguistic behaviour and attitudes of Estonian-speakers, given the length of the time period (60-70 years), there are no consistent data available. There are, however, a few studies which help to complete the overall picture (Praakli & Viikberg 2010).

Detailed data concerning Estonian language skills and language use are available, for instance, for the Estonian diaspora in Sweden. Although previous studies were conducted decades ago (1981–1982; Raag 2010 and listed references), there is no reason to believe that the ratio of the use of Swedish to the use of Estonian, broken down by generations, has changed much. The level of Estonian language proficiency among the Estonians in Sweden, as elsewhere, has been inconsistent: older generations (born and educated in Estonia) speak Estonian better than Swedish, while those born and educated in Sweden have better knowledge of Swedish. The younger the speaker the more limited is his/her knowledge of Estonian, in terms of both grammar and vocabulary, and vice versa – the older the speaker the lower is his/her proficiency in Swedish (Raag 2010: 402 and listed references). Regarding language choices, the ratio between everyday use of Estonian and Swedish is balanced in older generations (those who were born and educated in Estonia); younger generations (those who arrived in Sweden at a young age or were born there) are characterised by the predominance of Swedish. Estonian was used every day by 92% of older language informants and by 54% and 53% of younger generations, respectively, including 23% and 31% of those who used Estonian only occasionally, i.e. a couple of times a week (Raag 2010: 401).

It was characteristic of the first generation of Estonian refugees in the U.S. to place high value on Estonian and to be orientated towards preserving the language; purist views were the most prestigious. For younger generations, the ability to speak Estonian is important, but not necessary a priority – the language has a symbolic (integrative) rather than practical (instrumental) value (Kivik 2010: 227-228). A study of multilingualism among the Estonian communities in North England by Katrin Hiietam (2010: 320-321) indicates similar trends: the first generation of emigrants places high value on Estonian language skills; the second generation's Estonian language skills are more limited and English dominates; the second and third generations use Estonian and English alternatingly, often switching from one language to another; communication between parents and children is often bilingual (older people use Estonian, younger use English). While some representatives of the second generation consider themselves bilingual, this is not the case for the first and third generations: for the first, the dominating language is Estonian; for the latter it is English (Hiietam 2010: 320-321).

Therefore, we can speak of language shift based on the example of the younger generations following the post-war emigrants, which shows that institutions that operate in their native language (school networks, associations, citizens' initiatives, cross-border cooperation between different language cluster groups, putting high value on language and culture) do not necessarily ensure the sustainability and inter-generational transmission of the language – the ethnic and linguistic identity and language skills of the second generation of emigrants mutated very quickly even in these circumstances. Although the Estonian language enjoyed institutional support in larger Estonian diasporas, for many users (see examples 1 and 2) Estonian had only integrative value, i.e. they had an emotional connection to the language, but at the same time the language lacked instrumental value, such as usefulness in broader terms (e.g. as a labour-market language); in some cases attitudes and language choices were affected by political situation as explained by different generations of emigrants (Praakli 2016: 60, 64).

1) Why would you learn Estonian when Estonia was occupied?

2) It was not popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Not popular at all. You just had to assimilate; it was so both in Sweden and Germany.

Let us look at the language developments among the Estonian emigrés in a broader context, based on the example of the Finnish diasporas in Australia and Sweden. According to Magdolna Kovács, who has studied Australian-Finnish communities (2004: 217-218), there is a clear language shift in favour of English among younger generations: while the majority (74%) of the first generation emigrants used mainly Finnish in everyday interaction, the second generation used predominantly English (79%). Kovács estimates that indications of a language shift were already evident decades ago when 25% of the first generation, 41% of the second generation and the majority (93%) of the youngest generation had substituted English for Finnish.

What about the status of Finnish in Sweden? Emigration from Finland to Sweden started already in the 1960s, mainly due to economic reasons. There are approximately 446,000 first and second generation Swedish Finns (Ilmasti 2006:15-16 and references therein);

according to the estimates of the media, about 200,000 of them are Finnish-speakers (MTV 2016). Huss and Wande (2007: 287) argue that in Sweden Finnish is an endangered language: while for a large majority of Swedish Finns it is their first language and is associated with their Swedish-Finnish identity, they prefer to use Swedish in everyday interactions and their proficiency in Swedish is much higher. There is also a correlation between age and language skills: Finnish speakers are primarily older people. According to the study conducted by Sally Boyd (referred to in Huss & Wande 2007: 287–288), language shift occurs in the second and third generations, in particular among young people. As regards children's language choices, the position of Finnish was worse in families where parents had different native languages (Finnish and Swedish). However, a number of studies indicate that the valuation of Finnish has increased in the last decade (see: Ilmasti 2006: 19–20). There are a number of reasons for this: appreciation of Finnish-medium education and multilingualism, increased use of Finnish in education, media and public space, as well as increased scientific interest in Swedish Finnish (Ilmasti 2006: 19–20 and listed references).

4.3.3. Estonian language learning

All major Estonian communities have established various structures to support the Estonian language and culture, in particular to meet children's linguistic needs. Estonian associations, weekend schools, hobby clubs, kindergartens, supplementary school programs, folk universities and language schools offer opportunities to learn the Estonian language and culture. Opportunities to learn Estonian are also offered by a number of general education schools in Finland, Sweden, Latvia and Russia as well as by European Schools in Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany and approximately 30 universities. Estonian is taught in different formats and at different levels at nearly 100 educational centres across the world. A list of educational centres is published on the website of the Estonian Institute (http://ekkm.estinst.ee/keskused).

While 'old' communities (e.g. in the U.S., Canada, Sweden, the UK and during the first post-war decades also in Germany) have established functioning educational structures over time, which have ensured the continuity of Estonian language learning and speaking, in new communities (particularly in Finland) the organisation of Estonian language learning is still taking shape despite the fact that Estonian schools have operated in some communities for a decade already. For instance, after the enlargement of the European Union to the east, Estonian schools were opened in Hamburg, a few years later in Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne and in 2011 in Brussels.

Regarding the existence and accessibility of educational structures, the Estonians in Finland – the country with the largest Estonian-speaking community – are in the most vulnerable position. However, it is just as true that new immigrants may not be familiar with the activities of language enthusiasts, the legislation in the educational field and their right to mother-tongue education. Among general educational schools in Finland, only the Latokartano school in Helsinki offers classes in Estonian, providing bilingual education in Finnish and Estonian to about 120 pupils of Estonian background (Latokartano school data, 2015). There is also an Estonian kindergarten in Helsinki (Anni

lastentarha) and a number of hobby and singing groups for children. Finland also supports native language learning for children from immigrant backgrounds (two hours per week).

Supporting Estonian language proficiency and learning among the Estonians abroad is also one of the objectives of the Development Plan for the Estonian Language 2011-2017. The Development Plan lists a number of measures aimed at the maintenance of Estonian language proficiency and describes actions and support schemes for the organisation of language learning. Estonia supports Estonian speakers in other countries primarily through the Compatriots Program and the External Program for the Academic Study of the Estonian Language. Support measures are organised, mediated and funded by the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Estonian Institute, and local institutions in foreign countries (local governments, departments of culture and education, associations, etc.). The activities funded by the Estonian state include financial support to the development of learning materials and to education and culture projects (language camps, study tours) and the organisation of refresher training for teachers and science events. In 2014, *Üleilmakool* (The Global School) was established on the initiative of the Association for Estonian Education (Helsinki). The school offers e-courses (on Estonian language and literature, history, geography, mathematics) to Estonian-speaking students from 5 to 9 years old across the world. In 2016, 125 students of Estonian origin from some 20 countries across the world studied at the Global School.

Conclusions

Languages are constantly changing and evolving to meet the needs of their users. It is clear that some communities maintain their native language to a greater or lesser degree, while others are predisposed to language shift (through living environment, lack of social networks, attitudes, practices of families regarding language, geographical distance from other compatriot clusters, etc.). It is difficult to predict the future of Estonian in one specific environment or another. A good mirror is offered by the post-war refugee communities, which allow us to predict the fate of Estonian abroad: whether and which communities have managed to create the necessary conditions for the preservation and sustainability of the Estonian language. That said, it should be borne in mind that the political and socio-cultural situations were completely different in post-war refugee communities – people saw themselves as agents of the continuity of the Republic of Estonia and one important indicator of being such an agent was putting very high value on the Estonian language as well as considering it the main feature of personal identity. But, as we know by now, these factors could not prevent the decline or loss of Estonian language skills nor the shift to the local language among the second generation expatriates.

Despite the fact that Estonian communities use vernacular Estonian when communicating with each other, supported by strong Estonian-language proximity networks, the attitudes of the representatives of one and the same generation towards the importance of the transmission of their native language to their children can often be

contradictory. Supporting children's native language use is often a secondary matter for families and emphasis is placed on rapidly learning the language of the new country and on the creation of new networks in that language. While parents talk to their children in Estonian (at least to some extent), further development of Estonian language skills (e.g. participating in language courses or summer camps, reading in Estonian, using the Estonian-language media, attending cultural events, etc.) is not always considered important or necessary. A key to ensuring the sustainability of Estonian is successful generational transmission – parents' ability and willingness to pass on their language and children's willingness to accept the language. A major threat to the preservation of the Estonian language is the failure to involve the children, and the children's distancing or isolating themselves from the language, i.e. if the relationship of the children - as the potential transmitters of the language – to the Estonian language fails to evolve. Another key factor is the existence of personal contacts, visits to Estonia and regular contacts with the family/friends back in Estonia.

The language will survive if the necessary preconditions are created for it. This means providing cultural and financial support to expatriate communities, informing and motivating their members, supporting language and cultural events and activities (language learning, cultural events, Estophiles initiatives, etc.), institutional development of the communities, supporting citizens' initiatives and recognising their achievements. And perhaps the key factor may prove to be the emotional awareness of the presence of the Estonian state.

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