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Du glint baltique au lac Peïpous

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# Introduction. From Baltic Glint to Lake Peipsi

Discovering Estonia's environment

Pascal Bartout and Tiiu Koff

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# Introduction

*Saaremaa cliffs and foreshore of limestone slabs (photo: Pascal Bartout).*

# From Baltic Glint to Lake Peipsi

## Discovering Estonia's environment

Pascal Bartout<sup>1</sup> and Tiit Koff<sup>2</sup>

Version française p. 13

For geographers, to evoke in 2018 Estonia, this small Baltic country located in the northeast of the Baltic Sea, is to highlight its economic geography. Independent since 1991, Estonia became a member of eurozone in 2002 as the first ex-Soviet state. This country is open to innovations such as electronic voting and is an economic opportunity for its *Norden* neighbours, particularly Finland. It is also to evoke geopolitic with all the problems generated by the presence of the Russian neighbour (ethnic minorities, NATO...). It is finally to cross these two sets by dealing with all the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia).

However, should the study of Estonia be reduced to these partial and sometimes biased approaches, such as the use of the term "Baltic countries" implies? In fact, what do these three geopolitical entities have in common apart from bordering the Baltic Sea?

The Baltic states are unique and it begins with language. Latvian and Lithuanian form the Baltic group of languages, a part of the large Indo-European family to which Slavic and Germanic also belong. Estonia is a part

of different Finno-Ugric language group part of the bigger Uralic language family. The three most spoken languages are Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian.

Estonians arrived on the territory of Estonia most probably 5000 years ago, even Estonia was inhabited 10 000 years ago after the Last Ice Age by a people whose ethnic identity is unknown. The name Eesti is apparently derived from the word *Aisti*, the name given by the ancient Germans to the peoples living north-east of Visla river.

Historically, although Estonia is the smallest country in the three Baltic States, its strategic location at the south-west end of the Gulf of Finland has generated many wars with the only goal of controlling this strategic situation. Although the first counters on the Baltic coast were made by the Danes, such as "The Danish Fort", which will give in Este language "Taani-Linn", the ancestor of the present capital "Tallinn"<sup>1</sup>, the first mass implantation was the result of the first German Crusaders. These Teutonic and Gladius-Carried Knights

1. There was an older "Tallinn" known as "Ravel" or "Revel".





of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century fought against the local pagan society and developed trade in the region, notably by entering the Hanseatic League. After the conquest of 1227, Estonia was divided between Denmark, the Livonian Order and the Bishops of Tartu and Saare. For centuries, local power was in the hands of the German-speaking nobility who neglected the Estonian peasant mass, deteriorating their legal status and covering them with taxes.

In 1721, the geopolitical situation evolved. By the Treaty of Nystad, the Russian Empire seized Estonia and Livonia at the expense of the Swedes who had been walking a few centuries before in the region. Indeed, Russian tsars and notably Peter the Great wish to turn the Russian Empire into Europe. To do so, they set up their new capital St. Petersburg in the immediate vicinity of the Estonian territory in the Neva delta. The conquest of this Baltic space becomes vital to secure the passage to the newly created port.

This conquest is not going to lead to forced Russian assimilation, as for example on the religious level where orthodoxy will not supplant the Lithuanian Catholic majority or that Lutheran Latvians and Estonians.

The era of awakening as a nation began shortly after the great European "national" Revolutions of 1848. From the years 1860, this resulted in the establishment of an Estonian-language secondary school for peasants, a song Festival (1869), but also a folklore collection. Later, agricultural and cultural societies and the National Theatre were founded.

The era of Russification began shortly after that in 1890. Economically, Estonia largely benefited from this new Russian market with, for example, the exploitation of the oil shales of northeastern Estonia around Kohtla-Järve. It became one of the most industrialized areas of the Russian Empire, developing according to the general interest. This was reflected in the number of Russian raw materials but also Russian work-force. After

the collapse of the Tsarist power in 1917, the chaos also seized Estonia, which proclaimed its independence on 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1918 under the name "Republic of Estonia". Not accepted by Soviet Russia, a war of independence followed, until the February 2, 1920, when Soviet Russia officially recognized the Republic of Estonia.

This period of independence was short-lived, just over twenty years. In fact, according to the secret protocol of the German-Soviet pacts skinning central Europe, Estonia entered the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. Thus, in June 1940, the Red Army occupied Estonia. There followed massive deportations of Estonians (about 10 000 people were sent to Siberia). However, this Soviet domination was short-lived and German forces occupied Estonia from July 1941 until September 1944, when the Red Army "liberated" Tallinn. Fearing another Soviet occupation, about 70,000 people fled to Sweden or Germany, creating a large Estonian Diaspora. Forced accession to the USSR led to new challenges and deportations such as that of 1949 where 20,700 people were expelled.

In the middle of the 1980s, general stagnation prevailed. The political changes of the Moscow regime caused a popular awakening of Estonians. On August 23, 1989, the Popular Fronts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania organized a 600 km long human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius, demanding freedom for the Baltic States. In August 1991, concomitantly with its Baltic neighbors, Estonia declared its second independence.

This complex geopolitical history made of successive dominations, where the Estonian people are most often peripheral in thought as central, has built a local "dwarf" that is little studied in relation to the relative magnitude of its neighbors, whether they are Germanic, Scandinavian, Russian or Baltic.

These geopolitical changes have necessarily aroused the interest of social scientists such as historians and geographers. If his-

torically, Jean-Pierre Minaudier (2007) wrote a General history of Estonia, Ago Pajur and Tonu Tannberg (2017) of the University of Tartu have synthesized the history of Estonia over the period from 1918 to 2017. Maarten Ham and Tiit Tammaru (2011) focused on the links between minorities and ethnic majorities in Estonia as well as researchers from IN-ALCO in France, like Antoine Chalvin (2008). Finally, other researchers sought to understand the Estonian soul and the vision that the neighboring peoples had. Thus, according to R. Brunet (1996), for the Russians, the Estonians were "Germans", denoting for the author a mark of respect, of envy. However, this vision is not shared by all the actors and the current geopolitical conflicts between Russians and Estonians, both external and internal to the Baltic state, lead to an assimilation born of the Second World War where "German = Fascist".

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, three thesis in French allowed to enlighten these questions, only the last one being exclusively devoted to Estonia: first of all that of Claire Autin (2002), under the direction of Andre-Louis Sanguin at the Paris-Sorbonne university, dealing with a geographical approach of Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic countries; then that of Pascal Orcier (2009), under the direction of Violette Rey at ENS Lyon, on the territorial recomposition of the eastern Baltic; finally that of Vincent Dautancourt (2016), under the direction of Beatrice Giblin-Delvallet at the Paris 8 university, more specifically dedicated to the city of Tallinn.

In general, francophone literature is fairly poor in sources on Estonia and apart from the themes already stated, we can mention the question of tourism vision (Dragicevitch et al, 2016) and anthropology (Brokken, 2013, Kesa, 2011 ) but the environment, nothing or so little, while the unity of the Baltic countries, even if it exceeds the current borders, is based on a flat common environment (the highest point of the Baltic states is in Estonia at 318 m high at "The Big Egg Hill", the Suur Munamägi) made of wood, lakes, swamps

and peatlands, and a Baltic peculiarity that is the isostatic uprising.

In Estonia, these are characteristic landscapes with a primary peneplain planed by the ice sheet where hydrography is sometimes uncertain due to the succession of hills and terraces of kame and other *œsar*. The north presents a regional originality with the presence of a cliff exceeding by place the 50 meters in height: it is an erosional limestone escarpment called "glint" or "klint". The erosive action of the former ice sheet is visible with the presence of many erratic blocks placed on the shallow sea (photo 1).

However, the descriptions of this common and original environment are not many not to say almost non-existent if we focus on the French language. Thus, apart from our work (Touchart et al, 2013) on the Kurtna natural reserve in northeastern Estonia, we only found traces of Camille Girault's article in *Vertigo* review in 2018 on the right of access to nature in northern Europe. Almost all bibliographic references dealing with environmental subjects are in the English language (Ilomets and Kallas, 1995, Raukas, 1996, Hang et al, 1996, Raukas and Teedumäe, 1997, Ott and Kõiv, 1999, Punming et al, 2005, Roose, 2005, Leito et al, 2008, Terasmaa, 2011, to name a few) or Estonian (Arold, 2005, Keskkonnaministeeriumi Infoja Tehnokeskus, 2006, Reinberg, 2018).

This special issue, co-written and co-thoughted by researchers in humanities and geoscience of the University of Orléans (France), around the geographers of the Cedete laboratory, and of Tallinn University (Estonia), around the Institute of Ecology, is therefore intended to fill for share these geographical shortcomings by making discover to a large cultivated public different facets of the Estonian environment, past and present. We thank those responsible for *Dynamiques Environnementales* review who believed in this project to the point of kindling a Baltic holiday for one of them, but also all the Estonian colleagues who participated in this epic



because we know the time taken to make these articles foreign to the local publishing methods made of contracts and articles of hard science.

This issue dedicated to Estonia, born of human and scientific meetings around the lake issues, makes it possible to constitute a great first for a review of environmental geography in France. For this first, we obtained from *Dynamiques Environnementales* a double publication (English and French) in order to propose to the readers a complete vision possible of the richness and diversity of the Estonian environment at the international level, but also to make discover or rediscover to a francophone readership the beauties of a northern region no greater than a French administrative region with its 45000 km<sup>2</sup> of area, but which deserves to be dwelled and contemplated, such as the Serenity emanating from our great friend and colleague Laurent Touchart on the edge of the peatlands of Viruraba (p. 28).

This issue will have two separate parts.

The first, introduced by Anto Raukas on the question of landscape components, focuses on natural environments, populations and rural landscapes that have contributed to the construction of Estonian territory. Oliver Koit will first discover the unsung richness of the karst, and then Agnes Anderson and co-authors will be interested in coastal dune management issues. Then, Helen Sooväli-Sepping and Bianka Plüschke-Altof will introduce us to four different types of rural functional landscapes and Anatole Danto will be interested in relations between men and nature on three islands in the Gulf of Riga. Finally, to close this first part, Piret Vacht and co-authors will take us to visit the Estonian capital, Tallinn, seen from the perspective of

ecosystem services and Martin Küttim with co-authors will ask the question of ecological restoration of peatlands.

The second part of this issue will focus on a geographical science that is the limnology, limnology which was the gateway to this Franco-Estonian collaboration from the International Symposium of Châteauroux in 2012 and the Hubert Curien Program (PHC PARROT) (Campus France) between 2013 and 2014. Pascal Bartout will introduce this part by laying the groundwork for the originality of the Estonian Limnic Corpus and the representativeness of its limnic territories. Next, Jaanus Terasmaa will present the results of the latest lake censuses highlighting significant quantities of water bodies and the induced morphological and spatial diversity. Thus, Egert Vandel and Tiit Vaasma, by a paleolimnological entry, then Marko Vainu and co-authors, by a focus on anthropogenic pressures, will highlight the whole interest of the tens of thousands of very small Estonian lakes. Finally, two other articles will look into the case of Peipsi Lake, the Estonian mastodon, the fourth largest freshwater area in Europe. Laurent Touchart and co-authors will question the contribution of this lake in the world limnological research but especially Russian, and Galina Kapanen will ask the question of the management of this lacustrine entity separating two countries, but also two "worlds", one "European" with and the other "Russian" with the Russian Federation. Finally, Pascal Bartout concludes this part by questioning the supposed originality of the Estonian Limnic Corpus and its apprehensions to build an operational limnic territory.

Good Reading!

**References (p. 22)**





*coastal landscapes of erratic boulders near the village of Käsmu (Lahemaa Park, photo: Pascal Bartout).*