Tallinn University

Find Estonian in LIFE

Project Portfolio

Supervising student: Yijia Chen

Members: Gulassyl Amirgaliyeva, Faith Emike Igbafe, Molly Elizabeth Maloy, Merily Sell, Anastasia Sitnikova, Laura Vilumets.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROJECT REPORT

Goals and Importance

The goals of the project include encouraging Estonian learners to notice the Estonian language around them and learn in real-life situations, making the learning process more interesting than it would be in a traditional classroom and motivating self-study. The project also aims to create a space for Estonian learners to share and learn from each other and to gather ideas from learners to understand what help they need in the learning process along with their opinions about the photoshoot activity of the project. Attracting potential language learners with visual media is our intention as well.

It is important to carry out the project because it provides a creative, fun, and easy approach to learning Estonian and can help promote continuous learning. Meanwhile, the project might help increase the popularity of the Estonian language among international students and employees in Estonia, inspiring language education in the Information Age.

Problem

The central problem lies in the difficulty of learning and promoting Estonian. Since Estonian is a bit difficult to learn owing to the grammatical structure and the linking of words in a conversation, people either don't start or lose interest quickly and give up. Besides, Estonia is a relatively small country with a small population. It is thus difficult to compete with English or other "big" languages in terms of the number of speakers and popularity. These two issues raised challenges for both educators and learners regarding how to make the learning process easier, funnier, and more attractive as well as how to encourage further learning.

Activities

We will organize multiple necessary and meaningful activities to help resolve the problem and fulfill the goals of the project. First of all, a 30-day photoshoot challenge will be initiated and promoted in March 2023. Participants are required to take photos of interesting or confusing Estonian texts they notice in daily life. This activity will raise people's awareness of the language around them and stimulate their interest in learning everywhere and every day (Aladjem and Jou 2016).
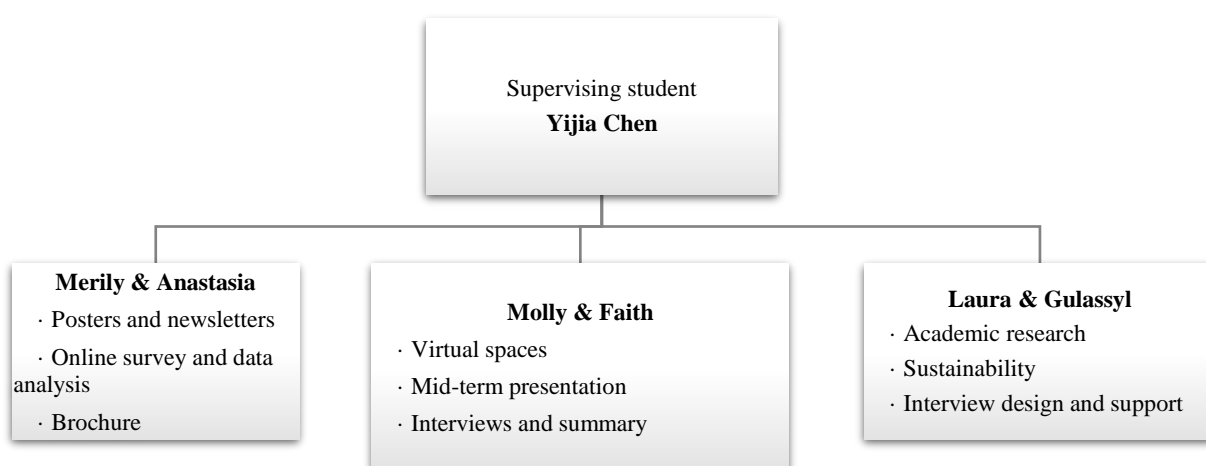
Secondly, two virtual spaces including a Facebook group and an Instagram page will be created for learners to share their photos and interact with others. These two social media communities are among the most popular and frequently used in Estonia, we therefore choose them as a platform for communication. Erarslan (2019) showed in his research that learning via social media is attractive to young generations and tends to result in satisfying outcomes. Learners' knowledge will be consolidated through sharing and interacting online, which help them refresh their understanding of Estonian language and culture.

Furthermore, a brochure will be completed in April using the photos we receive. The reason is that visual media along with texts included in a brochure would be more likely to attract attention by highlighting both language study and the extensive cultural variety of the language itself (Paduraru and Mihaila 2018). This would help increase the popularity and appeal of the Estonian language and culture.

Last but not least, an online survey and several offline interviews will be conducted to gather feedback from participants and non-participants of the activity. We will then analyze the results, make summaries, and reflect on our work, all of which will be finished by the beginning of May.

Distribution of Tasks

Six team members are divided into three groups, each cooperating with their partner from a different discipline. Groups also need to collaborate with each other occasionally in the completion of the cooperative tasks. The distribution of tasks is shown in the following organization chart.

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│     Supervising student     │
│        **Yijia Chen**       │
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Merily & Anastasia	**Molly & Faith**	**Laura & Gulassyl**
· Posters and newsletters	· Virtual spaces	· Academic research
· Online survey and data analysis	· Mid-term presentation	· Sustainability
· Brochure	· Interviews and summary	· Interview design and support

Aside from each group's responsibilities, all members are required to promote the photoshoot activity, write their parts of the mid-term report and self-reflective report.

Stakeholders

Eight stakeholders in total supported the project by helping spread the word about the photoshoot challenge. Educational institutions including Estonian Language Houses, Tallinn University, University of Tartu, and Tallinn University of Technology informed the students about our photoshoot challenge via newsletters. ESN Tallinn, Settle in Estonia, Work in Estonia, and Study in Estonia posted our flyers on their social media, calling for participation. Most Estonian language teachers at Tallinn University also told their students about the activity and encouraged them to participate.

Educational organizations and educators will benefit from the project as the results of the project will reveal Estonian learners' needs, engagement, motivation, as well as satisfaction in the participation of our activities and their own learning process. Suggestions will also be provided in terms of how to make learning Estonian easier and more engaging. Educators could thus understand the learners better and adjust their teaching focuses and strategies accordingly. National language program designers and supporters such as the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research might gain some ideas from the feedback which could be useful for future language courses and events.

Sustainability

The project "Find Estonian in LIFE" possesses great potential for expansion and growth, thereby should be sustained and upgraded in the future. It could benefit language learners and educational institutions in various ways. Estonian learners, for instance, can improve their language skills with the aid of entertaining visual media which helps boost interest and involvement. The Facebook and Instagram communities allow learners to share and learn from the other members, reinforcing and expanding their knowledge of Estonian and Estonian culture. Meanwhile, the project could potentially advertise Estonian language and educational organizations like Tallinn University by introducing a unique and interesting language learning method that might inspire educators.

One of the plans regarding the sustainability of the project involves offering overall control of the project to Estonian language instructors at Tallinn University. Teachers can adjust, according to meet their goals of teaching, the implementation and criteria of the photoshoot activity which can be utilized as a novel way to involve students actively in the learning process. Sharing knowledge of Estonian language on Facebook or Instagram could also be a good choice for students who are eager to use Estonian but too shy or too afraid to speak in public.

Another possibility is to encourage TLU students to continue this project as their LIFE project next semester. Photo shooting challenges or something as interesting and helpful for language learning could be arranged but on a bigger scale using more effective media dissemination. The social media accounts could be kept active with new posts and promotions as they constitute convenient learning resources on which learners could always rely and reflect.

Cooperating with Estonian authorities is also a good option for the sustainability of the project. Since the Ministry of Education and Research showed their interest in this project, it would be useful to discuss with them the opportunities to upgrade the project into a version that could have a wider and deeper influence on Estonian learners. Funding and media support from the government could be of great help for the promotion of the activities included in the project, fueling participation.

Summary of the Project

Upon discussing and agreeing on the action plan, all members of the project worked diligently according to their roles and tasks. Two eye-catching posters and a newsletter were created by the end of February for the promotion of the 30-day photo shoot challenge in March. Meanwhile, a Facebook group (FB) and an Instagram page (Ins) were made ready for new posts. The target audiences, from students to immigrants in Estonia, were reached via social media, newsletters, emails, and word of mouth. The chance to win a prize was also included in the promotional process as an incentive for active participation.

As of March 31st, when the activity ended, 37 posts were received on Facebook and Instagram, with two in repetition. 60 people became members of our Facebook group and 41 followed our Instagram page. Today the number of followers is still increasing, having reached 77 on Facebook and 56 on Instagram.

In April, a digital brochure was designed using the photos posted on our platforms. Two winners were also selected from the participants, with each receiving a box of Estonian chocolate as a reward. An offline interview was conducted with the winners, as were two online interviews with two participants and two non-participants of the photoshoot challenge. The interview questions can be found here.

In addition, an online survey questionnaire was designed and distributed to the members of our communities. We had, by the end of April, a total of 30 respondents, 15 of whom are participants of the photoshoot challenge and 15 are just members of our social media groups. Respondents are mainly students or employees living in Estonia, aged from 18 to 49 years old.

The results of the survey indicated that the photoshoot activity was an interesting and useful method for Estonian learners to develop their language abilities, with a great potential to expand further. Contestants became more aware of the Estonian language around them in daily life and learn further by themselves. Meanwhile, our Facebook and Instagram communities functioned effectively in bonding people who like to learn, share, and offer advice, having given those who struggle with the mastery of a difficult language a sense of belonging and mutual understanding.

The survey takers' views on the project corresponded, to a large extent, with what the interviewees suggested. Both groups liked our idea and found what we did helpful and

motivating. They offered, in the meantime, practical advice on the improvement of the activity and continuity of our social media platforms. With regards to the learning experience, learners met similar difficulties and expressed their needs for practice with native speakers and more free, accessible language courses, programs, or events that can make learning easier and more entertaining. Besides, respondents provided a plentiful of tools that the government and educational institutions can use to support Estonian learners and contribute to Estonian flourishing, such as language buddy programs, language café, and more free and accessible classes.

More details about the results of the survey and the interview can be found [here](#).

Winners of the 30-day photoshoot challenge:

- Molly Elizabeth Maloy - Participant who received the most likes
- María de Fátima Acha Suárez - Participant who shared the most interesting photo

Self-assessment

The project can be considered successful since we have achieved all our goals by working cohesively as a team. Our major aim was to raise Estonian learners' awareness of the language environment around them, helping them to learn the language in an easier and funnier way. We also want to gather some ideas from Estonian learners on their learning experience and attract potential learners using visual media. Our team initiated effective activities for these purposes and received positive feedback which can serve as solid evidence of our goals being accomplished.

We succeeded in introducing a creative, interesting, and practical way of learning Estonian as well as making Estonian language and culture visible. The success of the project is the result of proactive communication, effective teamwork, good time management, strong leadership as well as individual competence and a sense of responsibility.

Suggestions for Improvement

There is always room for improvement despite the achievement we have made in the project. We could, in retrospect, have done a better job in getting more participation in the 30-day photoshoot challenge, which is an essential part of the project. To begin with, more effective

marketing techniques could have been applied to gain wider outreach. We could, for instance, use reels and short videos rather than merely posters when marketing the photoshoot challenge. The reason is that users of social media are no longer accustomed to an environment where the brain keeps attention sustained to a picture, instead of a moving and ever-changing video (Jargon, 2022). Other popular platforms such as Twitter and TikTok should also be adopted for promotion. As for the targeted participants, children at international schools and Ukrainian communities need to be taken into consideration while we advertise the activity.

Furthermore, the frequency of posting the photoshoot challenge could have been increased to improve the chance of being seen by more people. One of the most important factors regarding giving posts an algorithmic push is timeliness. The Instagram algorithm, for example, pushes the most popular and relevant content to the top (Alfred Lua, 2021). This means that the newer the post, the more likely it is to appear on people's feeds. A larger crowd will be more likely to be attracted if we promoted our activity more frequently.

In addition, we noticed that many participants posted old photos instead of taking new ones. This might weaken the effect of learning the language through noticing and trying to understand the texts in real-life scenarios. Also, most contestants focused more on signs and advertisements on the street rather than other materials such as lyrics, movies, and books, which also aid language learning. Although some respondents reported that they saw an increase in their awareness of the Estonian language surroundings, it would be more beneficial if we specify clearer the rules of participation.

All in all, it is possible to improve the project and expect a better outcome by advertising the photoshoot challenge more comprehensively to boost the number of participants. Effective measures could be taken including using short videos, increasing the frequency of advertising, and incorporating various age groups into the activity.

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PROJECT ACTION PLAN

Tasks	Timeframe	Stakeholders	Students responsible
Brainstorming	February 2023		All members
Poster designing, newsletters (in English & Estonian)	February 2023		Merily Sell (Linguistics and Language Editing) & Anastasia Sitnikova (Mathematics, Mathematical Economics and Data Analysis)
Platforms creating (monitoring during the whole process)	February 2023		Molly Elizabeth Maloy (Liberal Arts in Humanities- Estonian Studies/Cultural Analysis)
Academic research I	February 2023		Laura Vilumets (Estonian philology) & Gulassyl Amirgaliyeva (Human-Computer Interaction, Digital Technologies)
Activity promotion	February & March 2023	Supervisor: Yijia Chen (Estonian Studies) Supporters: TLU, TalTech, UTU, Estonian Language Houses, ESN Tallinn, Settle in Estonia, Work in Estonia, and Study in Estonia	All members
Mid-term report	March 2023		All members
Mid-term presentation	**5-7pm, 29 March, 2023 S240**		Presented by Molly Elizabeth Maloy (Liberal Arts in Humanities- Estonian Studies/Cultural Analysis), PPT by Yijia Chen (Estonian Studies)

Online survey & Data analysis	March & April 2023		Merily Sell (Linguistics and Language Editing) & Anastasia Sitnikova (Mathematics, Mathematical Economics and Data Analysis)
Interview questions design	22 March-4 April, 2023		Laura Vilumets & Gulassyl Amirgaliyeva (Human-Computer Interaction, Digital Technologies)
Brochure design	April 2023		Merily Sell (Linguistics and Language Editing) & Anastasia Sitnikova (Mathematics, Mathematical Economics and Data Analysis)
Interview with winners	April 2023		Yijia Chen (Estonian Studies) & Laura Vilumets (Estonian philology)
Interview with participants and non-participants & report	April 2023		Faith Igbafe (Human-Computer Interaction, Digital Technologies) & Molly Elizabeth Maloy (Liberal Arts in Humanities- Estonian Studies/Cultural Analysis)
Research on improvement of the project	April 2023		Laura Vilumets (Estonian philology) & Gulassyl Amirgaliyeva (Human-Computer Interaction, Digital Technologies)
Self-reflection report	May 2023		All members
Portfolio	May 2023		Yijia Chen (Estonian Studies)
Final presentation	**2-4pm, 15 May, 2023 M-225**		Presented and PPT by Yijia Chen (Estonian Studies)

MEDIA COVERAGE

Various forms of media were used throughout the implementation of the project. Firstly, posters about the 30-day photoshoot challenge were sent out on social media such as Facebook groups "Expats in Estonia" and "Study in Estonia". Reels were posted by ESN Tallinn and several other accounts on Instagram. Multiple individuals who have personal contact with the team members were also notified using the posters. Secondly, we sent emails to Estonian language teachers as well as personnel responsible for communication at TLU, TalTech, and UTU, asking for their help in promoting our activity. Furthermore, TV screens at Tallinn University displayed information about the photoshoot challenge. Newsletters were also sent in March to TLU and TalTech students via email. Moreover, a Facebook group (FB) and an Instagram page (Ins) were created for the participants to share photos and interact with each other. They were both named "Find Estonian in LIFE" and open to all members who joined the community. In addition, an online survey questionnaire was posted in our virtual communities and distributed to both followers and students at TLU. Lastly, a finely designed brochure was completed using some of the interesting photos we received.
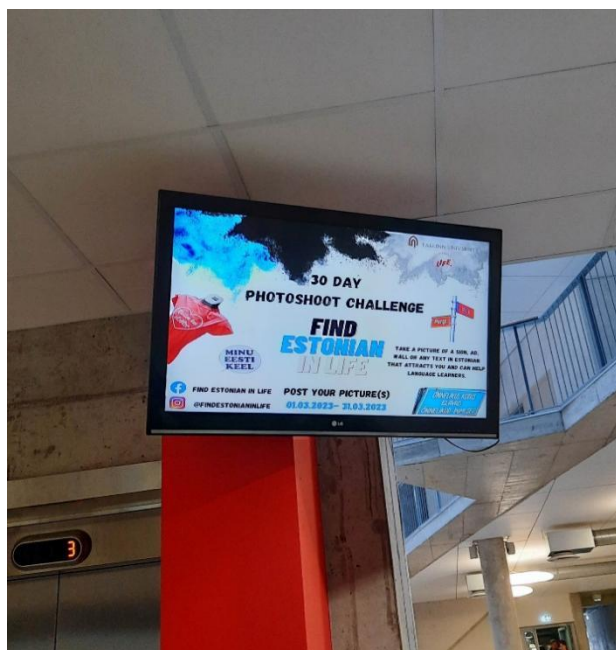
Posters and TV screen

Three versions of posters we made and the latter two were finally used based on team members' votes.
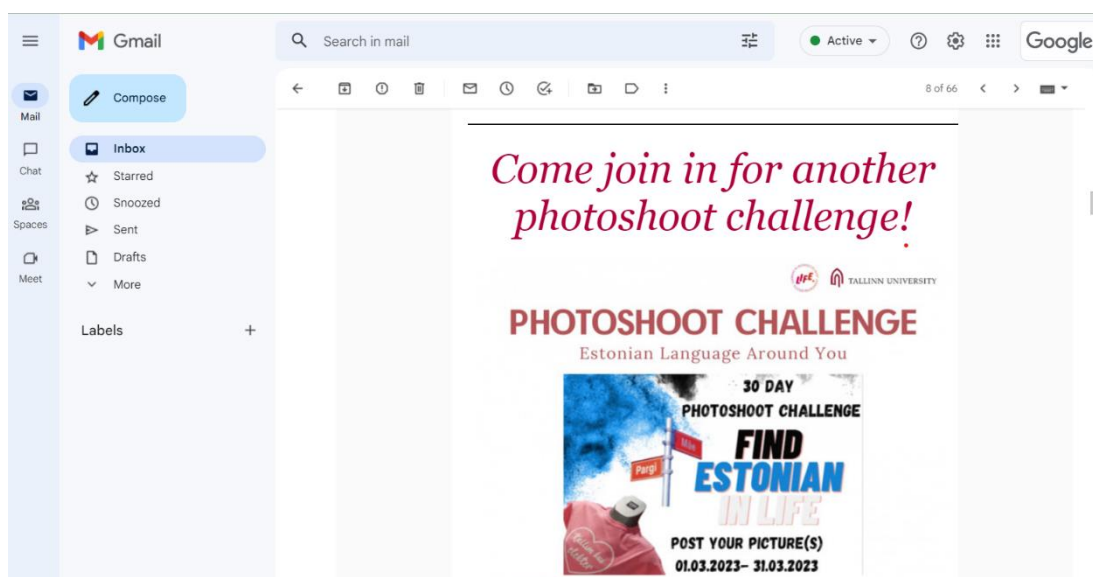

Picture 1. Poster 1

Picture 2. Posters in use
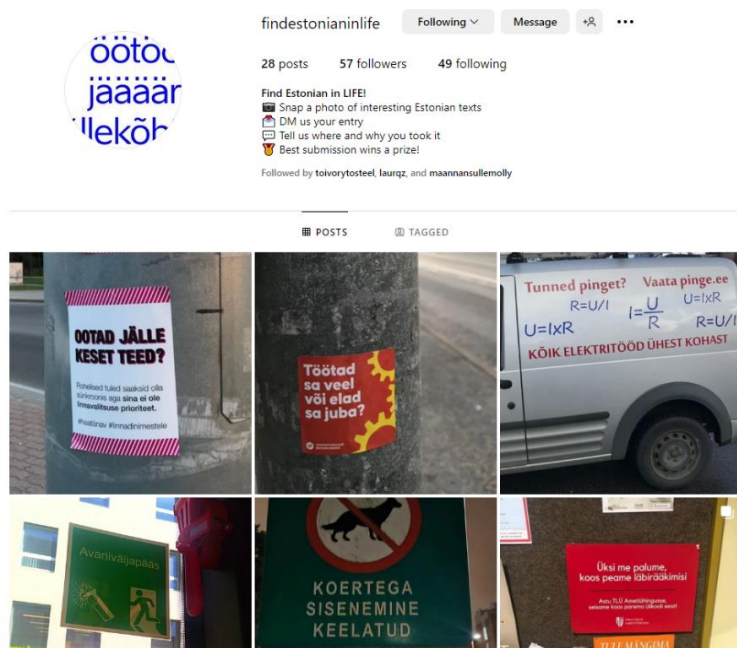

Picture 3. TV screen showing the activity

Newsletter
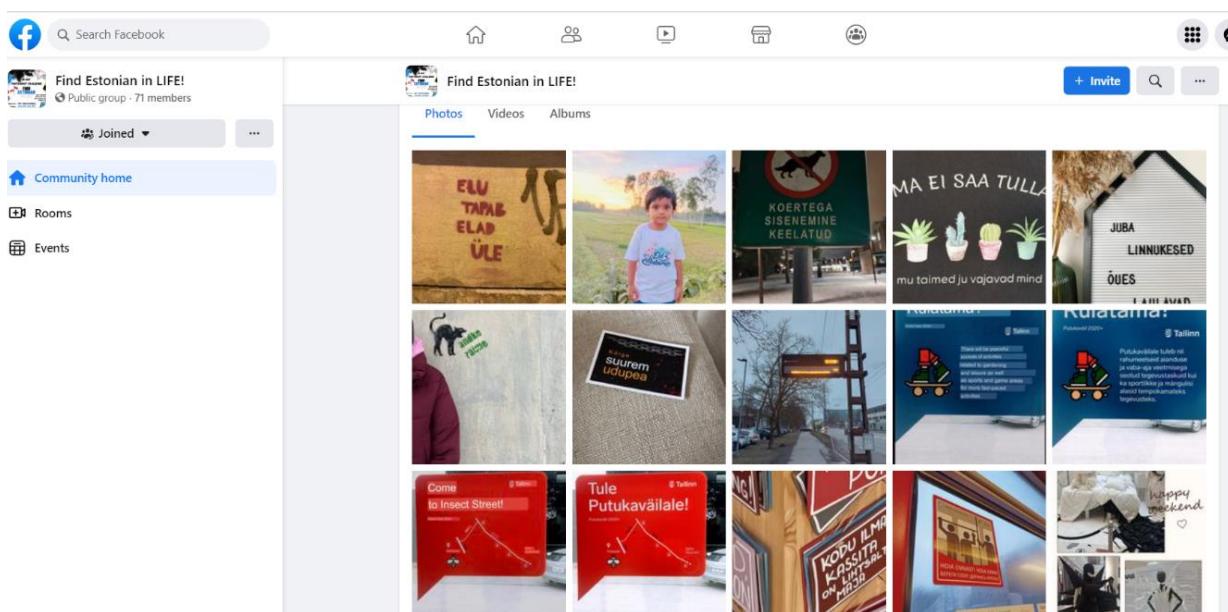

Picture 4. Newsletter

Picture 5. An example of the newsletter sent on March 17, 2023

Virtual Spaces

Picture 6. Screenshot of the Instagram page

Picture 7. Screenshots of the Facebook group

Online survey

Picture 8. Screenshot of a part of the questionnaire
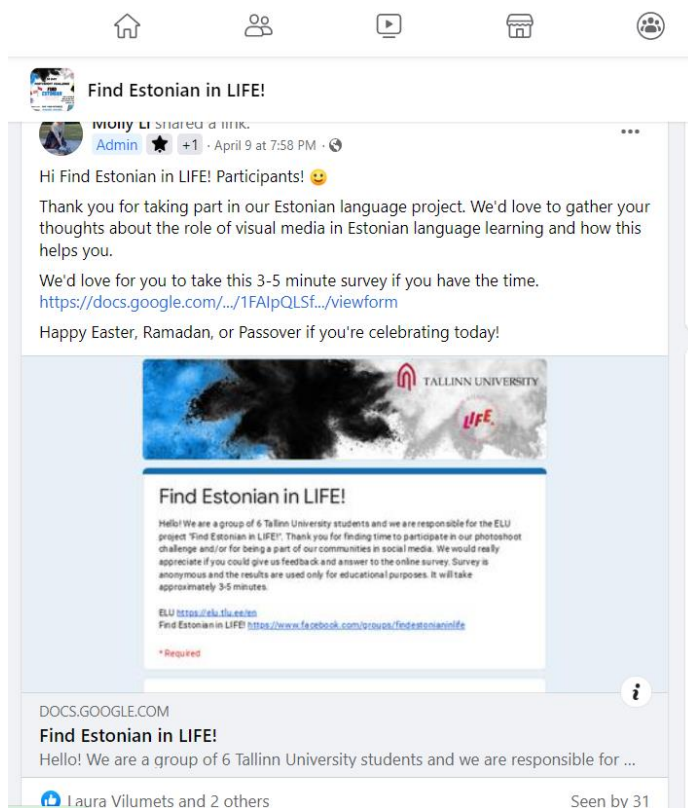
Picture 9. Screenshot of the online survey promotion

Brochure

Picture 10. Brochure cover

SELF-REFLECTION REPORTS

Gulassyl Amirgaliyeva

As an international student who started learning the Estonian language in the autumn semester, I was excited to learn and help others to learn in an enjoyable way.

I was assigned with a team member to conduct research and plan an interview. We got along well and provided varied viewpoints because we were from different departments. Her work was of outstanding quality, and together we delivered all tasks on time. I believe that splitting tasks into pairs was a critical success ingredient for this project.

Within the project, I gained more experience on how to effectively read research papers by gaining necessary knowledge. Also, I learned how to design interviews starting from recruiting participants, guidelines to moderators, questions for the interview and many other important points that needed to be considered. Thanks to the support from our supervisor and other team members, I managed to learn and gain experience in research without being frustrated and confused.

I am so happy that I joined this project and had an opportunity to improve my existing skills and gain more experience in research.

Faith Igbafe

I joined the Find Estonian in LIFE project because I found the project fascinating and as an international student who learnt Estonian language for the first time in my first semester, I wanted to know more about Estonian language and get to meet other Estonian language learners like myself.

I managed the social media team, the team consisted of Molly and myself but Molly handled the Facebook page while I handled the Instagram page. I also took part in the preparation of the mid-term presentation and interviewing participants who partook in the find in Life photoshoot challenge conducted in March. The whole team met every Tuesdays by 8:30 pm to discuss the growth of every department and I found collaborations easy with them as they were very professional with their deliverables.

One of the things I learnt during the project was team work and I learnt to notice Estonian phrases around me which made me curious about my surroundings.

This project was worth my time and I really enjoyed the fact that we could come to an agreement every time and the group work was distributed perfectly. I found new friends and in the course of the project, I was able to meet a lot of new people even in the University of Tartu.

Molly Elizabeth Maloy

I joined this project because I felt I could provide unique insights as a person who speaks Estonian every day and is not a native speaker. I expected a project in which I could gather the insights of others who have taken the challenge to learn this difficult language and understand how the structure of Estonian relates to their mother tongues. I thought these perspectives could provide an interesting new angle to which I approach the Estonian language.

My role in the team was to create the Facebook and Instagram pages for photoshoot participants, monitor the Facebook posts, and contact and interview non-participant group members at the end of the project, writing a report on their contact with the Estonian language and language-learning process through the project. I got along well with the members of my group, and it seemed that we were all well-aligned with our goals and time management. If we experienced any miscommunication, we discussed it as a whole group and it led us all to a greater understanding of our goals. I would evaluate my group members and I's contribution as valuable and well-collaborated. This dynamic formed because, I believe, we have a very unique background in terms of diverse courses of study and we could all contribute our own insights to each other and the project.

Through interviewing non-participants, I learned several different ways that Estonian learners are tackling learning the language. For example, one interviewee described using a flashcard system popular in Dutch schools to practice their Estonian vocabulary. I also got to notice the specific things non-native speakers of Estonian noticed about the language that they deemed peculiar, which clued me in to the intricacies of their native languages. The experiences of learners understanding more complicated parts of Estonian grammar were the most rewarding to see. However, it was challenging for participants to find Estonian signs in their daily lives that they deemed interesting enough to contribute to the project. We found victory in the fact that many people responded positively to funny posts about the interesting aspects of Estonian vocabulary. In the future, we would focus more on promoting ourselves in each social media platform's algorithm.

I would summarize the project for myself by saying: my group created a 30-day photoshoot challenge for learners of Estonian, provided an interactive linguistic space for participants, then gathered their thoughts and feelings about both the project and the process of learning Estonian, from both the angle of self-learning and external education, such as university or government classes. I will take with me the ways that those with different native languages approached Estonian and how they view the language based on their mother tongues. I would recommend to the supervisors of the LIFE! course to perhaps have some sort of call or meeting between two separate projects, to compare and contrast methods and interdisciplinary approaches during the process of the project to see if there is anything the groups could learn from each other.

Merily Sell

I joined the project because I am studying language editing as a native speaker of Estonian, so I know or at least have an idea of how difficult it is for foreign people to learn it. I strongly believe that visual memory can help language learners, because it is a good way to make and memorize connections between language and real-life situations.
At first, I thought that we will find more participants, but overall I believe that it takes more time to form a community like that, so I think it was a good start to create a helping and supportive community for language learners.
I designed a poster to use it in our promotions on Facebook and TLU TV screen, contacted language schools to get photoshoot participants from there and promoted activity on my social media. I also helped with the designs and content of the newsletter and brochure. I created online survey and analyzed the results.
I think group dynamic was good, we had our weekly meetings where we effectively divided responsibilities, discussed progress and made weekly summaries. Our group was divided into three groups of two people, it made communication easier and task distribution clear. I'd like to recognize our student supervisor, who managed everything very well and supported our team members.
I learned that working as a group helps to get the best out of everyone and team work makes it work! Most important were the experiences with promotion work, when we didn't get as many participants as we expected and really had to work as a team to promote our photoshoot challenge. In the future I would do more face-to-face promotion work to reach to more people.

I think that we really gave our best to make the project work and I feel that we could have done better promotion work, but other areas were covered well and teamwork was great! Since my experience was good I don't have any recommendations, but I'd like to say that LIFE webpage is really great, all the information that is needed is easily findable and well structured.

Anastasia Sitnikova

When I was searching what projects were presented for this semester, I really liked the idea of the project „Find Estonian in LIFE". Since I have been studying Estonian all my adult life, it was very interesting for me to bring variety to the study of the language.

In our project, I was more responsible for the creative part, the creation of advertising and brochure. I really liked that we were divided into pairs to complete tasks. Thanks to this, we discussed different ideas as in a pair and could come up with something that would satisfy both.

For this project, I used the Canva app a lot, and I'm very glad that thanks to it I learned this program much deeper. I also started to pay more attention to various advertisements on the streets, as I was looking for an idea for photo to participate in the project. And thanks to this, I learned a little better Estonian. To be honest, I didn't have any difficulties while working, the members of our group are very responsive and if any help was needed, everyone was always happy to help.

I am very grateful to this project that I was able to meet such interesting people and bring creativity to my studies. At the beginning I was worried that we would not have enough participants in our photo challenge but in vain. I really liked how actively people sent their photos and everyone was so creative and original. I would like to participate in similar projects in the future to encourage people to develop and learn something new.

Laura Vilumets

I joined the project because I study Estonian philology and a project focused on language and language learning sounded appealing to me. The expectations I had for the project were fairly broad. I wanted it to offer me a way out of my comfort zone, and to give me a reason to pay closer attention to the Estonian linguistic landscape.

As soon as we met up with our group, we divided the roles among ourselves. Mine was to do academic research alongside Gulassyl Amirgaliyeva. Our shared work went fast and well. Our contribution was irreplaceable to the project, because everything we did, we needed academic justifications for.

During the project, I learned to do academic research more effectively, and to word myself better in English while writing reports and analyses. Both of those things are highly valuable to me for my future, since I still have a long way to go in school. There are multiple things to keep in mind for the future, but the most important of all is that I should work with my designated partner in a more close manner.

I am happy with the project. I made new, international connections and gained valuable group work experience. I think we succeeded in doing what we were set out to do, even though, in retrospect, there were parts we could have improved or changed. I will carry the experience with me, and if the project continues, I hope to be a part of it in some way in the future.