

## ChimneyScapes: Perspectives on Rural Estonia and Industrial Heritage

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### **Project Report**

This ELU project researched the transformations of Estonian rural life from the perspective of its industrial infrastructure. Rather than approaching infrastructure as a passive object built onto the landscape by impersonal forces, the activities of this course focused on the relationships that are generated through these infrastructures. The goal has been to approach the rural infrastructures as a methodological device to think about life in the Estonian countryside.

The participants collected information on the history of the Kunda Cement Factory and contextualised this information in relation to current discussions on the condition of social life in the Estonian countryside. The group discussions specifically considered the relation between the information we were collecting and narratives of “emptiness” (<https://emptiness.eu/what-is-it/>), Just Transition ([here](#)), and heritage protection ([here](#)).

We asked:

- What is the story of the landscape when approached from the position of its infrastructure?
- What perspectives are developed when thinking with infrastructures?
- What kind of relationships are enabled through infrastructures?

Our research points to three fundamental findings:

- Rather than describe the countryside as “empty”, we found “transformation” to be a more appropriate narrative to describe the story of the Estonian landscape.
- Just Transition policies emphasise on the role of the individual citizen in mitigating the effects of climate change. From the perspective of the factory, this placement of responsibility is misplaced and, possibly, irrelevant.
- Contribute to a discussion on the value of industrial heritage of Estonia.

Our project was experimental in nature meant to generate a discussion and plan for future research, rather than produce definitive findings.

The result of our ELU project was a presentation based on extensive archival work on the Kunda Cement Factory. The text-based information on the factory was ran through ChatGPT, which was prompted to turn this information into a story told in first person. We found it interesting to see how the story presented human beings in the background and as somewhat incidental to the development of the factory’s “consciousness”. We found a similar tone in the way in which people in Kunda referred to the factory. This kind of narrative

suggests a relationship between town and factory as somewhat independent from each other. At least, not as intimately entwined as is suggested when the Kunda is described as a factory town.

See our presentation [here](#).

**2. Project action plan** - project action plan is presented in the most suitable way for the participants; however, it should contain the timeframe of the planned activities in chronological

The course calendar was:

26 September - Lecture: Ideas on Industrialisation of Agriculture - Friedrich Kuhlmann

3 October - Kohila Fieldtrip to visit this exhibition:

<https://www.artun.ee/en/calendar/exhibition-abandoned-landscapes-kohila-paper-mill/>

10 October - Lecture: Participant Observation with Audiovisual Technologies - Carlo Cubero  
Go-Along interviews to make a landscape speak (30 min.) - Friedrich Kuhlmann

17 October - Lecture: Archival Work & Heritage Management - Martti Veldi & Riin Alatalu

24 October - FREE WEEK - Submit Mid-Term Report

31 October - Field Trip to Kunda (POSTPONED)

7 November - NO MEETING (Archive Work)

14 November - Brainstorm I

17 November - Guided Tour of Kunda -

<https://www.puhkaeestis.ee/et/kontrastirikas-kunda-jalutuskaik-kohalikuga>

21 November - Lecture: Industrial Landscapes in Art - Saara Mildeberg

28 November - Brainstorm II

5 December - Brainstorm III

12 December - Brainstorm IV

**3. Self-reflection report** about the learning experience of each team member - learning experience of each individual student (up to 150 words) to describe the experience gained during the project and evaluate the achievement of project goals

Man Cheung YIU:

It offers me a foreign student a valuable chance to explore Estonia's local industrial history and heritages. We have been to Kunda, one of the important industrial towns in Estonia with a tour guide, for the field work and documentation. Unfortunately, we cannot see deeply the community around there but I think it is a good step to flash the history out.

Marta Toomsalu:

I think this project really challenged my way of thinking about the industry and the role of the factories. It seemed almost an impossible task to make something that is usually considered

without the voice. I really enjoyed that part of the project, where we started brainstorming on ideas how to make the factory speak. Taking part in the activities we did during the project, I was able to use some of my previous knowledge and skills, to analyse and take part in the discussion. I also learned new methods for analysing, especially from the anthropology and landscape studies field, which I might be able to apply in the future in my own studies as well. Overall, this project provided another point of view of the Estonian countryside using industry as a method of approach.

Responsibility: gathering background information about Kunda cement factory from the digital archives; organising the suitable articles chronologically; giving the short summary of the articles in english; finding photos from the digital archives for the story.

Francesco Cremonese:

Joining the "Chimneyscapes" project has been a way to learn more about anthropology, landscapes, and architecture, and the way they all connect. The prospect of visually untangling the story of Estonian rural landscapes and their intricate relationship with industrial infrastructure resonated profoundly with my academic interests. From absorbing lectures to spearheading visual design, each task felt like a step into the heart of Estonia's rural essence. Immersive fieldwork, especially the impactful Kunda visit and the many lectures we had on this topic, became personal milestones, whereas navigating challenges in defining the project's outcome became rich learning experiences. "Chimneyscapes" was more than a project; it was a personal journey through Estonia's rural narrative.

Aoi Ito:

Through this LIFE project, my biggest takeaway was discovering a new side of Estonia through Kunda. The field trip to Kunda was the most impactful learning experience. When I arrived in Kunda, I could sense the strong smell of cement from either the town or the factory. This experience made me aware of the importance of field visits as an anthropology student. Touring Kunda by car and on foot with the former mayor was a valuable opportunity to explore the town's nature, buildings, and history. It allowed us to get an overall picture of the town. Through the mayor's insights, we could also understand the town's current situation and residents' thoughts; it was a very beneficial experience. It was unfortunate that we could not visit Kunda more than once, as in anthropological fieldwork, it is fundamental to make multiple visits for in-depth research. However, adopting a new approach, primarily utilising archives instead of multiple field visits, was also part of my learning experience.

Airat Ganeev:

The main positive outcome of participating in ChimneyScape ELU project for me was to have an experience of fieldwork. It just happens to be that so many hours that I have spent studying academic materials, listening to lectures and participating in seminars did not fully prepared me to the reality of a world outside of university. Participating in the project that aimed at producing knowledge on the industrial sites of rural Estonia in an area so rich with historical sites, intertwined human and non human histories provided me with opportunity to challenge my own assumptions and recognise how vital it is to maintain a wider outlook on what can be considered knowledge, on the collective nature of participant observation and necessity for critical evaluation of methods and practices within anthropology.

Emma Siekkinen:

While participating in this project I learned how different study methods can be effortlessly mixed together. We had lectures, field trips, group works, individual work etc. Through this mix of different study methods I learned that it can be great to use different methods to approach different aspects and sometimes it can be necessary to mix these together. I also learned more about how to do fieldwork and how to gather necessary research materials. We visited Kohila and Kunda and these trips were very educational and interesting. In my opinion, these new skills learned through this project will be useful to me in my continuing studies and in my own study field.

Liselle Evert:

The experience gained during this project is quite diverse. The project gave a good idea of what research on a little bit bigger scale than regular school group work looks like. Overall, the experience varies from collaborative work to technical knowledge gained. I gained good experience on how to work with digital archives and how to do it more efficiently. The original project goals were reached. As a result of the project, a presentation on the desired topic was formed to address the questions raised. Although the form of presenting the results is different from the original idea, it still serves the same purpose. The different approach was a product of group discussions, therefore serving another purpose of the overall idea of LIFE projects.

Responsibility: Researching digital archives and collecting information from different Estonian newspapers about the Kunda Cement factory throughout the last century. Writing summaries about newspaper articles and forming a chronological story. Looking for pictures from digital archives for the final presentation of the project.