

# Remembrance Tourism: Maarjamäe Memorial Versus The Estonian Victims of Communism Memorial

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**Abstract:** The people of the Republic of Estonia experienced severe oppression and terror during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following their forced annexation into the Soviet Union. Additionally, the Soviet military can rightfully be credited with decisively driving Nazi Germany out of Estonia, during World War II. These related, but conflicting results, has resulted in two different memorials, and two radically different perspectives, located within 500 meters of each other, in the Estonian capital city of Tallinn. This research examines the impact of such confrontation in ideals and remembrance, through the promotion (or lack of), funding, and maintenance of history, through memorials in public space. This research addresses these questions through a comparison of two Memorials located within sight of each other, the Maarjamäe Memorial and the Estonian Victims of Communism Memorial, in Tallinn, Estonia. The comparison of the two Memorials highlights the challenges involved in the construct of remembrance, as well as the related construct of nostalgia, within markets such as Estonia that has two distinct ethnic groups, Estonian, and Russian, and how their respective views of the constructs shape the success or failure of such tourism attractions. The findings of this research will be of benefit to other regions with a similar past, when it comes to remembrance and reflection through tourism.

**Keywords:** tourism, memorialization, remembrance, Estonia, Russia, Post-Soviet

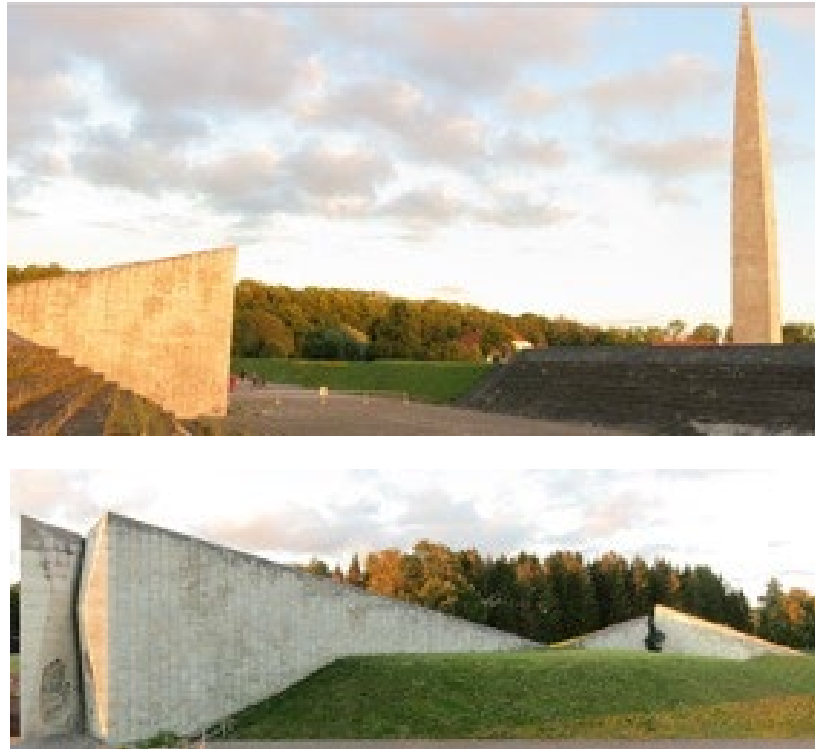
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## 1. Introduction

The people of the Republic of Estonia experienced severe oppression and terror during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following their forced annexation into the Soviet Union (Waldstein, 2007). At the same time, the historical reality is that the Soviet military can rightfully be credited with decisively driving Nazi Germany out of Estonia, during World War II. These related, but conflicting events, has resulted in two different memorials, and two radically different perspectives, located within 500 meters of each other, in the Estonian capital city of Tallinn. The positioning of these memorials exists within a country with a population of approximately two-thirds ethnic Estonians, and one-third ethnic Russians. Thus, a challenge resulting from the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Estonia has been how one should look back on this period, and to what extent nostalgia for the past has continued to reinforce ethnic divides.

With Estonia's return to independence in 1991, Estonians could overtly focus on what defined Estonian culture. The challenge that also resulted was how would Estonia's past be incorporated into these cultural freedoms? The concept of how one should market and promote Estonian culture and heritage would come into conflict with how nostalgia in general, and how nostalgia and tourism specifically, could or should be represented. This research examines the impact of such confrontation in ideals and remembrance, through the promotion (or lack of), funding, and maintenance of history, through memorials in public space.

Following the end of World War I, in 1918, the independent Republic of Estonia was established, which lasted until the Soviet/Nazi occupations, in 1939, with present day re-independence occurring in 1991. During the Soviet period, the Maarjamäe Memorial (Dragicevich et al. 2016) was designed and sculpted by ethnic Estonians, between 1960 and 1975 (See figure 1). Since the end of the Soviet period, the monument has received little support in terms of maintenance and has been the source of rumours as to its demolition (Cavegn, 2018). In contrast, the Estonian Victims of Communism Memorial, which was completed in August 2018, and is dedicated to those who were deported, imprisoned or executed by Soviet authorities and was funded by the Estonian Repressed Persons Assistance Fund and the Estonian state budget (BNN, 2017). The latter Memorial also includes a memorial wall for Estonian military officers killed during the communist period (Tambur, 2018) (see figure 2).



**Figure 1:** Maarjamäe Memorial (Source: Author, 2020)



**Figure 2:** Memorial to the Victims of Communism (Source: Author, 2020)

## **2. Research aim**

The focus of this research is to examine the impact that these two Memorials can, and will have, on how members of the public, both within, and outside of Estonia, remember the relevance of the events of Estonia's 20<sup>th</sup> century. The two Memorials are viewed within the context of how the voice of nostalgia is, or is not, part of the tourism perspectives and experiences of tourists with respect to the Memorials. As will be discussed, there exists a contested Estonian past, particularly the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the roles that these two Memorials have played as instruments of this past will be presented. This analysis will also focus on the comparison and contrast of the how ethnic Estonian and ethnic Russian populations within Estonia help and hinder the shaping of this past.

The layout of the remainder of the paper is as follows. The background literature looks at the role that Memorials play in the context of nostalgia and remembrance within former Soviet Republic of Estonia, by way of a high-level review of Memorials erected during the Soviet period. An analysis of the controversies relating to memorials erected in Estonia's capital city Tallinn, during the initial period of independence between the World Wars, and their existence during the Soviet period will then be reviewed.

The subsequent section will compare and contrast the two aforementioned Memorials, physically located within a few hundred metres of each other, and the implications to the ongoing tensions between the ethnic Estonian and ethnic Russian populations in Tallinn. The analysis is based upon citations within published, historic texts as well as travel guides and tourism ephemera. The paper then places the role of Memorials within the larger context of how different ethnic groups remember, or wish to be able to remember, conflicting views of history, and the role that Memorials continue to have in contemporary society. The paper concludes with a discussion of Memorials and Nostalgia and the role they play in changing political, social, and economic environments.

### **3. Nostalgia and Estonia**

The extent literature that has researched the role of nostalgia in Estonia has seen a growth in publications since Estonia's return to independence in 1991. Of major events since 1991, the most studied has been the conflict between ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians during Estonia's period of annexation into the Soviet Union (Jeffries, 2004). An area of conflict and tension that arose was how the ethnic Russian population was to be part of the re-independent Estonia (Küün, 2008). There were issues raised about citizenship as Estonia excluded what they labelled 'Soviet Immigrants'. These were people that moved to Estonia after June 1940, with the vast majority being ethnic Russians. Thus, approximately one third of the population of Estonia in the early 1990s was not automatically granted citizenship (Onken, 2007).

What these events have in common, and how they have an impact on the concept of nostalgia and tourism in Estonia, is that Estonia has taken a path of dealing with the past, but also forgetting it (Järä, 1999). The position taken has been often to ignore these events, and related criticisms, and redirect attention back to Estonia's and Estonians' suffering, that has been misunderstood outside Estonia (Lauristin et al. 1997). The challenge of taking this position with respect to tourism, specifically foreign tourism, is that other countries, particularly in this case Russia, shaping the narrative about Estonia's past if the attractions and memorials do not adequately present multiple perspectives to this past. This also represents a potential issue for Russian tourism to Estonia, as Russians represented the second largest group of tourists to Estonia after the Finns in 2019 (<https://www.stat.ee/news-release-2020-016>).

### **4. Memorials in Estonia**

The end of World War II represented two different realities in Estonia. In September 1944, Estonia's capital city Tallinn was either; (1) Liberated from fascism and Nazi occupation by the USSR; (2) Was occupied by USSR until 1991. The creation of memorials to Soviet war heroes and key victories of World War II became ubiquitous in the capital cities of each of the Soviet Republics. The so-called Bronze Soldier has received the most attention in terms of Soviet era memorials in Estonia. The Memorial (official name "Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn") was the most celebrated in Estonia, due to its central location in the capital city Tallinn. The site of the memorial was used as a meeting place to highlight Soviet power, commemoration of Red Army victories, and other anniversaries (Kaasik, 2006).

Although created by an ethnic Estonian, and depicting an ethnic Estonian soldier, the statue represented to many Estonians, the forced incorporation of Estonia within the Soviet Union. Unlike the numerous statues of Lenin that were removed within the early years after re-independence, the Bronze Soldier was not relocated from its existing spot to a military cemetery until 2007 (Smith, 2008). The ensuing riots, including deaths, that followed the move, were blamed on supporters and sanctioned agitators from Russia (Kuczynska-Zonik, 2016). The Russian press saw the relocation of the statue as a continuation of official anti-Russian provocations by Estonia's government (Vihalemm & Keller, 2011). The movement of the Bronze Solider was viewed as another overt step to downplay the role that the Soviet Union played in the liberation of Estonia from the Nazis (BBC News, 2007).

In fact, as noted by Bruns and Kangropool (1980), the Bronze soldier commemorated the role played by both the Soviet troops from Leningrad as well as the Estonian Rifle Corps, who although may have consisted of a number of ethnic Estonians, was created to serve the Soviet Union, not Estonia. The fact that the official name of the memorial was changed to "Monument to the Fallen in the Second World War", and not the original intent to memorialize those who fought to free Tallinn, increased ethnic Russian concerns, as the statue became a meeting place of ethnic Russians in Estonia, particularly on dates of personal relevance (i.e. weddings) or collective remembrance (i.e. May 9<sup>th</sup>, the end of World War II).

For Estonians the Bronze soldier, although intended to commemorate those who died in defeating Nazi Germany, also commemorated the period that saw the Soviet Union reoccupy Estonia (Kõresaar, 2011). Due to the controversies in 2007 a law was passed, the 'Law on Forbidden Structures', which would allow the removal of all statues and memorials in Estonia that depicted Soviet soldiers (Mark, 2008). With the reality of ongoing tensions as to the role of memorials in Estonia, the next section of this research compares and contrasts two exemplars of memorials that have received a great deal of tension, arguably manifested by the aforementioned conflict in remembrance by Estonian and Russian speakers in Estonia.

## **5. Maarjamäe Memorial**

The first memorial was designed, constructed, and dedicated during the Soviet period in Estonia, and continues to exist today. The Maarjamäe Memorial (also known as the Maarjamäe War Memorial) is located on the eastern border of Estonia's capital city Tallinn on the north coast of the country. The official stated purpose of the Maarjamäe Memorial as described on the official "visit estonia" (<https://www.visitestonia.com/en/maarjamae-memorial>), website is described as;

*...the Maarjamäe Memorial (designed by architect A. Murdmaa and sculptor M. Varik) stands on Pirita Road between the Lasnamäe plateau and Tallinn Bay. It was erected to those who had fallen defending the Soviet Union. The memorial is made up of both architectural and landscaping elements. At its centre stands a 35-metre obelisk, but the ensemble also includes the graves of the crews of the Avtroil and Spartak minesweepers, dolomite-lined walls, grass-covered slopes, the pathways between them and a bronze sculpture of a flock of birds.*

The first step in trying to place the Memorial within the context of Estonian nostalgia and tourism was to demonstrate the evolving nature, and branding, of the Maarjamäe Memorial. The goal was to provide additional descriptions of the Memorial, and to examine materials published during the Soviet period. The first, was a tourist souvenir guide sold in Soviet Estonia;

*...Monument to fighters for the Soviet power in Estonia...Many school leavers (graduates) and newlyweds come here to mark the beginning of a new stage in their lives (Gryaznov, 1982, pg. 32).*

A second example, also a Soviet Estonia tourist guide described the Memorial as;

*...dedicated to the memory of those who fell in the battles for Soviet power (Kallion, 1979, pg. 61).*

Not surprisingly there was lesser confusion as to the nature and purpose of the Maarjamäe Memorial, from the Soviet or Russian point of view during the Soviet period. In contrast, tourist guides that have been published since Estonia's return to independence have described the Memorial somewhat differently. Thus, to provide greater insight into how the positioning of the Maarjamäe Memorial, in terms of remembrance within Estonia, one of the most popular travel guide publications in Estonia, 'Tallinn in Your Pocket' was reviewed.

The section of the texts relating to the Maarjamäe Memorial were reviewed following the recommendation of Oswald (2007) to help clarify how constructs such as brand identity, brand personality, and associations the brand are communicated in relation to its history and in relation to the current social, political, and cultural environment in Estonia (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2008).

The perspective of the Maarjamäe Memorial often mirrored the conflicting views of the ethnic Estonian and ethnic Russian population in Estonia;

*...the pointed obelisk...a cement filled park similar in its imposing style to other large complexes created in the USSR in the 1960s and 70s. The spire was put up in 1960 in memory of Russians who died in 1918, while the surrounding inspirational concrete and iron figures were added in 1975 to honour Soviet soldiers killed trying to fend off the Nazis in 1941 (Tallinn in Your Pocket, April/May, 2009, pg. 58).*

The potential politicization of this definition of the Memorial lies in the fact that the description is included in a section labeled "Soviet Tallinn", rather than the more generic "Statues and Monuments" category which was the case a decade later in the same Guide;

*...The memorial is made up of many parts: the spire, in memory of Russians who died in 1918, the concrete and iron figures honouring Soviet soldiers killed trying to fend off the Nazis in 1941, the graves of the crews of the Avtroil and Spartak minesweepers, grassy slopes and pathways, and a*

*bronze sculpture of a flock of birds entitled "Perishing Seagulls", a symbol of the two political powers of the time (Tallinn in Your Pocket June/July, 2019, page 26).*

The fact that the Maarjamäe Memorial has suffered from neglect and deterioration since Estonia's return to independence has not been ignored. As noted by Martínez (2018), the Memorial area is viewed as something that is different, or representative of the other. The fact that the majority of the ethnic Russians in Estonia were born in Estonia, results in the further criticism from Russian populations within and outside of Estonia. Martínez (2018) further highlights that this separation of the Memorial as not being representative of an Estonian Memorial, results in a lessening of the site as a place of remembrance and mourning.

## 6. The Estonian Victims of Communism Memorial

The second memorial of study, the Memorial to The Victims of Communism, officially opened in Tallinn in 2018 (<https://www.memoriaal.ee/en/>). This Memorial was an addition to a growing number of Memorials in the world that are dedicated to the Victims of Communism. These Memorials are located in both countries that fought against Communism, such as Victims of Communism in Washington, DC (<https://www.victimsofcommunism.org/memorial>), and those that once were ruled by Communist governments such as the Gloria Victis Memorial in Hungary (<http://gloriavictis.hu/en/memorial.html>).

There has been controversy as to the purpose of such Memorials particularly by countries that continue to be governed within a Communist system such as China and Vietnam (Nordlinger, 2014). From the first announcement that such a Memorial was to be built in Tallinn, and specifically the chosen location, as it was to be located within approximately 500 meters from the Maarjamäe Memorial (see figure 3), there were protests raised in the Russian press, as there was an ongoing concern that Estonia was continuing to equate Nazism and the Soviet Union (Moscow Times, 2015). The concern for the Maarjamäe Memorial was heightened with the building of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, as there were voices to tear down the former as the latter was being built (Cavegn, 2018).



**Figure 3:** Relative location of the Two Memorials (Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/>)

Due to the recency of the establishment of this Memorial, there existed less published material, but the official website for the Memorial, (<https://www.memoriaal.ee/en/>) is entitled Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940-1991. The site allows people to search the database of those listed as Victims of Communism. The site is offered in Estonian, English, and Russian, although the search for names can only be made using the Estonian or English spelling of the name. The website states that the intent of the Memorial is to highlight that;

*...Estonia lost every fifth person of its population of slightly over a million as a consequence of the terror imposed by the occupying regime. A total of over 75,000 people from Estonia were murdered, imprisoned or deported. The Memorial to the victims of communism is dedicated to all of them! (<https://www.memoriaal.ee/en/>)*

The inclusion of the word 'Victims' in the name of the Memorial stoked controversy. The Memorial states that the Memorial remembers "those who perished, who were extrajudicially repressed or groundlessly convicted by the Soviet Union's occupying regime and were released, and also persons who were subject to deportation but whom the occupation authorities did not succeed in deporting." (<https://www.memoriaal.ee/en/>)

The use of the term "groundlessly convicted by the Soviet Union" implies that supporting Nazi troops could be considered "groundless", an anathema to many in Russia, while to ethnic Estonians, there was never a case of fighting with the Germans in World War II but rather the fight was against Communism (Feest, 2007). Estonian authorities contest the concerns that the Memorial is anti-Russian, in that although the site does not overtly state that the Memorial is solely focused on ethnic Estonians, a search of the database includes dozens of ethnic Russian names. The reality is that the ethnic Russian names included in the Memorial classified as victims, were considered victims because they cooperated with the Germans, or served in the German army. This furthered ethnic Russian issues that Estonia has never truly acknowledged its role in World War II (Melchior & Visser, 2011).

In terms of how the Memorial to the Victims of Communism has been described in tourist guides and books, the first inclusion in the aforementioned Tallinn In Your Pocket, was in November 2018, which had a picture of the Memorial on the cover, and states;

*... newly-opened striking memorial is dedicated to all Estonian people who suffered under the terror inflicted by the Soviet Union. There are two parts to the memorial - 'Journey' and 'Home Garden'. 'Journey' consists of name plaques of all the victims. Apple trees and honeybees are the symbols of the 'Home Garden', marking a place for the victims yet to be identified. Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union from June 17, 1940 to August 20, 1991. More than 75,000 Estonians were murdered, imprisoned or deported over this period. Estonia lost one of every five persons from its population of slightly over one million. (Tallinn In Your Pocket, October-November 2018, pg. 32).*

The June-July 2019 edition included the same description under a "Statues and Monuments" section, while beginning with the Winter 19/20 edition there was no longer a "Statues and Monuments" section, just the larger "Sightseeing" category. A major change occurred with the Summer 2020 edition (pg. 25), as the same description for the Memorial to the Victims of Communism again appears, but the Maarjamäe Memorial was no longer included in the guide.

## **7. Memorial comparisons**

As reviewed, both of the Memorials had a stated purpose. Beginning with the plan, approval, creation, and commemoration events that have occurred at the Memorial to The Victims of Communism the two Memorials have been conflated within the ethnic Estonian, ethnic Russia tensions within Estonia. The fact that funds were made available to create the new memorial while the condition of the Maarjamäe Memorial continued to deteriorate, was viewed in the Russian press, as revisiting the issue of the aforementioned Bronze Soldier as Estonia further silencing the role played by the Soviet Union/Russia in the liberation of Estonia and the defeat of Nazi Germany (Melchior & Visser, 2011).

From the planning of the Maarjamäe Memorial in 1960, to the opening of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in 2018, the meaning and purpose of the former has changed. As the Maarjamäe Memorial has been allowed to decay, while the Memorial to the Victims of Communism has become the site of remembrance for a number of Estonian anniversaries such as Independence Day in February, commemoration of deportations in June, as well as an annual ceremony as more names are added to the memorial wall, further lessens the potential for the Maarjamäe Memorial being part of those ceremonies, even though, as noted, the two Memorials are in sight of each other.

The concerns that have been raised in the Estonian ethnic Russia press, as well as the press from Russia specifically, are that the meaning, and intent, of the Maarjamäe Memorial has been allowed to change, and literally decay. These views were countered in the Estonian press as since there had been changes in the social order from the former Soviet period, that memorials and monuments should reflect that change.

## **8. Discussion and future study**

As noted by Walder (2014), the continued attempts by both individuals and groups to redefine the history and identities of their countries, within the guise of nostalgia, is often predicated on the removal of unpleasant occurrences of the past. As reviewed, there is little evidence to suppress the existence of atrocities and violence inflicted upon the people of Estonia during Soviet period. There is also a potential concern with the creation of single perspective memorials such as the Victims of Communism Memorial, and the concurrent limitation, or destruction of, those memorials that commemorate any Soviet/Russian role in the preservation of Estonian culture, or support provided to Nazi Germany during World War II. Furthermore, the existence of a large ethnic minority within a country such as the Russian population in Estonia, who have a differing view of the past, or the importance of memorials to their culture, may have an impact on the overall country identity to tourists outside of these groups.

Kattago (2008) stated that both social and political celebrations related to those that have died for a cause can change over time. The result is that memorial messages will also change from their intended purpose. With respect to nostalgia, and tourism, what does the fact that the Memorial to the Victims of Communism seems to solely focus on the remembrance and commemoration of Estonians within a country with a third of the population of ethnic Russians. The fact that the Maarjamäe Memorial continues to be listed as a site to be visited, in the major Estonian tourism guides and websites, particularly within the category of “Communist Estonia” highlights that outward nature of tourism marketing, indirectly voicing the need to maintain this Memorial.

Nostalgia, as an influence upon how visitors interpret a country and its people, through the existence of the two Estonian Memorials reviewed, highlights a continued area for study. To what degree does the influence of the official view of the past have on the creation of new memorials and the maintenance or neglect of existing memorials? What is the impact upon placing memorials with such conflicting positions on the past within such proximate distance of one another? What are the long-term consequences upon tourism, in this case visitors from Russian speaking countries, and what will be the future impact of such memorials in the preservation of certain ethnic groups to the exclusion of different ethnic groups?

Although this research examined only one geographic location, and two examples of commemorative structures or edifices, based on a limited range of tourism related materials, it none the less provides some insight into the role of brand identity, and brand management, from a longitudinal perspective. The research also helps to advance the call for additional research methodologies in terms of better understanding of linkages between Nostalgia and Tourism as represented by longitudinal studies of how memorials, monuments, and other historical remnants can be utilized, or exploited, beyond the original intent of their creation. As monuments and memorials can be intertwined with public memory, an increased challenge is how they are used when there are multiple memories and multiple, in this case, ethnic groups use them to support or suppress differing views.

It is suggested that there remains value in future studies that compare and contrast the findings of this form of research with other countries that have similar large ethnic minorities, such as Ukraine, Latvia, and Georgia. A continued examination of how their respective tourism sectors have benefited from, or been hindered by, the existence of such conflicting forms of remembrance, would be of interest.

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