

““The Great Escape” and the “Shetland bus” - two sides of the coin that shaped the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees”

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Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner  
Museum

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# Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum

- Established in 1919, when the War of Independence was still raging
- Dissolved in 1940 by the Soviets
- Started its activities in 1993 as a museum to commemorate General Johan Laidoner (head of Estonian armed forces in the War of Independence), officially re-established as the Estonian War Museum (EWM) in 2001
- EWM collects, preserves, researches and exhibits Estonian military history and heritage; carries out educational activities in military history, publishes scientific and popular science books on military history, cooperates with other similar organisations in Estonia and abroad – i.e. does everything a contemporary memory institution is supposed to do!

# Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum



# Our projects

- „Preserving memories about and of the victims of Soviet and Nazi crimes imprisoned in Patarei Merekindlus“ (Europe for Citizens)
- “Collaborative Digitization of Natural and Cultural Heritage” (INTERREG)
- ““The Great Escape” and the “Shetland bus” - two sides of the coin that shaped the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees”

# “The Great Escape” project – WHY?

- To widen the remembrance of the relatively little-known phenomenon of war refugees from Estonia and to Shetland during WWII in the context of the current refugee crises and the 65th anniversary of the UN Refugee Convention.
  - 80 000 Estonians (of whom 6-8% perished therein) fled from the forthcoming 2nd Soviet occupation in 1944
  - The Shetland Bus transported hundreds of agents and refugees between UK and Norway

# “The Great Escape” project and the Europe for Citizens Programme

- 2016 priority – *“Adoption of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in relation with the post WWII refugee situation in Europe”*
- Our project - *“As late as the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of refugees (mainly from the Soviet regime) still wandered aimlessly across Europe or were squatted in makeshift camps. This led to the adoption of the 1951 UN Convention on refugees - and this is the story the project builds on”*

# “The Great Escape” project – WHO?

- Partners:
  - Estonian War Museum (EST)
  - University of the Highlands and Islands Shetland College (UK)
  - The Baltic Initiative and Network (DEN)
  - Estonian Heritage Society (EST)
- We wanted to tell our story to our fellow Europeans and to learn about the situation in other countries (escaping, refugees etc)

# “The Great Escape” project – WHAT?

- Initially planned
  - Thematic seminars in Estonia and Shetland (2+2)
  - Final conference in Estonia (1)
  - Exhibitions in Estonia (1+1+e-exhibition)
- Additional ideas and post-project activities
  - “Film morning” in EWM
  - “Travelling exhibition” around Estonia
  - New research and future cooperation



# Project and international partnership – theory and practice (1)

- Always involve international partners!
  - Interesting & inspiring for (out-of-project) activities
  - Widens your perspective and focus
    - Especially if the partners are not from your neighbouring countries
  - Helps to achieve the objectives of the Programme
    - Improves your chances for a positive decision

# Project and international partnership – theory and practice (2)

- Where to find the partners?
  - Previous cooperation (Baltic Initiative and Network)
  - Professional and other networks (ICOM)
  - Matchmaking events
  - Search & find (Google)

# Project and international partnership – theory and practice (3)

- Be as flexible as possible, but regulate the relationship: who does what by when and how the finances are allocated
- Be ready for surprises: we had to change one of our partners

# Achievements and challenges: what happens after the project? (1)

- The project has achieved its objectives and results: people across Europe know more about the events that directly led to the adoption of 1951 UN Convention on Refugees
- New possible strands of research and cooperation between the core partners and new network members

# Achievements and challenges: what happens after the project? (2)

- Shall we apply in 2018 as well?
  - *The end of the WWI – the rise of nation states*
  - *Beginning of WWII*
  - *Beginning of the Cold War*
  - *The Hague Congress and the integration of Europe*
  - *Protest and civil rights movements, invasion to Czechoslovakia, student protests and anti-Semitic campaign in Poland*
- Yes of course!

- THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
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