

Delegation Brandenburg on the topic 'Sustainable development within the framework of Saksa Kevad'

Report on the fact-finding mission to Estonia from 18 - 20 September 2024

Travel Report by Jacek Jeremicz (Chamber of Industry and Commerce Frankfurt (Oder))

From September 18 to 20, 2024, a study trip was organised to Tallinn, Estonia. The main theme of the trip was "Sustainability in the European Context Using Estonia as an Example." It was guided by the framework of the EU Agenda 2030 and aimed to examine Estonia's current achievements and planned measures for sustainable development. Central to the visit were key questions about the implementation of sustainability goals in both Estonia and Brandenburg, fostering a comparative perspective on progress and challenges such as:

- What similarities exist?
- How do the approaches differ?
- What lessons can the partners learn from each other, and what opportunities for collaboration emerge?

The conference addressed and discussed the perspectives of various societal actors involved in the Agenda process and highlighted examples of and approaches to region-specific communication in the following areas:

- Networking among stakeholders in sustainable development
- Education for sustainable development
- Sustainability strategies

Day 1

On the first evening, a seminar took place with three Estonian scholars, who provided us with comprehensive insights into the topic "Sustainability in Estonia" from a scientific perspective. They underscored the significance of sustainability within the framework of the European Green Deal, which plays a significant role in Estonia's regional development. While academic programmes increasingly incorporate sustainability, a lack of qualified teachers remains a challenge, fuelling strong interest in enhanced cooperation with Germany. The scientists also stressed the importance of effective communication—particularly via social media and major conferences in Tallinn—in raising public awareness about sustainability issues. Additionally, they addressed the political influence of lobbying on the expansion of nuclear power, a prominent factor in Estonia. From an economic perspective, sustainability was framed as a vital opportunity for future development of the country.

Day 2

On the second day, we received detailed information on the political and economic situation in the country from Mr. Sauder, a permanent representative of the German Embassy in Estonia.

Germany holds a strong reputation in Estonia due to the deep historical ties between both countries. Currently, oil shale remains Estonia's primary energy source, though the country

plans to phase out fossil fuels entirely by 2040. Given that renewable energy accounts for only 35 % of the energy mix, this ambitious plan sparked critical discussions. However, Estonia aims to eliminate dependence on Russian energy sources by 2025.

Climate change has become an increasingly pressing issue in Estonia, significantly shaping its sustainability initiatives. Trade with Germany amounts to around 3.1 billion euros per year. While there are currently no town partnerships between Estonia and Brandenburg, there is substantial interest in cooperation. Due to high energy prices, the Estonian industry is struggling with competitiveness, while the IT sector is considered to be future-oriented. Estonia aims to establish itself as the "Singapore of Europe."

Another highlight of the day was a visit to the E-Estonia Briefing Centre, where we were able to experience the country's highly developed digitalisation system in action. 99 % of public services are digitalised, and administrative processes can be almost entirely conducted online. It was especially impressive to see how older people in rural areas are supported in their digitalisation efforts through special funding programmes.

At the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Agriculture (MRAL), we learned about the administrative restructuring that followed the 2017 territorial reform. The discussion centred on development and implementation of the National Sustainability Strategy 2035, which has been in effect since 2021. Local mayors are playing an active role in bringing the strategy to life within their communities. Participants underscored the state's role as a service provider, with a strong focus on incorporating renewable energy into public procurement processes and the planned phase-out of fossil fuels.

The day concluded with a meeting with civil society representatives to discuss regional development and the green transformation. Topics such as rural development and stakeholder networking were explored in depth with the Estonian LEADER Union, revealing numerous parallels with Brandenburg's experiences.

Day 3

On the final day, we were received at Tallinn City Hall by Ms. Krista Kampus, Head of the EU and External Cooperation Office of the Tallinn Strategy Centre. She provided an overview of the city's approach to sustainable governance, which earned Tallinn the title of European Green Capital in 2023. Tallinn has set ambitious goals for sustainable urban development, including the introduction of free public transport as early as 2013. By 2035, the city aims for 70% of its residents to rely on public transport and move away from private car ownership. The city focuses on specific projects in the areas of urban green spaces, climate protection, and waste reduction, many of which are already visible across the city.

To conclude the trip, we visited the headquarters of BOLT, where we were introduced to the company's "Green Tiger" initiative — a network of 96 companies promoting sustainable development in Estonia. A notable aspect was that many members of the network have already actively implemented principles of the circular economy. BOLT itself presented its vision: "Developing a City for People Without Cars." The company aims to become climate-neutral by 2040 and is working intensively to prepare for European sustainability reporting (CSRD).

Conclusions for Brandenburg and Future Cooperation

The exchange with Estonia's sustainability network "Green Tiger" was extremely insightful — participation in the German-Polish Sustainability Conference in 2025 is possible.

The motivation of Estonian network members can serve as inspiration for the establishment of similar networks in Brandenburg.

Insights into the digitalisation of public administration in Estonia offer valuable suggestions for Brandenburg.

Information on Estonia's political and economic situation is relevant for Brandenburg-based companies interested in international markets.

Estonian approaches to sustainability at national and local levels can serve as models for Brandenburg-based businesses.

The contacts made will be used for preparations for a climate policy educational trip in 2025 along Rail Baltica, planned by the August Bebel Institute and the Association of German Railway Engineers.



Visit to the E-Estonia Briefing Centre



Visit to the German Embassy Tallinn



Discussions at the Ministry (MRAL)



Discussions at Tallinn City Hall

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment, and Climate Protection, particularly to Dr Martin Pohlmann, and to the German Embassy for the excellent organisation of the study trip. The journey provided valuable insights that I will incorporate into my further work in Brandenburg and beyond.

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