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VÕRO INSTITUTE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2024 – 2028

Võru 2023

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Introduction

The Võro Institute is a research and development institution under the Ministry of Culture established in 1995. Since 2015, the institute has two departments: the research and development department and the museum department. The goals and activities of the institute are focused on supporting the preservation and development of the language and culture of Võro people in Old Võromaa (Figure 1).

The Võro Institute's development plan is a document that's compliance by the management and employees ensures the fulfillment of the institute's goals and its sustainable development. The development plan supports the institute's management in making essential decisions. The development plan defines the institute's goals for five years, and the planned activities to achieve these goals. Based on the institute's strategy, an action plan is drafted annually.



Figure 1. Old Võromaa and its eight parishes: Hargla, Kanepi, Karula, Põlva, Rõuge, Räpina, Urvaste and Vastselliina.

The development plan is prepared based on the following legislation and strategic documents:

1. Statute of the Võro Institute
2. The Act on the Organization of Research and Developmental Activities
3. The Language Act
4. The Museum Act
5. Cultural Development Plan 2021-2030
6. Estonian Language Development Plan 2021-2035
7. Conditions and procedures for supporting the traditional culture of Old Võromaa
8. Võro County Development Strategy 2035+
9. Põlva County Development Strategy 2035+

To prepare the development plan, a working group was formed. All employees were allowed to make suggestions and additions. The development plan is coordinated with the Research Council.

Description of the Current Situation

The research and development department of the Võro Institute consists of qualified national/ethnic sciences researchers. Research goal is to enrich the cultural and linguistic space of Old Võromaa. Research areas include grammar, vocabulary, place names, and person names.

In terms of research, the work continues with the gathering and researching both the ancient and modern Võro language. Innovative language research applications, such as modern language technology solutions, language learning tools, and interactive language learning systems are created for Võro language. Võro and other Finnic place and person names are being studied. The field of research will be expanded in the directions of ethnology and folkloristics to implement the goals of the convention on the protection of spiritual heritage, which would support the vitality of the Võro language, culture, and community. Formulating and researching the spiritual cultural heritage of Old Võromaa helps to understand and enrich the original local cultural practices. Research results in the field of ethnology and folkloristics are primarily applied in the activities of the museum department, but also more broadly in the development work done for the entire cultural space.

The development activities are divided into four sub-categories:

- Publication of prints and digital solutions
- Trainings and counseling
- Organizing events
- Activities that connect and highlight the Võro cultural space.

The field is managed by project managers, while researchers and specialists participate in projects when needed. Museum department employees also participate in training and consulting activities as well as in event planning. Efforts are made to promote the use of the Võro language and culture more widely in Võro schools and kindergartens. For this purpose, educational and informational materials are published, and various initiatives are organized for the target groups in the field of education. In addition, museum lessons introducing the Võro language and culture are offered. The development plan for Võro-language language nests is implemented (approved by RC decision 63/3 dated 03.04.2020). The scope of the use of the Võro language is expanded: Võro-language media, literature,

and virtual applications are created, and Võro-language events are organized. To promote entrepreneurship connected to Võro cultural idiosyncrasies, the institute seeks to establish a regional development program for the Old Võromaa region from the state. In collaboration with local governments, various organizations, and community representatives, the institute is prepared to lead the implementation of the program's substantive activities. We plan to strengthen international collaboration with European multilingual communities, researchers of European regional languages, and research institutions, as well as to continue cooperation with researchers of other Finnic languages and cultures in the Baltic Sea region.

Strategy

Mission

The main goal of the Võro Institute is to promote research and development in specific issues related to the historical region of Võromaa, focusing on its linguistic and cultural uniqueness, maintaining its vitality, and introducing local cultural heritage.

Vision

In the region, people freely and proudly communicate in the Võro language. The people of Võro believe that living in their native area is prestigious. Võro culture is known and respected both in Old Võromaa and throughout Estonia.

Goals

1. The local governments of Old Võromaa value the Võro language and culture in their daily activities.

Indicator: Observations show a more frequent use of the Võro language in meetings, events, and gatherings compared to 2021.

Expected outcome: The Võro language is viable.

2. All schools in Old Võromaa teach the Võro language.

Indicator: The curriculum of all schools in Old Võromaa emphasizes the teaching of the Võro language.

Expected outcome: The Võro language remains viable in the future.

3. At least one Võro-language kindergarten group has been established in every parish of Old Võromaa.

Indicator: Võro-language kindergarten groups (language nests) are established in every original parish.

Expected outcome: The Võro language remains viable in the future.

4. Families are able to use the Võro language in everyday life, in any situation.

Indicator: Survey results confirm that families have the opportunity.

Expected outcome: The Võro language is heard more in the community than before.

5. Research covers all areas of Võro culture.

Indicator: Over five years, research has been initiated or continued in every field of Võro culture.

Expected outcome: Võro culture is better researched and introduced to society.

6. The museums of Old Võromaa have satisfactory conditions for collecting, preserving, and presenting Võro culture so that they are well-known and valued nationwide as places to explore the cultural heritage of Old Võromaa, and as partners for the Võro community.

Indicator: Satisfaction survey results show an improvement in working conditions.

Expected outcome: Museums are valued workplaces, keepers, and promoters of the Võro culture.

7. Entrepreneurs proudly present the origin of their local products or the unique characteristics of their local services.

Indicator: Observation results demonstrate a greater use of the Old Võromaa emblem, and other symbols compared to 2021.

Expected outcome: Old Võromaa is more valued in Estonia than before.

8. The Võro community feels belonging to their common cultural space, and the Võro people collaborate with each other.

Indicator: At least two common events are held annually, or collaborative projects are launched.

Expected outcome: Old Võromaa becomes a cohesive cultural and business hub.

Goals and Activities

E-1. The local governments of Old Võromaa value the Võro language and culture in their daily activities.

T-1.1. Training sessions and common events introducing Võro culture are organized for municipal employees and politicians.

Clarification: Events are organized sector by sector for various groups at least twice a year.

T-1.2. Conducting a study that explores the approaches used to introduce the region's uniqueness in other countries.

T-1.3. Organizing a reputation-building campaign.

Clarification: Developing and implementing the campaign with the help of a public relations specialist. Familiarizing with project requirements for entities such as the European Commission, Erasmus+, Interreg, Norway, etc., and if possible, writing project proposals and executing the projects.

T-1.4. Cooperation is intensified with the Põlva county development center, Valga county development agency, and Võro county development center.

T-1.5. Cooperation with local governments in distributing Võro-language gifts to newborns continues.

T-1.6. Local governments are asked to participate in the preparation and implementation of the Võro language week and other events.

Clarification: Symbolic events for the Võro language week are held each year in a different municipality. In collaboration with the NGO Võro Selts VKKF, the Summer University events are organized each year in different municipalities, etc.

T-1.7. It is proposed that the Võro language be spoken at every local government meeting and other gatherings.

1.8. It is proposed that the preservation of the Võro language and culture be a recurring theme in every development plan and other strategic documents of local governments in Old Võromaa.

E-2. In all kindergartens and schools in Old Võromaa, the Võro language is taught.

T-2.1. A proposal is made to the Ministry of Education and Research to increase funding for supporting the learning of Võro language.

T-2.2. Existing educational materials are introduced to kindergarten and school leaders, as well as teachers.

T-2.3. New educational materials are composed for all age groups in general education.

T-2.4. The support for continuing education for kindergarten and schoolteachers on the Võro language and culture continues.

T-2.5. Regular meetings are organized for municipal education advisors, kindergarten, and school leaders to introduce Võro culture.

Clarification: A pilot group for introducing the Võro language and culture is established to develop and expand basics and activities.

T-2.6. The sample syllabus for addressing the Võro language and culture in the school curriculum is updated and introduced to education leaders and teachers.

T-2.7. The advantages of knowing the Võro language and culture for advancing one's career are explained.

T-2.8. Training days introducing the Võro language and culture are organized for parents.

T-2.9. Events such as excursions, hikes, social gatherings, are arranged to encourage interaction among children and youth from different parishes.

E-3. At least one Võro-language kindergarten group (language nest) has been established in each parish of Old Võromaa.

T-3.1. Experience seminars are arranged to introduce good examples.

T-3.2. Participation in municipal and kindergarten events and meetings continues to reiterate the importance of the Võro language proficiency.

T-3.3. A proposal is made to the Ministry of Education and Research to support the activities of Võro-language kindergarten groups.

T-3.4. The encouragement of kindergartens' activities continues through the distribution of awards, educational materials, etc.

T-3.5. Discussion meetings are organized for municipal leaders and education managers on the preservation of the Võro language and culture in kindergartens.

T-3.6. The activities outlined in the Võro Language Nest development plan (Appendix 1) continue to achieve the objectives listed in the plan.

E-4. Families are able to use the Võro language in everyday life, in any situation.

T-4.1. The website helüait.ee is updated and advertised.

- T-4.2. Võro language refresher courses are organized for service providers and language enthusiasts.
- T-4.3. Collaboration with ERR and other media channels continues to promote the production and distribution of Võro-language programs.
- T-4.4. Folk theaters and other creative outlets are encouraged to use the Võro language.
- T-4.5. The compilation and publishing of Võro-language books continues.
- T-4.6. The support for creating Võro-language songs, including choir songs, continues, and choirs are encouraged to include these songs in their repertoire.
- T-4.7. Local governments are encouraged to add Võro-language information to their websites, and assistance will be provided in doing so.
- T-4.8. Event organizers and entrepreneurs are encouraged to use the Võro language.
- T-4.9. It is recommended to prioritize Võro-language names when choosing place names.

E-5. Research covers all areas of Võro culture.

- T-5.1. To support teachers and learners, the Võro language grammar is prepared and described.
- T-5.2. Planning and conducting applied research based on archive and other materials (folk tales, ethnic costumes, culinary heritage, folk songs, sauna traditions, etc.).
- T-5.3. Researching person and place names, collecting place names if possible, explaining and introducing the origins of names, naming conventions, and recommending the reintroduction of historical names.
- T-5.4. Analyzing, organizing, and presenting materials related to the Võro-language literature.
- T-5.5. Research on the Võro language and its usage, including analyzing the dynamics of Võro language users based on the census data.
- T-5.6. Integrated language technology and language resources for Võro and Seto languages.
- T-5.7. Consultations regarding research and the popularization of science.
- T-5.8. Issuing a periodic research journal and organizing research conferences.

E-6. The museums of Old Võromaa have satisfactory conditions for collecting, preserving, and presenting Võro culture so that they are well-known and valued nationwide as places to explore the cultural heritage of Old Võromaa, and as partners for the Võro community.

- T-6.1. Monitoring the implementation of the development plan for museums in Old Võromaa (Appendix 2)
- T-6.2. Applying for budgetary funds for museums in Old Võromaa, distributing them, and controlling their use.
- T-6.3. Arranging information campaigns within the Võro community to highlight that the museums in Old Võromaa are excellent places to explore the historical and traditional customs, and other cultural heritage of the Võro people.

E-7. Entrepreneurs proudly present the origin of their local products or the unique characteristics of their local services.

- T-7.1. Informing, advising, and training entrepreneurs on how to use local cultural heritage in production and marketing.
- T-7.2. Promoting products or services of entrepreneurs representing local uniqueness.
- T-7.3. Making a proposal to the Ministry of Finance to increase the funding for regional development in Old Võromaa.
- T-7.4. Increasing the visibility of the Old Võromaa brand and encouraging its use.

T-7.5. The support for networks such as handicrafts, tourism, local food, smoke sauna, etc., continues, including the management of the online store Uma Puut (umapuut.ee).

9. E-8. The Võro community feels belonging to their common cultural space, and the Võro people collaborate with each other.

T-8.1. Arranging discussions for people living and working in Old Võromaa on heritage preservation and building a common identity.

T-8.2. Developing shared principles of action for promoting Old Võromaa culture, similar to the Latvian example.

T-8.3. Initiating proposals to the Ministry of the Interior and governing bodies for the establishment of local government in Old Võromaa.

T-8.4. Continuing collaboration with the Kultuurileht foundation for issuing the newspaper *Uma Leht* and other Võro-language publications.

T-8.5. Continuing collaboration with the NGO Võro Selts VKKF in organizing the Võro-language song festival and other events.

T-8.6. Encouraging the use of symbols of Old Võromaa, including its flag.

T-8.7. Promoting the use of ethnic clothing originating from various Old Võromaa parishes and other developmental activities for expanding the daily use of cultural elements inherent in Võro culture.

T-8.8. Supporting and maintaining connections with the Võro communities living in Old Võromaa and beyond.

Procedures for Updating the Development Plan

The Director of the Võro Institute is responsible for arranging the updating of the development plan. The implementation of the development plan's activities and the achievement of its goals are evaluated annually, before the preparation of the budget for the following year, along with the employees and the advisory board. If necessary, activities planned for achieving the goals are adjusted, and new goals and activities are added.

The new development plan is prepared in accordance with the procedures prescribed by law under one or more of the following conditions: a) the end of the development plan period, b) changes in the vision of the Võro Institute, c) the early achievement of goals.