

# Research and Development Activities of the Estonian National Museum 2023-2027

## Main strategic goals

- 1 High international level of academic research at the ENM*
- 2 Diverse and high-quality outcomes of research*
- 3 Research at the ENM serves the social interests and needs of Estonia*
- 4 Research communication is an inseparable part of research*

## Main research strands

When outlining its main research strands, the Estonian National Museum seeks to consider a growing need in society to interpret contemporary sociocultural processes and changes in a historical as well as a global and cultural/theoretical context. As in cultural sciences at large, we feel an increasing responsibility to contribute to the cultural, social, economic, and ecological sustainability of society through both basic and applied research.

The Estonian National Museum is an ethnological research center with a long scholarly tradition. In addition to its international research, the museum plays a unique cultural and social role in Estonia, presenting its research results to the public through exhibitions, Estonian-language scholarly and popular science publications, educational programs, and information centers of folk culture. The ENM's academic activities combine research and museum work. The museum's research activities focus on the use of its collections, while another strategic part of its research efforts concerns the growth of the museum collections and exhibition activities.

In accordance with the ENM's statutory objectives, a special feature of the museum as a research institution is its direct contact with the general public. Largely owing to its collections, broad-based educational activities and open communication with audiences, the museum has advantages over other research and development institutions when addressing the public, receiving feedback, and becoming aware of the needs of the public as it offers analyses on cultural changes.

Considering the requirement of methodological heterogeneity in the study of culture, the museum's research is thematically diverse as it covers various fields and sub-cultures of Estonian

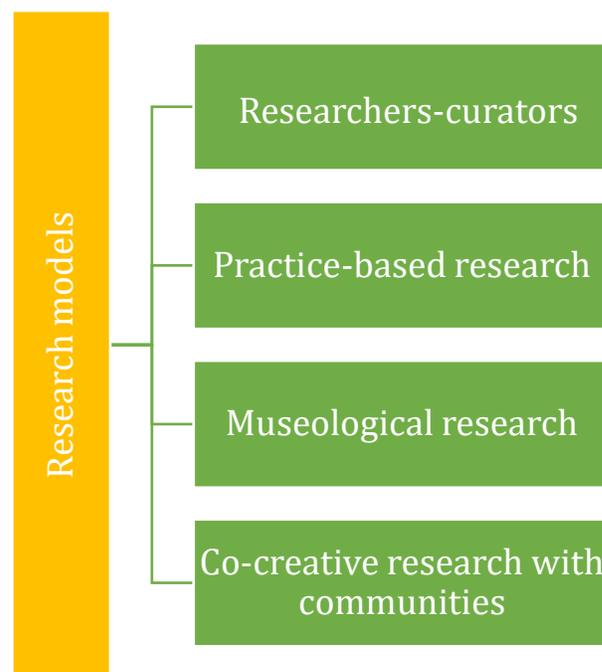
culture and Finno-Ugric cultures and applies both historical and contemporary perspectives. As a national museum, the ENM studies and documents manifestations of Estonian identity and regional cultural diversity as well as the forms of material and spiritual culture characteristic of the country. It likewise analyzes cultural changes and cultural influences in a local and a global context.

The ENM studies and advises enterprises, tourism developers, identity policy makers, creative people and practitioners of folk culture who use cultural heritage and interpret it as a cultural resource. The ENM provides expertise in addressing societal and cultural challenges (balanced regional development, ethnic relations, sustainable lifestyle practices, etc.).

Being a museum, the central output of the ENM is exhibition activities. The exhibitions curated by the museum's research staff are based on the original research of the museum's scholars and their academic partners, and they are informed by the main research strands of the ENM.

The ENM's research is divided into two main areas: Estonian and Finno-Ugric ethnology and museology, which serve as a basis for sectoral consultancy activities. The nature of research problems also presupposes cross-sectoral, cross-institutional and cross-border cooperation.

The museum applies a research model that encompasses different forms of research (Ill. 1).



**Illustration 1.** Research models at the Estonian National Museum (adapted: Sigfúsdóttir, 2022)

**Researchers-curators.** Scholars trained to work at the museum have competencies in using ethnological museum collections and archival sources in research. The outcomes of this work are both publications meeting academic standards and exhibitions targeted towards a broader audience.

**Practice-based and artistic research.** Academic research and museum work are entangled, creating new knowledge through integrating theory and practice. In such research, exhibition is an analytic tool and a form of research, not just a form of dissemination. Educational programs and other public events may also be outcomes of artistic research.

**Museology.** Museological research is targeted at analyzing the museum as a public institution, involving user surveys and organization development and enhancing reflexive approach within the museum organization. Research at the ENM also aims to develop the broader museum field in Estonia and at the international level.

**Research cooperation with communities.** Citizen science or a model of co-creation by different stakeholders of common public knowledge is not a new phenomenon but common data gathering has developed into a more advanced cooperation with diverse minority and cultural groups. The public is also involved into contextualization and interpretation of data in order to increase the museum's openness and social relevance. At the ENM, the research department plays a supportive role in this process while the communities are chiefly engaged through collecting, education and exhibitions.

### A Estonian and Finno-Ugric ethnology

Ethnological research at the Estonian National Museum aims at studying cultural heritage, changes, processes and practices on the individual, collective and social levels. The studies that focus on cultural changes on the individual level problematize everyday culture in Estonia both in the historical and contemporary contexts and analyze its role in the development of worldviews, social attitudes and values.

The research focuses on the modernization and globalization of Estonian everyday culture and ways of life in the context of these processes. An exploration of everyday life – how people organize their daily lives, their routines and main practices, and the processes of meaning making – allows us to interpret more complex cultural patterns and cultural changes as well.

Studies focusing on cultural memory, cultural changes and cultural influences as well as collective meaning making at the societal level encompass the exploration of the national, cultural, and regional (subcultural) identity of the Estonian and Finno-Ugric peoples, as well as the impact of various political and social factors and changes on Estonian culture and identity. Questions about the possibility of preserving cultural diversity in a globalizing and culturally homogeneous world frame the attempt to interpret cultural diversity and cultural influences. The research contributes to the preservation of material, spiritual and collective forms of Estonian culture.

As part of the study of collective cultural processes, we also look at the use of cultural heritage and history: its contemporary interpretations and applications, including the creation and use of cultural heritage as a social resource in business, tourism, community mobilization, politics and local identity preservation, and cultural heritage as a source of inspiration in the practicing of folk culture and in creative efforts. Our research on cultural heritage can be placed in the wider European and global context of cultural heritage, and it also has the potential to contribute to

cultural policy-making, cultural heritage as a source of inspiration in amateur activities, professional creative work and everyday life.

The studying of cultural heritage of Estonians and kindred peoples is related to a broader context of European and global cultural heritage, and this enables us to contribute to shaping cultural policies. Interpretation of the history of the discipline frames the research orientations on both the individual and social levels: Estonian and Finno-Ugric ethnology as the history of the ethnonational sciences and its impact on the ideas of nationalism, identity building, cultural memory, and related museum collections.

### Main research strands

- EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND LIFESTYLES
- CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
- HISTORY OF ESTONIAN AND FINNO-UGRIC ETHNOLOGY

Research and exhibition activities in the field of Estonian ethnology focus on modernization processes and adaptation strategies of everyday life in the 20th-21st centuries in the context of social changes as well as contemporary interpretations and applications of cultural heritage. The working group continues the studies of home culture and food culture, particularly in the Soviet period, cultural interpretations of the body as well as contemporary new spirituality and reuse. Collecting the material on everyday life of Estonian diaspora communities abroad (the Collections Department) is developed further by academic analysis of material and spiritual culture of Estonians living in the West and in the East. In addition to scholarly articles, commented source publications (everyday life in the Soviet period, diaspora culture, colonization history) and monographs (diaspora culture) are scheduled to be published.

### Ongoing projects

#### History of Estonian ethnology (2019-2027)

The object of the study is the emergence and influence of ethnographic knowledge in the interplay of changing political power, ideologies and scientific theories. Ethnology/ethnography in Estonia is examined in its scientific-historical, cultural-historical, social-historical and regional contexts. The approach is hermeneutic, reflexive and interpretive. A special object of interest is the role of ethnology/ethnography as a national science in the formation of the Estonians' self-identity and in the construction and functioning of the Estonian society throughout the 20th century. Outputs: Based on previous and ongoing studies, academic articles as well as an Estonian-language collective monograph on the history of Estonian ethnology in the 19th and 20th centuries will be published in Estonian and English. The project also involves popularization of the field, including exhibition activities and complementing the collections with scientific-historical materials (interviews, materials from researchers' personal archives, AV).

## Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia: analysis of the mutual interactions of ethnicity and religiosity (2022-2026)

The project focuses on studying the ethnic and religious self-identification of eastern Finno-Ugric peoples, their connections and the meanings attached to them both on the individual and collective levels. The researchers examine the manifestations of ethnic identities of the Finno-Ugric minorities and the related practices in everyday life and presentations in the media. Alongside with the understandings and practices of the culture carriers, attention is paid to representations and narratives reflecting ethnic belonging outside the communities. The research builds on web-based fieldwork and analysis of archival materials. The leading partner of the project is the University of Tartu.

## B Museology and artistic research

The aim of the research strand is to respond to the changes taking place in the fields of cultural heritage and museums through academic research. It focuses on museum issues today and the development of the museum and cultural heritage sector. Some research problems of this strand are thus idiosyncratic, while others are closely related to the overall functioning of institutions in the context of structural and cultural changes. Answering the research questions related to the planning, execution and analysis of exhibitions and other museum work requires multidisciplinary, collaborative, and co-creative research that takes an active role in international dialogues and museum policy debates.

The ENM's museum research is informed by auditoriums and communication studies which provides a theoretical framework for issues of audience participation, engagement, and representation of different cultural groups. The research is placed in the context of different forms of cooperation, improved engagement of existing interest groups and audiences, as well as the addressing of new visitor groups and stakeholders (different socio-cultural groups, public and private sector).

Digital communication and access to cultural heritage bring about changes in the way museums work, but this must also be accompanied by a critical analysis of museums in the context of digitalization and data acquisition, and research into the phenomenon of digitalization itself. The research strand combines the processes taking place in the physical, on-site space of museums as well as the representation of museums and cultural heritage in the digital environment. Therefore, it is potentially necessary to apply data science and computational methods. Currently, the research has focused primarily on the aspects of digitalization in exhibition communication.

Similarly to the research on the history of ethnography, the museology research strand has a certain historical dimension as the two strands are united by an interest in museum collections and their origins, as well as in issues related to the use and development of collections. Thus, questions about heritage representations and interpretations are raised, including questions about access, communication, ownership, identity, as well as related art and design practices.

The research strand of museology is integrated with artistic research. To meet the multifaceted challenges in the fields of museum communication and museum development, we use an

experimental approach that views the museum as a research method and museum-based research and its results as open and dynamic. At the heart of the approach is a multidisciplinary exhibition activity that combines research based on scientific and artistic practice.

Artistic research is also represented in the ENM by visual anthropological research. We are developing visual anthropology into a discipline that can create independent research outputs across the main research strands or support either methodically or theoretically interdisciplinary qualitative research. The research methods characteristic of visual anthropology have historically been applied and are also currently applied in Estonian and Finno-Ugric ethnology.

The museology strand is built upon international cooperation with research institutions, museums and specific researchers through collaborative projects of various scales. Although the ENM does not act as a provider of formal education in museology, an important output of its work is the provision of museum education through various levels of study.

### Main research strands

- MUSEUM PRACTICES IN POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXTS
- CULTURAL ANALYSIS BASED ON MUSEOLOGICAL ARTISTIC RESEARCH

### Research projects

#### Museums of impact (2020-2025)

The research aims at helping the cultural sector and organizations of cultural heritage to increase their social impact. The researchers participate in interdisciplinary studies analyzing the influence of datafication and digitalization on the practices of museum organizations and their relationships with audiences. The ENM's research group participates in the project from an action research perspective, providing analyses at both macro and micro level and contributing knowledge and competencies derived from previous research in addition to the application, collection, and analysis of new data. Outputs: academic articles, arendustegevusi toetavad tööriistad, consultancy activities.

#### Communication of the ENM's permanent exhibitions (2017-2023)

The research focuses on the use practices of ENM exhibitions and the design and technological development aspects based on different users (auditoriums, curators). Drawing upon interdisciplinary research that primarily combines approaches from museum studies and media and communication studies, we analyze the innovative and creative opportunities offered today by the museum and cultural heritage. Our research, which combines basic and applied research, provides both an applied (direct input for the development of current exhibitions and new exhibitions) and a theoretical output.

#### Ethnology of nightlife (2021-2024)

The ethnology of urban nightlife explores the motives, strategies, and practices of creating, experiencing, and regulating nightlife in the past and present. The research questions also

concern the moral and political perspective and the manifestations of inclusion and marginalization, the gentrification of nightlife and possibilities of a democratic use of public urban space at night. The object of the research is primarily the so-called alternative culture, which is creative, experimental, culturally diverse and significant in terms identity formation, and its position in the context of wider social processes. Outputs: academic articles and publications based on artistic research methods, exhibition.

### C Dissemination and consultancy activities

Apart from academic research, a substantial part of the ENM's work involves professional scientific communication and information and consultancy activities. The purpose of the ENM's Cultural Heritage Study Centre, which operates as a subdivision of the Research Department, is to preserve and celebrate cultural heritage as well as use and make sense of the heritage. The main outputs of the Centre include: research-based consulting; development of training programs (including online thematic and object databases, digital instruction materials); documenting heritage skills and making them available online; organizing trainings, seminars, lectures, and workshops; compiling popular scientific publications on folk culture; exhibition activities; research into the use of cultural heritage (including the phenomenon of folk costume schools, use of national patterns, practice of national handicrafts). The Centre works closely together with other institutions in the field, including the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy, the Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union, NGO Rahvarõivas, the Estonian Song and Dance Festival Foundation, etc. The Centre co-operates internationally with other folk culture researchers and popularizers, offering consultations and, if necessary, supervising research both in Estonia and internationally.

The Centre is involved in academic research projects through its contributions to research and development of applied outputs. It participates in the production of publications, the development of applied activities, and the search for outputs and dissemination platforms, including the development of digital resources. Such interconnectedness ensures that the Information Centre will apply the latest results of the museum's academic research, expanding its thematic competence and thus better meeting the expectations and needs of the museum's wider target groups.

## Administration

Administrative activities focus on the following goals:

- Adequacy and timeliness of administrative resources. Administrative services offered by the institution respond to the needs of academic work. These needs are revised and updated annually.
- Mapping of the services and resources offered by the department, revision and pricing of the services needed.
- Timeliness of the procedures.
- We support the establishment and sustainability of research groups connected with the main academic fields of responsibility, including cooperation with other academic research institutions and universities and cooperation with international research groups.
- We support research-based development, applications for research and development projects and capability of effective research administration
- We rely on inclusive management in the research and development process.
- We support the improvement of the working environment in accordance with the development plan of the Estonian National Museum
- We support the development of publishing policy in the context of open science and compliance with the criteria of academic publishing

## Implementation of the strategy

- The Research Council, director and research director of the ENM are responsible for the implementation of the strategy. The museum's administration, management and supportive structure makes the decisions needed to support the fulfilment of the strategy. The strategy builds on the development plan of the ENM.
- Implementation of the strategy is discussed annually at the meetings of the Research Council and the Research Department, for mid-term evaluation internal seminars or collaborative seminars with main partners of research and development may be organized.
- The action plan of strategic goals, chief indicators of evaluation of results and structure of posts needed for their implementations are outlined in the appendixes of the present strategy (1-3).

# Appendix 1

## Main activities and results

MAIN ACTIVITIES	RESULT
<i>Goal 1 Internationally high academic level of research at the ENM</i>	
Establishment of fixed-term research groups to study specific topics, development of research-based publication strategy and definition of the roles of researchers to fulfil it.	The employees of the research department have been divided into three research groups: Estonian everyday culture, history of Estonian ethnology and museology and artistic research. Minimum requirements regarding the volume and quality of publications have been established for researchers. Consequently, the number of high-level research publications increases significantly compared to the previous period (2016-2020).
Theoretical and methodological innovation of research	<p>In the field of Estonian everyday culture we focus on umbrella topics uniting researchers – everyday life in the Soviet period and contemporary heritage interpretations, particularly on the example of food culture. Methodologically, the aim is to move from the descriptive and systematizing study of single topics towards source critical and holistic approach. When examining food culture, we rely on methods tested and proved to be effective during a pilot project funded by the EU Astra measure (2017-2020) for the involvement of entrepreneurs and developers in the food sector into research and popularization.</p> <p>In cooperation with the Cultural Heritage Study Centre we aim at moving from crafts counselling towards interpretation of material culture and collections on a contemporary theoretical level.</p> <p>When studying the history of Estonian ethnology, we regard it as an important part of Estonian cultural</p>

	<p>history that has significantly shaped the building and self-consciousness of Estonian society. The changes in the functions of ethnology over time are examined and comparisons with neighbouring countries are made.</p> <p>More attention than before will be paid to ethnology related to Estonia in the 18th-19th centuries. In the case of the Soviet period and the 1990s oral history sources (interviews with former and present colleagues) are also used.</p> <p>In the field of museology, research focusing on user studies and museum communication will continue; methodologically experimental participatory approaches will be applied in order to involve the voices of the research subjects into the research process.</p> <p>For the methodological development of all research strands we also apply artistic research, particularly visual anthropology in order to boost capacity in sound, photo and film as parts of research. For that purpose, cooperation with active researchers and centres of visual anthropology (universities having curricula in visual anthropology and important museums in the field) will be developed.</p>
<p>Increase in research financing, growth of the number and variety of funding sources.</p>	<p>Participation as leader and partner in Estonian and international research projects in order to raise the research capacity of the ENM and apply its research potential for developing national sciences as well as contributing to major research questions of international scope.</p>
<p>Strengthening networks and international cooperation with researchers, academic and cultural institutions.</p>	<p>Through their research groups, researchers participate in international research events and organize them. Existing individual contacts will be merged and enhanced in research groups.</p>

<p>Raising the level of research in order to continue work as evaluated research and development institution in the field of humanities.</p>	<p>The weaknesses in the research work at the ENM pointed out by the international evaluation commission: sustainability of financial and human resources, development of research topics, impact of research (number and quotability), involvement of postgraduate students, have been addressed and corrected.</p> <p>Research organization has improved due to the new structure of three research groups instead of multi-branch research basing on the researchers' individual interests and a more balanced contribution to the museum's research output helps to achieve a positive result in the research evaluation process.</p>
<p>Compliance with ethical standards of research is monitored</p>	<p>Researchers of the ENM participate in national working groups of research ethics, in commissions and in developing solutions. The research department has basic competence in research.</p> <p>The Estonian National Museum has joined the agreement of good research practice. The researchers operate on the basis of good research practice in planning and carrying out their research as well as in the stage of publishing the results.</p> <p>The organization of research respects the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums.</p>
<p><i>Goal 2: Diverse and high-quality outputs of research</i></p>	
<p>Efficient integration of research, curatorial work and artistic research</p>	<p>Major exhibitions and smaller exhibition projects at the Estonian National Museum and in partner institutions, including travelling exhibitions and exhibitions abroad will be created as outcomes of research. Anthropological documentaries and other artistic activity related to the main research strands are also outputs of research.</p>

<p>Collections of the ENM and other memory institutions are used in research</p>	<p>The main research strands are closely related to the use of the collections of the ENM and other memory institutions. Commented source collections are published aiming at improvement of access to collections and archives and offering interpretations for their better understanding and use.</p>
<p>Research-based complementation of collections in collaboration with communities</p>	<p>Collecting is carried out yearly in accordance with research topics, involving the groups and communities concerned and sharing research and collecting results with them.</p> <p>Principles of citizen science and opportunities offered by citizen science (so-called citizen humanities) are applied in the projects, thus using the traditional collaboration practices of the museum as well as testing and developing new ways and forms of collaboration.</p>
<p><i>Goal 3: Research at the ENM serves the social needs of Estonia</i></p>	
<p>Research strands of the ENM serve the social needs of Estonia, contributing to the sustainable development of Estonian cultural characteristics and national identity through active dialogue</p>	<p>Identification of research problems and dissemination of results in the field of food culture builds on cooperation with entrepreneurs, state and development institutions in the food sector.</p> <p>Studies in the history of Estonian ethnology build on the understanding that ethnography/ethnology are an important part of Estonian cultural history that have influenced the construction and self-identity of the Estonian society to a remarkable extent.</p> <p>Research in museology and artistic research supports the contemporary development of the field of cultural heritage, offering critical and analytical understanding to the actors in the sector through consultations, expertise and specific studies.</p>

	<p>The ENM publishes and disseminates popular scientific materials, methodological guides, online study materials, films and exhibitions on folk culture; research-based consultancy services are provided, training courses are organized, and folk costume schools take place regularly.</p>
<p>Partnership with Estonian universities, other research institutions and museums</p>	<p>ENM develops research cooperation, involving partners, primarily experts from other Estonian research institutions and universities into interdisciplinary research related to major temporary exhibitions. Cooperation also involves publishing, organization of scholarly events and ethnological fieldwork.</p> <p>Researchers of the ENM supervise and review research articles and books as well as students' museum practices.</p> <p>The Research Council of the ENM is an active partner in planning and implementing research at the museum.</p>
<p>Testing and analysing research-based applied forms of collaboration as a part of research projects and business cooperation</p>	<p>The strands of Estonian ethnology and artistic research support product and service creation and development based on cultural heritage. Key stakeholders are small enterprises and the public sector.</p> <p>The strand of museology and artistic research collaborates with cultural institutions of the public sector and also private enterprises in the field of culture and design aiming at improving and analyzing the processes.</p>
<p>Participation of experts in commissions, councils and programmes</p>	<p>Researchers of the ENM contribute to the work of commissions, councils and working groups in their particular field and broader decision-making bodies as experts.</p>

*Goal 4 Research communication is an inseparable part of research*

<p>Regular cooperation with the Service of Public and Foreign Relations is a part of research work at the ENM</p>	<p>The Service of Public and Foreign Relations provide constant support for the communication and dissemination of research.</p> <p>Introduction of topical and long-term research projects and activities and production of communication plan takes place on a quarterly basis.</p>
<p>Participation of researchers in public debates related to their field of expertise and cooperation with the media</p>	<p>Researchers of the ENM introduce the results of their research to the public in the media, via digital channels and at diverse events and participate in public cultural debates.</p>
<p>Development of the museum as educational and open learning environment: mapping, developing and communicating the teaching and supervising portfolio of the Research Department</p>	<p>Researchers are responsible for lectures and lecture courses at universities. The list of lectures and topics is mapped, updated and available at the ENM's website.</p>
<p>Preparation and publishing popular scientific publications and teaching aids (if necessary, with partners)</p>	<p>Popular scientific publications cover the main research and folk culture consultancy areas of the ENM. Learning aids, popular scientific articles and books are published.</p>
<p>Development of digital opportunities for dissemination of knowledge and information related to collections in collaboration with the Education Centre</p>	<p>Activities at the ENM's Media Class are designed for supporting use of digital cultural heritage.</p> <p>Visual anthropology is used in research, including collaboration with universities and citizen science projects.</p>

## Appendix 2

### Main activities, immediate outputs, key indicators

Goal 1 Internationally high academic level of research at the ENM

KEY INDICATOR	31.12.21	31.12.22	31.12.23	31.12.24	31.12.25
Number of academic staff holding a PhD	6	7	7	8	8
Number of high-level publications (1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 3.1)	14	14	15	15	15
Number of other scholarly publications	16	16	16	17	17
Number of research groups	3	3	3	3	3
Research funding	425 800	430 000	430 000	440 000	450000
Cooperation projects (international projects, cooperation with other research institutions)	3	3	3	3	3

International mobility of researchers (papers at conferences)	20	20	20	20	20
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## Goal 2 Diverse and high-level outputs of research

KEY INDICATOR	31.12.21	31.12.22	31.12.23	31.12.24	31.12.25
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Research-based exhibitions and artistic projects	1	1	2	2	2
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Anthropological films	0	1	0	1	0
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Commented source publications	0	1	1	1	1
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Cooperation projects with communities, citizen science projects	1	1	1	1	1
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## Goal 3 Research at the ENM serves the social interests of Estonia

KEY INDICATOR	31.12.21	31.12.22	31.12.23	31.12.24	31.12.25
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Number of cooperation agreements with universities, other research institutions and museums	7	8	9	9	9
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Cooperation agreements with enterprises and institutions of the public sector	1	2	3	3	5
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Participation of experts in commissions, boards and programmes	15	15	15	15	15
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Goal 4 Research communication is an inseparable part of research

KEY INDICATOR	31.12.21	31.12.22	31.12.23	31.12.24	31.12.25
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Media appearances	16	16	16	16	16
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Number of lecture and training courses	30	30	30	30	30
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Popular scientific publications and teaching material	3	3	3	3	3
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Popular scientific articles (printed media, web)	16	16	16	16	17
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Research and co-creative projects in the media class	0	0	0	1	1
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