

A sketch of a pedestrian overpass providing access to the commercial centre of Lasnamäe, Tallinn, 1977. Source: Museum of Estonian Architecture

# Concepting Resilience in Kuristiku / Lasnamäe / Tallinn

Workshop in Tallinn,  
November 19th–27th 2025

Prof. Dr. Barbara Engel  
Nora Staab  
Ekaterina Gladkova

Chair for International Urban Planning and Design  
Institute of Urban and Landscape Planning, Faculty of Architecture  
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

in cooperation with

Tallinn University  
Tallinn University of Technology

Odessa State Academy of Civil Engineering and Academy,  
Taras Shevchenko University of Kyiv,  
Lviv Polytechnic National University,  
State University Kyiv Aviation Institute,  
O.M. Beketov National University of Urban Economy

# 1. Introduction

The excursion and the integrated workshop are organized together with our colleagues from Estonia and Ukraine. The workshop will be an immediate and intense start into the design process. The supporting program gives you a further introduction into the broader context of Lasnamäe, Tallinn and Estonia.

This workshop is integrated into the broader research project led by the chair of international planning and design on the resilience of Soviet-era housing areas in the Baltics, the Caucasus, and Ukraine. The project examines how migration dynamics, housing demand, socio-economic change, and climate adaptation shape the long-term resilience of post-Soviet neighborhoods. Within this framework, Kuristiku serves as a Baltic case through which students can explore patterns of transformation and identify vulnerabilities and strengths that influence the district's future adaptability.

Every place, every space, every street, and every quarter are composed of a plurality of different spatial, historical, social, cultural layers. To understand and evaluate this "DNA" is a crucial foundation for future planning and design processes. The workshop gives you the opportunity to better understand the context. Beside visiting the site and getting familiar with the broader spatial context you will get insights in the official planning strategies and documents as well as you will get information of civilian initiatives about their demands.

During the five-day long workshop, you will work in teams with students from different universities and countries. Each team will work on mapping and understanding Kuristiku, formulate its strengths and weaknesses and discover its unique potentials and risks. Finally, you should formulate goals and first conceptual ideas for the urban redevelopment of our project area.

# 2. Situation and Background

## Planning Framework and Urban Dynamics of Tallinn

Tallinn is the largest city and capital of Estonia with about 450,000 residents, combines a UNESCO-listed medieval core with actively revitalized historic districts such as Kalamaja, where 19th–20th century wooden housing integrates with new residential projects and creative industries. At the same time, much of the city is shaped by extensive Soviet-era mass housing estates, built using standardized and functionally zoned planning that produced monofunctional environments lacking human-scale qualities. Post-1991 privatization deepened socio-spatial disparities and slowed reinvestment in these districts. Today, through the Tallinn 2035 strategy and principles of the 15-minute city, the municipality aims to rethink mobility, strengthen public spaces, support climate adaptation, and upgrade Soviet-era estates toward a more resilient, connected, and socially inclusive urban future.

## Lasnamäe

Lasnamäe, Tallinn's largest residential district, spanning approximately 30 km<sup>2</sup>, remains emblematic of the complex legacy left by Soviet-era modernist urban planning. Built predominantly between the 1970s and 1980s, the district still bears the consequences of unfinished planning schemes. These include the absence of key transport connections,

missing cultural and commercial centers, and a fragmented network of green spaces. This historical incompleteness continues to influence everyday life in Lasnamäe by limiting access to essential amenities, weakening the formation of local identity, and hindering community cohesion. While the original urban model aimed to provide efficient mass housing, it also created environments that many residents have found monotonous and emotionally detached.



Lasnamäe in Tallinn, 2025

Today, Lasnamäe continues to face multiple challenges in both urban planning and social life. The dominance of car-oriented infrastructure, lack of sufficient parking, underutilized communal areas, and low diversity of public services remain significant issues. However, several recent interventions point toward promising directions for revitalization. One example is the cultural reuse of the Lasnamäe canal area, where public art installations have temporarily transformed neglected infrastructure into a space for gathering and creative expression. These types of initiatives show how overlooked parts of the district can serve new and meaningful purposes.

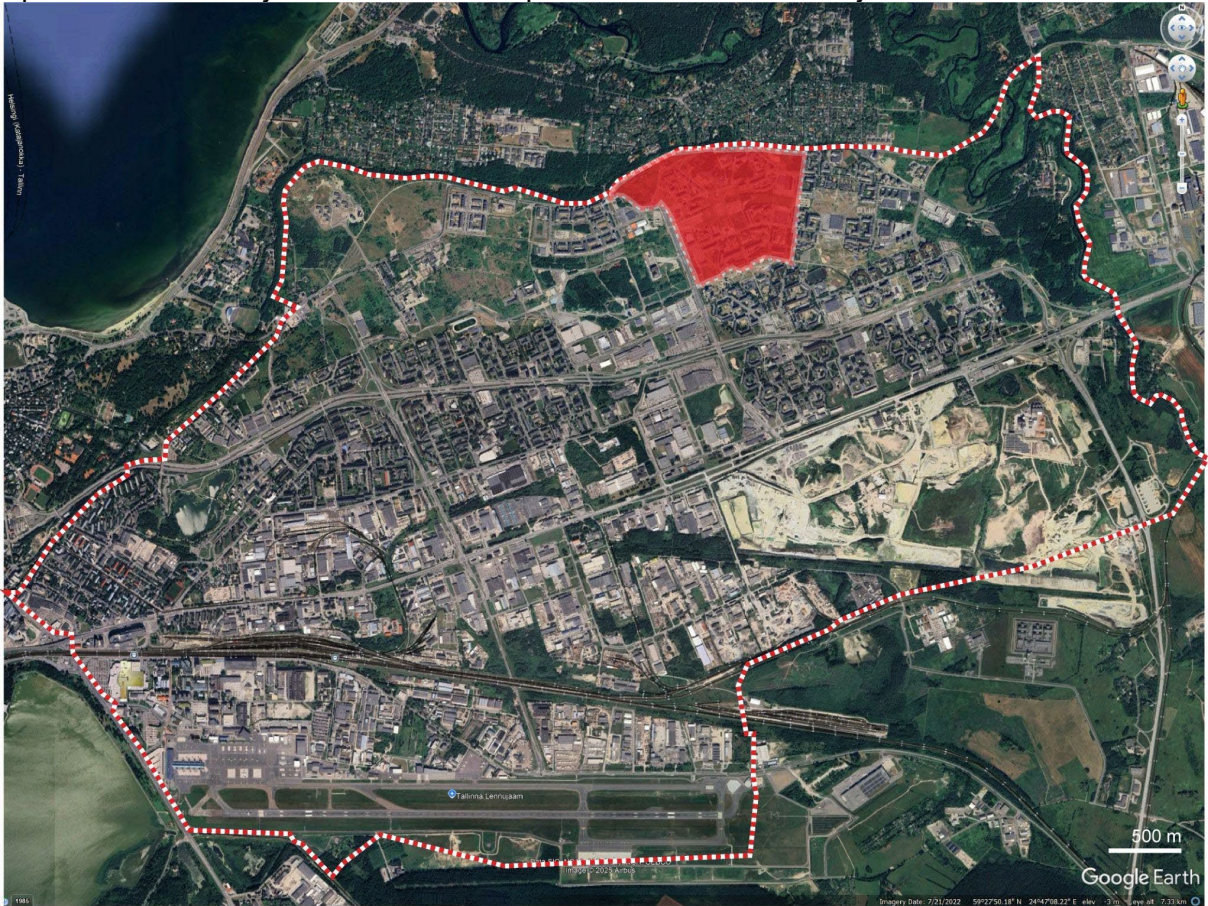
Community-based efforts also play a key role in reshaping Lasnamäe from within. The NGO Lasnaidee has been particularly influential in organizing neighborhood events, building

community gardens, and strengthening everyday social ties. One of its notable projects, the Laagna community garden, became a widely recognized example of successful grassroots urbanism in Tallinn.

A more detailed exploration of Lasnamäe and the evolution of Soviet housing estates in Tallinn can be found in the research project *City Unfinished*, <https://www.cityunfinished.ee/>.

## Kuristiku

Kuristiku, one of the northern micro-districts within Lasnamäe, is home to approximately 11,000 residents and covers an area of about 0.84 km<sup>2</sup>. Its spatial structure is shaped almost entirely by late-Soviet housing development between 1987 and 1990. The built environment is dominated by repetitive prefabricated panel blocks, five to nine storeys in height, surrounded by fragmented open spaces. Despite its relatively high residential density, the area is marked by low development momentum, with few signs of structural renovation or public investment. Physical deterioration of both buildings and shared infrastructure remains visible, reflecting prolonged under-maintenance. This material condition is compounded by spatial isolation: major road corridors separate the district from adjacent areas.



Kuristiku in Lasnamäe, 2025 (Aerial photo: Google Earth Pro)

Kuristiku exhibits an absence of active ground-floor uses and localized amenities, contributing to a street environment with minimal everyday activity. Public spaces between buildings often remain undefined and underused. These patterns suggest a disconnect between the physical presence of density and the actual intensity of social or functional urban life. In contrast to other parts of Lasnamäe, Kuristiku shows little evidence of sustained

community organizing or locally initiated cultural activity. The absence of grassroots structures or visible forms of collective care points to a diminished sense of civic presence in the neighborhood. Despite these challenges, Kuristiku remains a relatively affordable neighborhood. Accessible rental and housing prices make it popular among families with children and elderly residents. The area's demographic is predominantly Russian-speaking, which also shapes the neighborhood's social and cultural character.

While other areas have become sites for temporary cultural interventions or experimental community projects, Kuristiku remains relatively untouched by such dynamics. The lack of perceived agency among residents, coupled with procedural distance from municipal decision-making, sustains a condition of everyday detachment. At the same time, the spatial and social gaps observed across the district reveal layers of latent tension between the ideals of planned collectivism and the realities of lived fragmentation in post-socialist urban space.



Kuristiku, 2025 (Aerial photo: Google Earth Pro)

### 3. Task

The lens for the overall project are the current development strategies and planning goals of Tallinn. Problems, opportunity statements and conceptional approaches should be explicitly tied to the strategy's points and key factors of Tallinn's development agenda. The following guiding questions should be considered: How to support Tallinn 2035 goals and sub-targets e.g., 15-minute city; safe/green mobility; climate adaptation; biodiversity; resilient communities; affordable/diverse housing? Who must be engaged first for implementation who can be relied on now? Take into account the different actors in the neighborhood, residents, existing housing associations, schools, libraries, social centres, and NGOs. Who could contribute and what would be the social impact of spatial transformation – who wins and who might lose? Where is infill or reprogramming actually needed? How it could use what already exists in terms of spaces, programs, governance? Take into account seasonal performances in summer heat and winter cold/dark.

In order to achieve professional depth each group shall focus on one of the following topics:

#### **Direction 1. Strengthen what exists.**

The point is not to focus on “what’s missing” but what to strengthen socially, economically, infrastructurally and spatially using existing assets and relationships already present in the neighbourhood.

#### **Direction 2. Heat-islands and seasonal comfort: blue-green measures + building retrofit + health modelling.**

Heatwaves and urban heat islands threaten wellbeing especially in 1970–80s mass-housing districts with a high share of seniors. Tallinn expects practical recommendations at yard–street–block scale.

#### **Direction 3. What purpose do the first floors serve? a network of spaces for everyday and emergencies.**

Identify vacant/underused spaces (open, underground, at-grade, inside buildings, exterior annexes) and the legacy social infrastructure; define today's vs. target profile for non-residential use. Build a curated, neighbourhood-run mix (community-led commerce + social functions). Include a focus area at the Rahu Street east–west spine and its junction with the local high street and centre.

#### **Direction 4. Biodiversity network: Kivila Park ↔ Klindipark via yards and streets.**

Strengthen ecological connectivity across the district while co-designing with everyday human use.

#### **Direction 5. Infill development for a diverse housing mix & the 15-minute city.**

Plan infill to diversify housing types and support 15-minute services, while addressing heat-island and stormwater issues and integrating with the existing fabric.

## 4. Assignment

### Assignment 1: Analysis – Exploration & Mapping

#### GOAL

Documentation, interpretation, and evaluation of the design territory and its relation within the city and the surrounding. Based on your very own perception of this urban space, you should form your own opinion and present it via a subjective "reading". Find its specifics!

- Critical analysis of the district with an evaluation of qualities and deficits, identifying the genius loci.
- What relations do exist to neighboring areas (concerning housing, working places, university, leisure facilities)?
- What values of the built fabric and open spaces do exist that should be kept for the future?
- Which buildings, urban structure, green or public spaces are spaces of identification and appropriation?
- What threats do you identify in terms of current and potential crises and conflicts? How do you evaluate the existing resilience of the neighborhood?

Formulate a first interpretation of the analysis: What problems and what potential have you discovered? What are the biggest challenges in terms of desired sustainability and resilience? The aim is to find and precisely formulate your own position on which you can later argumentatively build and justify your design proposal.

#### MEANS

Walking, observing, understanding, collecting (and representing) first impressions - in the form of photographs, drawings, mapping, diagramming, interviews, films.

You should present this collection specified to certain aspects that seem relevant and interesting to you (as opposed to trying to cover everything), so that further discussion will generate specific knowledge of and raise specific questions to the area.

#### SUBMISSION

Saturday 22.11.2025 at 4 pm

Submit circa one A1 working plan (hand drawn) – documenting your work in progress.

The format is open; it may take the form of a map (not necessary to scale), collage, a mental map, a comic strip, a drawing.

#### PRESENTATION

Saturday 22.11.2025 at 5 pm

Presentation of Analysis

Significant brief presentations – each group has a maximum of seven minutes.

### Assignment 2: Concepts and Strategies

#### GOAL

The aim is to formulate first conceptual ideas and strategies for a future transformation of the district, including improvement of public spaces, implementation of new functions and buildings, and a mobility concept. How to improve resilience of buildings, open spaces and infrastructures?

- Formulate possible scenarios, based on prognoses of future development. What could happen and what were the particular requirements for the proposed futures?
- What functions would be needed to encourage neighborhood life and a district of proximity? What functions would foster the relation to neighboring areas and how can they be implemented responsibly into the existing fabric?
- Elaboration of concept sketches and first (selected) master plan ideas by keeping the emphasis on the existing structure, creating a responsible dialogue between old and new.

Develop an appropriate form to coherently represent ideas and conceptual approaches.

## MEANS

Reflect on the current situation, your gathered material, and impressions. Formulate first possible solutions and proposals based on needs, missing or available functions, use and role of public space.

Think of alternative conceptional approaches and use this fast-working method to collect new, thought-provoking, and useful ideas. Develop one idea into a feasible concept that prompts further discussion on different levels between various actors.

The plans should include:

- the position/role of Kuristiku in its larger urban environment
- the focus on the design site in regard to your scenario/strategy/intervention
- your concept/approach with regard to resilience on the scale of the neighborhood
- visualization, illustrations, schemes, and/or diagrams to support your concept

## CONSULTATION SUNDAY + MONDAY MORNING

Please bring modeling and sketching material:

cardboard, strings, colored paper, stickers, glue, post it / paper, pen, crayon, marker, scissors, cutter, ruler etc. Although all presentations are analog and you won't be able to print, I recommend to you to bring your computer to have access to planning files and documentation.

## SUBMISSION

Tuesday, 25.11. at 4 pm

Submit 2-4 A1 Poster

## FINAL PRESENTATION

Tuesday 25.11.2025 at 5 pm

Present your findings using your plans and models and other forms of representation you find appropriate (no projector) 15 minutes

## 5. Schedule

Date	Time	What
Wed, 19.11.		Arrival in Tallinn
Thu, 20.11.	11–1 pm	Introductory lecture “Perspectives for Large Housing Estates in Tallinn” by Ann Kristiin Entson and Mae Koomnemagi, Urban Planning Department <i>at Municipality of Tallinn</i>
	1–2 pm	Lunch
	2–4 pm	Walking tour Old Tallinn, guided by Triin Talk, starting <i>at Freedom Square</i>
	5–7 pm	Welcome and Introduction <i>at Tallinn Tech</i> / Prof. Kimmo Sakari Lylykangas, Prof. Irina Raud Presentation of Program and Assignment Presentation of Student homeworks, Group forming
Fri, 21.11.		Workshop Day 1. Analysis – Exploration & Mapping
	9–10.30 am	Lecture by Prof. Tauri Tuvikene, Tallinn University <i>at District administration</i>
	10.30-12 am	Lasna!dee Experiences and Insights from the NGO. Polina Ljaševa and Anton Kuunal, Lasna!dee <i>at District administration</i>
	1–2 pm	Lunch
	2 pm	Guided visit to the site by NGO Lasna!dee (2–2,5 h)
	7 pm	Welcome evening <i>in Pelmen kohvik</i>
Sat, 22.11.		Workshop Day 2. Analysis – Exploration & Mapping <i>at Estonian Centre of Architecture</i>
	9:30 am	Group Work / Consultation
	5 pm	Presentation of Analysis
Sun, 23.11.		Workshop Day 3, Concept <i>at Estonian Centre of Architecture</i>
	9:30 am	Presentation of Scenario Methods
	10:30–5 pm	Group work / Consultation
	5 pm	Pecha Kucha Presentation
Mon, 24.11.		Workshop Day 4 Concept <i>at Tallinn University</i>
	9:30 -	Group Work / Consultation
Tue, 25.11.		Workshop Day 5 Concept
	9:00 – 3 pm	Group work / Consultation <i>at Tallinn University</i>
	5 pm	Introduction of the Lasnamäe Pavillon by Paul Aguraiuja Workshop Final Presentation <i>at Lasnamäe Pavillon</i>
	7 pm	Closing dinner
Wed, 26.11.		Visit planning offices (in groups)
Thu, 27.11.		Free time / Departure

## 6. Additional Information

### How to go

from/to airport -> Bus or Bolt

- Ticket can be bought in the bus with wireless debit or credit card (free public transport in Tallinn is available only to city residents)
- Bolt App (Taxi costs about 10–20 EUR)

### **Accommodation**

Hotel ibis Tallinn Center,  
*Juhkentali tn 28, 10132 Tallinn*

### **Whereabouts**

Lasnamäe Pavillon (Kunstihoone Lasnamäe paviljon),  
*J. Koorti tn 24, 13623 Tallinn*

Municipality of Tallinn, Urban Planning Department,  
*Avalinn Vabaduse väljak 10, 10146 Tallinn*

District administration (Lasnamäe Linnaosa Valitsus),  
*Pallasti tn 54, 11413 Tallinn*

Tallinn Tech,  
*Akadeemiatee 15a; (7th floor) of the ICT building (Infotehnoloogiamaja).*  
*Eg. Freedom buses 11 and 83*

Tallinn University, School of Humanities,  
*Narva mnt 25, 10120 Tallinn, The Room S-412*

Estonian Centre of Architecture (MTÜ Eesti Arhitektuurikeskus),  
*Kursi 3, 10415 Tallinn*

Pelmen kohvik  
*Vana-Viru tn 4, 10111 Tallinn*

Salto Architects  
*Kalasadama 4, 10415 Tallinn*

KOKO Architects  
*Tartu mnt 84a, 10112 Tallinn*

Molumba  
*Tatari tn 21b-15, 10116 Tallinn*

### **Contacts**

Phone Nora: +49 172 7084835 / Phone Katja: +49 176 27830423