What to learn from folk music festival research:
The history, features and perspectives of Finnish and Estonian folk music festival research traditions

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Mitä opittavaa on kansanmusiikkifestivaalien tutkimuksesta: suomalaisten ja virolaisten kansanmusiikkifestivaalien tutkimusperinteen historia, piirteet ja tulevaisuuden näkökulmat

Artikkelin tavoitteena on antaa vertaileva katsaus suomalaisen ja virolaisen kansanmusiikkifestivaalien tutkimuksen akateemisesta historiasta, tutkimuskohteiden paikallispärteistä ja tutkimusperinteiden tulevaisuuden näkymistä. Tutkimus perustuu suomalaiseen ja virolaiseen perinteeseen kansamusiikkiin ja kansanmusiikkifestivaalien käsityksiin liittyviin julkaistuihin historiallisiiin lähteisiin ja akateemisiin töihin. Tekstissä esitellään kansanmusiikkifestivaalien tutkimusta etnomusikologisen lähestymistavan kontekstissa, itämerensuomalaisen perinteisen musiikan ja siitä kehitnyeen nykykansamusiikkin tutkimusten historiallista taustaa ja paikallisia piirteitä sekä aikaisempia akateemisia lähestymistapoja että tulevia näkökulmia suomalaiseen ja virolaiseen kansanmusiikkifestivaalien tutkimukseen.
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The aim of this article is to give a comparative view to the academic history, local features, and future perspectives of traditions of Finnish and Estonian folk music festival research. The current study is based on published historical sources and academic works related to Finnish and Estonian traditional music and folk music festival studies.¹

The first chapter of the article presents folk music festival research in the context of an ethnomusicological approach. The second chapter concentrates on the historical background and local features of surveys of Finnic traditional and revival music. The third chapter introduces previous approaches and proposes further perspectives in Finnish and Estonian folk music festival studies. This is followed by conclusions about the history, features, and prospects of folk music festival research traditions in Finland and Estonia.

An ethnomusicological approach to folk music festivals

The festival (Latin festum ‘holidays, feast, festive’) as event has been defined and studied in several ways depending on scientific discipline and research questions. Anthropologist Alessandro Falassi describes a festival as time out of time – an event which is outside of the everyday routine. In his analysis a festival is a social phenomenon, which is encountered in virtually all human cultures. (Falassi 1987, 2.) Within the discourse of

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humanities and social sciences the festival commonly means a periodically recurring, time and place bound, organized and scheduled, socially and culturally uniting, public cultural performance. (Stoeltje 1983, 240; Kuutma 1996; Cudny 2014, 641–643.)

The festival as a certain occasion belongs to a broader historical, cultural and social context. This multi-level phenomenon demands a suitable and flexible approach that helps to solve the research questions that arise, while taking into account different aspects of the festival. Researchers involved with folk music festival studies have generally sought answers to the research problems related to creative practices, tradition changes, event histories, social relations, and reflections. (Kõmmus 2023, 142.)

Ethnomusicology as a multidisciplinary discipline offers a good approach in this regard. It could be emphasized how this academic branch combines the methods of different fields, especially of musicology, folkloristics, anthropology, sociology, cultural history, linguistics, and statistics and studies music’s cultural, historical, and social aspects in local and global contexts. (Merriam 1964; Moisala 1991, 8; Pegg 2001; Bohlman 2013.)

At the same time the methodologically flexible nature of the ethnomusicology leads to broader approaches. For example, the focus of the earlier ethnomusicological research tradition has shifted in the middle of the twentieth century from local traditional music to worldwide revival-oriented perspectives. In this way, ethnomusicology provides a relevant theoretical and methodological framework for the study of contemporary music events, including folk music festivals, because an essence of the discipline is to examine an object in context – a human in a living musical culture. (Nettl [1983] 2005; Pegg 2001.)

The background and features of Finnic folk music research

The history of Finnish and Estonian traditional music research has common roots in collecting, studying, and publishing the Finnic traditional ethnic runosongs (Fin. runolaulu, Est. regilaul). Remarkable cultural and social figures – heritage collectors, popularisers, and scholars – on both sides of the Gulf of Finland have communicated, influenced, and collaborated with each other on this topic since the awakening of the ideas of national romanticism in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century. (Sarv 2002; Koiranen 2003; Rantanen 2016; Rüütel 2022.)
In Finland, the leading folk music scholars of the era were Finnish and Karelian oral tradition collector, Finnish national epic *Kalevala* compiler and publisher Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884), Finnic heritage enthusiast and Finnish and Estonian runosong collector Oskar Andreas Ferdinand Lönnbohm-Mustonen (1856–1927), eminent researcher of Finno-Ugric music heritage, first phonographer of Estonian and Finnish folk music Armas Otto Väisänen (1890–1969), as well as founders of the school of Finnish folkloristics, Finnish folk poetry researcher Julius Krohn (1835–1888) and his son Finnish folklorist and developer of the historic-geographic method of folklore research Kaarle Krohn (1863–1933). (Pekkilä 1982; Louhivuori 1994; Asplund 2006a.)

In Estonia, similarly important figures were folklore collector, national epic *Kalevipoeg* compiler and publisher Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), Estonian first wide range folklore collecting campaign organizer and “Vana Kannel” runosong book series founder Jakob Hurt (1839–1907), first Estonian doctor of folkloristics and local runosong melodies collecting campaign initiator Oskar Kallas (1868–1946), and Estonian folk melodies collector and first Estonian phonographer Cyrillus Kreek (1889–1962). (Sarv 2002; Särg 2012; Rüütel 2022.)

The Finnish historic-geographic school was an important trailblazer in the study of folk traditions at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of its outstanding members, the Finnish scholar Armas Launis (1884–1959), examined the rhythm types of Finnic folk tunes in his research and pointed out that the runosong type, which consists of eight equal note lengths, dates back to the common time of the Finnic tribes. (Launis 1910a, 1910b, 1930.)

The most valued features of the Finnish historic-geographic school were the practice of including the most comprehensive material about the phenomenon under study and the cartographic method, by which the characteristics of studied phenomenon are placed on contour maps, which gives a visual overview of their distribution. While the initial goal of Finnish scholars was to find out the most perfect form of the assumed original form of a song, story, etc., the Estonian researchers, including Herbert Tampere, studied with the help of this variant analysis rather than the distribution and variation of a folklore piece. This approach can be considered as a precursor to the analysis of traditional music adaptations played at later folk music festivals. (Sarv 2002; Särg 2012; Rüütel 2022, 29.)

Since the 1930s, Herbert Tampere (1909–1975) became the most prominent folk music researcher and collector in Estonia. He created
his own ethnological method, the principle of which was to study text, melody, and performance in parallel. He considered the most important characteristic of folk songs' the function, on the basis of which he classified them into songs related to work and activities (work songs, calendar songs, lullabies, etc.) and songs sung in leisure time (lyrical and narrative songs). Tampere’s research on functions of folk songs in traditional lifestyle, including festivities, also paved way for the study of contemporary folk music festivals. (Tampere 1934, 1956, 1960; Särg 2022.)

Tampere’s student, ethnomusicologist Ingrid Rüütel (born 1935) has followed the same approaches in her research. In 1978, she founded the first academic folk music research group in Estonia which evolved into the Department of Ethnomusicology first at the institute of Language and Literature in Tallinn and later at the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu. One of the goals of this research department was to collect and study contemporary musical traditions, including music festival culture, in addition to traditional music. One of Rüütel’s research interests has been the international folklore festival Baltica, which has been held alternately in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since 1987. She can therefore be considered a founder in the academic study of folk music festivals in Estonia. (Rüütel and Tiit 2005, 2006; Rüütel 2022, 42–43.)

Since the end of the 1940s, Erkki Ala-Könni (1911–1996) became one of the leading collectors and researchers of Finnish folk music. He collected a significant amount of traditional folk music samples and established a remarkable folk music sound and photo archive at Tampere University. In the 1960s, when folk music began its revival, he had a notable role in the popularisation of traditional Finnish kantele. Ala-Könni was one of the founders of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in 1968 as well. Through this he also laid the preconditions for the academic study of folk music festivals in Finland. (Saha 1994; Valo 2022.)

Mutual substantial co-operation between Finnish and Estonian researchers continued until the end of the 1940s. But from the Second World War until the start of national awakening in Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the 1980s, traditional music research traditions of Finland and Estonia developed differently because of historical and political reasons. In spite of political oppression caused by the dominance and ideology of the Soviet Union, some academic contacts between Finnish and Estonian folklorists and ethnomusicologists were still allowed.

For example, the old rural folk music roots shared by the Finnic peoples were considered politically correct to research and compare.
Thanks to their Finnish colleagues, Estonian researchers were aware of the era’s newer ethnomusicological trends, relevant literature and scientific results. At the end of 1980s, after the falling of the Soviet iron curtain in Europe, free co-operation between Finnish and Estonian researchers started again. Since then, old and new parallels, similarities and overlaps in the ethnomusicological research field have appeared again. (Kõmmus 2005; Rüütel 2022.)

The historical development of ethnomusicological research in Finland and Estonia has been influenced through times by the features of local ethnic music, especially by the Finnic runosong. This approximately two-thousand-year-old practice of singing dates back to the common tradition of the Finnic cultures. Although runosong’s newer layer has adapted the influences of harmonic and melodic singing styles of Western European cultures and the features of modern languages, it still preserved its traditional essence for a long time. The characteristic features of older runosong are alliterative text, narrow range of melody, a speech-like singing style without a harmonic dimension, and singing practices with one leading singer and a following choir. (Leisiö 1988; Lippus 1995; Rüütel 1998; Asplund 2006a; Kallio, Frog, and Sarv 2017.)

The runosong heritage, including the creation of verses, variation of melodies and preserving the ritual behaviour, has been largely extinct within community traditions since the end of the nineteenth century. The Estonian peripheral areas, such as the county of Seto and the island of Kihnu, where certain runosing traditions have been preserved until today, form an exception. (Sarv 2000; Rüütel 2002.) However, the Finnic runosing tradition has shown signs of revival in Finnish and Estonian contemporary musical cultures since the 1960s. (Honko 1990; Asplund 2006b; Särg 2014) The majority of Finnish and Estonian folk music researchers have treated the contemporary use of runosong as an example of musical revival in their works, either directly or as contextual knowledge. (Pekkilä 1982; Saha 1994; Sarv 2001.)

According to the folk music revival movement, which gained global popularity in the 1960s, the old runosong traditions were brought and adapted from their traditional situation to a new context. The revival of traditional music has been clearly seen in contemporary performative outputs. (Hill and Bithell 2014: 3–42.)

A particular challenge in this field of research concerns the reuse of archival sources of the traditional runosongs for contemporary singing practices. The traditional melodies and texts have become a popular and
The European and American tradition of ethnomusicological research has until the first half of the twentieth century been based on the discovery, documentation, and study of other, “foreign” and “exotic” cultures. According to the academic ideology of the time, objectivity, i.e., distance from the research object was considered an important quality in this regard. It was seen as a guarantee of freedom from prejudice when approaching a certain culture. This is also explained by the emic-etic dichotomy, which separated internal and external aspects of research. (Sarv 2000, 45–48.)

In ethnomusicology, the term pair emic-etic, originating from the linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike’s linguistic concepts created in the 1960s, highlighted the idea that musical culture can be viewed from two perspectives, from the inside and from the outside of a community (Pike 1967, 41–42). In the study of foreign cultures, especially within the paradigm of comparative musicology, the researcher-centered etic-type aspect, which focused on objective recording all musical manifestations perceived by the researcher, had been in the foreground until the 1970s. Afterwards, the performer-centred emic-type aspect, which highlighted the important inside details and contexts of a specific culture, started to gain more attention. (Sarv 2000, 47.)

Pike’s approach was introduced in Finnish ethnomusicological thinking and adapted to local music research by the Finnish ethnomusicologist Erkki Pekkilä (1988, 36). In Estonia, the emic-etic dichotomy was introduced through the works of Pike and Pekkilä by the first Estonian ethnomusicologist Vaike Sarv, who defended her doctorate at the University of Tampere in 2000. (Sarv 2000.)

Based on historical traditions, researchers of Finnish and Estonian folk music have mostly taken the emic position of observing their culture from the inside. In knowing the context of local culture, history, and mu-
sic, subjectivity becomes more of an advantage, allowing one to see details and connections that are not perceived by someone outside the culture. Following this practice, researchers from the same nationality or even grown out of the same folk tradition have engaged in the study of local folk music festivals. (Sarv 2000, 45–48.)

In the 1960s, the term folklorism also came into wider use. It refers to the conscious use of folk music and other folklore phenomena in today’s hobby and professional groups in a new context and function. Basically, this is a secondary tradition, where traditional songs, dances, and instrumental music are learned through documented sources – archive recordings, for instance. (Kurkela 1989.) Finnish researcher Lauri Honko (1932–2002) has called it the “second life of folklore” (Honko 1990). Folklorism gained a certain place on concert stages. This was the period when local and international folklore festivals started to organize around the world. (Rüütel 2022, 30.)

Guntis Šmidchens, an American researcher with Baltic roots, points out that folklorism, defined as “the conscious use of folklore as a symbol of ethnic, regional, and national identity”, has become itself a tradition that belongs to the Baltic cultures. According to Šmidchens, “Baltic folklorism today is a new variant of the long-lived tradition of using folk songs and singing as a means of national self-realization”. (Šmidchens 1996, 11.)

Ethnomusicologists involved with Finnish and Estonian folk music festival studies have often been interested in the change of folk music events and festivities in the past and present (Kuutma 1996, 1998; Saha 1994, 2004; Rantanen 2016; Silvanto 2016). This approach is closely related to the research of traditional music revival as local and worldwide phenomenon (Ramnarine 2003; Hill 2007; Kuutma 2008; Rüütel 2022) and the primary and secondary tradition, including folklorism. (Kurkela 1989, 1991; Honko 1990; Sarv 2001, 2002; Haapoja 2013, 2017.)

Researchers have been paid specific interest to the role of the community as a creator, modifier, and preserver of folk music festivities (Laitinen 1977, 1994, 2003; Koiranen 1982, 2003; Tormis and Lippus 2000; Rüütel 2002; Tõnurist 2002; Rüütel and Tiit 2005, 2006; Aslund 2005, 2006b; Leisiö 2006; Šmidchens 2014; Oras 2004, 2016) and the interactions between performers and audiences in a performance situation (Cantell 1993; Kästik 2014; Särg 2014; Kõmmus 2023). In addition, the changing terminology of music festivals has received attention. In this case, the emic approach has been highlighted, in context of which practicing folk musicians have influenced the academic vocabulary. (Tõnurist 1979, 1988; Särg and Johanson 2011; Kõmmus 2019.)
According to the works of leading Finnish and Estonian folk music festival researchers, it can be pointed out that the most widespread fieldwork methods have been interview and survey, both quantitative and qualitative. (Briggs 1986; Berg 2004; Hirsjärvi et al. 2009.) In the aforementioned Finnish and Estonian festival study approaches face-to-face dialogical interviews as well as printed and online questionnaires have generally been used. Researchers have stressed that verbal materials collected especially in an informal and open atmosphere have provided a wealth of relevant data. (Laitinen 1977; Kuutma 1998; Rüütel and Tiit 2005, 2006; Särg 2014; Haapoja 2017.)

Another productive method in the Finnish-Estonian folk music festival field has been participant observation. This approach, which requires direct communication, gives to researcher the possibility to understand the culture under study and the meanings that people attribute to the phenomena present in their culture. (Sarv 2002; Berg 2004; Vuori 2021.) The researchers have made observations in a relevant environment collecting data through participating in the activities of the community they have investigated. Audiovisual recording is often involved in this process. Sound recordings provide an opportunity for applying the methods of musical analysis, which are often combined with comprehensive ethnomusicological research. (Rüütel 2000; Särg 2014; Haapoja 2017.)

One frequently used method for studying fieldwork materials has been the transcription and description of sources. In this case, the relevant methods have been a “thick”, i.e., detailed and context-related description of the collection situation and collected material, followed by a close, i.e., repeated and thorough reading of transcribed source texts. (Geertz 1973; Kuutma 2008.) Furthermore, these methods have proved useful for collecting and analysing media reception. The sources used in this approach comprise publications in traditional and electronical media. Contemporary technical developments have enabled researchers to broaden their collecting and research methods by the means of digital humanities, e.g., electronical databases, multimedia text corpuses, web-collecting platforms, analysis programmes and so on. (Harvilahiti 2013; Hill and Bithell 2014; Järv and Sarv 2014.)
The studies referred to above have mostly focused on three folk music festivals: the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival\(^2\) (Fin. Kaustisen kansanmusiikkijuhlat) in Western Finland, the Viljandi Folk Music Festival\(^3\) (Est. Viljandi pärimusmuusika festival) in South Estonia, and the international folklore festival Baltica\(^4\) in the Baltic states. The choice of these events is explained by the fact that these are large and significant among their kind in their region. In Finnish and Estonian contemporary folk music festival research practice, an international comparison has still been applied sporadically. The festivals have mostly been studied autonomically, following their musical, social and historical development. (Laitinen 1994; Kõmmus 2005; Šmidchens 2014; Sârg 2014.)

The comparative aspect of further folk music festival research would highlight the specific starting point and approach of the Finnish and Estonian folk festivals. For instance, the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in Finland and the Viljandi Folk Music Festival in Estonia have emerged from interest-based communities which value folk culture and promote the revival of traditional music. (Kõmmus 2005.) These two events share principally the same goals – making traditional music more understandable for contemporary local people (Rüütel 2005, 18–19) and at same time highlighting the possibilities of world folk music in Baltic and Fennoscan-dian regions. (Hill and Bithell 2014, 12.)

\(^2\) The Kaustinen Folk Music Festival began in 1968 at the Kaustinen village in the Central Ostrobothnia region in Western Finland. The festival lasts seven days and it takes place during the second week of July. The number of performing musicians has been ca. four thousand and the audience ca. forty-eight thousand per year. (Laitinen 1977; Cantell 1993; Määttälä 2005; Asplund 2005; Kaustinen 2023.)

\(^3\) The Viljandi Folk Music Festival started in 1993 in the Viljandi town in South Estonia. The festival takes place during four days in the last weekend of July. The number of folk music artists has been ca. eight hundred and the listeners ca. twenty-six thousand per year. (Kõmmus 2005; Kiviberg 2019; Viljandi 2023)

\(^4\) International folklore festival Baltica was organized in 1987 collaboratively by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania at the suggestion and under the auspices of The Council of International Folklore Festivals and Folk Art Organizations CIOFF (Le Conseil International des Organisations de Festivals de Folklore et d’Arts Traditionnels). The first festival was held in Lithuania, and it takes place in rotation in three Baltic countries alternately. Depending on the different host countries, the number of performers and participants at the festival varies. At the same time, it continues to be the largest and longest-running traditional music festival in the Baltic States. (Rüütel 2022: 30; Baltica 2023)
Conclusions

The history of Finnish and Estonian traditional music research has common roots, and cultural and social figures from both sides have collaborated with each other for scientific purposes since the national awakening in Europe in mid-nineteenth century. Active academic co-operation between Finnish and Estonian scholars continued until The Second World War. (Sarv 2002; Koiranen 2003; Rantanen 2016; Rüütel 2022.)

From the 1940s until the end of 1980s folk music research traditions in Finland and Estonia developed differently for historical and political causes. In spite of political oppression some limited contacts between Finnish and Estonian researchers were still allowed. Especially comparative studies of Finnic common folk music roots were considered politically acceptable by the authorities. Thanks to Finnish academic connections, Estonian music researchers were aware of the contemporary trends in ethnomusicology worldwide. (Kõmmus 2005; Rüütel 2022.)

Since the beginning of a new national awakening in Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1980s, active collaboration in Finnish and Estonian folk music research has started again. Researchers involved with Finnish and Estonian folk music festival studies have mainly been interested in the change of folk music events, traditional music revival, primary and secondary traditions, the role of community in folk music festivities, interactions in performance situations, and the terminology of festivals. (See more thoroughly in the chapter “Previous and further approaches in Finnish and Estonian folk music festival studies” (pages 94–95).

While Western European and American ethnomusicological research traditions have often expected to discover the exotic “other”, studies of Finnish and Estonian festivals are done primarily by representatives of the local researchers inherited from same tradition. This gives them an advantage in understanding the cultural background of case studies. (Sarv 2000; Pegg 2001.)

One local feature of Finnish and Estonian ethnomusicology has been the influence of runosong studies, which has a long and abundant tradition in the research history of the linguistically related communities of neighbouring countries. The runosong tradition has been considered one of the oldest, essential, and unifying features of the folk cultures of the Finnic people. (Lippus 1995; Rüütel 1998; Asplund 2006a; Kallio, Frog and Sarv 2017.)

The runosong singing tradition, which has been almost extinct since the end of the nineteenth century, has shown signs of resurgence since the beginning of the worldwide revival movement of traditional cultures
in the 1960s (Honko 1990; Asplund 2006b; Särg 2014). Finnish and Estonian folk music festivals are one of the outputs of this traditional music revival phenomenon. (Pekkilä 1982; Sarv 2001; Heinonen 2005.) Among these remarkable events have been the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in Finland since 1968, the Viljandi Folk Music Festival in Estonia since 1993, and the international folklore festival Baltica since 1987, which have also been in the focus of the Finnish and Estonian festival researchers. (Laitinen 1977, 2003; Rüütel and Tiit 2005, 2006; Kõmmus 2005; Särg and Johanson 2011.)

As folk music festivals are a part of the revival movement, they offer a good basis to study spontaneous and creative singing situations. Relevant methodology derived from various paradigms and research traditions helps compile high-quality collections of this culturally interesting phenomenon and give reliable results of research. Finnish and Estonian ethnomusicologists have used a multitude of research methods in studying music events in a wider interdisciplinary context.

Folk music festival fieldwork has typically included participant observation, qualitative and quantitative interviews, and audiovisual recording. As analysis methods, researchers have often used detailed transcriptions, “thick” descriptions, and close reading. (See more in page 66.) All these methods are supported by a multidisciplinary ethnomusicalogical approach combining possibilities of musicology, folkloristics, anthropology, sociology, cultural history, linguistics, statistics and so on. Ethnomusicalogy is a flexible combination of these (sub)methods, to learn more about humans as musical beings. (Merriam 1964; Nettl [1983] 2005; Moisala 1991, 8; Pegg 2001; Bohlman 2013.)

Today’s folk music festivals provide us with a wealth of multi-faceted and interesting research topics. Events that bring new life to folk music have grown out from communities which respect traditional folk culture. The active organizers and participants of festivals have preserved an appreciation for traditional local folk music, while adapting it to a more global context. At these festivals, an old cultural heritage is revived and presented in a form which is understandable and gripping today. In the context of folk music festivals, it is good to observe whether and how traditional culture adapts to the rules of modern culture or still preserves its traditional form.

In the scholarly traditions regarding folk music festivals of Finland and Estonia, the indicated festivals have been submitted to comparison sporadically. Comparative research of the folk music revival traditions of linguistically, culturally, and historically tied countries could have a fruit-
ful perspective for further studies. It might reveal interesting features regarding the current situation, offers perspectives for future developments of folk music festival traditions, and helps us better understand and compare the practices and conventions of folk music revival processes in the wider cultural context of the Baltics and Fennoscandia.

References


