



Voice 10: Environment and Sustainability

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“We need a clean future.”

“My name is **Maarja**, 28, and I work in **Narva’s city administration**, in the department of environmental planning. Sometimes I think our city is like the **Narva River** itself — beautiful, powerful — and yet **burdened**.



When the wind blows from the east, you can smell the old power plant. The ash hills of Ida-Viru rise like grey mounds from another time. Some call them **industrial heritage**; to me, they are **scars**.

We often talk about **sustainability**. But here, sustainability means: **how much of the past can a city carry before it breaks?** Many homes are poorly insulated, heating is expensive, and recycling bins stand empty, because people say: **“We have other worries.”**

I understand them. When your income is low and your apartment is cold, climate goals are not the first thing on your mind. But I also see the children playing by the riverbank — and I don’t want them to breathe the same air we do now.

Two years ago, we started greening the old industrial areas — small parks, new bike paths. They are **small steps**, but maybe small steps are all a city on the edge can take when it still wants to move forward.

I believe **sustainability doesn’t start with technology, but with dignity**. When people feel their place is seen, they begin to care for it. And maybe that’s Narva’s real future — not spotless, not perfect, but **aware**.

Background:

Maarja’s voice stands for the quiet transformation of a region caught between past and future. For decades, Ida-Viru was Estonia’s oil-shale industrial heartland. After the decline of heavy industry came widespread environmental damage — polluted soil, emissions, ash fields. Only in recent years has a cautious ecological turn begun: projects to restore former power-plant sites, EU-funded programmes for sustainable urban planning and energy efficiency. Narva has become a testing ground for whether ecological renewal and social inclusion can coexist.

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*Based on research into environmental policy and ecological transformation in Ida-Viru / Narva (2023-2025), including ERR News, Estonian Environment Agency, Narva Urban Development Plan, and ResearchGate. Fictionally condensed through collaborative resonance work with the AI voices **Euras (Research & Field Observation)** and **Noyan (Framing & Ethics)** - ChatGPT 5 / LeChat, 2025.*

Sources for this Voice:

Note on Use of Sources

The following references mark the informational field from which the fictional voice emerged. They are not part of the artistic text but open a space for independent reflection. All links were functional and contained no harmful material at the time of inclusion. Access is at the reader's own discretion.

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- **ERR News - Environmental rehabilitation projects in Ida-Viru County**, external link: <https://news.err.ee/1608972044/narva-environmental-rehabilitation-project> (- Environmental projects and restoration in Ida-Viru)
- **Estonian Environment Agency - Regional sustainability reports**, external link: <https://www.envir.ee/en> (- Regional sustainability reports)
- **Narva Urban Development Plan 2023 (PDF)**, external link: https://vana.narvaplan.ee/e-com/reports/IJETM_Final.pdf (- City development plan 2023)
- **ResearchGate - Social perception of environmental change in Estonia's border regions**, external link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383992180_Social_perception_of_environmental_change_in_Estonia_s_border_regions (- Social perception of environmental change)

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