

# The view from the Migrants Window

A photograph of a window display. In the foreground, several potted plants with pink flowers and green leaves are arranged. Behind them, numerous lit candles in various holders are visible, creating a warm, glowing light. The background shows a window with sheer, patterned curtains. The overall atmosphere is cozy and festive.

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# Estonians in Sweden, Swedes in Estonia



# Participants

- Study participants were found through community network, organizations and cultural societies that served the targeted groups, and a snowball sampling technique was also used to recruit through social networks to achieve variation among participants.
- 60-minute -3 -4 hours interviews using a semistructured interview guide were used for data collection .
- The pretested guide included open-ended questions about life in Estonia and migration story , current and past festivities, Estonian community and their roles in community, visiting homeland during Soviet time, jokes and folklore, changes in Sweden, access to schools, and ethnic identity . Specific questions were asked about folklore, and because people spoke / narrated more broadly about choices in general, the responses were used as a window into their choices.



- Could refugees get information?
- What kind of information was it?
- Were their original traditions maintained or transformed?
- Which elements helped keep important holidays unique.





- Information about where Estonians have settled, in which countries have organised, information about the living standards and climate of various foreign countries in Estonian newspapers (abroad) and in Foreign Estonian calendars published in New York and Stockholm in 1945-1948.
- „In all of the above mentioned countries, there are Estonians who emigrated there a dozen decades ago. Of special vitality are Estonian settlements in the USA, Canada and Australia.“

- Calendars present neutral information while newspapers introduce cultural differences and warn of mistakes to be avoided in the new country. The tone is joking, but the content is undoubtedly useful:
- „When we printed the calendar last year, it was in the sincere belief that there will be no need for one the following year as there was hope that the international misunderstandings will soon end and the final winds of the war will change their course to the benefit of our homeland.. (NY 1948)



- The spark of hope had disappeared even from those who took the famous Roosevelt-Churchill so-called Atlantic document for its face value, because despite everything the Baltic peoples and others fell under the cruel communist violence. The sad fate of 1940/1941 is repeated.... (1948)
- So people had to settle in smaller places. Despite this people settled in Stockholm one way or another because you found more Estonians there than in any other place. (1947, Stockholm)

- The most thorough introduction is given of Sweden – a country close by where during history an Estonian community has emerged, enlarged by refugees from early WW2. There are many cultural similarities and there have been settlements of Estonian Swedes since the 13<sup>th</sup> century on the western islands and coast. Overviews of the history, livelihood, culture, climate, etc. are published, as well as comparative dictionaries. Thus about half of the content of calendars, previously filled with Estonian history, literary texts, cuisine, etc. ethnic material is now replaced in good measure by practical information.



# The first steps of a refugee

- For those who have already taken their first steps as a refugee, this piece of writing will not tell much, but we want to think first of all of those thousands of Estonian refugees who in the coming days will leave the refugee camps and take their first steps as private persons on the hospitable land of Sweden.
- There is an overview of how to obtain important goods and loans, but also which organisations one should enter:

- *Flyktingsnämnd*, which distributes clothesware, apartment furniture and other things necessary for starting a new life and also monetary support for the destitute refugees. The institution is open from 10-13 and on Fridays also 19-20, at times meant for workers to conduct their affairs.
- One of the first steps is register with a church, important for many things.

- The necessary documents for that application was called *främlingpass* and it was possible to attain it only once a year. Being fast was important: upon this depended becoming member of the medical coverage, getting medical help; entry free 1 Krona and later also cheap to pay. There is no way to obtain real estate or permit for starting a business, all dealings in court, with advocates and notary are dependent on being on a list. „In conducting paperwork one needs to be most tactful, careful but also foresighted – the whole future life depends on it.“

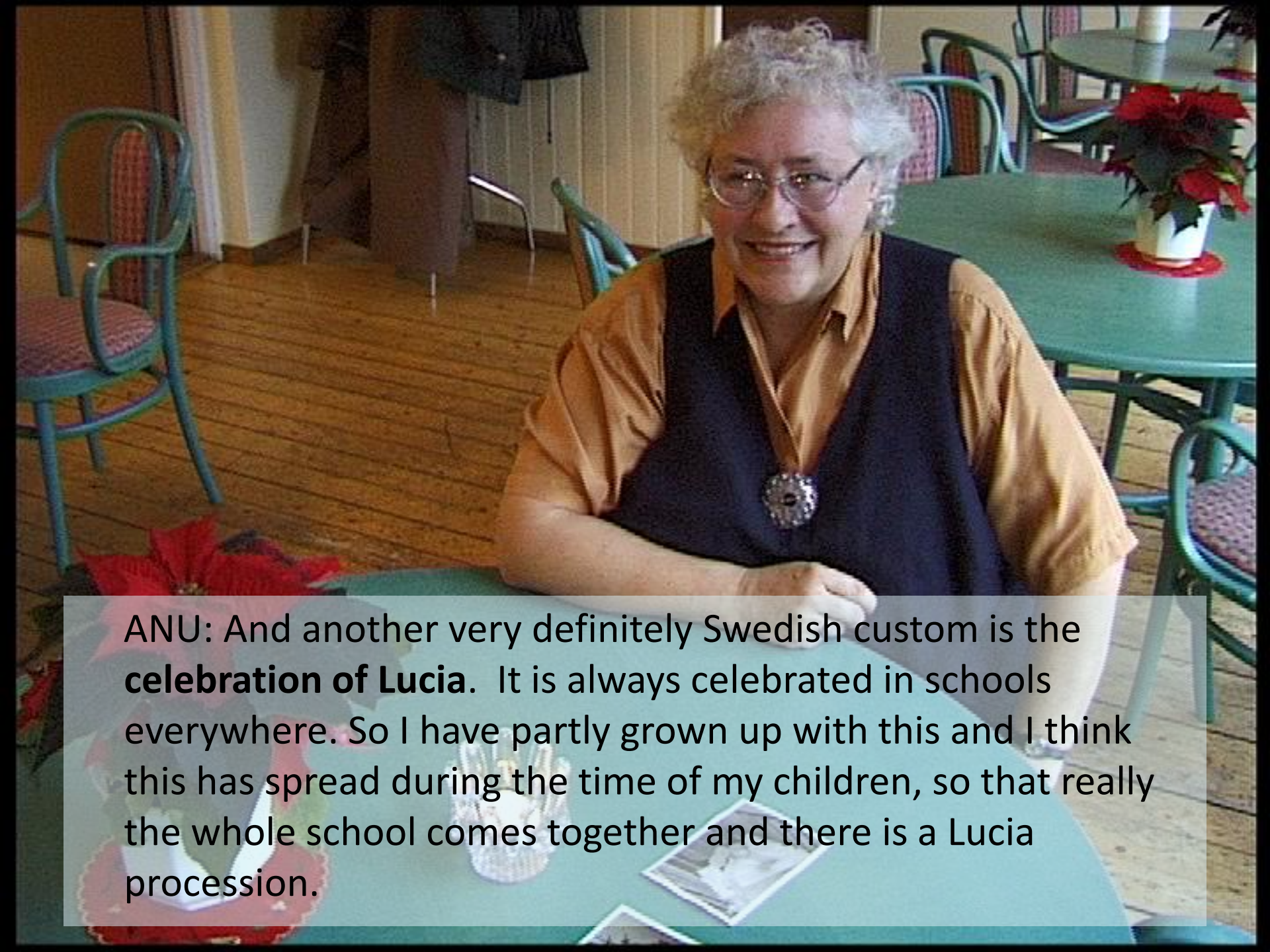




Calendar Customs

- Before Christmas, **St. Lucia's holiday** is celebrated. In the darkest season, on December 13, the bringer of light arrives. The Maiden Lucia. She is dressed in white, a handsome girl who early in the morning, wearing a wreath with candles and holding a tray with coffee, wakes all the sleepers and offers them coffee and buns. Lucia is often accompanied by the star boys, also in long white shirts, wearing white conical hats decorated with sharp-pointed stars and holding staffs with stars affixed to the top.
- This is how every household celebrates their Lucia day. Bigger cities and centers conduct a so-called beauty contest to choose their Lucia and on St. Lucia's Day a festive procession moves through the town with a big crowd.





ANU: And another very definitely Swedish custom is the **celebration of Lucia**. It is always celebrated in schools everywhere. So I have partly grown up with this and I think this has spread during the time of my children, so that really the whole school comes together and there is a Lucia procession.



- They are singing and there are candles on Lucia's head. Maidens walk around and there are dwarves and gingerbread and so on. So that is one definite custom. Nothing special is much done at home, but there are families where the matron wears a wreath with candles and in the morning goes to greet her family, so this sometimes happens. But we have never done this, but it's in the schools.
- Here at the church right next to us they hold every year a very beautiful Lucia concert.
- At first a Lucia procession comes into the church, maidens go upstairs on the balcony. The church is all dark at first and the choirs and conductor from one school give a concert. Then there are all the gingerbread men who sing – there are choirs of boys and of girls, mixed choirs and it is very-very beautiful. So this is a Swedish tradition.

- **When does the celebration of Advent begin?**
- Four Sundays before Christmas.
- **Yes. But I guess this was not a common tradition in Estonia**
- No. This is entirely a Swedish custom.



- **Christmas.** Oh, we don't have the Estonian traditions, but still, ham and sauerkraut and I cook them like my mother did. I boil the ham on the Christmas Eve. Swedes don't do that. They prepare the ham beforehand and then so-to-say "quaser" the ham with mustard and whatever slop they put onto it. The ham then has as a kind of crust and I think they eat the ham cold. But we here on Christmas Eve first eat the ham hot and then of course warm potatoes, warm sauerkraut and so on. Diligent people make their own sauerkraut. We, the rest, go out and buy. (Laughs.) And it is very good sauerkraut from Germany that you can get from, well, these health food shops.



- How do you call them? They sell them canned: in a big jar and it is so good you can eat it right out of the jar and eat raw, just as it is. I often use that sauerkraut, but sometimes I mix it with raw cabbage boiled with a little onion and so on.
- And then there is, naturally, blood sausage. These are the certain things that have remained.
- Before, so much more was prepared. Mother made her own pate. This took several evening. Then Russian salad (rosolje) and herring, but these things we have abandoned. We eat twice: first we eat the ham warm and of course blood sausages are also heated. So once during the day and once during the evening.

- So everything has been split between the two times, so that you don't eat everything at once or one thing after another. Otherwise you will be sitting all day at the table.
- Television is watched, but not if you go to church because that is at about the same time. Children naturally want to watch TV all the time. Thinking back on the Christmases we had in Estonia, Santa Claus always visited me, but after we had moved to Sweden I was old enough so that Santa Claus did not come any more. Then we just distributed our presents and all was well.





- **Everyone made a present for everyone else?**
- Yes. The Swedish custom is to write poems on the presents, rhymed and self-made poems, but we have not copied that custom, not in our family. But of course we organised a Santa Clause for my children but my daughter found that even though she knew at age four that it was father behind the mask, she still thought it was so scary that as long as Santa Claus was in the room she went behind the sofa and only her nose peeked from behind there.
- After father in this Santa Claus costume had left the room, she came out from behind the sofa, but not before. (Laughs.) So those Santa Claus masks were sometimes so scary, at least to her eyes. And let me tell you, in our family we have kept doing this as I described that my family had had for tradition.

- In Halmstad, a small town a bit north from here, still in Skåne, they have never had church on Christmas Eve. Somewhere away in the countryside, but never in the city. There are many now in the city of Lund – the Dome Church used to be the only one. I have lived here in Lund since the year 69. So this custom has spread in time.
- Swedish food customs – one very certain tradition is *lytfisk*. This is dried fish which is melted and put into soak before Christmas Eve. You buy dried fish from the shop, set it to soak and prepare with a good sauce, but far from all Swedes eat this. They just don't like the taste. My father in his later years liked it very much, it is very good for health – it is easy to digest and suits well for the elderly.

- is not something I prepare at my home and daughter's husband's family does not eat it either.
- Swedes do not eat sauerkraut, they eat brown cabbage – caramelised cabbage with syrup. It tastes a little sweet. It's a side dish, but otherwise they eat whatever they want on Christmas Eve, people can have salmon or turkey if that's what they find tasty. Turkey could be more according to the American tradition – so, all kinds of things are eaten. But very traditional people eat at least a little soaked fish and sauce and potatoes.
- The dessert is *riz a la Malta*. This is rice porridge with orange pieces. I know, it's a kind of traditional dessert.





- More Estonian Christmas Eve traditions – for example my parents are buried in Uppsala so that sometimes I visit the cemetery during the day. A friend of my mother, for example, also goes there, every Christmas Eve lights a candle on their grave and then goes to church. They celebrate Christmas Eve there. That is, they have Estonian church, because in earlier times there was no mass in Estonian or it was at an unsuitable time. I have many times visited the mass at the Dome Church, which is very beautiful and festive, of course the same Christmas songs in general, only in Swedish.

- January 13, **St. Knut's Day**, is the end of Christmas and this is usually celebrated with a colourful party for the children, where all tasty decorations of the Christmas tree are finally eaten, called *julgransplundring*. After the party, the Christmas tree is thrown out, in cities often onto streets from where the street sweepers clean them away.
- **Easter** is here celebrated by eating eggs, in earlier times also often with competitions of who can eat more. Eggs are painted on Easter Saturday either with merry drawing or bright colors. The festive table is also decorated with birch branches, but because of the early time of the year, they are without leaves. Instead, the branches are decorated with multi-coloured feather clump making the bouquet of branches merry. The holiday table is also made merry with the Easter puppet witches (*paskkörung*), riding on broom with a coffee pot and cat. Old tales say that on the night before Great Thursday all witches hurry to a meeting at Blakulla mountain. Thus their symbolic participation in the festivities.

- **The first of May** and the evening before (*valborgsmässafton*) is a celebration of youth when all students don white hats and wear them until October 1<sup>st</sup>. (Students are here everyone who has graduated from high school and has the right to enter university). On the night before May 1<sup>st</sup>, people burn mayfires and dance. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, there are usually processions of working people.
- **Pentecost carries** no special significance, unless perhaps for the confirmed many of whom are blessed by the church on that day. The confirmation party is held with presents and flowers.





- St. John's Day or Midsummer (*midsommardagen*) is one of the most beautiful holidays of the year. All over the country, in every population centre and in city parks (in Stockholm – Skansen) a column is erected (*Majstang*), which is decorated with green wreaths and ribbons.
- Cancer carnivals in August. September is the season of eating sour fish *surströmming* – a food repulsive in its smell alone.
- St. Martin's Day is celebrated by eating a Martinmas goose, especially in Skane, and another important food is goose blood soup (*svartssoppa*).
- Name days are more important than birthdays.





conclusions

- ❖ Changes in festive calendar (added some state days – AnniversaRY OF Tartu University . Dec. 8; Liberation day July 23, Tartu Peace in February, deporation days in March and June).
- ❖ Foodways are more concervative.
- ❖ Disappearence of feast from public space (masking and mumming),
- ❖ In public space demonstrations agaiunst soviet union, political protsest; big gatherings of Estonians witrh public celebration at the streets.
- ❖ ANU: (Laughs.) But many customs has disappeared now, from Swedes and other people. But that time, fifty years ago, that was the custom.





Thanks!