



Good Practice Story Title:

A-Line to Arvamusfestival: Bridging the Last Mile to Estonia's Democracy Festival

Destination:

Järva County

Country:

Estonia

Submitting Organization:

Järva Foundation

Category *(check only one box):*

- ☐ Destination Management
- ☐ Nature & Scenery
- ☐ Environment & Climate
- ☐ Culture & Tradition
- X Thriving Communities
- ☐ Business & Marketing

Destination description (150-200 words)

Järva County, located in central Estonia, is a rural region defined by peaceful countryside, small towns and strong local communities. The county's heart is Paide—a town known for its medieval landmark tower and easy-going pace of life. Since 2013 Paide is strongly associated with *Arvamusfestival*, Estonia's leading democracy festival that brings this usually calm town alive in August with its more than 10,000 visitors.

Often described as “the heart of Estonia,” Paide blends centuries-old charm with a growing reputation for forward-looking public dialogue. *Arvamusfestival* transforms Paide's green hills and castle ruins into a vibrant forum for open discussion, powered by local enthusiasm and a team of more than 250 volunteers. Since its founding, the festival has embodied sustainability in its planning, content and culture.

Järva County was also among Estonia's first pilot destinations to join the Green Destinations network—an easy match for a region that naturally practices rural sustainability. With its clean air, low-density settlements, local food traditions and community-first mindset, Järva county embodies values that align with global goals for responsible travel.

Summary of Good Practice Story (150-200 words)

Arvamusfestival was launched in 2013 to restore public trust in democratic processes after years of political disillusionment. It has since grown into a respected space for citizen engagement and dialogue. Each year in August, *Arvamusfestival* brings to Paide more than 10,000 participants to join in more than 150 discussions curated by civil society organizations, government institutions as well as grassroots initiative groups. The festival is based on openness, inclusion, shared responsibility, and ecological sustainability.

For years, *Arvamusfestival* has been a pioneer of more sustainable solutions such as advanced sorting of waste and avoiding single-use dishes. In 2024, *Arvamusfestival* piloted the A-line—a symbolic, demand-responsive shuttle connecting major transit points with the festival grounds in Paide. Though long-distance public transport services reach nearby transportation hubs, the final stretch to downtown Paide has long posed a barrier for many participants.

The A-line helped bridge this last mile for €1 per ride, enabling broader accessibility and reducing the need for private car use. The initiative was a cooperation between *Arvamusfestival*, the Ministry of Regional and Agricultural Affairs, ticketing platform Fienta as well as national and regional transport partners.

True to the festival's nature, this was more than a logistical fix: it was a democratic experiment—a practical test of how to build a transport system that is inclusive, sustainable, and replicable. The A-line reflected the values of shared responsibility and ecological mindfulness, contributing to the festival's role as a space where policy ideas are prototyped in real life.

Issues faced (150-200 words)

While *Arvamusfestival* welcomes thousands of people to Paide every year, the accessibility of its location has remained a practical and symbolic challenge. Most festival guests arrive by car, because public transport

isn't accessible enough. Some participants still come via public transport to regional hubs but often find the last stretch to downtown Paide difficult, inconvenient, or inaccessible without a car. This posed several challenges:

- **Limited access for non-drivers:** Youth, elderly, and those with limited financial means faced barriers to attending.
- **Increased car dependency:** More attendees chose to drive, leading to congestion, parking issues, and higher emissions.
- **Tension with core values:** The gap in accessibility clashed with Arvamusfestival's core principles of openness and inclusion.

Organizers recognized that enabling participation required a solution that was both practical and aligned with the festival's main purpose.

Solution (100-150 words)

The A-line pilot program introduced a flexible, easy-to-use shuttle service for just €1 per ride. It connected key arrival points—Mäo, Mäeküla and Türi—with the festival grounds. Tickets were booked in advance via online ticketing platform Fienta, enabling effective route planning and minimizing unused capacity.

The service ran the whole day on both festival days and was synchronized with bus and train arrivals. It provided participants with a smooth, dignified and climate-conscious transition to the heart of the festival. Internally, the festival team had already in previous year adopted low-emission vehicles for on-site logistics, thereby further reducing environmental impact.

The A-line pilot complemented Arvamusfestival's long-term habit of testing ideas in action—in this case, offering a model for rural and event-based transportation solutions. It has been a problem for many years in Estonia and this test project showed that there are simple yet effective ways to conquer the challenge.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied (500-600 words)

1. **Mapping the challenge:** Organizers assessed travel patterns and attendee feedback to identify where the last-mile gap affected inclusivity and sustainability.
2. **Co-creation of the model:** [The A-line](#) was designed as a real-world pilot for rural shared transport. Its structure—affordable, flexible and timed—was planned to address actual user needs.
3. **Partnership building:**
 - The Ministry of Regional and Agricultural Affairs supported the pilot as an experimental platform.
 - Ticketing was facilitated by Fienta's platform, with pre-booking ensuring demand alignment.
 - Local and national transport partners helped coordinate stops and routes.
4. **Communications:** The A-line was clearly promoted in [travel instructions](#) and festival communication channels. It was framed not as a service, but as part of the event's spirit of shared action.
5. **Implementation:** Shuttle vans made round trips during the festival days from early morning to midnight. Timetables were linked to regional arrivals. The symbolic ticket price kept the service accessible and valued.



6. **Reflection:** User numbers and feedback were collected. The pilot was viewed as a civic prototype—a small act with potential national relevance.

Achievements and Results (250-300 words)

- **Wider access:** More people—especially those without private vehicles—were able to attend the festival.
- **Lower emissions:** Shared transportation options reduced car traffic and parking needs in Paide.
- **Civic impact:** The pilot project was an example of democratic prototyping: a public idea tested in a real community context.
- **Tourism integration:** Easier access reinforced Paide's image as a welcoming and well-connected destination.
- **Sustainability awareness:** The use of electric support vehicles showcased visible commitment to greener operations.

Community feedback: Users described the A-line as smooth, affordable, and reflective of the festival's inclusive spirit.

Lessons Learned and Advice (150-200 words)

- When access is part of the values, transport must be treated as more than just a technical detail.
- Community-based pilots can shape broader thinking in rural mobility policy.
- Advance booking and symbolic pricing increase accountability and ownership.
- Volunteers and partner networks can make a complex idea easy to execute.

For other destinations: if your event is built on values, your transport system should be too. Think of movement as part of participation.

Recognitions and Additional References

General recognition received by Arvamusfestival: EFFE Label awarded by the Democracy Festivals Association in 2015 and hosting of their annual meeting in 2019, membership in the Democracy Festivals Association, long-term collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers. About the festival:

- Homepage of the festival <https://arvamusfestival.ee/>
- Arvamusfestival introduced on the homepage of International Democracy Festivals' Association <https://democracyfestivals.org/arvamusfestival>

- Previous Top 100 Good Practice Story related to Arvamusfestival

https://jarva.kovtp.ee/documents/6653157/38567135/2020_Jarvamaa.pdf/672d480c-ff6e-4717-ab37-373483b1e327

The A-line communication by the festival (in Estonian only):

- Announcement and background info <https://arvamusfestival.ee/liin-a/>
- Announcement on the festival's Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/Arvamusfestival/posts/-arvamusfestival-piloteerib-n%C3%B5udep%C3%B5hise-transpordi-projekti-liin-a-eesm%C3%A4rk-on-v%C3%B5/783272130635301/>
- Posts on the festival's Instagram account:
<https://www.instagram.com/arvamusfestival/p/C-R1-B0iY6L/>
<https://www.instagram.com/arvamusfestival/p/C9eQIGhNoH0>
- How to get to Paide, A-line practical info:
<https://arvamusfestival.ee/blog/transport-arvamusfestivalile-kuidas-paidesse-tulla/>
- Timetable of A-line: <https://arvamusfestival.ee/liin-a-turi-soiduplaan/>

The A-line communication by partners

- Coach company Lux Express announcing A-line as the last mile solution for the festival
<https://www.facebook.com/LuxExpressEstonia/photos/lux-express-viib-teid-arvamusfestivalile-mis-toimub-juba-sel-n%C3%A4dalavahetusel-mei/895988152572663/>

The A-line project reflected in local media (in Estonian only):

1. **Järva Teataja (2024): Ühistranspordivõrk toimib maakonnakeskuses ja ümber ideaalilähedaselt**
<https://jarvateataja.postimees.ee/8059846/ainult-kaks-paeva-uhistranspordivork-toimib-maakonna-keskuses-ja-umber-ideaalilahedaselt>
2. **Järva Teataja (2024): Arvamusfestival meelitas arutlema ligi 11 000 inimest**
<https://jarvateataja.postimees.ee/8076064/arvamusfestival-meelitas-arutlema-ligi-11-000-inimest>
3. **TRE Raadio (2024): Paides avab uksed 12. Arvamusfestival**
<https://keskeesti.treraadio.ee/uudised/45135/paides-avab-uksed-12-arvamusfestival>
4. **TRE Raadio (2024): Arvamusfestivali suur pilootprojekt parendab ühistranspordiühendust Paidega**
<https://keskeesti.treraadio.ee/uudised/45103/arvamusfestivali-suur-pilootprojekt-parendab-uhistranspordiuhendust-paidega>

Internal case (2023): Use of lightweight electric vehicles for on-site logistics

1. <https://vokbikes.com/articles/opinion-festival-vok-case-study/>