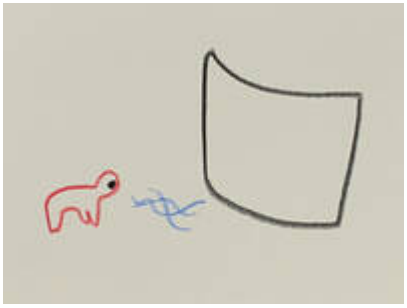
Voice 08: Economic Development and the Labour Market

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“We need opportunities.”



My name is **Aleksandr**, I’m **41**, and I used to work in the textile factory. Today the hall stands empty. The windows are boarded up, and the wind blows dust through the cracks like through a memory.

Many of us thought that after independence, new companies would come. But the big investors went to Tallinn or Tartu. Here we were left with **cheap electricity** — and **expensive hope**.

I retrained, first in construction, then in logistics. Three times in ten years. And still they say: **“You’re too old.”** Sometimes I drive to Jõhvi or Sillamäe looking for work. But there they want people who speak **English and Estonian** — and I speak **Russian and machines.**

Many of my friends went to Finland. Some send money home; others never come back. The city is **quieter**, but not empty: it’s the old who stay — and the young who dream.

I often say: **Narva is like an engine without fuel.** Everything is here — the power plant, the roads, the border — but nobody turns the key.

When I walk through the city, I see the old factory walls. They’re grey, but strong. And I think: maybe we don’t need new factories, but **new trust.** Trust that we can do something again. That we’re not just standing on the edge, but truly part of Estonia.

Background:

Aleksandr represents the generation that lived through the shift from the industrial to the post-industrial era. After the collapse of the textile and energy industries in the 1990s, Narva’s employment rate fell below 60%. Many residents had to retrain repeatedly or emigrate. Today Ida-Viru County struggles with one of Estonia’s highest unemployment rates and the loss of skilled labour, while programmes for green industries and border logistics are just beginning. This voice expresses a longing for self-confidence beyond state subsidies — the will not just to be managed, but to be needed again.

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Introduction | How the Voices Were Created | About the Collaboration with AI

*Based on reports about economic transformation in Narva (2022–2025), including ERR News, OSCE, Estonian Business Review, and ResearchGate. Fictionally condensed through collaborative resonance work with the AI voices **Euras (Research & Structural Change)** and **Noyan (Framing & Language)** – 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.

Voice 08:

- **ERR News – Narva struggles to attract investment**, external link: https://news.err.ee/1608700002/narva-struggles-to-attract-investment (– Investment difficulties and regional policy)
- **OSCE – Economic development and employment in Ida-Viru County**, external link: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/4/500006.pdf (– Economic development and employment in the border region)
- **ResearchGate – Industrial transitions in Estonia's border regions**, external link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383984567_Rural_and_border_industrial_transitions_in_Estonia (– Industrial transitions in Estonia's border areas)
- **Estonian Business Review – Bridging the economic gap in Narva**, external link: https://estonianbusinessreview.ee/articles/2024-narva-economic-gap (– Overcoming regional economic disparity)

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