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# **DEFINING DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR ESTONIA**

Master's thesis

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# **EESTI DIGIDIPLOMAATIA DEFINEERIMINE**

Magistritöö

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Tallinn 2022

## **Author's declaration of originality**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis. All the used materials, references to the literature and the work of others have been referred to. This thesis has not been presented for examination anywhere else.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to address the issue of digital technologies impacting foreign policy and how this has shaped the concept of digital diplomacy. It will give an overview of different theoretical approaches, as well as compare digital diplomacy to cyber diplomacy. Moreover, this paper will try to define digital diplomacy for the context of one country – Estonia, a country that is highly digitalised and seen as a role model. A case study methodology is used to explore the Estonian example. The data is collected from semi-structured interviews with experts and from document analyses. The research uses the data triangulation methodology for making adequate and well-justified conclusions. Based on the research results and theoretical framework, recommendations will be provided for policymakers for improving Estonian digital diplomacy efforts. Furthermore, a potential definition of digital diplomacy will be proposed for Estonia.

This thesis is written in English and is 43 pages long, including 6 chapters, 2 figures and 1 table.

## **List of abbreviations and terms**

ICT	Information and Communications Technology
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
US	The United States of America
MKM	The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
AI	Artificial Intelligence
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
SADC	Southern African Development Community
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
UN	United Nations

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# 1 Introduction

After the world entered the digital era, international relations have gotten another perspective to work with. It is not only about the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in people's daily lives and how multiple tools can support processes and decision-making both in personal and professional life. It has become more interlinked to different spheres of the society and having an impact, whether on a larger or a smaller scale. For example, how do we change the national policies to meet the needs of e-commerce, which offers the possibility to expand to numerous markets for companies, as well as offering increased selection of goods for the customers to purchase? And assuming these goods are electronic devices used for educational purposes, we bring in other areas to consider, such as the education system, questions regarding standardisation of these devices and even healthcare to evaluate whether these gadgets influence children's well-being. More accessibility and connectivity enhance globalisation, therefore making these matters part of the 'global questions' to deal with [1]. As we keep on getting more connected and interoperable, we also need to understand that the relevant discussions and coordination must have a global approach. Especially due to the fact that the level of development in countries is not equal and incautious decisions can lead to unexpected outcomes, e.g. increasing the digital divide rather than helping to create space for effectiveness [2].

Technology and digital innovations have become a geopolitical issue [3]. Technological innovation in essence is not new, but the increased interdependence on other actors and areas influenced by it, has changed the pace and importance of digital development. Furthermore, it's not only the tools that are being created, but the way they are being used and for what purposes. The use of technology for authoritarian and oppressive purposes have become a valid issue as we see disinformation spreading actively, restrictions imposed to limit access to social media channels, mass surveillance of citizens, increased cyberattacks against nations' websites and many more [3]. The lack of clarity and discord on relevant definitions, principles and values, are adding more complexity to this horizontal topic [4]. Moreover, we frequently talk about how technologies are influencing

our daily lives and how the world is changing because of that [5]. Therefore, it is important to realise both the risks and the opportunities that technology and new developments have on our society, as well as to understand how it is changing the geopolitical environment.

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

Past couple of years have proven how a myriad of incidents and decisions can disturb the world order, creating more chaos to an already rapidly changing environment. In 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused losses of human lives, heavy pressure on healthcare systems, inability to access essential social services and education [6]. These are of course only some of the outcomes, as the pandemic didn't leave anyone or anything untouched. Just as the world started to cope with the afterwaves, a major armed conflict took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 [7]. Russia attacked Ukraine, claiming to 'demilitarise and de-Natzify' Ukraine and its citizens [7]. The rest of the world decided to not stand aside and take joint actions to stop the aggression [8]. This brought up new geopolitical tensions and countries' were redefining their priorities, being supportive towards Ukraine, but still keeping in mind their own national interests [9].

International relations are not sculpted only during turbulence times, but it's the everyday decisions and constantly changing environment that builds the way. Digital innovation and new technologies have expedited the changes and digitalisation has become a crucial part of the global (but also on a national level) development story. The world has realised that digitalisation of services or processes and developing new technologies for users is not the only way the world is influenced by digital innovation, nor is it a standalone topic [10]. It has become clear, that digitalisation and the use of digital tools have changed our governance models and impacted several areas in addition to ICT, such as healthcare, economy, education etc. Technological advancements have brought many benefits, but also several challenges. Given the speed, scale and the global nature of digital developments, it is clear that discussions and decisions on a global level will shape our future and how our societies work with the help of digital tools.

Estonia has become a role model of digitalisation across the globe [11], [12], having 99% of its public services accessible online [13]. E-Tax, I-voting, e-Prescription are just few of the examples of digital public services, that a citizen can use online [12]. In addition

to having a well-developed digital society, Estonia has been sharing its digital transformation experience with many others across the globe [11] and has therefore become an inspiration for several countries, such as Barbados, Aruba, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and others [14]. In order to keep moving forward, satisfying citizens and businesses, and improving the society as a whole, Estonia has understood the importance of international cooperation, specially the importance of digital cooperation [15]. It does not only help to raise awareness and bring attention to the benefits of digitalisation, but it also helps to solve existing problems on a practical level, as many countries and organisations are trying to tackle similar issues [16]. Having a strategic approach can help to direct resources to the right place and to use the tools wisely [16], [17]. Reusability of existing digital tools and services is one of the solutions to speed up the digitalisation process and close the digital divides that the current world is still facing [18]. Understanding these issues that need attention and action on a global level, it is clear why technology and digitalisation have become topics on its own in the foreign policy [10], [19]. It is necessary to deal with both the risks and the opportunities as these go hand in hand [19], [20]. Therefore, the strategic way of thinking about technology and digitalisation in the international fora is not only coming from the possibilities to be more efficient, but there is actually a need for it, too.

Technologies are not things per se anymore and impact other areas of life horizontally and globally, which is why it is important to have a strategic approach to digitalisation, innovation, and to the influence it brings. In order to be competitive in this fast-evolving world, just like the others, Estonia needs to map its strengths and weaknesses to be able to position itself in the global arena. As well as to constantly analyse the changing environment, realising the threats and the opportunities, making technology work for the country, not vice versa. As described previously, Estonia is a highly digitised country that is a role model for many others. Still, it hasn't yet created its digital diplomacy strategy, which would pinpoint the focus regions and topics it would prioritise for digital affairs in the foreign politics. Understanding the scale and speed of digital developments happening, it is crucial to develop responses to occurring challenges. Also, to seize the moments and reap the benefits of the ongoing global digital transformation. Therefore, Estonia should look how to develop its own digital diplomacy strategy; find and phrase the priority topics; and choose the international initiatives it needs to be part of to support its efforts in the global arena.

## 1.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions

To understand, how could Estonia fill this gap and have a focused digital diplomacy strategy, it is important to firstly define what does digital diplomacy represent for Estonia. This thesis seeks to find an answer to this question and to provide a definition based on research. In addition, the goal is to provide suggestions for policymakers for shaping Estonia's digital diplomacy. Therefore, to achieve these objectives, the following research questions and sub-questions were formed:

- RQ1: What is the present state of affairs in Estonia for conducting digital diplomacy?

SQ1: What are the main characteristics of Estonia's current environment for conducting digital diplomacy?

- RQ2: How to define digital diplomacy in the context of Estonia?

SQ1: What is the difference between cyber diplomacy and digital diplomacy?

- RQ3: What recommendations can be given for shaping Estonia's digital diplomacy?

○ SQ1: What policy priorities should Estonian digital diplomacy focus on?

○ SQ2: What international organisations/initiatives should Estonia consider for its digital diplomacy?

○ SQ3: Which countries/regions should Estonia focus on for its digital diplomacy strategy?

Formulated sub-questions act as guidance and give input for answering the main research questions. The expected outcome of the research was to provide the reader with a possible definition of digital diplomacy, that fits for Estonia. Taking into consideration the research conducted and the data that was collected during the process, the author will also give recommendations for future work.

### 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has 6 main chapters and 4 of them with subchapters. The **first chapter** gives an introduction to the topic and to the thesis itself. It briefly introduces how ICT is an inseparable part of our lives and how it has now entered the discussions of foreign policy. The first subsection presents the problem this thesis is trying to solve through research. The second subsection of the first chapter lists the research questions and sub-questions that help to achieve the aim of this paper. The current, third subsection gives an overview of the thesis' structure. The **second chapter** dives into the theoretical background that is necessary to understand for this topic. The first subsection of that chapter talks about technologies and their role in foreign policy, finishing by introducing diplomacy and its importance. After that, the second subsection presents different ways digital diplomacy has been tried to define and provides the reader with similar definitions that are relevant for understanding the characteristics of digital diplomacy. The **third chapter** gives an overview of the research methodology used for this thesis. The first subsection presents the case study methodology and why it was chosen for this paper. The second subsection introduces the data triangulation method and how it helps to achieve the expected outcomes of the research. The third subsection presents one of the data collection methods, interviewing, by giving an overview of the collection process for this work. The **fourth main chapter** will show the results of the research. First subsection commences with the results of document analysis research method that was used for this thesis, which is divided into two smaller sections as to introduce two of the analysed documents separately. This is followed by another subsection of the main chapter, that presents the results of a thematic analysis that was conducted with the outcomes of interviews. The **fifth chapter** discusses the results of the research and proposes a definition of digital diplomacy for the Estonian context, as well as policy recommendations for shaping Estonia's digital diplomacy strategy. It also mentions the limitations of this research, which can be solved with further studies. The **sixth chapter** summarises the findings of the research and also presents recommendations for future work. This document also has appendices which are added to the end of the paper.

## **2 Theoretical Overview**

This chapter intends to offer an insight to the impact of technology and how it has embedded to foreign policy topics. It tries to present multiple positive and negative roles that digital technologies play in this matter and how diplomacy is involved. The second subsection of this chapter will elaborate how previous research has tried to define digital diplomacy and will shortly compare it to cyber diplomacy, which is seen as a definition defined more distinctly.

### **2.1 Technology in Foreign Policy**

It has become clear, that living in the digital era has made technology almost an inevitable part of our daily lives, giving us the opportunity to be connected to the world more conveniently and easily. Media outlets, that have also been digitalized over the years, are keeping us up to date on what is happening and doing this within minutes, if not even seconds. For example, news about bombing in the Middle East can be presented via live stream by a local correspondent to television channels in France. Unfortunately, distributing information is not done only on noble purposes and digital media channels are being used to spread disinformation globally [21]. In example China, that is using different media channels to promote its own narrative on controversial topics, having a large network of diplomats and journalists abroad to help with this [22]. COVID-19 pandemic is only one of those topics, which had a massive amount of disinformation around it, questioning the source of the virus, the actual effects of the vaccines, data of deaths and many other issues [23], [24]. China used vaccines as a tool in their foreign policy, claiming that the Western countries are being selfish while China is donating the vaccines to others that are lacking of it, using media once again to distribute these messages [22], [25]. It was not done only to shed a bad light on other countries, but rather to use this as an argument to get political support for other matters, i.e. the question of Taiwan's sovereignty, that China has been struggling with [22], [26].

Using technologies as tools in the foreign policy is not limited to information distribution and using media channels to do so. Even though this has been an angle to look at digital diplomacy and will be elaborated more in the next chapter. Digital technologies have become a geopolitical issue, which also shows its complexity and importance. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the United Kingdom, for example, has stated five ways how new technologies are influencing the international landscape [27]:

- Technology ‘democratisation’ – increased online access, which allows more engagement for public governance.
- Dependence on critical technologies – new and emerging technologies such as 5G, 6G, Artificial Intelligence etc. are mainly developed in USA and China, giving them more power and making others dependent on them (e.g. controlling the supply chain).
- ‘Weaponisation’ of the Internet – just as the online space can be used for creating good governance, it can also be used for malicious purposes. E.g. spreading disinformation and propaganda online, conducting cyber attacks and creating mistrust in the society through these activities.
- Enhanced connectivity – Increased pressure for the diplomats and foreign ministries that have more issues and topics to deal with. Due to the fast and powerful spread of information with the help of online channels, public officials are pressured to react and take action rapidly.
- Increased role of the private sector – big tech companies that have the power and capacities to influence policymaking, either directly or through their actions on the global arena.

Elaborating more on the technology ‘democratisation’, then this can be seen as one of the positive impacts of digital development. E-governance and the use of digital tools to provide public services is a way to increase transparency in the society, as well as to improve public service delivery [28]. Nevertheless, e-governance has also been researched and seen as something that can deepen the socioeconomic inequality. Whether it is the lack of access to ICT and digital infrastructure, lack of skills or insufficient application of a national digital identity, latter one being one of the key pillars to provide

public services efficiently and transparently [29], [30]. The global digital divide is still a very relevant issue as only around half of the world's population is using Internet, while developing countries are extremely disconnected comparing to the world [31].

Another human-centric debate has been whether digitalisation and technology will put people out of jobs and replace humans with robots [32]. This fear will most likely remain for some time, considering the fast-paced developments happening and people having to make a change in their careers, or to learn new skills to be competitive in a digitalised society. Although these discussions were happening already during the industrial revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, today, we are actually facing a global deficit of workforce in ICT sector [32], [33].

Digital technologies don't recognise borders, so whatever happens in a nation, will have a global impact as well. Question won't be if, but rather the scale and scope of it. Currently, most of the technological advancements are happening in 'big tech' companies [34], [35]. 'Big Techs' refer to digital platform providers that control the majority of the provided platform services and the data flows with it, biggest players being Amazon, Apple, Meta (Facebook), Alphabet (Google), Microsoft, Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu [35], [36]. These corporations have a substantial market capitalisation, showing their dominance in the stock market, but not limited to [37]. This also validates a previously mentioned aspect how big technology companies have the power and capabilities to influence global policymaking. None of these companies were established in Europe, but mainly in the United States and China [34], [35]. Which has made Europe realise its gap in technological developments and decreasing market share. An issue so burning, that Europe has adopted a digital sovereignty concept, an ideological framework to decrease Europe's dependence on 'Big Techs' and gain back its competitiveness [38].

Despite the several emerging ways technology is influencing foreign policy, an old tool, diplomacy, remains as the key instrument for influencing international discussions between nations [39]. By understanding the importance of ICT in diplomacy, many countries have created separate department(s) to their foreign ministry to handle these matters, such as USA, Russian Federation, Canada, Estonia, Germany, France, United Kingdom and many others [40]. Of course, as articulated earlier, it is not solely the public sector anymore, who dominates the policymaking. It's the role of private sector and civil society as well, who have the opportunity to participate in public governance



mechanisms, or to impact the processes indirectly with their actions. Therefore, coordinated actions between states and stakeholders are needed to bridge the global digital divide and take advantage of the technological advancements. Internet is global, so should be the approach we jointly take.

## **2.2 Defining Digital Diplomacy**

The principle of technology influencing foreign policy is clear, but what exactly is perceived as a problem and what are the opportunities, depends on the viewpoint and the changing society. Still, the institutions responsible for foreign policy and affairs remain traditional – the ministry of foreign affairs, which in some cases can be united with other spheres of policy [41]. Diplomacy is the soft way of achieving foreign policy goals by negotiating, gathering necessary information and so on, without using force [42]. Researchers claim that the current political landscape and our societies have changed tremendously, meaning that diplomacy should not be talked only in the context of governments, but other players such as international companies etc. also practice diplomacy [40], [41], [43]. ICTs have had an extent impact on diplomacy, which have led to coining the term ‘digital diplomacy’ [39]. As there isn’t yet a mutually agreed definition, the phrase “digital diplomacy” can cause confusion due to its ambiguity [44].

Many definite it as the use of digital tools and social media in the field of diplomacy. Manor [43] looks at it as how ministries of foreign affairs use social media for their work and claims the Arab Spring in 2010 being the catalyst event for that. He points out that the ministries of foreign affairs follow news carefully as their source of information. Hence, when online media became dominant, the diplomats had to adjust. Sheludiakova *et al.* [45] describes digital diplomacy also through communication, by explaining how ICTs have put mass communication online and diplomatic service has been forced to start using different online media channels for work. This is seen as a positive way to promote a country and create a certain image for the public, which also enables a bigger outreach to target groups. Authors also explain that digital diplomacy is part of public diplomacy, which like digital diplomacy, doesn’t have a joint definition, but simply described, means the efforts to communicate to foreign publics with a purpose of influencing the information receiver(s) in a way that it helps to achieve foreign policy objectives of the information provider [45]–[47]. As Ayhan [47] brings out, some even argue about the

role of non-government organisations in public diplomacy, while the European Union External Action (EEAS) contrary, emphasises the importance of non-government actors in order for policymaking to be inclusive with the people and for the people [48]. But when it comes to digital diplomacy, it is something that the European Union (EU) hasn't outlined coherently, though it has realised the importance of digital diplomacy strategy and how it supports the EU on achieving its objectives [3].

This opens up another possible way of defining digital diplomacy, seeing it as a topic part of the foreign policy, meaning that how digitalisation and digital tools are influencing the geopolitical stance. The European Union's Foreign Affairs Council has come out with conclusions, describing the influential role of digital technologies in geopolitics, referring to the importance of having a joint digital diplomacy for the EU [20]. Still, 'digital diplomacy' is not defined, nor is there a reference to other documents that could be defining it. On the other hand, 'cyber diplomacy' has a clear definition with specific objectives:

Cyber diplomacy aims to secure multilateral agreements on cyber norms, responsible state and non-state behaviour in cyberspace, and effective global digital governance. The goal is to create an open, free, stable and secure cyberspace anchored in international law through alliances between like-minded countries, organisations, the private sector, civil society and experts. [15, p. 1]

Cyber diplomacy is more related to defence policy, handling the civilian and military aspects of cybersecurity, and bringing in the applicability of international law in cyberspace [50], [51]. Regardless of that, the lines can still be blurry on many occasions, especially as internet governance and internet freedom are discussed among other matters. Feakin and Weaver [52] argue, that the angle of work is a matter of maturity, which is why countries have decided to talk about cyber diplomacy from the security aspect, saying the advancements will push nations to see the issues with cyber, digital and technology in a holistic way. For the purpose of this thesis, main focus will stay on digital diplomacy, but explaining the essence of cyber diplomacy is important when articulating the definition of digital diplomacy. This shows how digital diplomacy takes the umbrella term of technologies' power in geopolitics, and how cyber is a supportive sub definition with the security perspective.

Nevertheless, despite the numerous perspectives, there is no exact definition accepted widely for digital diplomacy [39], [44]. The Diplo Foundation, an organisation studying this matter closely for several years, claims that by using different adjectives and prefixes to describe ‘digital’ topics in different spheres, the terminology keeps on getting more confusing [53]. However, they point out three main ways how digital technologies are influencing diplomacy and try to explain digital diplomacy through that [54]:

- Digital technologies impacting the environment for diplomacy – new and redistributed political power, interdependence on other countries and actors etc.
- New emerging issues such as data privacy, e-commerce, digital infrastructure and standards, digital identity etc.
- The use of digital technologies in diplomacy, such as social media, virtual and hybrid events etc.

In addition to digital diplomacy, a similar term ‘tech diplomacy’ is in use. It can be argued that it gained momentum when Denmark as a first country in the world appointed a Tech Ambassador, that is located in Silicon Valley, in the hub of majority global technology trends [55]. Even though based in Silicon Valley, the ambassador has a global mandate and is being supported with additional offices in Beijing and in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. The purpose of this unique setting is to represent Denmark’s national interests and to make sure these are aligned with technological advancements and also follow democratic principles and value human rights [56].

Garcia [57] sees ‘tech diplomacy’ as the umbrella term, where digital diplomacy is being conducted in a multistakeholder environment, meaning states, private sector, academia and civil society, all included in the ecosystem. Even though tech diplomacy could also be interpreted as diplomacy with Big Tech companies [58]. The relationship between different definitions as seen by Garcia is shown on Figure 1. It also brings in the term ‘e-Diplomacy’ which refers to the use of ICT tools in diplomacy. According to his theory, digital diplomacy combines the use of ICT tools in diplomacy together with topics in foreign policy that are influenced by digital technologies and their developments.

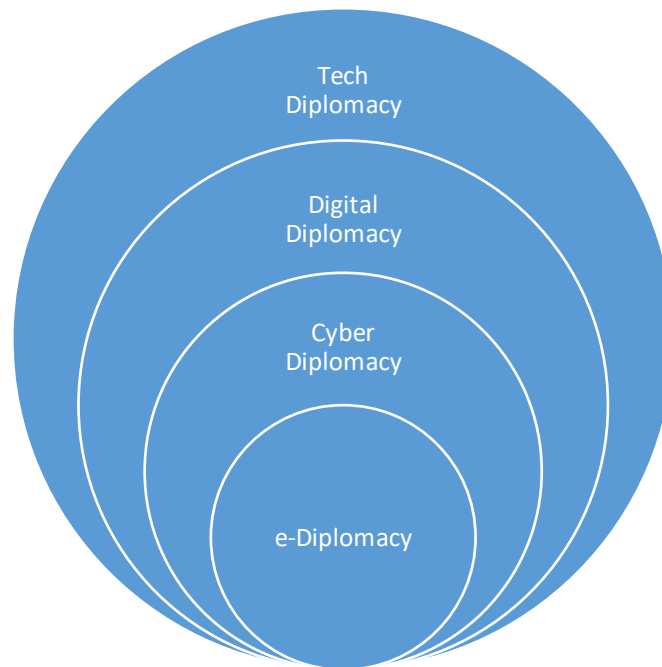


Figure 1. Garcia's theory of defining technology in diplomacy.

The characteristics of diplomacy are destined to change as technology develops [57]. Therefore, it is understood why the definition of digital diplomacy still remains unclear to many and is often used in different settings interchangeably with tech diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, e-diplomacy etc. In addition to states, the private sector has a tremendous influence in global policymaking compared to former environment where old-school diplomacy was conducted, thus adding more complexity to this topic. This thesis tries to bring some clarity for the Estonian case.

## **3 Research Methodology**

This chapter will give an overview of the used research methodology for the thesis. A qualitative research was conducted, which is used to explore and analyse data that is presented in text and is non-numerical [59]. The first subsection of this chapter will introduce the case study methodology and explains why it was a suitable choice for this thesis. The second subsection introduces the data triangulation theory, used data collection methods and how the data was analysed. Lastly, the third subsection presents one of the used data collection method, interviewing, and will introduce the conduction process. The other data collection method, document analysis, is covered in the data triangulation section.

### **3.1 Case Study**

With the aim to find an answer to the stated problem of defining digital diplomacy for Estonia, a case study research methodology was chosen. This thesis is looking at a concrete example in a wider context, which has not been researched before. The Estonian model has been looked at multiple times, but mostly from the perspective of Estonia being a good example for e-governance and digital solutions. Therefore, this paper pursues to fill the gap of something that is not in place for a digital frontrunner, as Estonia is often referred as. This section will introduce the essence of a case study, bring out positive and negative aspects of this research methodology, and explain how this choice of methodology fits for the current thesis.

The case study methodology is a way to analyse an object of interest through a more complex and comprehensive lens [60]. As Yin refers [61], when ‘why’ or ‘how’ questions are framing the research, using a case study methodology is preferred, even though there is scepticism around it as well. It can be argued, that by analysing something from multiple angles, the research can be too abstract and not have a solid outcome backed up by arguments [62]. Nevertheless, case study remains a commonly used approach to understand phenomena, which can be difficult to explain when taking something out from

the bigger picture. In-depth analysis of the examined case can help to create connections between different aspects that otherwise would be left out of the scope of the research, yet can have an influencing role [60]. Nevertheless, it is important to set boundaries to fully understand what the research will focus on. Otherwise, it will be easy to get lost in the data and nuances that might complement the research, yet will be extra for the chosen scope.

By focusing specifically on Estonia's model, this research was designed as a single case study, offering a deeper understanding and analysis for the chosen object (Estonia). As Yin suggest [60], a screening procedure should be done before going to the actual case, so looking at relevant documents and talking to people connected to the topic that could be potential respondents in the data collection phase. The author of this thesis went through the screening process as the topic is very relevant to the author's daily work. Different public and confidential documents were reviewed that proved the need to conduct a case study with the scope chosen for this paper. These findings were validated by experts in the field who also confirmed the necessity and some of them contributed to the data collection process by giving interviews. The next chapter will introduce Yin's theory on data triangulation, which was used for this thesis and is a crucial part of a case study.

### **3.2 Data Triangulation**

Even though approaches to conducting a research can vary depending on the subject and objectives, the importance of data is relevant for any case. Independent of the scope, the source and validity of information becomes crucial when doing an analysis and justifying the stated arguments. Therefore, multiple data sources are needed to compare different positions and findings, and to adequately make conclusions based on the findings, not on biases [63]. Yin's theory of data triangulation [60] exercises the way of using several data sources to collect and analyse data, therefore finding and confirming which results overlap. Through that, overarching conclusions can be represented, which constitute for a common understanding, not for a narrow interpretation of the subject.

For the current thesis, main sources of data were two national strategy documents of Estonia, interviews conducted by the author, and various other academic or official documents. Firstly, thorough literature review was done to give background information

on how technology is related to foreign policy, and to give examples of attempts to define digital diplomacy. Several existing academic journals and sources were visited and studied to provide the reader with relevant up-to-date information. After laying a strong foundation, further document reviews were conducted to dive in deeper to the Estonian model. For this, document analysis as a form of qualitative research was chosen. The author looked at two national development plans – The Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy and the Estonia’s Digital Agenda 2030. Both will be introduced in section 4.1.

After analysing the development plans, interviews were conducted with key experts working in different sectors. Thorough overview of the process and criteria will be presented in the next section, subchapter 3.3. In essence, interviews act as a valuable source of information that complement the data triangulation theory, Yin [61] even claiming this being one of the most important one. The qualitative data that is being collected through interviews will help to include insights that may not be reflected in written documents. It is possible to hear from people who are connected to the topic that’s being researched, and therefore understand, whether theoretical approaches on the paper are actually relevant in practice. Of course, it is important for the interviewer not to be biased and not direct the conversation to the desired outcome [60]. When the interviews are conducted, transcripts of the conversations are created so the data could be analysed efficiently. There isn’t one standard way of creating a transcript and it is up to the author to decide the level of detail and form how the transcript is presented [60]. After collecting data through interviews and having finalised transcripts, analysis is carried out. A commonly used tool for analysing qualitative data is thematic analysis, which is a method to find reoccurring themes in the qualitative data [64]. Different phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke [65] are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Phases of thematic analysis (Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006).

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS</b>
Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

For this thesis, taguette.org tool was used for coding and to extract themes from the interview transcripts. While conducting the analysis, the thesis followed the theory and guidelines by Braun and Clark [65]. The analysis together with the results are described in section 4.2.

### 3.3 Interview Overview

After literature review for the case and document analyses was done, interviews with experts were conducted. This was a tool to validate the findings and to get an additional insight to the current situation and problem. In order to have a perspective from all governance sectors (public sector, private sector and civil society) represented, interviewees with different professional background were chosen [66]. Total of 7 interviews were conducted that gave valuable insights to the topic. Most of the interviewees were current or former Estonian civil servants experienced in policymaking and digitalisation. In addition, views of the private sector and academic institutions that deal with international cooperation on digitalisation/ICT were represented.

Interviews lasted between 25-40 minutes, depending on interviewee’s speaking pace and the length of answers. In the beginning of each interview, the respondent had to give consent for the session to be recorded. The interviewer notified all respondents in advance that the session would be recorded for transcription purpose and full anonymity for the individual will be granted. In total, the semi-structured interview [67] had 10 questions, the 5<sup>th</sup> one having a sub-question if the interviewee was able to elaborate more. Interviewees were also given the chance to provide any additional feedback or comments after responding to the main questions. The interview questions can be found in appendix 2.



All interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Sessions were recorded and automatically transcribed by the Teams' transcription tool. The author did a proofread afterwards for the generated transcripts by watching the recording and comparing it to the generated text. Faulty phrases were corrected, repetitions and stuttering were removed, creating verbatim transcripts [68]. These transcripts were used for thematic analysis and the results are presented in the corresponding section 4.2.

## 4 Results

This chapter will introduce the results of the research and the analysis conducted with the data. It will demonstrate the data triangulation theory described in the previous chapter, as different sources of data will help to evaluate the findings and draw well-argued conclusions. The first subchapter will present two document analyses that were carried out with the purpose of understanding Estonia's current conditions and the state's official view and plans. The second subchapter discusses the results of a thematic analysis, where the interview data was identified, analysed and interpreted. Overarching summary of the findings will be reflected in the next main chapter, where the output is used for solving the research problem and providing recommendations.

### 4.1 Overview of Key Strategies

This section will give a detailed overview of two key national strategic documents of Estonia that were analysed for the purpose of this thesis. Important to explain, that Estonia is a highly digitalised country (as elucidated earlier), which means it has a developed and overarching digital ecosystem. In order to fulfill its goals as a digital society, all other policy spheres have to contribute to their field of expertise, also making them responsible for digital matters in their area of work [69]. A document analysis was conducted for the following strategic documents:

- Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030 (in Estonian 'Eesti Välispoliitika Arengukava 2030') – national development plan for achieving Estonia's foreign policy objectives;
- Estonia's Digital Agenda 2030 (in Estonian 'Eesti digiühiskond 2030') – national digital strategy of Estonia.

The abovementioned two documents are not comprehensive to give a full overview of Estonia's digital landscape, but are the most relevant ones when we look at technology in the foreign policy context. Both documents were reviewed and evaluated in detail and

will be introduced further in this chapter. To follow the aim of this thesis, the analysis of the documents predominantly introduces issues related to technology and digitalisation, elaborating more on the Estonian context. Important to explain, that as a member of the EU, Estonia is strongly involved and dependent on policymaking and regulations of the EU [70]. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021, the Government of Estonia approved priority topics for Estonia in the EU, these being digital and green transitions, and security [70]. Therefore, just like other national documents follow the EU's regulations and guidelines, so do the two that are being analysed for this research. Firstly, 'Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030' is being expounded.

#### **4.1.1 Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030**

As described in previous chapters, by nature, foreign ministries are responsible for their nation's foreign policy strategy and completing the objectives set [41]. Same applies in Estonia, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia is leading the planning and implementing of the nation's foreign policy [15]:

The task of Estonian foreign policy is to ensure the security and prosperity of the state and its citizens and to protect their interests in international relations. Foreign policy is consistent and intertwined with other fields, and its overall success depends on the clarity and functioning of the principles of cooperation between all actors, including the private and public sectors and civil society.

The intertwined nature of foreign policy has been brought out multiple times in the document, which also aligns with the characteristics of technology in foreign policy, as explained earlier in the chapter 'Theoretical Overview' of this thesis. The Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030 serves the purpose of ensuring Estonia's interests internationally, while considering the constantly changing environment. This development plan for foreign policy is first of its kind in Estonia and was composed together with a supporting committee, which consisted of representatives from all other ministries. In addition, other stakeholders and civil society was involved for the purpose of inclusivity.

According to the document, Estonian foreign policy has a general purpose: maintaining Estonian language, culture and nationality; the country's sovereignty and independence in the global arena; increased welfare of its citizens and the Estonian diaspora; Estonia's

increased contribution to the sustainable development goals. The document states three strategic strands, that need to be strengthened for fulfilling this purpose, these being the following: 1) security, stable international relations and sustainable development; 2) external economy; 3) Estonian diaspora. First, each of the strand gives an evaluation of the current situation of the topic(s) that is covered with the strand, also presenting main conclusions from it. Then the goals set for 2030 are being stated, together with the supporting sub-objectives, indicators and necessary actions needed to achieve the goals.

**Security, stable international relations, and sustainable development** – this section brings out the fact, that over the past decades, the environment has become more complex, blurring geographical borders and making it difficult to handle security threats. It mentions the rapid development of technologies, which has caused increased digitalisation and therefore brings both risks (i.e. cyberattacks) and opportunities (i.e. e-commerce). Also, it mentions the spread of disinformation via online media channels and how it has an impact on the public opinion. This means that when planning foreign policy strategies, dynamics and situations happening on a national level must be considered. Estonia's digital identity, e-services, secure cyberspace and esteemed digital country image are considered Estonia's strengths, that can and should be used to strengthen Estonia's international reputation.

Technology is not stated in any of the sub-objectives, but has been mentioned several times together with the necessary actions. Strategic communication and helping with development of digital services and tools in priority countries (that have shown interest) is emphasised. As well as encouraging other countries to implement ICT solutions and e-services in multiple fields, mainly in the context of providing development aid. In the EU, single market that promotes innovation, use of digital solutions and ensures free flow of data, is being prioritised. In addition, development of e-services and cross-border data exchange in several other formats (i.e. Nordic-Baltic Cooperation, and group of Likeminded countries) is highly welcomed. The actions also include the capabilities of Estonian diplomats, placing the need to train them on cybersecurity and emerging technologies, in the agenda. According to the document, increased reputation and influence of Estonia is important and it is the role of foreign service to support and spread the word of Estonia as an innovative digital society.

**External economy** – the section explains how the powers have shifted in the global economy, where China and India are becoming dominant over US and EU. It also marks Asia and Africa as new emerging markets. Technology is no stranger in this context, stating the difficulties of e-commerce and the trouble of creating relevant legal frameworks, also the need and pressure to ensure free flow of data. Thus, Estonian companies selling ICT solutions have high potential on the global market. As the proportion of digital services in the total export of goods and services is growing (in the example of Estonia), so is the need to develop a global legal framework.

The interest for Estonian secure and trustworthy digital identity and identity management system has grown across the world, which is another reason to actively participate in shaping the global legal framework. It is not only to share Estonia's model, but to increase international cooperation thanks to secure data exchange, digital identity and mutually accepted standards. The Estonian e-Residency program has opened Estonian e-services for foreign entrepreneurs, which has increased Estonia's 'digital country' image and has increased investments to the country, supporting its economic growth. Estonian diplomats also have a role in this, by introducing these benefits around the world and finding opportunities to strengthen international cooperation, as well as standing for Estonia's interests.

Despite the huge potential and benefits, there are still some hurdles waiting to be crossed. Even though digitalisation has automated many processes and supporting daily tasks, the aging society and lack of workforce is deepening. The document also states the ICT sector being one of the most in need for laborers in the upcoming years. It is why promoting Estonia as an attractive, efficient and safe place to work and live, is important. Of course, it is not only to invite foreigners to fill the labor gaps, but to support the Estonian diaspora to return to Estonia and make their acclimatisation as smooth as possible. Supporting companies on the global market and building the business diplomacy capacities among Estonian diplomats are seen as needs to strengthen Estonia's external economy. It is also pointed out, that finding the right balance between country's economic and security interests is crucial.

The need to build business diplomacy capacities are also brought out as action items, but moreover, mentioning the need to increase the number of digital diplomats. The strategy also prioritises actions to ensure digital data exchange with all Estonia's economic

partners in Europe. Therefore, it supports the development of cross border data exchange and e-services, also the infrastructure needed for it. Strong bilateral digital cooperation with France and Germany are seen as priorities, as well as the implementation of EU's digital solutions in Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus) [71]. In addition, paying extra attention to the growth of Estonian ICT companies and supporting their export of goods and services.

**Estonian diaspora** – the third strand describes the growing Estonian diaspora, as well as the growing international travel of citizens. It once again mentions the issue of aging population, also stating the fact that young people between the age 20-39 is the main age group to leave Estonia. Main purpose for this being better job opportunities and salary abroad, but on top of that, free movement in the EU and Estonia's well-developed e-services that support the movement. The movement for leisure purposes, job abroad or other reasons, has increased the workload of Estonian missions, that are obligated to assist its citizens. Technology has a part in this issue too, both as the solution and as the cause of the problem. To start from the bright side, an example being that citizens travelling are able to find necessary consular information online. An example from the negative side – foreigners applying for the e-Residency card will usually collect the card from an Estonian mission (consulate or embassy), which puts a lot of pressure for Estonia's small missions due to the small amount of personnel. Efficient, better accessible and convenient e-services are stated as a sub-objective to support the Estonian diaspora and Estonian citizens abroad for shorter time, i.e. for travelling purposes. As stronger connection and communication with the Estonian diaspora is brought out as an objective, the use of technology and online channels are there to assist with achieving this.

**Strong foreign service** – this supportive section is seen as a foundation that is needed to work on the aforementioned strands and achieve the set goals. The description of the current situation states that the number of employees in the Estonian foreign service has decreased, but the need to represent Estonia and its interests globally has increased tremendously. There are many regions and fields that are not covered or don't have an Estonian footprint and this has caused many difficulties for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to achieve Estonia's foreign policy goals. In order to tackle the problems brought out in the strands before, it is important that the contribution of the foreign service increases. The document also emphasizes, that acquiring new skills and knowledge in diplomacy is crucial to keep up in this fast-paced world, specially when it comes to

emerging technologies. At the same time, Estonia's visibility, representation and good image must be kept up. For this to happen, an action item of increasing the number of diplomats dealing with cyber, economic and digital matters has been marked down. The document also says Estonia plans to be the first country in the world to create an e-Embassy, which would help to increase global coverage. In addition, the use of modern ICT tools that will help to conduct foreign policy activities, especially in unexpected and distinct situations, is listed as an action item.

To sum up, technology crossed each strand from different perspectives. The given overview brought out the main topics of the Estonian foreign policy development plans, that were connected to technology and/or digitalisation. Even though the strategic document discussed the importance of several factors that have and will change the geopolitical sphere, the focus of this analysis remained on digitalisation and technologies for the purpose of this thesis. It is clear for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that technological developments are influencing foreign policy and how the landscape in diplomacy has changed – from new discussion topics to educating diplomats to use ICT tools and to understand their role in foreign policy.

#### **4.1.2 Estonia's Digital Agenda 2030**

The Estonian Digital Agenda 2030 [69] aims to develop the country, its economy and society with the help of digital technologies. Sub-objectives are formulated in the document to support the overall aim, while emphasizing innovation, the use of emerging technologies, creating favourable conditions, and keeping citizens in the centre of the developments. Open and inclusive public governance, where citizens can and want to be involved, is seen as a trend Estonia is able to set and lead the example globally. The document has phrased a vision of a country that's full of digital power, and to fulfill this, the Digital Agenda has set precise objectives and action plans. There are three courses of action that the activities are drawn on:

1. General development of Estonia's digital society, with a goal of providing best user experience for digital services.
2. Improved connectivity, with a goal of fast and accessible internet everywhere in the country.

3. Development of national cyber security, with a goal of keeping Estonia's cyberspace safe, secure and trustworthy.

In order to achieve the ambitious vision, this development plan has stated expectations for other policy spheres, as these are directly connected to the Digital Agenda, but not covered in this document. That's because the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Telecommunication (MKM) is responsible for implementing the Estonian Digital Agenda and for the overall digital development of the country. But each institution is responsible for its own area of work and digitalisation. The three action courses brought out in the previous paragraph are described in detail, but before that, general overview of the current digital landscape is provided.

Estonia really is a digital society that has established itself in the global arena and ranks high in several leaderboards. Such as the EU's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) or the United Nation's E-Government Survey. Almost all public services are available online and the number of people using digital public services is one of the highest in the EU. Nevertheless, usability is not meeting people's expectations nor demands. Lack of resources to maintain and develop services is a pain point, which hinders keeping up with the trends. On top of that, issues with connectivity and fast internet are still relevant in rural areas. Geography comes into play when talking about security as the number of cyberattacks and acts of cybercrime have increased. Changes in geopolitics and the use of technologies to influence policy is becoming more and more acute. Estonia sees this as a huge threat as itself is also dependent on foreign companies and vendors. The snapshot of Estonia's current situation emphasizes that threats online don't recognize borders and international cooperation is crucial. The evaluation also describes the economic perspective, saying Estonian ICT sector and startup companies have a lot of potential on the global market. However, lack of workforce and specific skills in the field is considered as the main factor that's slowing down the digital development. It is clear that digital technologies and their development is here to stay, which brings several opportunities, as well as risks, that require specialists and not generalists to mitigate them.

The first course of action, **Estonia's digital country**, has the sub-objective of providing best user experience when using digital public services. The success is measured with user satisfaction rates (both companies and citizens) and published once a year. For



improved service delivery, the country wants to move to proactive and event-based services, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quality data for it. Among that, citizens' rights must be protected, developments need to be citizen-centric and people will have to have control over their data. Sustainability and green digital government is the way of developing for the future, and Estonia is no exception. It does so by implementing environmentally friendly solutions and following the reusability principle when and where possible.

The question of sustainability comes to discussions when centrally provided IT-services are talked about. Currently, most of the foundational IT-services are handled and maintained by each organisation independently, making the ecosystem very distributed. Maintaining this with legacy systems is costly and here, consolidating base layer solutions is seen as one solution. In addition, the usage of cloud solutions in the public sector that is interoperable with private sector solutions is looked at. Worth to mention, that the concept of a data embassy is being revised and researched as the opportunity to host critical data and services elsewhere for backup, and is a potential way of mitigating risks when a severe cyberattack is happening (or happened) and critical services are dysfunctional.

One of the pillars of Estonia's digital society is its data exchange layer X-tee, which allows to exchange data securely between information systems, by both public and private organisations. As this solution is being further used by other countries, it is important for Estonia to continue its development. Moreover, as the EU prioritises cross-border data exchange and aims to create interoperability between basic public services of nations across the Union. Unfortunately, Estonia's resources are mostly directed to keeping up the current systems and there's no actual strategical system how to develop new skills and technology, which has decreased the innovation in digital government. The goal is to change this and to become the initiator of implementing new technologies, as well as to create a systematic approach for the academia, public and the private sector to collaborate on development efforts. The document states, that there's still too much duplication and silos between different entities when developing digital technologies and services. Reusability of digital tools and services with sustainable funding is seen as the core method to tackle the aforementioned issues.

The first action course also elaborates on international cooperation, as Estonia is seen as a valuable contributor to international policymaking. Due to limited resources, Estonia has to choose the focus and scope of its contribution to international initiatives, even though its participation is expected in almost all cooperation formats on digitalisation and technology topics. Estonia has also learned from other countries' experiences on digitalisation, as well as continues to share its experiences. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Digital Nations are mentioned as priority cooperation formats that Estonia should participate in for knowledge-sharing purposes. Additionally, making bilateral cooperation with countries that are digitally well-developed and that could benefit to Estonia's digital government development. The EU and the cooperation format between Nordic countries are marked as ones to take part for larger policy and law-making purposes. The objectives of targeted international cooperation include better interoperability of digital services between Estonia and other countries in the EU, for both private and public sector. Estonia will continue to support its ICT sector companies on external markets when possible and necessary, and offer state expertise for other countries if requested.

The second course of action, **improved connectivity**, has the subobjective to provide super fast, affordable and trusted connectivity, that would enable the creation and use of innovative digital services across Estonia. Currently, 58% of the households and companies can access internet connection that is at least 100Mbit/s, the aim is to reach 100%. The results will be measured annually by the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority. Estonian communications market depends a lot on the regulations made on the European Union level, which gives clear guidelines how the market should be functioning. There are currently three large cable network providers, three mobile telephone operators and several smaller regional operators in Estonia. According to the document, there is high competition on the retail market, making it easy for new actors to enter the market, which also makes the mobile communication services affordable for the users. Nevertheless, per consumers, Estonian market is small on the global scale. This makes the Estonian communications market more vulnerable to international changes. Therefore, the strategy sees European Union and the International Telecommunication Union as two large forums, where Estonia's interests should be protected and presented.

To improve the service provision across the country, Estonia has a broadband network with the length of 7000 km that has been built with the state's support. That's in addition

to the networks built by the telecommunication operators (also known as telcos). In general, the average and maximum speeds provided by the telcos are sufficient to offer daily digital services for the users. Despite that, Estonia ranks below EU's average when it comes to stable and fast networks in rural areas. The state is slowly progressing as it needs to keep up with the EU's targets and aims to have fiber-optic access networks to more than 45,000 households, which is around 1/3 of the total number of rural area households without fast fixed connection. The goal is to have full coverage with 5G networks, which will avail opportunities to implement new technologies, including 6G networks. Digital inclusion is high on the agenda and therefore investments to the infrastructure from both the state and telcos is needed. The document states, that in order to have stable and uninterrupted 5G coverage in main transport corridor areas, the country will support the installation of core infrastructure necessary for it. Moreover, state will support selected residential and business areas with the same matter. And to be ready for implementing 6G networks, Estonia will support reaching an agreement on the EU level soon, which will regulate the usage, support measures and creating the legal framework to operate in.

The need to develop doesn't come from the urge to be modern and innovative, but rather to be able to offer services on an advanced level, that new technological developments are helping to provide. Building 5G and 6G networks are not seen as success stories just by creating more connectivity, but how it can improve service delivery through better outreach with the relevant and expected content. The state supports planning and developing services that majority of the society finds beneficial. Energy, environment, social services, healthcare, connected mobility are just few of the example areas that could also serve Estonia's economic and social interests, not only from the citizens' perspective. Innovative content and business services that are based on new broadband technologies, such as 5G networks, are seen as Estonia's opportunity to be a frontrunner of global 5G trends. Maintaining internet freedom is a priority when talking about digital developments, therefore Estonia also continues to contribute to the work of international organisations, with the purpose of advocating and protecting internet freedom and its principles.

The third course of action is focusing on **cybersecurity**, as this is essential to keep the digital society up and running. Safety and trust lay the foundation for innovation and developments, so cybersecurity supports the general vision of Digital Agenda, while

keeping the national security in mind. To measure the security of Estonia's cyberspace, it is evaluated with two indicators: 1) Service providers (as defined in the Cybersecurity Act) have met the requirements at the level where potential damages are not remarkable, and 2) The amount of people who haven't avoided using digital services despite the existence of security risks.

The current division of responsibilities for cybersecurity in Estonia is very decentralised and each system owner has to ensure the security of their systems by themselves. This has increased the necessity for specialised cybersecurity experts. Still, there are tasks that are centralised from the state's perspective, including but not limited to monitoring cyberspace, development of national strategies and security standards, and supervision. The Digital Agenda states that the current setup for crisis management and solving incidents needs improvement, e.g. having the right responsible authorities for different situations. But the problem lies deeper as the general ability to analyse the current situation and trends is low, which hinders the ability to develop responsive up-to-date standards and guidelines to deal with the threats. This shortcoming is seen as something that prevents sustainable development and innovation for a digital society. To recap, Estonia's current capacity to prevent risks is not sufficient as there is lack of specialised cyber experts, issues with financial resources, and the decentralised ecosystem that makes it more difficult to monitor cyberspace and mitigate threats.

To conclude, the Estonian Digital Agenda 2030 is a forward-looking development plan, which understands the rapidly changing nature of technologies, as well as how it influences geopolitics. The information presented in this section was derived from the necessity to give an overview of Estonia's current digital landscape, which the Agenda comprehensively does. However, considering the scope of this thesis, the author summarised the circumstances and future plans of the Agenda into a holistic description, while most relevant matters to the topic were emphasised. It is important to note, that due to Estonia's decentralised ecosystem, other institutions and their strategies and plans strongly complement and influence Estonia's overall situation.

## **4.2 Thematic Analysis of Interviews**

This section will explore the results of the thematic analysis method that was applied to analyse the data collected from semi-structured interviews. After familiarising with the

interview transcripts, the data was coded with an open-source software taguette.org. The approach used was data-driven, not having specific codes generated beforehand, but rather finding unique statements and reoccurring point of views [65]. These codes were collided into themes and in total, five themes were extracted from the texts that outline the main discussion points of the interviews and also give input for answering the research questions. These themes are presented in Figure 2 below and findings of each subject matter are discussed afterwards.

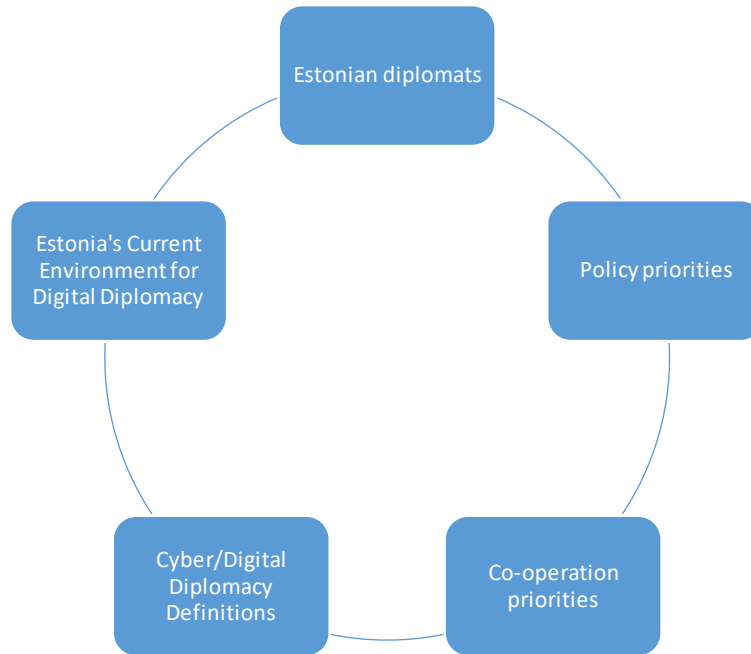


Figure 2. Thematic analysis.

## **Estonian diplomats**

Estonia is seen as a country whose voice is heard when talking about digitalisation, as well as can bring other countries together and raise awareness globally on digital matters. When asked about the role of diplomats in ensuring Estonia's image as a digital frontrunner, all respondents said they are aware of the importance and see diplomats as the 'face' of the country abroad. Interviewee E compared diplomats to a 'business card' of the country as they are often the first official contact and create the first image of the country in a foreigner's mind. Respondent A thinks that Estonian diplomats are able to raise the 'digital issues' of importance to the country on the global arena, and also bring

together likeminded countries to then spread the awareness and Estonia's positions. Interviewee D thinks that the biggest value of the diplomatic community is diplomats' good situational awareness abroad and knowing what's happening on the ground in the country they are.

Diplomats play a strong role in representing and maintaining Estonia's image and sharing its positions and best practices. Branding is a significant part of diplomats' job but standing for the country's interests in discussions happening on the political level are becoming more vital. There are higher expectations to Estonia due to its image as a digital state. Therefore, building capacities of diplomats to handle matters related to digital topics and to increase their knowledge is becoming crucial. Interviewees B, C, D, E, F and G all raised the issue and need for training the diplomats. Increasing essential knowledge on Estonia's main priorities and developments, as well as how to support these from their job position, is expected. Interviewee F specifically pointed out previous experiences, where Estonian diplomats were aware of the narrative they had learned but did not understand the essence nor the importance of the topics presented in the narrative. Adding, that *'including people in the foreign service outside of the organisation and its traditional diplomatic career path (referring mostly to the experts from private sector and academia) is a good example of trying to bridge this knowledge gap'*, as well as complementing Estonia for already testing this.

Interviewee C elaborated by saying *'more and more conversations on foreign policy have to do with digital and cyber and tech, and geopolitics being intertwined with those. So I think the ministries of foreign affairs should have people that can make sense of the technical aspects, or have at least people who can 'translate' to diplomats who maybe are not used to digital/tech aspects'*. As the discussions developed, Interviewee C shared their opinion that the role of diplomats can be divided into two main categories: 1) public diplomacy role as representing the country and talking about it publicly, and 2) practical role as meeting different stakeholders and making connections, so creating a network and conducting business diplomacy. The influence diplomats can have and how this supports the state's objectives from multiple angles (economic, security etc.) is acknowledged and appreciated. For a small country like Estonia, the representation of diplomatic missions is not extensive, yet the image of a 'digital Estonia' has spread across the globe. Interviewee G believes that the network of Estonian diplomats should increase, specially in countries where *'you wouldn't expect to send a diplomat because there is a lack of*

*economic ties or the country's views or approaches, e.g. to democracy, security policy, etc., are not very close*'. The human capital of Estonia for conducting digital diplomacy is modest, yet highly necessary when it comes to representing Estonia in discussions about digital matters. It is not only about introducing the country as a highly developed digital society, but its involvement is expected in substantive debates that shape the digital future of our societies.

### **Estonia's Current Environment for Digital Diplomacy**

Estonia's governance model and trustworthy society creates space for innovation and changes, especially related to digital matters as 'digital' is considered equivalent to the country's existence. Interviewees were asked about national strategies and development plans, to understand how they perceive policymaking in general and whether strategic documents have any influence on actual policymaking. It was stated on several occasions (respondents A, C, D, E, G), that strategies are instruments that help to create a common understanding of the priorities and goals, which then help to evaluate the progress made. This gives the opportunity to adjust if something is going out of the track, as well as it is needed as an input for improving future strategies. When the overarching goals and general vision are set with the national strategies, other agendas and working documents are supporting. Nevertheless, respondents pointed out some negative aspects that they see and have experienced in their work. Interviewee D mentioned that policymaking is more about overall governance of the country rather than strategies per se. Referring to the reality that most strategies (and not only from the Estonian perspective) are vague enough for the government to interpret it as feasible for them and the actual will and need to make changes is what sculpts the outcomes. Interviewee E explained that even when a good strategy is in place, there are still common problems between countries, such as issues with clear responsibilities, exchange and coordination of information, matching long-term visions with short-term visions and resources etc.

Estonia's policymaking is seen agile and flexible due to its small size and open governance. All respondents said that they are satisfied with the way policymaking is done in Estonia, some described it being open, inclusive or forward-looking. Respondent A said that it is evidence-based and looks at researches, so what is written is being backed-up with evidence, adding that *'there's a good understanding of the effects that these policies will create'*. Including the private sector to policymaking and engaging with the

sector in the strategy drafting process has a strong influence on economic objectives and helps to look more towards the future trends as the private sector is seen as the ‘driver’ for innovation. Interviewee B made a comment that on many occasions, engaging the private sector happens rather late and the government asks feedback to relatively mature documents that are not easily changeable. Yet, respondent C brought an example of the current war in Ukraine, which has caused many geopolitical challenges and forcing countries (including Estonia) to adjust to the situation and deal with the consequences. Therefore, policymaking in that case is driven from actual circumstances, not by a previously written document. Interviewee D gave another perspective by saying ‘*in Estonia, the policymaking is very dependent on persons, so who is actually the person drafting this policy*’. Another person-centric example was given by Interviewee E, who said that Estonian Cybersecurity Strategy is broad and could even say prudent, putting public officials, including diplomats, in a position where they have a lot of flexibility and can actually design country’s policy with their actions. Estonian policymaking is agile, responsive to changes which can be implemented quickly. It is mostly due to its lean government and small size, but it is also about inclusivity and the role of different stakeholder in the processes. Policymaking is co-creative, including other sectors and the opinions of citizens. The overarching national strategies indicate well what are the general objectives and what are the supportive policies to achieve these goals.

### **Policy priorities**

For efficient use of resources and sustainable development, prioritising for a small country such as Estonia is inevitable. Limited resources and therefore the need for a strategic approach appeared from the discussions. Conducted interviews explored key topics and policy spheres that Estonia should be focusing on from its digital society perspective. From the topics to focus on, cybersecurity was mentioned multiple times (by A, C, D, E, F, G). Respondent A pointed out data governance, explaining how in Estonia the state is handling the citizens’ data and how citizens in return know how this data is being used, adding that there’s an understanding of the data governance philosophy in the society, which is not common in many countries. Thirdly, artificial intelligence (AI) was mentioned as a key topic (by A, C, G). Interviewee A referred to the ethical use of AI as a niche to address, explaining that ‘*Estonia is not the ‘maker of technologies’ but could contribute to discussions on how AI can be used responsibly*’. Cross-border data exchange and services, including interoperability is Estonia’s strength and from the interviewees’



(A, B, D, G) perspective, seen as something to certainly focus on. Respondent D elaborated on data flows by explaining how strongly it is tied to trade and economy, referring to e-commerce. In addition, suggesting that Estonia should follow Denmark's approach – negotiating with Big Techs and being present in necessary forums that are important for Danish companies and to country's economic interests.

Interviewee B stated that '*Estonia is mostly known for its e-Government ecosystem and digital government services, which it should continue to focus on*'. Respondent E shared a similar understanding, saying general digitalisation and digital transformation topic and how this increases efficiency. In addition to the previously mentioned, interviewee B also mentioned digital identity and authentication as Estonia's strength, while interviewee D said human rights and how these are protected online. Respondent G said that '*Estonia needs to continue being and also promoting to be the transparent digital country, a digital-by-default country*', stressing inclusivity and advocating for democratic principles. As well as gave an extensive list of key topics: cybersecurity, open government, digital transformation and development, core principles of a digital society, open data, privacy protection, life-event services, artificial intelligence in public services, innovation, using and experimenting new technologies.

Discussions on priority policy spheres showed that the emphasis by respondents is set based on their professional background, but still aligning on general principles. Interviewee A didn't mention any specific domains, but rather explained the need to choose the priorities based on the country's strengths and then clearly state the expected outcomes. Interviewee B stated that due to Estonia's well-developed and digitalised ecosystem, different organisations are in charge of their own topics, which include the digital dimension, e.g. the Ministry of Education and Research dealing with the implementation efforts of using digital tools in school curricula. Therefore, it is not possible to name exact sectors, but rather taking all into account, which interviewee E and F also stated – you can't and shouldn't exclude any areas because digital is everywhere. Respondent C shared a similar understanding as A, saying that '*the Estonian narrative should focus on the things that we're good at and how do we actually evolve these things based on the technologies that the future will bring*'. But also stating important policy spheres, such as security, economy, healthcare, business diplomacy and development cooperation.

Interviewee D recognised Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for bringing business diplomacy and development cooperation topics together, claiming these two are important and connected from the ‘digital perspective’. There are many opportunities where Estonia could take advantage and have a stronger role, yet little resources are hindering necessary actions. Interviewee D said that there have been many good options in the past that have been missed due to lack of time and people. Also stating that ‘*digital diplomacy policy is utmost necessary*’ and there should be clear roles and responsibilities as who is in charge of what topics in their work sphere. In addition, gave a negative remark by saying that currently there are still a lot of silos, ministries and other relevant government institutions are not aware of how each institution is prioritising digital topics, specially from the foreign policy perspective, and a better coordination mechanism is needed. Interviewee G emphasised the influence of national security, stating that ‘almost every strategy that is focused on global aspects is a matter of national security’ and ‘*Estonia needs to make itself visible, understood and known, and which is aligned to its general security policies*’. To sum up, as digital is part of almost every policy sphere, it is not wise to prioritise one over the other, but rather focus on the country’s strengths and have a clear understanding of the linkages and objectives on the national level. The extent of the focus areas is also dependent on available resources.

### **Co-operation priorities**

In addition to policy priorities, potential and already existing cooperation with countries were explored, as well as the necessary involvement and participation in international forums. Need to contribute to the European Union and its different working groups and initiatives were mostly mentioned (A, B, C, D, E, F, G). Interviewee A brought out OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), where Estonia should be better represented. Respondent G also mentioned OECD but indicated that ‘*it is a big organisation, and the e-Leaders Working Group has been the most useful one so far*’. Cooperation format named Digital Nations was mentioned as an important initiative by A, D and G. Suggestion was made by interviewee A, saying ‘*Estonia should be part of forums, where pressing your agenda on your own is not needed, but more as doing it gradually together with other countries*’.

Respondent B mentioned specific initiatives as GovStack and European Union Digital 4 Development Hub. Moreover, stressed the necessity to have dialogues with donor

organisations that support digitalisation in developing countries, naming the World Bank, national development cooperation agencies and relevant United Nations' organisations. In addition, regional cooperation organisations, such as Smart Africa, ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and SADC (Southern African Development Community) for African countries. Interviewee C listed the ITU (International Telecommunication Union) and United Nations in addition to the EU, but also explaining that the approach should be to contribute to places '*where we can actually be visible, but where we also have the resources to properly make a difference*'. Interviewee D also mentioned the ITU where Estonia has not been very present due to the lack of human resources but is important as the organisation deals with standardisation. Respondent continued by saying 'it is difficult to name specific ones, but it would be wise to engage with organisations that have available funding that could be useful for Estonia'.

United Nations and ITU were again mentioned by interviewee E, first one also pointed out by G. Respondent F was the only one to say Gaia-X initiative is important, which is about building European digital infrastructure and where the discussions about future data spaces are happening, but where Estonia is not actively involved. Interviewee F also stressed that '*Estonia should be more active in the European Union work related to digital matters than it is right now*'. Nevertheless, said that '*Estonia is internationally well-represented and appears on many social media channels*'. Interviewee G's perception was similar to F, stating that Estonia is in most of the necessary global groups, but adding that '*most useful cooperation formats are bilateral working-level meetings with countries, which have practical outcomes*'. G concludes by saying '*work needs to be done where it could impact us the most*'. Based on that, MR-Digital working group of Nordic Council of Ministers was additionally mentioned.

When asking interviewees about concrete countries who to cooperate, overlapping answers appeared, as well as unique responses. Respondent A mentioned countries that belong to the Digital Nations initiative (in addition to Estonia, these are Portugal, Israel, South-Korea, New-Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, Uruguay, Mexico, Denmark). The same opinion was expressed by interviewee F, D as well as by G. Cooperation with the EU countries was brought out multiple times (by A, B, C, D, E, F), interviewee A specifying '*likeminded EU countries as the ones who share the same values as Estonia*'. The Nordic-Baltic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Estonia,

Latvia, Lithuania) were listed by interviewees A, C, D, F, G considering the geographical position and shared values and principles of these countries. Not only to cooperate bilaterally, but also regionally. Lithuania was separately mentioned by A, C, D – *‘it has recently done very well in regard to digitalisation and could be a good partner’*, also due to its close position to Estonia and being a Baltic country.

Asian countries were pointed out by A, B, E, interviewee B elaborating that *‘Southeast Asia countries are open to cooperate’*. From Asian countries, Japan was specifically mentioned (by B and E) as a digitally developed country. Interviewee E also listed Singapore, South Korea, United States, Australia and United Kingdom, respondents C and G referred to Australia and United Kingdom as well. Latter one was also mentioned by interviewee D. Singapore was described as a highly developed country that is similar to Estonia and with who the current cooperation is good and should continue (listed by B, D and G). The United States was seen as a good partner by respondents A, C, E, but interviewee D stated that *‘they might have many resources, but it’s also a big country and hence implementing something or getting actual outcomes is difficult’*.

Respondent D suggested to *‘think broader about digitalisation and how we deal with policies from the digital perspective with other countries’*, finding ways to advance bilateral agreements and cooperation. The interviewee gave an example of Singapore and how Estonia could work on recognising digital signatures mutually to enable more data flows. Interviewee F shared a contradictory opinion, saying that *‘Estonia has found this reputation of being the digital nation, which is beneficial for Estonia, but not similarly beneficial to others’*. Hence, Estonia may face difficulties sometimes working with others due to having different interests and also not understanding each other the same way. From other regions, Middle East was mentioned by respondents B, D and G, while D and G specified by listing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, respondent B pointed out Israel.

As the dialogue continued, respondent G shared a perspective of private sector as a cooperation partner, saying *‘we should be looking towards the private sector, implementing those new innovative solutions’*. Another region that was listed was North and South America (by B and E), both emphasising Latin America and E specifically mentioning Chile and Brazil. Interviewee B was the only one to see Africa as a region to cooperate with. Other countries which have not been mentioned yet but were pointed out

by some interviewees where India (by B, D, E) and Ukraine (by C and G). *'their development of past three years has been tremendous'*, said respondent G about Ukraine. India was introduced rather as a country that is digitally developed and could be a good partner but is difficult to cooperate with. Interviewees were additionally asked whether they see any countries as competitors or even threat to Estonia's position as a digital frontrunner. Most respondents (A, C, E, G) believed it is not wise to take other countries as competitors, rather as role models and an opportunity to learn from them. Interviewees A and B mentioned China as a very advanced country where many digital developments are happening but did not see it as a potential partner. Despite the level of digitalisation of a country, sharing similar values is considered as a prerequisite for cooperation in the digital diplomacy sphere.

### **Cyber/Digital Diplomacy Definitions**

The theoretical background of this thesis introduced potential definitions for digital diplomacy and briefly described cyber diplomacy. Still, universally agreed understanding (moreover definition) is missing, which were also reflected in the interview responses. There was a common point of view that cyber diplomacy is more defence-focused, related to international security and keeping cyberspace safe. Interviewees A, C, D, E, F indicated that they see cyber diplomacy as part of digital diplomacy, which is wider and connected to almost every domain. Respondent A said digital diplomacy is *'to raise awareness, raise the issues of interest to international attention and to collaborate to face the, or to strengthen the voice over the matters that are of interest'* and explaining *'cyber diplomacy being part of wider digital diplomacy'*. Also clarifying that *'digital diplomacy is broader because digital is something which can be part of every aspect of our life'*. Interviewee D defined digital diplomacy as *'doing business development having principles in mind' or 'principles-guided business development (with digital angle)'*.

Interviewee E drew a parallel with 'cybercrime' definition, explaining how *'there isn't one globally agreed on definition what it is, yet it has not stopped the world dealing with these matters'*. Furthermore, as the discussion developed, explaining that the EU has defined areas that digital diplomacy should cover (referring to the EU Council Conclusions on Digital Diplomacy) and Estonia as a member of the EU should follow that. Interviewee E suggested that first, national priorities for digital should be in place and then *'digital diplomacy is working towards these goals using diplomatic tools'*.

Respondent F stated that digital is everywhere, and everything can be digital, cyber diplomacy being one part of digital diplomacy. Interviewee G emphasised that the definition should include 'transparency' and have an indication of national security, saying digital diplomacy should focus on main principles of digitalisation that we value and preach'. Digital diplomacy is a holistic concept, aligning multiple policy areas, such as economy, development cooperation, security, education, transport, governance etc. The exact definition of 'digital diplomacy' depends on the context and on the person or organisation defining it, which is related to the objective(s) that defining aims to address.

## **5 Discussion and Recommendations**

This chapter will discuss the main takeaways of the thematic analysis, and by combining these outcomes with the results of document analyses, give answers to the research questions. Conducted research resulted with a good overview of Estonia's current landscape for digital diplomacy. Estonia has a great global image as a highly digitalised country, which also sets many expectations – its contribution to discussions and work shaping the digital future is anticipated. Unfortunately, Estonia is a small country with limited resources, which means prioritising and strategical attitude is needed. Still, its size and governance model has good features – its agile, transparent, inclusive and open, which creates a trustworthy environment where innovation can flourish. Estonian diplomats, who are often the first 'face' of the country abroad, have an important role of introducing these qualities and shaping Estonia's image. Nowadays, it's not only about branding as digital has intertwined to policy topics. Estonian diplomats are forced to represent national interests on different occasions, hence capacity building is becoming crucial. The need to train the foreign service on digital matters and how to stand for Estonia's interests globally, was frequently mentioned by the interviewees of this research. Moreover, the role of private sector in digital diplomacy should not be underestimated as digital technologies are mainly developed by private companies, not by the governments. It is important to engage the private sector to ongoing discussions, policymaking and understand their influence on our digital future, as well as other relevant stakeholders.

Digital technologies have been seen as a technical matter for years, but it is changing now as these technologies are shaping geopolitics. International cooperation and strong partnerships with likeminded parties is needed to develop a democratic digital society, which is human-centric and empowered by emerging technologies. Estonia has to prioritise due to limited resources, and the same applies to partnerships. As a member of the European Union, it should align with other member states and the EU approach, when working bilaterally with a certain country is not possible, nor wise. Regional and bilateral

cooperation with the Nordic-Baltic countries is reasonable and mutually beneficial. Countries that are members of the Digital Nations initiative are seen as strategic allies for Estonia, as well as it's seen as a cooperation format where Estonia should be actively engaged. Additionally, more involvement in the European Union working groups is considered as one of the priorities. Besides the member states in the aforementioned formats, the United States, Japan, Australia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, India and the Latin American countries were mentioned as good or either potential partners for digital cooperation by the experts.

Strategic approach is furthermore necessary for the digital topics and policy spheres it connects to. As digital is strongly intertwined with different policy spheres, prioritising one over the other is not rational, not to say wrong. Instead, Estonia should be well aware of its strengths, use them strategically, and also have a coherent coordination mechanism in place for its national efforts to be aligned. Topics that Estonia is experienced with and can be considered as its strengths, based on the conducted research, are following: cybersecurity, data governance, e-Government ecosystem and digital transformation, cross-border data exchange, digital identity and use of artificial intelligence in public services. The list is not exhaustive but provides ground for further discussions. Moreover, it is important to follow the democratic digital society principles, on which Estonia is built on – transparency, inclusion, openness, trustworthiness and respecting human-rights.

The second research question of this thesis aimed to find how to define digital diplomacy for Estonia. The thematic analysis proved that 'digital diplomacy' is a definition that is still evolving and can be understood differently, depending on the stakeholder's point of view. There is a clear understanding that digital in today's society is linked to everything and therefore digital diplomacy is an overarching definition. For the Estonian model, it should include an indication to democratic principles and values, which are fundamental for a digital society, as well as consider the importance of national security. Considering the theoretical approaches in this thesis and the research results, the author proposes the following definition:

‘(Estonian) Digital diplomacy aims to achieve Estonia’s digital agenda and foreign policy objectives, to strengthen its position in global discussions on



technological issues, while being aligned with likeminded partners and following the principles of a democratic digital society.’

Based on the research results, the author was able to answer the third research question and provides the following recommendations for shaping Estonia’s digital diplomacy:

- Creating a Digital Diplomacy Strategy that would support achieving national and foreign digital policy objectives, has a holistic approach and considers different policy spheres.
- Include in the strategy the principles that should be followed for using technologies, i.e. good governance and democratic values and principles.
- Training diplomats and increasing their capabilities to deal with digital matters.
- Hiring experts outside the foreign service system to bridge knowledge and expertise gaps. Also, a way for Estonia to be a frontrunner and showing the lead by being bold, diverse, open and inclusive.
- Conducting an exercise or survey among ministries on what is digital diplomacy and how to define it for Estonia.
- Choosing focus areas based on where Estonia can be visible but also can make an impact, taking into account available resources and its strengths. Including, but not limited to: cybersecurity, data governance, use of artificial intelligence for public services, digital identity, cross-border data exchange and interoperability, e-Government ecosystem and digital transformation, human rights online, promoting core principles of a digital society.
- Prioritising cooperation and using the European Union’s approach and unity when lacking resources. Therefore, involvement in the OECD, ITU, UN should mainly rely on the EU’s joint activities.
- Better coordination mechanism between the ministries and other government institutions on digital policy priorities, especially from the foreign policy perspective. Outcomes of these discussions can act as inputs for the digital diplomacy strategy.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs could take the role of coordinating digital foreign policy priorities as it has a good understanding of relations between countries and due to its horizontal nature of work, is in a good position to evaluate.

- Strong and proactive cooperation with the private sector, including them more to policymaking and discussions on digital policies.
- Prioritising the involvement in the Digital Nations, European Union and Nordic-Baltic cooperation formats.
- Conducting more research on digital diplomacy, while considering the role of other stakeholders in modern diplomacy besides governments.
- Raising the awareness that ‘digital’ is an overarching term and not a domain itself, mainstreaming the understanding that digital diplomacy is an integral part of foreign policy.

As the results of this research showed, digital is part of almost everything and brings new issues, as well as opportunities, to modern diplomacy. Therefore, digital diplomacy is an emerging topic that needs further research. This case focused on the Estonian context, providing a definition for digital diplomacy and recommendations to policymakers forming digital diplomacy for Estonia. It is suggested to work in close collaboration with likeminded partners, on the basis of geopolitical priorities. Estonia should prioritise and increase its involvement in some organisations, also following the same approach with partnerships for digital cooperation. The author contributed to Estonia’s strategy-making and filling the research gap that exists for digital diplomacy. It was done by providing a conceptual definition of digital diplomacy and concrete policy recommendations that can help Estonia with its strategy-building efforts. Moreover, this work presents a case study which can be an example for other country cases, and the proposed definition as well as the theoretical overview benefits current and future researchers working on digital diplomacy. To conclude, this research achieved its objectives and all research questions that were posed, were answered.

Despite the results achieved with this thesis, it had limitations, which could be addressed and solved in future studies. Firstly, the number of interviewees could have been more extensive. Secondly, for a better understanding of Estonia’s position in the global arena, a comparison with other countries, specially with well-developed digital societies, could be conducted. Moreover, modern diplomacy is not only about relations between countries, but private sector and other stakeholders have a powerful role. It is very relevant to digital matters, where technological developments are created mainly by the private companies and the impact is global. For that reason, the author suggests

incorporating the aspects of different stakeholders in future research to a greater extent, specially the role of Big Techs in geopolitics.

## **6 Conclusions and future work**

It is evident that technology is evolving fast and digitalisation is perceived as a tool to enhance socio-economic development. But not only, as digital technologies impact almost every aspect of our modern life. Societies have understood the importance of digital technologies, both the risks and opportunities that come with it. Digital and technological matters have embedded to different policy spheres and due to the global nature of digital technologies, as well as to foreign policy.

The main goal of this thesis was to find what digital diplomacy represents for Estonia and propose a definition suitable for the Estonian context. In addition, to give recommendations for policymakers shaping Estonia's digital diplomacy. Estonia is a small country that has a global image as a digital frontrunner, with decades of experiences regarding digitalisation. Due to its size, high level of digitalisation and open governance, changes can be implemented relatively quick, creating more room for innovation. For a tech-savvy country with limited resources as Estonia is, strategic approach to digital diplomacy is pivotal. Based on the research, this paper introduces ideas on how to improve Estonia's digital diplomacy efforts. Moreover, a definition of digital diplomacy is proposed for the Estonian model. The author used a case study research methodology to fulfil the objectives of this thesis, while data was collected with document analyses and by conducting interviews.

This paper achieved its objectives, but also contributed to further research in this domain. Within the constraints of a master's thesis, a comprehensive view of Estonian digital diplomacy and current situation was given. It is becoming clear that digital diplomacy is an overarching definition as 'digital' is linked to almost all fields in today's information society. Still, the concept of digital diplomacy remains miscellaneous worldwide, having different ways to define it. The outcomes of this work will help to bridge this gap, moreover, the Estonian case acts as an example for other policymakers looking at digital diplomacy from their country's or organisation's perspective, and is more specifically helpful for Estonia's policymaking and strategy-building.

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## Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

1. How do you see the role of Estonian diplomats in ensuring Estonia's image and global position as a digital frontrunner?
2. How do you evaluate the current impact of state strategies/development plans to policymaking? Please explain your assessment.
3. Based on your previous answer and work experience so far, how do you evaluate Estonia's policymaking?
4. In your opinion, what are the key topics/policy areas that Estonia as a country should be concentrating on to strengthen its position as an esteemed digital country?
5. Based on the need to develop an Estonian digital diplomacy strategy, what do you think should be the international organisations, where Estonia should be more strongly represented?
  - a. Can you name specific working groups or initiatives, that Estonia should be part of?
6. In your opinion, which policy spheres are most fundamental if Estonia was to create a national digital diplomacy strategy?
7. Which countries (or regions) do you see as best to partner with for digital cooperation? Why?
8. Which countries (or regions) do you see as competitors (or even threat) to Estonia that can overshadow Estonia's success and image as a digital country? Why?
9. Based on your knowledge, how would you define 'digital diplomacy' for Estonia?
10. Based on your knowledge and understanding, how would you explain the difference between cyber diplomacy and digital diplomacy?

**Transcripts of conducted interviews are available based on request.**