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CONTENTS

https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2023.89.introduction

INTRODUCTION: AFFECTIVE MIRES IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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The word 'mire' in English means "an area of deep, wet, sticky earth" (see Cambridge Dictionary). The dictionary defines mire by its character and also by the affective way it is perceived and sensed by people when entering and moving around in it. Mires are special natural areas that have determined how people have learned and adapted to live in them in different cultures and eras. This special thematic issue on mire cultures explores the changing cultural practices and values associated with mires in the modern day, and further, their effects on the cultural heritage of mires for the future. During the current time of climate change and eco-crisis, people's attitudes and ways of thinking

about mires and nature in general have changed, with a greater emphasis being placed on more-than-human aspects. Human-mire relationships are processes that are shaped by changes in culture and society, and also by the experiences of individuals (Laurén et al. 2022). They include various activities that reflect the emotions, attitudes, knowledge and values of individuals and communities. In our research, the intangible cultural heritage is seen to be based on values, where mires are regarded as culturally significant natural areas and living organisms (see Poulios 2014). From the perspective of living heritage, it is essential that communities constantly recreate their traditions in relation to their environment, and in interaction with nature and their own history. Our research shows that the importance of mires is reflected in the transformation of cultural heritage for communities and acting on mires is part of people's self-expression and identity, and there is a desire to pass on different forms of mire traditions not only into the future but also within generations.

The studies presented in this special thematic issue aim to find answers to the following questions: What is the cultural heritage of mires in the twenty-first century? How has it changed since the past times? Are there signs of a changing relationship arising between humans and mires in the future?

CHANGING MIRE CULTURES

Mires have always been used in a variety of ways, especially in Finland, which has the largest amount of mire area in the world in relation to its surface area. Mires have been viewed as food stores, mostly because of the wild berries and game animals that can be found there. In the countryside, since the beginning of farming, bog-grass provided fodder and bedding for the cattle and mud taken from peatlands was used as a soil improvement material in the fields. But in modern times, especially after the Second World War, mires were seen as a kind of wasteland that needed to be transformed into something more useful for people (Laurén 2006).

Mires were seen to increase in value as they were drained and converted into fields and forests. In the 1960s and 1970s, mires began to be viewed more analytically, leading to them being perceived as more manageable, familiar, and as safe ecosystems (Lehtinen 2000). Agriculture, forestry, and peat extraction have left the most visible traces on the landscape, and while they have had a major impact on Finland's economy and the development of the welfare state, they have caused a eutrophication of surrounding water systems. However, mires are one of the most degraded habitats and their typical species are constantly

declining. Finland is protecting and restoring mires, which strengthens their biodiversity, mitigates climate change, and improves the condition of waters (Ympäristöministeriö). Overall, the country is currently covered with 8.7 million hectares of mires, of which about 1.2 million hectares are under protection (Metsähallitus 1).

In modern societies, mires have long represented places where people seek a counterbalance to everyday life, where they want to be in a peaceful and quiet environment and enjoy nature. The most typical recreational uses of mires today are berry picking, hiking, camping, exercise (e.g., running and orienteering), and hunting. The legal concept of Everyman's Rights allows everyone to spend time freely in Finnish mires, which are perceived as valuable shared environments (Metsähallitus 2). In line with the trend of the 2000s, there has been an increase in environmental, commentary art and performances related to the mire, as well as various cultural and sporting events. Also, various kinds of sustainability-oriented art productions and fictional narratives represent changes in the human-mire relationship.

Perceptions of these changes in attitudes and practices towards mires served as a starting point for our research and for the collection of research material. The affective turn in cultural studies has guided our research and analysis of the multi-sensory experiences, feelings and emotions associated with mires. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg state that such affects are vital, embodied forces that stem from stimuli other than our conscious awareness, but which guide our actions, thinking and movement. They are found in relation to the human, the non-human, and the rest of the world around us (Seigworth & Gregg 2010: 1). The way we thought, sensed, felt and understood mires in the past and do today will also have a decisive impact on how we relate to them in the future. Based on our empirical findings and research, we have identified four interrelated themes – sense of community, experientiality, affectivity, and ethics – that broadly characterize the mire trend of the twenty-first century. For example, a global climate crisis can be experienced by people as both communal and private at the same time, and art in general can be used as a tool of resistance and as raising awareness in many ways. Particularly, the artwork in mires has the potential to remind people of the diversity of nature and the coexistence of humans and other species on Earth, to influence emotions and thoughts, and to support the cultural transformation that is deemed necessary to affect change. In addition, moving and exercising together in the mire strengthens the sense of community between people and their multisensory connections with the mire. Furthermore, these experiences can awaken a sense of the various values of nature.

Cultural and social attitudes have also influenced the scientific definition of peatlands. Countries classify their peatlands in different ways, but common names include mires, bogs, fens, and marshes (International Peatland Society). Peatlands are generally classified according to their water source and vegetation. There are many types of peatlands, and the number of types is influenced by the classification system employed. The botanical classification system has over 100 different types of peatlands, while the forest classification system has over 30 (Laine & Vasander 1998: 11). Some of the terms are based on specific geographical features. The definition of mire-related vocabulary may also reflect the differences in language areas and dialects between different regions of the countries, where the naming is based on the characteristics and importance of the surrounding mire environment (Sepänmaa 1999). Some names and expressions have regular combinations. For example, we speak of bog holes when referring to small sinking and watery spots in a mire. But sometimes the established usage ignores the more specific biological meanings; for example, the term 'swamp' is mainly used for both sport and monsters, and in popular culture in general. In the articles of this special issue we use the word 'mire' as a general term, but with contextual nuances. But in botanical terms, the mire refers to a peatland in which peat is actively formed (Sjörs 1980: 304).

ARTICLES IN THE THEME ISSUE

The research by **Kirsi Laurén** and **Marjukka Piirainen** focuses on the swamp soccer and swamp volleyball tournaments that have been organized in Finland and places elsewhere in Europe for a couple of decades. The mire is at the heart of those events, offering a wet and immersive playing field which makes the games and events distinctive from common sporting events. Consequently, the researchers were keen to find out how the sensory experiences of team play in mires affect the players' relationship with mire, and also the cultural heritage associated with mires. Based on interviews and ethnographic observations at the game events, the research shows that public events in the mire represent a new cultural heritage, where the mire is no longer just a source material of benefits or a peaceful haven of privacy, but a social space. As such, the mire provides an opportunity for people to be part of a community, and to communicate with each other and with the mire in a multisensory way. Importantly, sensing and acting on the special mire space prompts people to think about the natural and cultural values of mires which would otherwise not be considered.

In her article on transformative art and a respectful mire relationship, **Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti** examines the *Kutsuvieraat* (Invited Guests, 2020) artwork by visual artist Reetta Partanen in the Sahanneva mire in Finland. The artwork is a sculptural series made of organic material, situated nearby the city of Seinäjoki in South Ostrobothnia, where peatlands are still used for energy. Contemporary mire art is a versatile form of ecologically engaged art that reflects the human-nature relationship, and more often the mire outside human activity and the importance of protecting mire nature in the climate crisis. In the article, Latvala-Harvilahti asks how the artist and her artwork emphasize the value of the mire as a natural place and softly question the dominant place of humans in the world. An ethnographic case study based on interviewing the artist and experiencing the artwork in situ suggests that art interventions can play a transformative role, increasing knowledge, trust, and social capital. The artwork (the materials of which are left in the mire, and which are chosen in such a way that they do not burden the environment but benefit nature) gave the mire a different focus from its commercial use, highlighting the importance of the mire for the environment, for people, and for the ecosystem. Like forests and seas, mires have become the landscapes of both hope and despair in our minds.

Virpi Kaukio's article on imaginary swamp creatures asks what kind of manifestations the relationship between humans and nature in mire environments has taken in the context of various stories about supernatural creatures in the mire. In particular she asks what their stories reveal about the wider changes in the relationship between humans and mires. Using a theoretical framework of environmental aesthetics and ecocritical theory, the analysis examines various fictional narratives (cartoons, television series, literature for adults and children, and video presentations) and folklore featuring different kinds of swamp creatures. Mires have often been considered to be strange and fearsome, and both mires and monsters are linked to anomalies and burdened by negative preconceptions. However, attitudes towards the mires are slowly changing, and imagined swamp creatures' narratives which reflect the relationship between humans and nature in the mire are also actively changing it.

Meri Kinnunen's book review looks at Finnish Swede Maria Turtschaninoff's novel *Suomaa* (Mire Land, 2022), which will soon be available to an international readership in several languages. This episodic novel moves from the 1700s to the present day, and presents an interpretation of the changing relationship between people and the mire. In the storyline, elements that particularly influence this change are the different traditions of folk religion and Christianity.

However, over time, the close connection between those living near to and far from the mire is also lessened for other reasons.

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EXPERIENCES OF MIRE SPORTS: SENSORY ENCOUNTERS IN NATURE

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Abstract: Swamp soccer and swamp volleyball tournaments have been actively organized on Finnish mires throughout the twenty-first century, reflecting a change in the cultural relationship with mires. Joyful and festival-style team sports events on mires seem to be a modern trend, not only in Finland, but also in other European countries. This study focuses on mire sporting events in the Finnish context, asking: How do the sensory experiences of team play on mires affect the players' relationship with mire, and also the cultural heritage associated with mires? The analysis is based on the theoretical framework of the ethnography of the senses, which is complemented by the concept of space. The research material was collected between 2020 and 2022 and consists of thematic interviews with 33 mire athletes, as well as observational material based on the World Swamp Volley and Swamp Soccer Championships held in Finland. The study shows that these humorous sports events emphasize the sense of community between the players. Playing in mires, sensing them, and getting dirty are key factors in this process. Fears of the mire familiar from folklore are forgotten when playing together in the mire. Mire sports bring new multisensory and entertaining elements to the traditional use of mires.

Keywords: cultural heritage, mire sports, sense of community, senses, sensory ethnography, space

INTRODUCTION

> *There is something in mire. … It's fun to roll around in the mud* [laughter] *and be messy. You can be so close to nature. You don't have to care about cleanliness, and you are allowed to be dirty, because you know you're going to get soiled anyway. You are allowed to be completely – in the mire.* (SV3)

The above interview quote is from a participant in a swamp volley tournament with his team in the summer of 2021. Swamp soccer (Fin. *suopotkupallo*) and swamp volley (Fin. *suolentis*) tournaments[1] have been actively organized on Finnish mires throughout the twenty-first century, reflecting a change in the cultural relationship with mires. Humans are part of nature, and here the cultural relationship with mire is examined from the perspective of the human experience. This cultural relationship changes and is shaped by changes in culture and society, and thus includes the different tangible and intangible uses of mires at different periods in time. Berry picking and traditional outdoor activities such as hiking and orienteering have been typical uses of pristine mires. Until the end of the twentieth century, drained mires were mainly used for agriculture, forestry, and peat production. Finland has a centuries-old tradition of draining mires for cultivation. Consequently, rural mires have been associated with an unrelenting work ethic. However, low-lying agricultural mires were often threatened by frost, which spoiled the crops. Perceptions and traditions related to mires – and nature in general – are changing alongside societal, cultural, and global trends. For those Finns living in cities today, forests and mires represent mainly rural areas where they can spend leisure time and holidays (Laurén 2006: 207). Thus, for decades, the main reasons for them to visit nature have been peace, quiet, beautiful scenery, and exercise (Hallikainen 1998: 119; Ojala & Heikkinen & Tolvanen 2013). Examples of the importance of outdoor leisure and exercise are the festival-style team sports events held on mires, which seem to have become a modern trend not only in Finland, but also in some other European countries during the past twenty years (e.g., Nikkilä & Korhonen 2008; Suopotkupallo.fi; Swampsoccer.se; Iceland Magazine 2018; Swampsoccer.co.uk). There is a key difference between the abovementioned traditional recreational mire activities and festival-style mire team sports: ordinary mire walkers try to stay dry and not sink, while mire athletes try to get in touch with the mire, sink and go into it (Laurén 2022). Thus, a close individual relationship with the mire is created, even though the main objective of the games is to play with other players.

The sports examined in this article combine sport, play and humor, and are constrained by certain rules and definitions inspired by traditional football and volleyball.[2] In general, the cultural characteristics of sport lie in its ritual patterns, which combine playfulness with varying amounts of play, work and leisure (Schultz & Lavenda 2005: 148; Blanchard & Cheska 1985: 55). In mire events, sport is mainly seen as a playful game, but one embedded in the norms and values of traditions that are specific to the culture it reflects. Like other sports and sporting cultures, mire sport can be seen in society as an ever-changing, diverse set of practices, activities and institutions (Reid & McKee 2021: 1). Playing sport in the mire is an activity that involves contact, meanings and emotions which are pathways towards a connectedness with nature (Lumber & Richardson & Sheffield 2017). By studying mire athletes and their individual and socially shared sensations, it is possible to gain an insight into the human relationship with mire. Thus, in this study the focus is on the mire sports phenomenon in a Finnish context, asking: How do the sensory experiences of team play on mires affect the players' relationship with mire, and also the cultural heritage associated with mires? According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage can be manifested, for example, in oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftmanship (UNESCO 2003: 3). Cultural heritage in the context of mire sports events can be understood, for example, as the mire-related sites, things and practices that the community – the participants of mire sports events – consider as important and worth preserving (Brumann 2015).

Sport, emotions, and physical sensations are inextricably intertwined (Scott 2021: 61). It is a characteristic of mire sport that, to move around in a soft and often submerged mire, the entire body and senses are tangibly in contact with the peat, water and vegetation, and also with the weather conditions. Accordingly, bodily sensations and emotions are pathways towards a relationship with nature. They are also intrinsically linked to the environment, in this case the sporting event site on the mire. Moving and playing sports on mire, and actions like walking, running, jumping, and crawling are very physical and felt throughout the body. Thus, we examine the experiences of mire sports especially from the perspective of sensory ethnography and bodily sensations. Our study shows how a mire becomes a special social space where people meet and form relationships during the game events. It is noteworthy that in this space and in these relationships, the mire plays an active role in making possible encounters between humans, and also between humans and non-human nature. Thus, to deepen our analysis of the sensory mire sports experiences, we further draw on the theoretical concept of *space*, which emerges from social relations and encounters over a given period (Massey 2005: 11–13).

TRADITIONS, SPORTING AND SPORT EVENTS ON MIRES IN FINLAND

Despite the fact that mires have traditionally been an everyday and valued environment and a source of livelihood, in an agricultural society, they were both respected and feared. The most common fears have been related to sinking and getting lost in vast and submerged mires. Thus, children have tended to be scared of going into the mire alone (Laurén 2006: 98–101). Even today, hiking or picking berries alone on an unfamiliar mire can evoke feelings of danger, such as a risk of stepping into a bog hole and sinking so that it is impossible to get out on your own (Laurén 2011: 114).

The folklore and cultural images of mires have tended to be quite negative. Mires are neither water nor land, which makes them anomalous in nature; they both reject and attract, take in and do not let out (Knuuttila 1999: 73). In Western folklore, mires and their dark waters have been considered as melancholic and gloomy sites where disease, frost and death prevail. They have symbolized the subconscious and the borderland between life and death, and served as a gateway to another world inhabited by supernatural beings (Lehtinen 2000: 84–84; Wilson 2005; Laurén 2006: 98–108; 2011: 108; Laaksonen 2008; Giblett 2014: 11; Joyce & Staunton 2020: 85; Kaukio 2023).

However, wet and submerged mires are given a different meaning in sports than in folk tradition, and they provide a demanding and difficult training ground where the heart rate rises, and fitness levels increase. Finnish competitive athletes have a long tradition of exercising by running on a summer mire, and famous athletes are cross-country skier and ski jumper Heikki Hasu, and cross-country skiers Juha Mieto and Mika Myllylä, all Olympic and world champions[3] (Laurén 2006: 58–59). Mire walking includes poles to enhance the use of the whole body in locomotion, which also provide support on unstable surfaces if needed. Running, walking, and cycling (using duckboards) on mires for exercise, recreation and having fun has grown in popularity in Finland and some other European countries especially in the 2000s (Latva-Mantila 2022; Bikepacking.com). Exercising by walking alone and in small groups is conducted in places where mires are easily accessible. In addition to fitness, walking on a mire is also about wellbeing and enjoying the peace and quiet of nature (Metsähallitus). Such activity on mires is a relatively new phenomenon, as in the countryside mires have been seen as a food store where people usually went to do or get something useful, such as hunting, picking berries, digging mud for soil improvement, and gathering bog-grass for cattle. But although mires have been crossed during hiking trips, they have not been seen

as popular sites in which to spend outdoor leisure time in the same way as, for example, forests and fells.

Mire sport events represent the same "crazy Finnish events" as, for example, the Wife Carrying World Championships, World Sauna Championships, and the Boot Throwing World Championships (Edunation; Keh 2017). However, nature is more central to swamp soccer and swamp volley events than to the other festival-style and humorous events mentioned above. Various team sport events on mires have been organized in Finland since the early 2000s (Nikkilä & Korhonen 2008: 252–256), and festival-style summer mire events have established their position and grown in popularity over the years. The first team sport to be played on mire was football. The idea of combining football and mire was inspired by the mire training of Finnish cross-country skiers. The first swamp soccer competition was played in 1998 in the municipality of Hyrynsalmi in northeastern Finland (Suopotkupallo.fi). Soon after, the official Finnish mire bandy/floorball championship was launched in Leivonmäki in central Finland in 1999, and swamp volley was organized in the municipality of Haukivuori in eastern Finland in 2003 (turning into the world championship in 2004: Swampvolley.com). However, swamp soccer is also played, for example, in Scotland, Estonia, Iceland and Sweden, all of which have taken inspiration from Finland (Juntunen 2007: 160–161).

Swamp sports events are the only and most important mass events held in the abovementioned rural municipalities, gathering thousands of players. These unusual events have gained national and international media attention. For example, in the early 2000s swamp soccer games were international events, and in 2007, teams came from 25 countries (Juntunen 2007: 148). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the games were not held in 2020 and 2021, and in 2022, the only foreign entrants came from Estonia. An Estonian TV crew visited Hyrynsalmi in summer 2022, making an episode on swamp soccer playing for the travel program *Wanderlust with Lada* (Loukasmäki 2022; SS9). The Finnish broadcasting company Yle and Svenska Yle's *Egenland* made a program about the 2019 Swamp Volley Championships, which was shown on Finnish national TV in 2020 (Yle Egenland 2020). The popularity of these events and their media attention have been important for the image of the municipalities, the local identity of people and communities, and also for the regional economy (Haukivuorelaiset ry; Kaskela 2019). However, the number of teams participating in the swamp soccer event has decreased in recent years, which is why the municipality of Hyrynsalmi has begun to consider the feasibility of financially supporting the event (Kurvinen 2022). But in comparison, the swamp volley event has grown in popularity every year (Bonnor 2022).

Figure 1. *Duckboards are used for walking around the playing area and to protect the Vuorisuo mire. Photograph by Kirsi Laurén 2022.*

Swamp soccer is played in a natural mire that is not specially modified for the games, and typical mire plant species such as tussock cotton grasses, sedges and stunted trees grow there. The landscape of the Vuorisuo mire is wide and open and surrounded by forest areas. There are 22 playing fields scattered on the mire, made by marking the lines with ribbons and the corners with pennants, and with simple goals made from sewer pipes. The playing field vicinity is accessed using traditional duckboards, which form a network on the mire (Fig. 1).

The swamp volley games are played on a former peat production mire where the top layers of peat have been extracted for human use. As a playing field, the peat production area is therefore in reuse. The arena is in the corner of a big peat production area surrounded by dug basins and young trees growing on their banks. Nearby, but out of sight is forest and pristine mire. In 2022, 21 playing fields marked with ribbons were set out in three areas. Duckboards are placed beside the playing fields, and sedge tussocks and birch saplings grow in the margins. Both of the mire event venues have a load-bearing gravel area in the center of the arena, where performance stages, food trolleys and marketplace canopies have been set up. A large bleacher is situated next to the main playing field for swamp soccer, and three smaller ones in the swamp volley area, from which it is possible to watch the games on several courts (FNSVL2021; FNSSL2022; FNSVP2022; FNSSP2022).

Swamp soccer and swamp volley are technically and tactically simpler sports than traditional soccer and volleyball, and it is possible to participate in swamp

tournaments without much previous experience of playing these sports. However, teams where players have experience of playing or have other sporting backgrounds tend to perform better than average. The swamp competitions are open to anyone, but in the swamp volley tournament, players must be over 18 years of age, and swamp soccer players are also generally adults. The rules of the swamp games are based on the rules of football, volleyball and beach volleyball, but these have been simplified and modified to suit playing in mires. The fields are smaller than in conventional football and volleyball, and there are fewer players on the field (five + the goalkeeper per team in swamp soccer, and four in swamp volley). There are several series in both the swamp soccer and swamp volley tournaments. Nowadays, the series in swamp volley are women's, men's, mixed, and business. Swamp soccer is played in series of men's competitions, men's hobby, women's, mixed, and the "Masters of Swamp" (Fin. *Konkarit*), where the players are over 40 years of age, or the team has participated in competitions at least ten times. In the swamp volley mixed series, teams have two men and two women on the field at the same time (Fig. 2). In swamp soccer mixed series, teams must have at least two female players on the field at the same time, and neither may be the goalkeeper (Suopotkupallo.fi; Swampvolley.com).

Figure 2. *Mixed team playing in the swamp volley venue in the Rajasuo mire, which is a former peat production area. Photograph by Kirsi Laurén 2021.*

SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE CONCEPT OF SPACE

The research method of this study is based on sensory ethnography. This means that in addition to describing and explaining people's activities, social relations, interpretations, and perceptions of the mire sports events, the focus is on multisensory experiences. Alongside the interviews we observed the sensory environments of the mire events by way of participant sensing (see Pink 2009: 67). Embodiment is an important part of sensory ethnography, as it is through this that people are related to the material, social and discursive environment. Anthropologist David Howes (2003: xi) has pointed out that "every domain of sensory experience is also an arena for structuring social roles and interactions". Accordingly, sensual relations are also social relations (ibid.).

When analyzing the sensations of a mire to study the cultural relationship with nature, the idea is that the senses are both physically and socially constructed, which means that they are formed through social interaction. Thus, the bodily experience is never a mere sensation, but contains cultural meaning makings, connotations, and denotations (Vannini & Waskul & Gottschalk 2012: 6, 130). The senses are located between the physical and the cognitive, operating in a tacit manner. Therefore, drawing conscious attention to them requires translation and interpretation, as the senses can be difficult to verbalize (Bendix 2005: 3). From a sensory ethnography perspective, our study focuses on the ways in which the mire is sensed in game events, and how the senses interact with each other (see Howes 2003: xi) and create social relations in a special mire sports space.

Senses and sensations play a key role when players participate in mire sports events, and it is possible to see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the mire and the mire space. The space of mire sporting events brings both people and the non-human nature of the mire actively and affectively together, including peat, grasses, water, and insects (see also Kaukio 2022; Latvala-Harvilahti 2022). The players are physically and sensuously interacting with the mire as they move through it, sink into it, and get tangled in the muddy peat. Through their presence and activities, humans and non-human nature are in a relationship during a mire sporting event, creating a specific space (Laurén 2022).

As mire sports take place at a special event and time in a space constructed on mires, their analysis benefits from the use of the theoretical concept of *space* which has been used particularly in the field of geography. According to this approach, the special mires that are formed during a sporting event are considered as open, social, and processual spaces. These spaces are perceived, experienced and lived simultaneously by the players and others who are present (see Massey 2005: 54–59). The meanings of the mire are constructed by the community

present at the time of the event, and can also be understood in their social and historical context. The meanings are generated through the interaction of the subjective experiences, cultural and social practices of event organizers, players, and other participants (Massey 1994: 154–156). Importantly, the different participants involved in the mire events can both individually and collectively change and shape the meanings of the mire (Laurén 2022).

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND INTERVIEWS

The empirical research material consists of 31 semi-structured, thematic research interviews, two of which involved two interviewees. The interviews were conducted in 2020–2022. All of the interviewees were Finns, as very few foreigners participated in the games organized during the study period due to COVID-19. The interviews were conducted by the authors and three research colleagues working in the same research team. Of the interviewees, 21 (13 women and eight men) were swamp soccer players and 12 (nine women and three men) were swamp volley players. Four of them were organizers who also had personal playing experience. The interviewees were aged between 18–68 years old and about half of them were still actively participating in the games. There were also people who had participated in several competitions in the past, but no longer took part in competitions as players.

To get a comprehensive perspective of playing on mires, we wanted to find players of different ages and genders for this research. Some of the interviewees were found within our own circle of acquaintances, and others were found by advertising the research project on social media to find volunteer interviewees for our research. However, most of the players interviewed for the study were reached during fieldwork when we were observing games in the summer of 2021 and 2022. During the games, we talked to players on the sidelines and gave them leaflets with information about our research. In this way, we asked for volunteers to take part in our study, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, about half of the interviews were conducted by telephone.

During the interviews, the interviewees were asked about their lifetime (from childhood to the present day) experiences of mires, and their current relationship with mires. In addition, they were asked to describe their feelings and experiences of being in and moving around the mire, their experiences and perceptions of the mire sports event, and the importance of the event to their relationship with mires. All but one of the interviewees had previous mire experiences, mainly from childhood berry picking with parents. Some had become

familiar with the mires during their military service, and others through hiking or through mires near to their homes. These experiences had created a sense of familiarity with mires and their sensory world. In general, however, mires were not particularly important to the interviewees. More important than the mire was the mire sporting event, and consequently, getting to and being on the mire with friends. The interviewees spoke in many ways about the mire sports events, games and gaming experiences. But the sensory experiences related to the games were clearly more difficult to put into words, even though they were implicitly part of the experience. However, when we specifically asked our interviewees about their sensory experiences, they tended to come back to them after a moment of recollection.

To support the analysis of the interviews, we use our own field notes (codes FNSVL2021, FNSSL2022, FNSVP2022, FNSSP2022), as well as photographs and videos taken by us and two research colleagues during the Swamp Volley World Championship Tournaments of 2021 and 2022 in Haukivuori, and the Swamp Soccer World Championship 2022 in Hyrynsalmi.

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE MIRE

> *For a city dweller, my relationship with mire is surprisingly close, as I have been participating in the Swamp Soccer World Championships with my friends since 2014. It has become an important tradition for our group of friends, with which the mire is strongly associated. We joke all year long that we miss the mire, and that once we get there, we'll be doing this and that. The mire has become a unifying factor for us.* (SS1)

As an event space, mire is conceived through encounters and interrelations, and appears as a sphere of simultaneous diversity where different trajectories coexist (Massey 2005: 9–10). Accordingly, for the participants, the mire sporting spaces are temporary constructions representing other realities that are separate from everyday life. For urban dwellers, the sites represent the countryside, characterized by its remoteness and natural beauty. It is noteworthy that for the locals, the mire venues also represent a special space outside their ordinary lives, offering an opportunity for community encounters and sensory experiences that cannot be experienced in the daily modern world regulated by rules and self-discipline (see Edensor 2014: 32). For many interviewees, getting together with friends to play in the same mire was the highlight of the summer. For example, when asked what motivates them to take part in mire

sports games, one of the swamp soccer players replied: "It's a tradition among a group of friends – in all its simplicity" (SS15). Mire sports events and the annual get-together with friends and acquaintances are seen as a recurring tradition that is hoped to be kept alive. Many teams register for the following year's tournament even at the event or shortly afterwards. Planning the journey with teammates builds a sense of community and helps prepare for the experience of the event, and the multi-hour journey to the venue acts as a rite of passage. It is also essential that the competition weekend is usually reserved entirely for the team, so that everyone has time to be together.

Each of the interviewees pointed out that taking part in the competition is first and foremost about having fun and being together. The mire in all its specificity is central to this; it brings people together, even those who are strangers to each other. This is highlighted in a tradition of swamp soccer events, where a chosen player from each team reads the special oath at the official opening ceremony. Community spirit, fun, and a respect for the mire and nature are emphasized in the oath:

> *I … swear in the name of all Swamp Soccer World Championship players to honor Vuorisuo, nature, Swamp Soccer World Championship games, and humanity, and also respect fellow players and all participants, obey the rules, and play with a fair play spirit. The spirit of Vuorisuo consists in having fun and playing fair, meeting friends and gaining new friends, and wallowing in the swamp.* (Suopotkupallo.fi)

There is also a conscious effort to build a sense of community in the swamp volley event, where the opening ceremony is accompanied by a warm-up session led by the competition's frog mascot, called Swamppis (Fig. 3).

The photos on the event website (which anyone can add to) also contribute to the sense of inclusion. The swamp volley event has active social media, Instagram and Facebook platforms, where administrators post updates throughout the year, keeping the spirit alive for the next competitions. The swamp volley official website also emphasizes a sense of community and fun: "The most fun summer sport and fun since 2003! The best thing about summer is swamp volley!" (Swampvolley.com). According to the players interviewed, an ordinary sporting event and playing field would not get people active in the same social way (e.g., SS5; SS8; SS15; see also Laurén 2022).

The interviews reiterate that it is implicit in the nature of the mire event that everyone is greeted and treated in a friendly manner. A special positive mental space is thus created in the mire, where people can meet each other openly and without prejudice. It is characteristic that participants of the mire

event meet each other physically at a very close distance, as it is almost impossible to avoid touching another person when passing on the narrow duckboards. Encountering each other like this makes greeting and chatting natural. This is clearly reflected in the following quote:

> *Everyone is very social and you're expected to be social, chatting to strangers. I think it's nice. Finns don't, just like that, go around talking to strangers when walking in the city. But when meeting on the duckboards of mire, it's: 'Hey, good game!'* (SV11)

Success in games and winning also motivate people to take part in the tournaments, although this is not the most important thing. The competitive spirit fosters a sense of community within the team (SV2; SS3; SS4).

Figure 3. *Swamppis gives participants a warm-up session before the games start. Photograph by Marjukka Piirainen 2022.*

As one interviewee (SV5) said: "The unity of the team that comes from playing and having a few successes – it's fun. … It's a different way for a weekend team to unite when we do something together for a common playing aim." On the other hand, team spirit can also be perceived as a decisive factor for success (Andersson 2019). Foreign teams have participated particularly in the competition series (SS9; SS10). However, teams playing in the same series may have very different competitive objectives: the competitive mixed teams interviewed have to have a minimum of two women in the field at any one time, while the teams that put fun first do not necessarily pay attention to this issue (SS8; SS12; SS13; SS14; SS15; SS17). But the lack of skills and competitive spirit does not prevent players from enjoying the event: "Then, when we have a good team, it's kind of … even though you can't really talk about sports when talking about our team, but the kind of teamwork, it's something that you enjoy" (SS16).

Sociologist and historian Henning Eichberg (2009: 286) has argued that the culture of laughter, which was an essential part of medieval popular competitions, disappeared or became marginal with the modernization of sport in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the production of results and records became central. But in contrast to that, the carnivalesque culture of laughter is central in mire sports events (Laurén 2022). The need to belong to a group is innate in humans, and as well as the psychological effects of laughter, social laughter also increases group cohesion physiologically (Manninen et al. 2017; Martin 2007: 122–123). Laughter is physically relaxing (Bennett & Lengacher 2008), and the organizers of the swamp volley and swamp soccer events pointed out in the interviews that entertainment and fun were the central ideas for planning the events from the very beginning (SV4; SV9; SS9; SS19). The idea was to offer a special experience in the mire: "When people get splashed into the mire, even the strictest guy becomes a nice guy. Adult people liberate themselves in mire, restraints go away, and people become easy-going" (SV9). According to the interviews, this aim has been achieved and the attitude of the participants in the events is seen as follows: "Players must have the ability to throw themselves into the game, not take it too seriously. The culture there must be understood" (SS5). Players can also toss mud at each other (SV6; SV10; SS11; Yle Egenland), and as such, adults playing together in the mire breaks the current Western assumption that play is only for children, and mire sport has its own legitimized norms and rules that provide an alibi for exceptional behavior in another context (see Deterding 2018).

The remoteness and primitive conditions, as well as the relative anonymity, can facilitate a break from the Finnish social code which includes a reticence towards strangers. Research in tourism and marketing has found that in natural environments contact with other people produces different social values than in

urban environments. The most important of these are emotional contact with fellow travelers (community), and closeness and group orientation (cohesion). A similar duality of social systems has been observed, for example, in groups of friends who participate as spectators in experiential events such as sports competitions or rock concerts. But in nature parks, hikers also experience a sense of security generated by other people – including strangers – when moving in demanding conditions (Sorakunnas 2022). The natural environment and a fear of the mires may thus also increase the role of unknown people in the event. Especially, shared sensory experiences in the mire like getting wet and dirty also structure social roles and interactions between players in a way that increases the team spirit and also the sense of community (see Howes 2003: xi).

Sport, competition and team play bring discipline to the event: the games have rules, and they start at a certain time. Breaching the rules will result in a penalty, which in the worst case can be a disqualification and exclusion from the following year's competition (Swampvolley.com; Suopotkupallo.fi). It is therefore important to be on the field on time, and fit to play. This partly restrains the use of alcohol, which is common at festivals in Finland. However, at normal sporting events, it is only possible for the audience, and not for the athletes. There is a general assumption that in mire sport teams alcohol can either be consumed or not, but while it is acceptable to party and stay up during the tournament, it is still necessary to be able to play (e.g., SS10; SS16; SS17; SV7; SV11). Because of the physical demands of the game, substitutes are important, so every player is usually needed. However, in a team with numerous players this is not so important (SS8). But for many teams, playing is a priority and alcohol is mainly consumed after games or not at all (e.g., SS4; SS5; SS9; SS13; SS14). When asked, most of the interviewees considered that mire sports events are not suitable for children because of alcohol consumption. However, both events are held in places where children cannot go on their own.

SENSORY ENCOUNTERS IN MIRE

The sounds of the event site (loud pop music) and the signs, flags, booths and other equipment brought there create a very special space in the mire. Arriving at the mire event on the first game day is an awaited moment, moving the participants away from their everyday life:

> *It's a wonderful feeling when we walk along those duckboards from the car parking area, and the mire opens in front of us. That's what we talk*

> *about (among the team), that moment, it's an important moment, that step on the first Friday (the first day of the game) into the mire. The mire opens and gradually you can hear the music and see the flags flying. The mire is joyful, welcoming, and lively.* (SS1)

The soundscape of mire sports events is one of the key creators of the sensory space experience. Under normal circumstances, the mire is free from human-induced noise. But during the tournament the soundscape is filled with loud music from the speakers, chattering and jokes from the announcers to lighten the mood, human conversations, cheers and shouts of joy, the whistles of the referees, and in the swamp volley event, the occasional sound of a chainsaw as the game is stopped to remove a rhizome that has emerged in the playing field. The interviews reveal that the human-made sounds are perceived as an important part of the character of the festival, and distinguish it from everyday life and the common mire with natural sounds. Music creates the right atmosphere for the event and adds to the excitement of the game (e.g., SS6; SV1; SV2). It also creates spirit and a sense of community among the teams. Some teams have their own theme song, usually chosen from the genre of popular music, which is played on a sound system carried to the playing field. A team's favorite music allows the players to create their own smaller soundscapes, especially around the playing fields on the edges of the large swamp soccer area where the sound of the speakers in the middle of the arena is less audible. Instead, in a smaller swamp volley area, the soundscape is dominated by loud music chosen by the organizers and played from loudspeakers (SS5; FNSSL2022; FNSSP22; FNSVP22).

Many interviewees compared mire sports events with music festivals, which have several common elements: summer, loud music, the outdoors, food stalls, friends, people from all over the country and abroad, relaxation, and alcohol (Fig. 4). The soundscape plays a big role in this, as music creates a festival atmosphere and the announcements related to the games evoke a feeling of competition (SS8; SS9; SS15; SV5; SS5; SS9; SS11; SS13; SS14; SV1; SV8; SV2; SV5).

Part of the attraction of mire sports is their simplicity. Mire players in general do not need a glamorous setting to play, but are satisfied if basic facilities such as the possibility to eat are provided for. The environment is also of importance, especially in swamp soccer tournaments played in natural surroundings (SS1; SS8; SS11; SS12; SS15). "In between games, it's lovely to just be and look around. Because it's so special, sort of a huge party in the middle of nowhere, it's a really strange combination, but you enjoy the scenery" (SS17). However, not everyone pays attention to it (SS5; SS6; SS16; SV1; SV6).

Figure 4. *Loud background music, and festival-style food and drink are available at the mire sports events. Photograph by Kirsi Laurén 2022.*

Visually, the area can be identified as a playing field by the uniformed teams. The uniforms teams wear are usually like those worn in ordinary football and volleyball: shorts and a T-shirt, usually with the team's name and the player's number and surname printed on it. Identical team clothing is essential for creating a sense of team spirit and cohesion between the players. The playing uniform is a means of communication within the team that distinguishes them from professional players, and also from other players and participants in the event (see, e.g., Nash 1995: 86–87; Fig. 5). It also acts as a message to the outside world, making the wearer a representative of their home village or sports club (SS17; SS15). However, there are features of the clothing which show that mire athletes are not as serious about competing as professional football and volleyball players, and the team names written on the shirts are often sexually charged, a bit naughty, and contain indecent puns (FNSVL2021; FNSSL2022; FNSVP2022; FNSSP2022).

> *There's a lot of investment in uniforms, but not necessarily a lot of money. Each team has its specific uniform. … We also had a huge flag, of course it was pink according to our theme* [laughing]*, it had the name of our team Los Poslinos in big letters, and the names of our sponsors. Wherever we went, the flag was always up.* (SS5)

Figure 5. *"The Cream of Haukivuori" team dressed in maritime costumes poses in front of their tent at the swamp volley event. Photograph by Marjukka Piirainen 2022.*

Dress plays an especially big role in swamp volley, where prizes for the best outfits are awarded every year (Swampvolley.com). But in swamp soccer, the level of physical contact between players is greater, and accessories that could harm other players are removed before the game. The role of the player is enhanced by the uniforms, and induces a playful state of mind (see, e.g., Stenros 2014), which makes it possible to enter a special space formed by a playing field in a mire. It allows people to break away from their everyday-self and throw themselves into the mire to play and get messy. The spirit of the game and the event is to get dirty in the mud. Getting dirty and playing together in adult play creates a sense of community, both with other players and also with the mire. It is a sign of belonging, and clean clothes, for example as a result of playing on dry playing fields, can even create a sense of embarrassment (SS2; SS13). As such, the feeling of mud on the skin is experienced as liberating.

> *That's because there's no need to think about what I look like. There you are free to be covered from top to bottom in mud and be free in that way. Even if you're dressed as a character, you can still be yourself, so to speak, even if you don't look like yourself. The fun and the sense of community, that's what it is.* (SV6)

Peat is also a valuable substance that is used in skin care, which some players were aware of (SS2; SS8; SV1; SV3; SV6; SV12), and could express humorously: "We women take it from the point of view that mud is good for the skin" (SS12). A long day playing on the mire field is physically tiring, but the peat on skin and clothes is not a problem – on the contrary, it is part of the game: "After a day in the mire, you feel clammy and dirty. But it doesn't feel bad or disgusting in any way" (SS15). The particles of peat cling to the clothes and skin, and only come off when washed off with soap (SS13; SS2; SS11; SS8; SS17; SV4; SV6; SV7; SV10; SV12). However, the peat is not necessarily something that should be taken off immediately, because it is a sign and proof of participation in the tournament (SS2).

As a consequence of Western culture, our senses are dominated by sight, and the touch of peat and the feel of nature on the skin is something that we rarely experience in our indoor daily lives. But when playing in a mire, the sense of touch forms a profound knowledge that usually takes place out of consciousness, and dominates and elicits a more comprehensive way of experiencing nature (see Subramanian 2021: ix–xviii). Culturally, the sense of smell is also considered essential because it provides useful information about the characteristics of an environment. The sense of smell indicates what is natural and real and what is not, and smell is instinctively valued as either pleasant or unpleasant (Porteous 1990: 6; Drobnick 2006: 13). The peat, moisture and vegetation give the mires their own special fragrance which most interviewees find enjoyable when walking on mires. However, the most characteristic smell during the games is that of decomposed peat and mud. It comes from the deeper layers of the mire, hovers over the playing fields, and clings to the players and their equipment (SS3; SS5; SS9; SS11; SS12; SS13; SS14; SS17; SV1; SV2; SV4; SV7; SV12). This smell, which is very different from everyday life, also forms a communal experience:

> *And it has a kind of peaty, not so fresh a smell, which spreads. But you don't even notice that kind of thing when you're going and doing. It is perhaps more of a thing that you can notice at some point while sitting with cider, and you might find that yes, I smell pretty bad. But fortunately, everyone there smells just as bad, so it doesn't really matter.* (SS16)

From our research material we can find that a player's body odor is non-verbally linked to their interpersonal communication in a way that it acts as a mediator of emotions among individuals in a social group (see also Ferdenzi et al. 2019; Roberts et al. 2022). The players' dirty, peat-smelling skin and clothes unite both team members and different teams with each other and players with the mire, and are therefore seen as appropriate and acceptable (see Corrigan 2008: 5). The smell is also carried all the way home with the clothes and equipment, and serves to remind the players of their experience afterwards.

Nature also influences the game experience in the form of weather. A thunderstorm can feel terrifying, the blaze of the sun against a dark peat surface can give players sunstroke and burn their skin, while in cold weather a cool wind and rain can cause chilling. The coldness of the mire is a distinct feature of the gaming experience: "I have never waded into a mire voluntarily. But the swamp soccer was absurdly fun. Cold, and chilly. All at the same time" (SS7). Stepping into the cold and wet mire for the first time feels uncomfortable, but the movement of the games warms players up, and they do not usually get cold while playing. Rather, they become cold between games when time is spent in the competition area in wet clothes which intensify the effects of wind and low temperatures. But sprawling in the mire can also be a pleasant way to cool down if it is hot during the competition (SV9). In swamp soccer, the weather is experienced without a shelter, as there are very few covered spaces in the area. In swamp volley, many teams have their own tents and canopies next to the audience, where they can rest and watch the games. In both mire sport events, it is possible to warm up in a sauna set up for the occasion. Cold showers are available at both events, but in the swamp soccer area it is also possible to rinse and cool off in the pond next to the sauna.

There is also a different openness when playing in nature than experienced in urban environments. Wet clothes stick to the skin, and at the competition site one can take a sauna and swim, which some players, mostly men, do naked. Nudity is part of Finnish sauna culture, but women and men who do not know each other do not usually bathe naked. Wet clothes dissolve the boundary between the self and the world around it that is normally created by clothing, and bring an eroticism that is also seen in the names of the teams. This feature did not come up in the interviews, but it is nevertheless a part of the nature of the events and the mire space. The sexually charged atmosphere was also added to by the swamp soccer event hosts' speeches that were tinged with ambiguous humor (FNSVL2021; FNSSL2022; FNSVP2022; FNSSP2022). However, from a natural perspective, the skin's contact with nature strengthens the sense of togetherness between human and non-human nature.

Nature can also get too close, and in a hot summer mire, mosquitoes are attracted by the sweaty human skin. Mire areas can even be avoided because of mosquitos, and clothes that cover most of the skin, mosquito hats and insecticides applied to the skin are therefore typical equipment used by mire walkers. However, mosquitoes did not emerge in the mire sports interviews in any way, and nor did we see them during the tournaments covered in our fieldwork (FNSVL2021; FNSSL2022; FNSVP2022; FNSSP2022). One reason for this is that mosquitoes find people by way of the carbon dioxide exhaled by humans, and the heat generated by the crowd lifts the carbon dioxide high above the humans, so that mosquitoes cannot find people's skin (Hinkula 2018).

MOVEMENT AND BODILY SENSATIONS

> *Actually, the first alighting on mire is the most disgusting, but after that you get pretty much used to it. Of course, the fields that you sink into and get stuck in are a bit different, because it's a pretty strange feeling when you sink in and can't get out. But you get used to it too.* (SS4)

In both mire sport events, the participants are almost in constant contact or in close proximity with the mire during the tournament. The mire is not only sensed from a distance, but also by moving around in it. A moving and perceiving body does not isolate the senses from one another, but rather brings them together, getting it actively involved with the environment (Ingold 2000: 262). Playing in a mire produces sensations which differ from normal everyday sensory experiences. Ordinary mire-goers such as berry pickers and hunters usually equip themselves with waterproof footwear and choose their routes so as to avoid the softest and boggy areas. Even knee-deep immersion in the mire is a rare experience, and one that is avoided. But instead, those who go out to play in the mire know that they will get their shoes and clothes wet, and their skins coated with peat (see Laurén 2022). Many players wear old sneakers that are no longer used elsewhere. Some swamp soccer players have football shoes that do not absorb water, protect the toes, stay tight on the foot, and give a better contact with the ball than sneakers. Because shoes come off easily in a submerged mire, they are usually taped to the feet. Even if the shoes get wet and muddy, they still protect feet that could otherwise be injured by unseen underground tree branches and snags inside the mire. Swamp volley players can also protect their feet with swimming shoes or socks with duct tape wrapped around them, and some even play barefoot (SS2; SS6; SS16; SS17; SV12; FNSVL2021; FNSSL2022; FNSVP2022; FNSSP2022).

Stepping away from the duckboards onto the boggy sports field means moving from a steady surface to a space where the speed and effort of movement is mostly determined by the surrounding nature. The wetness of the field is the most important factor affecting play, and the wet, boggy field limits movement and slows down the players' travel from one place to another. Moving the legs is difficult in wet peat, and sometimes the mire takes a player firmly in its grip, making it impossible to chase the ball. In a swamp volley tournament, the wetness of the playing surfaces can be controlled by humans by pumping water into the playing fields, so that the various playing fields can be made roughly the same (SV9). In contrast, the conditions in the swamp soccer tournament are mainly determined by nature. There are some small ditches and minor dams in the mire, but in dry summers the fields are drier, and in rainy summers wetter (SS9; SS19). Humidity levels are always different in the various parts of the large mire, which also has an impact on the games. Running on the wettest swamp soccer fields is impossible, and moving is done by crawling or rolling, and the ball is moved by bouncing it with the head or kicking from a side position if the foot is released quickly enough from the mire (Fig. 6). On dry playing fields it is possible to run, but the ball's movements on the mire are unpredictable due to the uneven surface (e.g., SS17; SS18; SS19). As one interviewee said: "The idea with the swamp soccer is that it makes it difficult to play football" (SS15). But when playing and moving around in the mire, the connection between humans and non-human nature is at its strongest, and in this connection the mire is an active participant and actor.

Figure 6. *On a wet and sinking swamp soccer field, crawling and twisting are the ways to go. Photograph by Marjukka Piirainen 2022.*

The playing experience is different in swamp volley and swamp soccer. In swamp volley, it is not necessary to take as many steps as in swamp soccer, where even moving from the edge of the field to one's own playing position can be exhausting. In swamp volley, contact with the ball is made with the hands, players move only within a small area, and the teams are not in physical contact with each other. In contrast, the swamp soccer playing field is bigger (ca. 35x60 m), both teams move in the whole area, and contact with the ball is made with the feet or head. The physical characteristics of players therefore influence their ability to move through the mire. Moving through wet fields is easiest for light and long-legged players, and those who are fit and have strong feet will also get ahead (SS2; SS6; SS10; SS15; SS17). But in mixed series, the size differences between players can be considerable, which can affect the game and even cause a risk in swamp soccer, especially on dry playing fields where movement can be fast (SS12A).

> *Even though I'm not exactly of slight build, when a man who is three times bigger than you runs into you, nothing really helps, you fly. … You can do a lot even as a small player and it doesn't matter as such, but sometimes it's just that even if you try everything, the other person has physically better natural gifts or experience.* (SS13)

Swamp sports can be physically very demanding, and almost all of the players stressed that playing in a mire is really hard. However, the difficulty of the game also depends on the team's objectives in the tournament, the tactics the team has chosen, and the player's role on the field (e.g., SS12; SS14; SS17). According to interviewees, it is difficult to compare the physical heaviness of playing swamp soccer with any other sport (SS13; SS14; SS16; SS17). It is more like a heavy foot workout in the gym or swimming with foot weights (SS17; SS18). However, the desire to win makes players try their best and exceed their own limits, pushing themselves beyond what they could normally have done (SS4; SS5; SS13; SS14; SS17). The physical exertion of the game also makes one feel relaxed and good afterwards (SS2; SS7; SS8; SS17). But the unusual physical exertion is also felt in the body.

> *For a first-timer in particular, it feels that every time, damn, you can't move anywhere here. It requires both muscle and stamina, because if you have no muscles, the leg will not rise from the swamp when you are stuck. It's so holistic in a way when you have to use your whole body. After that trip, you usually find new muscles in the body. And then the most confusing thing is that even though we play football, especially in wet years, the*

> *most painful part of the body after the whole trip has been the arms … it comes from the crawling.* (SS16)

A very wet playing field can even out the level differences between teams, and when technically skilled players are unable to utilize all their skills on a submerged surface, the importance of game tactics and good fitness increases. This is particularly pronounced in swamp soccer, but there are also differences in swamp volley courts (SS1; SS12; SS16; SS18; SV2; SV4; SV6; SV8; SV10). For this reason, luck plays a role in the success of the team: the draw for the allocation of playing fields may affect the placing of the team in the tournament because goal difference affects ranking, and on a wet field, few goals are scored (SS5; SS6; SS11; SV10). This is mainly accepted as part of the sport, but some interviewees still wished that the playing fields were more evenly distributed (SS4; SS16).

There is a risk of physical injury in mire sport, so professional athletes tend not to participate in swamp games (SS9; SS19; SV4). Getting stuck in the mire can cause joint dislocations and muscle strains. The movement of players on the playing field moves and compacts the peat, causing long-submerged rhizomes to emerge from the mire, which have not decomposed under the mire's anoxic conditions. These can cause injuries if unknowingly stepped on, where a foot gets caught under the root or a sharp edge breaks the skin. But in swamp volley, rhizomes can also be useful for providing a firm foothold. Rhizomes are often removed with a hoe and chainsaw during the swamp volley tournament, but in swamp soccer they are only marked and avoided during games, or hoisted outside the playing field until later. Plants, grasses, dried roots and twigs in the mire can also cause wounds to bare legs and thighs, although the player may not notice them during the game itself (FNSSL2022). However, wet fields are safer than dry ones because movement in them is slow, and in hard fields the speed is faster and the risk of accident is higher (SS1; SS2; SS13; Juntunen 2007: 117). The risk of physical injury resulting from the mire was mentioned in several interviews, but with a few exceptions, it was felt to be relatively low and not emphasized.

When a lot of people move around in a natural mire, the surface is broken up and tracks are left behind. The playing of swamp volley in a former peat production area was not generally considered to be a problem, because the mire is no longer in its natural state. Nor has the use of the natural Vuorisuo mire for swamp soccer been a subject of debate in the municipality of Hyrynsalmi, as there are many mires in the area, and it is not threatened, protected, or generally valued as a cloudberry mire. When asked, most swamp soccer players perceived that using one mire for sports purposes is acceptable, but it is important that

the event is always held in the same place and that new areas are not spoiled. However, although the mire surface is broken up and vegetation has disappeared mainly in the area of the playing fields, no deep passages are created due to the construction of a network of traditional duckboards in the area (cf. Savela 2021). Any garbage and marking ribbons are removed, and most of the structures erected for the competitions are taken elsewhere. The landscape will also receive attention from the organizers, and while building new duckboards using traditional methods is expensive, old and broken duckboards still have to be replaced with new ones, because other types of pathways would not blend with the landscape (SS9).

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we have analyzed the perceptions and sensory experiences of mire athletes playing in swamp volley and swamp soccer tournaments. Throughout the events, sensations form mutually reinforcing and unifying combinations through which players create their relationship with mire. The interpretations of these sensations are affected not only by the players' previous experiences, but also by the shared interpretations of other participants. Ultimately, the practices formed over decades by the community in mire sporting events and their shared perceptions of mire sensations add to the intangible cultural heritage of mires.

Our research reveals that multisensory team games in the mire give adults the opportunity to take on a role different from their everyday lives. This is enhanced by a humorous attitude and wearing particular playing uniforms. In these conditions, adults can play like children, they can get deep into the mire, get wet and dirty, and feel nature with all their senses. The festival atmosphere also plays an important role in creating a sense of community, and includes the commentary of the event presenters, loud background music, flags, stalls and their scents. But the most important factor in creating a sense of community and a desirable atmosphere is the mire, where people come together to play and have fun.

Interacting with mire, for example by moving through it, smelling and touching it, and getting tangled in the peat, are essential characteristics of mire sports. Seeing is also important, but it is not emphasized in the same way that it is in everyday life outside the mire. Our research indicates that the fascination of mire sport lies in its multisensory nature. However, a special space created in the mire during a sporting event through interactions between people and

between people and the non-human mire enables people to act differently than usual, and to experience nature in a new way. In this setting, the mire plays a role that reflects todays' multisensory trend of mire use.

The location of the venue is mentally and physically far away from normal everyday life, and is an important factor in the creation of a special social space. As a difficult and unpredictable environment for moving around, mire brings humor and entertainment to the sporting events. At the same time, it requires players to step outside their comfort zone. Thus, the participants are people who can laugh at themselves. Mire events also offer the opportunity to participate in a sporting competition for people who have no playing skills and who are otherwise not into sport. In addition, playing together in mires without serious achievement goals lowers the threshold to exercise, and increases the joy of movement. Competing and playing in this environment as a team evokes strong emotions such as frustration at being stuck in the mire, excitement, a desire to win, joy, and also disappointment. Because playing in a mire is physically challenging, and because success in a tournament does not depend solely on playing skills or physical fitness, just being able to play can in itself create a sense of victory. On the other hand, the challenges of the mire also form a space in which to let go of the illusion that humans can control everything.

The sporting events offer people an opportunity to encounter mires and, but for these, many of the participants would probably not otherwise go to mires at all. The negative images of the mire related to folklore were familiar to the interviewees when they were asked about them, but there were no feelings of danger and fear during the swamp sport tournaments. The area is usually well-known by the players, and the people around them create a sense of security. The fear of sinking into a mire is not necessarily only about the real danger, but also about the unpleasantness of getting wet in mire water, which is something we usually avoid. But in face of this, mire sports bring new elements to the traditional use of mires, such as lots of people, humorous costumes, playing, a noisy soundscape, and a positive attitude towards exercise and getting wet and dirty. Here, humorous play makes the mire more familiar, and it no longer feels as unpredictable as before. So, the sports events can also be interpreted as helping to dispel pre-conceived fears about mires during the games, and thus lowering the threshold to visit mires in general.

On closer inspection, what is required from the mire in sports events follows the traditional moral code of taking only as much of nature's gifts as is needed. For such events, only parts of specific mires are used for sporting events, and the area required is relatively small. Although human traces are left in the mire, nothing is taken away except for the small amount of peat that is stuck

to clothing, and as mires are only used for short periods of time, snakes, bears and other animals can continue to roam the areas freely.

Swamp soccer and swamp volley events have been organized regularly for several decades. The nature of these events has changed somewhat over the years, with varying numbers of participants, new players replacing old players, changes in series and rules, and new elements being added to the program. But these events have become a tradition for the players, and they hope that they will be continued in the future. Consequently, these multisensory mire sport events reflect the living cultural heritage of mires in twenty-first-century Finland.

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RESEARCH MATERIALS

Interviews (33) of the swamp soccer (codes SS1–SS19) and swamp volley (codes SV1–SV12) players conducted in 2021–2022. Field notes of the Swamp Volley and Swamp Soccer World Championship Tournaments 2021 and 2022 (codes FNSVL2021, FNSSL2022, FNSVP2022, FNSSP2022). Photographs and videos taken at the tournaments. The research materials have been gathered by the Mire Trend research team and will be stored in the Finnish Literature Society's Joensuu archives after the research project is completed.

NOTES

[1] The term *swamp* has become established in the context of mire sport. In this article we use the general term 'mire', but in the context of mire team sports we use the established term 'swamp'. Swamp soccer is the established term for swamp football, and swamp volley for swamp volleyball, therefore we use these established terms in our research.

[2] Competitions played in the mires are considerably different from professionally played modern football and volleyball that are among the most popular sports in the world, attracting millions of people.

[3] Heikki Hasu's active international racing career spanned the 1940s and 1950s, Juha Mieto's the 1970s and 1980s, and Mika Myllylä's from the 1990s to 2000.

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FIGURES IN THE MIRE: TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE ART AND A RESPECTFUL MIRE RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: Mire art is a versatile form of ecologically engaged art that reflects images of the relationship with nature in its time. This article regards mire art as transformative art that links both to climate change and new ways of experiencing the mire. Mire art no longer reflects so much the aesthetics of the mire enjoyed by humans, but rather the mire aside from human activity and the importance of protecting mire nature in the climate crisis. My perspective on the transformative aspects of mire art stems from the artist's choices, values and aims, which I explore by reflecting on both artist interview and my own experience of the artwork on site. The theoretical approach combines the study of cultural meanings and knowledge inherent in ethnological case studies with the concepts of art research. Art interventions can play a transformative role which increases knowledge, trust, and social capital. *The Invited Guests* series (Fin. Kutsuvieraat, 2020) by visual artist Reetta Partanen in the city of Seinäjoki, Finland, is a sculptural series made of organic material. The artwork is situated in the pristine mire in South Ostrobothnia, where peatlands are still used for energy. The article asks how the artist and her artwork emphasize the value of the mire as a natural place and softly question the dominant place of humans in the world. Importantly, the materials in the work have been chosen not to be a burden on the environment, but rather to benefit nature. The research shows that transformative art highlights the agency of nature, and in this study, the artwork gives mire a level of attention that differs from that centered on commercial use.

Keywords: cultural transformation, human-nature relationship, mire art, transformative art

INTRODUCTION

Finland is known as a country with an exceptional number of mires. Mires are important as they regulate flood peaks, maintain biodiversity, and act as an efficient carbon sink (Lindholm 2018). Mires are a mixture of water and land, having layers of overlying organic matter. In principle, about half of the mires in Finland are in their natural state, but given that traces of human activity can still be found, the idea of untouched nature is therefore more of an abstraction. Alongside the agricultural use of peatland, drainage and other kinds of land use near mires have had negative effects on the hydrological regime (see Metsähallitus). Mires with duckboards are popular places for walkers, mountain bikers, orienteers, nature photographers, berry pickers, snow shoeing, and winter skiers. Furthermore, as an international phenomenon, the contemporary cultural uses of mires include playful team sports events ranging from swamp volley and soccer to bog snorkeling (Lauren & Piirainen 2023). In recent years, the topicality of the mire is clearly reflected in the growing number of environmental artists making art in the mire, providing viewers with experiences of nature and spaces to address change in an era of global climate crisis.

Culture has an evolutionary, holistic and transformative role in a framework that recognizes culture as a transformative force for sustainable development. It is important to consider how the integration of cultural, social and ecological aspects appears in mire art, and also its local transformative power (Dessein et al. 2015: 31, 33). In the urban landscape, artwork effects and its perceived transformations have been studied in human geography from socio-cultural and political perspectives in the context of anti-coal struggles and artivism. The results show that along with its capacity to disseminate environmental and political awareness, artistic activism has emerged as a tool to tackle the socio-ecological crisis (Rodriguez-Labajos 2021: 44, 49). The thematic field of artivism – art and activism – is very broad, encompassing various social problems and tensions (see Golanska & Kronenberg 2020). The message of art is not only conveyed by art organizations in specific indoor spaces such as art museums. In this case study, artivism focuses on the growing appreciation of natural mires and their more-than-human world. Importantly, it means cultivating an awareness and contributing to social change (Latvala-Harvilahti 2021).

Ten years ago, it was thought that art could draw people's attention to the problems and contradictions of climate change (Miles 2010). But today, climate change art has already gone a step further. Emerging climate change art can connect viewers in order to understand the impacts of human-induced climate change and its consequences (Taplin 2014; Sommer & Klöckner 2021). As part of this new trend, mire artists raise serious questions among their audiences,

questioning unsustainable lifestyles and promoting a more sustainable future agency (Latvala-Harvilahti forthcoming). Interest in the growing impact of ecologically engaged art has intensified interdisciplinary debates on the relationship between art, inclusivity and well-being, as well as the role of art as a catalyst for people to act for a more sustainable lifestyle. Particularly, ecologically engaged transformative art uses materials that blend with nature and are useful to animal visitors, and aims to raise questions in the minds of human visitors.

This article addresses ecologically engaged mire art as a tool to strengthen the public's respective relationship with mire nature in general by way of a case study. The study analyses the transformative aspects and power of Reetta Partanen's artwork *The Invited Guests* (Fin. Kutsuvieraat, 2020), situated in the Sahanneva mire in Seinäjoki, Finland. Partanen's five-piece sculptural artwork is based on organic materials, and lines a kilometer-long art trail. Partanen talked to people working for the Nature Conservation District of Ostrobothnia,[1] and the ideas of combining art and mire conservation and organizing an event within this framework came up. The City of Seinäjoki was also overseeing a protected mire area, and together they agreed on the art trail. However, it is not a closed or regulated exhibit, and anyone walking there can easily end up in the art area, even those who do not visit art museums.

My perspective on the transformative nature of her art stems from the artist's use of materials and other choices and aims, and is explored by reflecting on both an artist interview and my own experience of her artwork. The overarching research question is: How do the artist and her artwork emphasize the value of the mire as a natural place and softly question the dominant place of humans in the world? The artist interview in this study was implemented with a combination of thematic and expert interview elements. The method of data analysis used is qualitative content analysis, based on repeated, open and critical listening to the interview. The key narrative of the interview was formed by the interviewee's own emphases and thematic openings, and is considered in more detail in the analysis. Following the interview, I went to see the artwork at the Sahanneva mire. My aim was to make observations of the artwork, and to get a feel for the place both physically and emotionally.

The next section introduces the contextual and conceptual background for the study, in which concepts of environmental art and process art, as well as transformative art in the context of contemporary challenges, sustainability and well-being are considered. The research materials and methodology chapter present the collection of the research material, including field reflections in the Sahanneva mire as part of an ethnographic approach. Next, the artwork and location of the Sahanneva mire is introduced and contextualized.

In three analytical chapters, the theme of change is examined through a thematic analysis. In my approach, the idea of change is situated in the context of transformative art by examining the artist's own relationship to mire, changes in nature and artwork, and the need for a more respectful relationship with mire as an aim of her artwork. The conclusion presents a reflection on how the artworks in the Sahanneva mire aim to respond to the transformation of the human-nature relationship.

CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Artists who become advocates for mire nature are not acting for external reasons, but are inspired more by their own environmental concerns and love for mires: especially, they wish to bring visibility to the mire as a valuable natural area (Latvala-Harvilahti & Laurén forthcoming; Kaukio 2022a). The history of on-site mire art in Finland dates to the 1970s, when among others, performance artist and painter Esko-Juhani Takalo-Eskola popularized mire art with naked mire dwellers spinning on a muddy ground (Takalo-Eskola & Linnilä 2017). Research based on environmental aesthetics saw the mire as beautiful and experiential, contrary to the mire imagery of its time (Hakala 1999). In the 1970s and 1990s, mire art was partly influenced by the same themes as seen in the 2020s, such as understanding the mire as a timeless or subconscious mystical place that humans have changed by draining it. However, by the end of the 1990s at the latest, mire art and the study of aesthetics and culture challenged the image of the marginal and work-oriented mire, emphasizing the mire's wanderers and its beauty (Hakala 1999; Laurén 2008). In the twenty-first century, the increasingly diversified work of mire artists has continued to stress mire conservation, and in recent years, a future-oriented and sustainable paradigm. One of the individual representatives of contemporary mire art is visual artist Kaija Kiuru from Sodankylä in Finnish Lapland, who has used her art to make people take notice of mining plans in the Viiankiaapa mire, which threaten Lapland's nature. By photographing the changing landscape, Kiuru has made visible the concrete boundaries of the mire and the symbolic boundaries between nature conservation and nature use (Kiuru 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Latvala-Harvilahti 2021).

Ecologically engaged contemporary art is often seen as a pillar of the relationship with nature, and as an enticement to imagine future visions of the relationship between humans and the earth. The shift from seeing the environment primarily as a human resource to seeing it in terms of nature's rights and agency has increased empathy for both living and non-living nature. This

does not mean, however, that cultural traditions such as berry picking and nature walks are ignored. Rather, the aim is to find harmony and avoid indifference to nature. As part of a broadening perspective, scholars have noticed the urgent need to find new ways of discussing environments where humans and nonhumans are entangled. Accordingly, artists around the world often position nature as their co-artist (Huhmarniemi & Jokela & Hiltunen 2021: 2, 4; Huhmarniemi & Salonen 2022).

I understand novel positionings of nature as part of the "transformative mire art". The concept refers to ecologically engaged art (DiSalvo et al. 2009) that links both to the rapid need for a change in lifestyle and sustainability goals in the mind of the artist, and to new ways of experiencing the mire environment and reflecting on the more-than-human nature. Transformative art asks whose well-being is of importance. Today, a more-than-human perspective that challenges human-centered art practices (e.g., Aaltonen 2022; Kokkonen 2017) seems to be a key theme in transformative art. Artists can take multispecies perspectives into account during the creation phase, for example, in the way that the artwork changes the surroundings of the animals. Transformative mire art seeks to generate targeted individual and social change in the human-mire relationship. One of the aims of transformative art is to use art intervention to enrich the experiences of nature. Transformative art as defined here is a phenomenon of the climate crisis. It can be approached as a cultural phenomenon, the causes of which are due to overconsumption in the Western world, and which artists and the creative sector are now seeking ways (e.g., through activism) to mitigate and adapt to (Karkulehto & Koistinen & Ugron 2022).

People can experience the global environmental crisis as both shared and private at the same time. Like forests and seas, mires have become seen as landscapes of hope and despair, and also as natural resource areas that are populated by their own species. From hope and despair, people also move onto the scale of well-being. The concepts in the field of ecologically engaged art reflect a relationship with a changing world, and a vision of what art can contribute to planetary well-being (Kortetmäki & Hirvilammi 2022). The recent rise of climate change art is a continuation of other forms and categories of environmental art such as land art and eco-art (Defrančesk 2022). Environmental arts are art works that are made in nature or in the cultural environment, and can take the form of a work, a process, or a single event (see Tieteen Termipankki). It involves people in a whole range of sensory experiences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile, and sometimes smell) and thus makes people aware of their environment, encourages pro-environmental behavior, and creates new meaningful relationships with the environment (Marks & Chandler & Baldwin 2014; Hannula 2002; Clarke 2010 [2001]: 92). In environmental art, moving

the same material and form to another place changes the work and may create a new work. An environmental artwork does not exist only in one place, but rather it is understood as living in time and linked to specific local cultural and social conditions (Naukkarinen 2003: 76–78). The importance of environmental art at the local level has been strongly reflected in the current tensions over peat use for energy, or the threat to the mire ecosystem posed by mining (Latvala-Harvilahti 2021). However, it is worth noting that the boundary between environmental art and other outdoor public art is fluid. Environmental art is a well-established art form that is a continuation of sculpture (Huhmarniemi 2021). The interviewed artist referred to her artwork as process art, which may be defined as "art in which emphasis is put not on the formal aspects of a work but on the processes involved in creating it and on the processes of change and decay it is subject to thereafter" (Chilvers & Glaves-Smith 2015 [1998]).

There are different approaches to evaluating and researching the impact of art. The most important impact relates to both the individual and the community level. Positive impacts on communities increase people's experiences of belonging and participation (Houni & Turpeinen & Vuolasto 2020: 17, 41; Timonen & Rotko & Kauppinen 2022). Cultural well-being has become a high-profile issue in Finnish society as the work of applied arts in the social and health sector has strengthened. The state of the environment and well-being have come to be understood as being closely interlinked. The health and well-being promoting the power of art takes place in nature, and also through nature (Houni 2021: 65–67; Moula & Palmer & Walshe 2022). A recent study on the recreational use of mires has looked at the importance of cultural heritage in the UK. But the natural and cultural heritage values of mires are individually perceived, which is why we need research on the different users of mires, their mindsets, and their values (Flint & Jennings 2022: 175; Latvala-Harvilahti 2022). Hence, mire artists are one such group of mire users that deserve attention.

Especially in interdisciplinary sustainability research, well-being is seen in a broader context than the human being. In the sustainability transition, planetary well-being refers to the integrity of the processes that are central to well-being at local and global levels, alongside the preservation of the web of life (Kortetmäki & Hirvilammi 2022: 62–64; Kjell 2011). The viewpoint of planetary well-being (Koistinen et al. forthcoming) can be approached from the idea of cultural intervention, applied from the typology of visual art forms and corresponding dimensions of public engagement (Nurmis 2016). Communication researcher Joanna Nurmis states that artworks are divided into three categories: 1) representations (paintings), 2) performance environments (interactive installations), and 3) interventions (Nurmis 2016: 506). The last one is of special interest in this article, as the aspect of engagement in interventions

is *behavioral.* Typical of such interventions is that artists place works within the public space or landscape to force an encounter that would otherwise not happen. In addition, the artists show a familiar space (like mires) in a new way. Each landscape offers a visible part, but also an invisible, individually sensed landscape that generates images, ideas and attitudes (Haanpää & Laakkonen 2018; Atha et al. 2019 [2013]). What is more, the level of engagement is a *motivation to act*. This is an example of the power of (mire) art and can provide a deeper understanding of the place of humans in the ecosystem (Nurmis 2016: 507; see Siivonen et al. 2022: 228). Critical interventions in culture are acts in which the values of an alternative world are expressed and shaped (Miles 2023); however, the stories and images about certain places reflect meanings we can recognize from various contexts and discourses (Karkulehto & Koistinen & Lummaa 2020: 1, 7).

In community development, art and artistic interventions can play a transformative role which increases knowledge, trust, and social capital. From the point of view of the instrumental role, art can be seen as a tool for education and personal development. The idea of transformative art is seen also in new perspectives on collaborative art which understand art as a transformational force to strengthen community and enhance well-being. Art projects may connect people to the natural world and spark conversations on coexisting with nature (Bublitz et al. 2019). Furthermore, the transformative force of art can bring forth community-based solutions to cope with tensions or contradicting values (see Häyrynen & Devery & Banerjee 2021). For example, in the environmental struggle related to mining, art-based resources include promoting cultural resilience, impacting values and fostering hope, and hence contribute to cultural sustainability (Huhmarniemi 2021: 2). Thus, mire art is contextual art in that it reflects the main themes of society. Today, mire artists who combine scientific knowledge and create a space for dialogue can be considered under this prompt genre of climate change art, underpinned by a planetary boundary thinking. As Karkulehto, Koistinen and Ugron (2022) argue, creative practices are an element of transformative planetary activism, which imagines various futures based on an ethical consideration of nonhuman others and a collective caring for the planet.

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on an interview with the visual artist Reetta Partanen, and an on-site observation of her artwork in 2022. The Mire Trend research project (of which this article is a part) decided to conduct interviews by phone because

of the COVID-19 pandemic. This proved to be a helpful solution, although it is not a substitute for a face-to-face meeting. The interview with Reetta Partanen, which lasted just under an hour, was informal in tone, and followed the framework developed in the Mire Trend research project. Firstly, Partanen answered questions about her background and talked about her childhood experiences in nature. I then addressed the art-related questions we had created for interviews, which included discussions about the idea and aim of the artwork, details, and feedback.

In ethnographic research, interviews are seen as a flexible tool for exploring knowledge and understanding. The interview is a conversation, and an interaction situation in which both the interviewee and the researcher draw on cultural knowledge and produce articulations of the subject matter (e.g., Nikander 2010: 254–255). However, I wanted to adopt the role of a listener rather than interlocutor for myself, as giving space to the interviewee seemed essential. Instead of asking questions, I tried to focus on the answers and the formation of the narrative from her point of view. The interpretation that appears from the interview is the result of a dialogue between theory and empirical data. I was especially interested in seeing the connections between what was said on different topics, as a way of understanding the larger context. I also hoped that the interviewee would use words, linguistic and narrative expressions that reflected her own meanings and perspectives, rather than unknowingly imposing assumptions or definitions in my speech that might over-direct the constructed discourse.

Having worked in environmental arts for a long time, Partanen is an expert on the subject. The interview situation is often conversational, with the interviewer allowing side-tracks from the main topic as appropriate. As an interviewer, I found it important that she was able to bring up something I had not thought of beforehand. There were narrative features in the interview which appeared from the verbalization of a process of change that the interviewee considered to be important. Typical of ethnographic interviews, our discussion generated talk about the overall place of mire art in today's world, rather than short answers to preconceived interview questions. The loosely framed discourse allowed for versatility, and as a researcher, I also approached the meaning-making processes from surprising perspectives (Huttunen & Homanen 2017: 141; Alastalo & Åkerman & Vaittinen 2017: 230). The method of analysis used in this study is qualitative content analysis. As a content element of the interview, I focused on the theme of *change* by finding the links between the artist's own human-mire relationship, the meanings she assigns to process art, and the impact of art: in particular, how art can influence the way we think about nature. Throughout the process, it was always borne in mind that artistic means serve as a tool to articulate and communicate questions about the environment.

The experience of the Sahanneva mire art trail in 2022 as part of my approach was different from usual ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., Palmu 2007). Except for my spouse, the mire was free from other people. I was able to compare the pieces of the artwork with the photographs of the opening of the art trail found in the press and social media. When I walked around, the physical experience and mental tuning was different from leisure time spent in nature. I had interviewed Partanen beforehand, and when I looked at the artwork, I recalled what she had said. After visiting the art trail, I thought that the interview should in fact have been done there, on the site. I also believe that my own sensory perceptions would have broadened and deepened the interview, but when I arrived at the mire, based on the interview, I already had some vision in my mind. My field diary was visual as I took about 50 photographs of the art trail. Later, while listening to the interview and writing the text, I looked at the photographs again. This allowed me to return to what the individual artworks looked like in nature and what was around them (see Kupiainen 2022: 219).

THE SITE AND THE ARTWORK

In South Ostrobothnia, a phased regional plan which covered both peat production and mire conservation came into force in August 2021 (see Vaihemaakuntakaava III). The location of the artwork south of the city of Seinäjoki is at the center of the province of South Ostrobothnia. In the Seinäjoki region, mires have previously been drained for forestry and the economic perspective towards mires is highly visible. The coexistence of peat policy and ditch restoration is an everyday issue for locals. The European Union is working to halt the loss of biodiversity in its territory, and one of the main ways to achieve this is through the Natura 2000 network (Ympäristöministeriö). Altogether, there are six biodiversity-friendly Natura 2000 sites in Seinäjoki. The Seinäjoki Environmental Protection group organized a restoration project in the mire by damming forest ditches. The protected area covers 170 hectares. The plan also contributes to the energy self-sufficiency of the province by allowing enough peat production areas to meet the needs of the energy industry (Vaihemaakuntakaava III). Art in the mires of Ostrobothnia area is not a unique phenomenon, as in recent decades local mires have been used for artistic projects. However, I am not aware of any art events having been organized in the Sahanneva mire in the past.

The Sahanneva mire is located about 10 kilometers (about 6.21 mi) from the Seinäjoki center. The Sahanneva mire is quite dry, and a combination of pine mire and open bog. The planned restoration will be carried out by damming

forest ditches (Sahannevan luonnonsuojelualueen vesitalouden ennallistamis-suunnitelma 2022), with the aim of improving biodiversity, mitigating climate change, and improving water protection, while considering the recreational use of the area. In 2016, the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia conducted a map-based survey open to all to support the preparation of the regional plan, the purpose of which was to find out the respondents' thoughts on the mire nature of South Ostrobothnia, its different uses and exploitation methods, and the values associated with mires. The survey received hundreds of responses and showed that most respondents visited the mire a few times a year, but there were also dozens of monthly and weekly visitors. Drainage and peat production were seen as threats to mires, and concerns were expressed about the changes that had already taken place in mires, the future of pristine mires, as well as the lack of appreciation of mires (Etelä-Pohjanmaan suoluonto-kysely 2016).

Figure 1. *The Invited Guests Art Route in the Sahanneva mire invites you to walk in mire nature and wonder where you can find art. Photograph by Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti 2022.*

As a marked art trail, the mire serves as a regional resource where art can be used to strengthen the inclusiveness of artistic and natural experiences. The route (Fig. 1) was chosen by Partanen from the perspective of walking through diverse types of land, where there is a wide mire and a small drier spot with different vegetation, which makes the diversity of the mire more visible. There are some duckboards in the area, but the art trail requires stepping into a slightly submerged mire. The mire is not the only attraction in the area, as right next to the art trail is a stargazing observatory, which hosts star and sun shows for the public. At the end of the hiking trail there is a traditional camping hut that is in active use. The announcement ceremony for the designation as a mire reserve was held at the opening ceremony of the art trail in 2020, which was attended by around 40 people. In areas of fragile mire ecosystems, regional community-based creative processes can be an effective way to build, among other things, knowledge, commitment, social capital, and ecologically sustainable development (Brandenburg 2008: 27, 42).

The Invited Guests artwork in the Sahanneva mire is a sculptural series made of organic material. For Partanen, making environmental art and eventually process art was her great dream. The artist used water-resistant *urushi* that is made from the sap of lacquer beans, traditional Japanese *kakishibu* with a high tannin content, as well as tar, flax fiber, wood, and soil. Ecologically engaged art is a set of common themes explored through a range of materials and practices (DiSalvo et al. 2009). The five independent parts of the artwork differ from each other, but most show familiar aspects of nature such as a bird sitting on a branch, or berries blossoming. Objects in nature have features of framelessness and involvement as they cannot be set apart so clearly – they are part of their environment, and in a symbiotic relationship with other living or non-living beings (Defrančeski 2022: 25). Accordingly and for example, the soundscape of nature can become part of the art experience. From this point of view, the experience of art in a mire is different every time. On the art route in question, the figures are placed in the landscape without any signs giving their name or other detailed information. First there is a life-size fox (Fig. 2), which is placed standing on its feet. According to my memory, the distance between the first and the second work is less than ten meters, where you find a two-meter-long mire butterfly on the ground, then soon a black grouse on a tree branch, and as you go further, along the path comes a large cloudberry, which grows upwards from the ground. The last installation is a human as part of a tree.

Figure 2. *When I visited the mire, the changing seasons and the normal life of nature had already changed the pieces of artworks. Photograph by Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti 2022.*

THE ARTIST'S RELATIONSHIP TO MIRE

The artist of *The Invited Guests* specializes in sculpture, installation, and community art. For over five years her works have been characterized by a sense of responsibility for the environment and the place of humans in nature. In the interview, she points out that in Finland the human-forest relationship is much talked about, which is in contrast to the human-mire relationship. The title of the artwork refers to an encounter, and Partanen does not separately refer to humans as guests:

> *The name of the work comes from the fact that the mire is an area that invites different organisms and animal species to come together, for which the mire is important in diverse ways. Some may visit for a day or two hours, others for a lifetime.* (Interview 22 June 2022)

Partanen says in the interview that her artwork is a tribute to the mires, and represents a trend of the 2020s, in which the artist is deliberately seeking to support a cultural transformation that includes respectful relationship with mire. The mire experiences of her adulthood seem to be the key narrative of the interview, although in the other interviews with Finnish artists conducted by

the researchers of our project, the influence of mire experiences from childhood has been more common. A human-mire relationship refers to one formed through human experience, and shaped and changed in a process-like way over an individual's life. It is influenced by the knowledge and emotions associated with mires, as well as their cultural heritage (Laurén 2022; 2006: 90–97, 209). As a living heritage, mire is a dynamic part of everyday lives that empowers communities and sustainable development (cf. Poulios 2014). Perceptions of mires have changed. For example, the mire no longer terrifies modern visitors as it used to (Kaukio 2022b). This is also reflected in Partanen's interview when she describes how her mire relationship changed due to her quite recent experiences in the mires. First, Partanen describes her feelings of excitement and fear about the mire, and how a sense of danger was present when she experienced the mire as a little-known terrain. As the feeling of familiarity became stronger, her shoes got wet, and she was no longer afraid of sinking into the mire (Laurén & Piirainen 2023). Thus, the feelings of alienation and uncertainty towards the mire turned to those of familiarity and enjoyment. This change was driven by her living near the mire conservation areas and working as an art instructor. In cooperation with a nature adviser, Partanen took people into mires, and spending more time in mire nature made her familiar with the characteristics of the mire and the annual cycle of its nature, shaping her thinking as an artist.

> *We also went through these (stories) a lot with our clients on various nature walks. That's when the "will-o'-the-wisp" and all that kind of folklore about the mire became familiar and close. It has made quite an impression on me.* (Interview 22 June 2022)

Partanen states: "The protection of mires is particularly important in a province where peat burning and the resulting destruction of mires is still going on" (visual artist Reetta Partanen's website). The geographic context and restoration processes of the location of the artwork are of particular importance in Seinäjoki. The conservation aspect was the starting point for *The Invited Guests* installation, and the brainstorming and background work of the artwork started in co-operation with the Finnish League for Nature Conservation, Ostrobothnia District, and the Seinäjoki Art Museum. Partanen explains:

> *In Seinäjoki there is still a lot of peat burning … there are very, very many mires, but they are used – it is terribly important to somehow give a different kind of attention than human utility.* (Interview 22 June 2022)

An outspoken tone has become common among environmental artists. However, many artists do not relate to activists who define or advocate a particular message. Partanen finds my question about art that carries a message interesting, but does not identify with (what is in her words) "exclamation mark art". Rather, she describes her art as "question mark art", in which the works allow people to reflect on things from their own point of view. But she sees this as a contradiction in terms: on the one hand she is a member of society and art is a part of it, and on the other hand, she does not like to call herself an activist who proclaims the truth. Instead, she wants art to reflect the thoughts and feelings of the visitor. According to Partanen, walking and exploring in the Sahanneva mire are a part of the (art) experience, not just watching. As visitors walk along the art trail, they must see nature and look for where the next work of art might be. In this way, as they walk, they form an observant relationship with nature, stopping at individual works to examine their observations.

The meanings attached to the environment are more comprehensive than before, as it has been associated with problems that threaten both the well-being of people and of nature as a whole (Haila 2022; Meadowcroft 2017). As a message of environmental mire art, the emphasis on change or process is therefore aligned with individual experiences of nature, as environmental art can make one notice changes elsewhere, and reflect on how one relates to them. This can also broaden the temporal perspective towards the future (Sepänmaa 1986; Naukkarinen 2003: 82), and by creating a new relationship between people and the mire, environmental art builds a unique way of looking at life, and a planetary understanding of the rapidly changing environment (see, e.g., Marks & Chandler & Baldwin 2017).

Most of us have already lived with negative experiences of the consequences of climate change (e.g., unbearable heat, drought), and have felt, for example, a fear of forest fires or a sadness about the drainage of mires. Nurmis (2016: 504) asks what messages contemporary climate change art can send. We in the West have grown up in a modern consumer society and associated lifestyle, and it seems that, as if by accident, we have become accustomed to over-exploiting nature. Part of environmental art's effectiveness is therefore to surprise the viewer, to astonish, to open a space for new perspectives and questioning, and to arouse interest and emotions (Latvala-Harvilahti forthcoming). Although art is flexible as a field of action and therefore in principle well suited to reaching all people, the cooperation between art and other sectors of society should be normalized to turn the message into action. During the interview, I asked: "Did the climate crisis and feelings of climate concern somehow come up in that context?" She at once replied, "Yes, yes they did."

> *I feel that it is now part of this whole.* [laughter] ... *If you have an artist who in some way deals with nature in their art – or in this world situation – it can be difficult not to deal with the lack of species or how different decisions affect our environment, or how an artist can create, for example, space for a different relationship with nature, which in turn can affect in its own way how we relate to our environment*. (Interview 22 June 2022)

The above interview quote reveals her view of her own role in transformative art practices. Partanen uses a concrete example to highlight the importance of the worldview and how it affects our relationship with nature. In her view, in the past, there was a significant link between the folk beliefs associated with wildlife and human behavior. When nature was believed to belong to various magical creatures, it was not regarded as inanimate:

> *How important have magical stories been for the human relationship with nature in the past? How have we thought that out there in nature, there are different little human-like characters living their own lives, and how they are affected. That's quite a different approach from the science-based approach of the modern world, where we approach the environment through science and utility.* (Interview 22 June 2022)

This anti-scientific and anti-profit mentality and a concrete approach based on a respect for nature has, in her view, protected nature from overuse. In folklore, environmental narratives have reflected a code of behavior: elves were seen as guardians of the invisible boundaries between man and nature. A person entering their territory had to ask permission from them, and without their permission and indulgence, human activities were unsuccessful (Sarmela 2007 [1994]: 379, 384–385). Compared to folk belief, it is worth asking why the animals that are dependent on the natural environment are no longer enough to inspire humans' respect for nature. Reflections on whether we could think differently about nature and understand that we cannot control it, surface in the artist interview. The idea of art that was created *with* the mire is in the background. In addition to its visual appeal, the mire is a multi-sensory place where listening, smelling and walking are important, alongside looking. In addition, the mire has its own stories, which have influenced the way we think about the mire (see Laurén 2006; Kaukio 2023). The co-agency with mire is part of art that considers more-than-human values. Then, art is not made on the conditions of the human viewer or taken to conventional places to be experienced, and the fact that the mire and its animals are allowed to transform and exploit (process) art is a reminder of the power and authority of nature.

Figure 3. *The only human figure in the series resembled a skeleton because of its transparent structure. Photograph by Lauri Harvilahti 2022.*

The full-size human (Fig. 3) built into a tree is a reference to Partanen's earlier sculptural installation, where figures were made of natural fiber masses. Notably, the pieces of artwork in the mire transcend interspecies boundaries, for example, by presenting blood vessels that become roots or showing trees that begin to grow from human feet.

CHANGES IN NATURE AND ARTWORK

Research on environmental art has emphasized questions of spatiality, such as how the work fits into the space, whether it creates a certain atmosphere or tension, dominates the space, or surrenders to it (Naukkarinen 2003: 74). Furthermore, due to the visible changes in the material caused by physical exposure to natural forces, the experience of art changes over time (Defrančeski 2022: 22). The mire changes and the forces of nature change the artworks. The art in the Sahanneva mire is understood as multi-level: it is not just individual works along the art trail, but also Partanen's premise that an essential part of the experience is wandering in the mire and finding the art (such as the

cloudberry in Fig. 4) placed in nature. In environmental art, temporality is a factor that influences art. Permanently placed in a mire, such artwork provides a repetitive experience for those who walk in nature. In the field of neuroscience, research on neurocognitive effects has looked at the repeated experience of art. Since a key feature of the brain is its ability to change because of experience, the effects of repeated experiences of art can be long-lasting. Moreover, the experience of the same work can change over time and affect people in different ways (Preminger 2012). The artwork in the Sahanneva mire strongly associates humans with nature, both as part of it and responsible for its future, and not with being a bystander or master of nature (see Sinervo 2022). This also relates to the fact that art has a strong role to play in environmental education, and is reflected in art teacher training, with an emphasis on environmental and community art activities. The paradigm shift also reflects a strong understanding of nature as a more-than-human environment. In addition, art education is focused on releasing eco-anxiety and increasing educators' capacities in facilitating transformative experiences (Huhmarniemi & Jokela & Hiltunen 2021). An eco-social framework of art education influences sustainability awareness. In other words, art education of this type can act as *a driver* of transformation in society towards a sustainable future (Foster & Salonen & Sutela 2022).

The theme of change is reflected in *The Invited Guests* on many levels. In the mire, the artwork is at first as Partanen intended it to be. But nature takes part in the creation of art. Figures can be transformed just as much by the animals moving through space, for whom the pieces are not seen as art, but simply as part of the habitat. Moss can grow within the works, and branches change their position with the seasons. Similarly, rain and wind can remove parts of the work, snow may cover the pieces, or fog may obscure the visibility from one piece to another. Thus, the multi-sensory nature of the art with the influence of the seasons is at the core of the art experience.

Changes in the mire also include changes in environmental values. The space in which the art trail was created is not just any natural mire, but a differentiated space marked by values that emphasize conservation. Consequently, environmental thinking, concern and feelings naturally became part of the project. Partanen said that the values of nature conservation were highlighted in a panel discussion on the opening day in regard to the relationship between nature conservation and art. In the art pieces, the delimitation of the mire art is managed by the signage at the start and end points of the art route. The timing of the work and the actions taken on the mire (i.e., the publicizing of the mire's protection) can also be seen as one of the settings for the work.

Figure 4. *Art in the Sahanneva mire is reborn every day, and also according to natural light, as there is no separate art lighting in the mire. Photograph by Lauri Harvilahti 2022.*

Moral and ethical issues are central to art in nature. Partanen argues that art that is placed in a mire should not disturb nature (see Laurén 2022). Hence, the materials were selected from the perspective of ecological sustainability, and will decompose over time. During the interview, we did not discuss in detail her thoughts about the changes and forms the pieces might take in years or decades to come. The use of an old Japanese varnish, *urushi*, which is resistant to cold and water, ensures that the works do not decompose as quickly in nature as they would without the varnish, so in this sense she has influenced the natural decay. But the artwork may have a positive impact on the mire's own plant and animal life, and, for example, the design of the works also considers that the artworks can act as insect hotels in the mire. Furthermore, environmental education values can be seen behind the work, and the interviewee was fascinated by the idea that art could introduce people to different areas of the mire and support the idea of spending leisure time in nature. Underpinning this is a consideration that a work of art has its own intensity, so it is essential to ask what art can do and what effects it may have on its audience, and not only what art means or what it refers to (see Kontturi 2018).

Art serves as a tool for juxtaposing the personal and the public, and makes us reflect on what it means to be in the world. The relationship between art and well-being has been described as, for example, focusing our attention on what is important and thus enhancing the individual and collective quality of life (Brandenburg 2008: 19). In practice, process art in the mire may make the

Anthropocene – the epoch when humans exist as a global geological force and the main determinant of the environment of the planet (Chakrabarty 2021) – *a cultural reality*. An important characteristic of such art is its ability to reflect back to the viewer in a different manner from media texts or research reports on environmental problems, as a work of art activates emotions, directly touches the most personal core, awakens a sense of responsibility, and challenges the viewer to reflect (Nurmis 2016: 506). On the one hand, one might also think that in a fragile mire ecosystem, humans could also be seen as 'uninvited guests'. However, environmental art stands for the positive impacts of human activity on nature, and through *The Invited Guests* artwork the mire is positioned as a unique local place, and as part of the mire culture. Thus, the environmental art series transforms the natural environment into an experiential space:

> *It's very fascinating for an artist – that it's inherently a very multi-sensory place. I somehow think that the smells of the mire and what happens around it become part of the experience, and that my work also becomes part of the mire in that way.* (Interview 22 June 2022)

In the mire, environmental effects can be site-specific in many ways. The 'look' of a piece of art in mire is influenced by the natural environment and the materials the artist has chosen to use. The relationship of the works to the mire is reflected in the fact that the pieces depict the typical flora and fauna of the site, albeit making something large when in real life it may be small. Except for the mire butterfly (Fig. 5), the pieces had been in the mire for two years.

Figure 5. *The butterfly has been in the art route since 2022. Photograph by Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti 2022.*

The natural materials and colors used in the works on the art trail blend in with and resemble their environment. When my eyes first caught a figure, it took a moment to see it for what it was. For example, the fox figure was partly broken, much of the surface material on the front of the fox was gone, and the branches that had been placed inside the surface of the work were clearly visible and the original colors were faded. A black grouse (Fig. 6) was hanging on a branch by only a toe. My attention was then drawn to the oversized mire butterfly, which lay on the ground as if in surrender. There was space to move around each piece of art, which allowed the works to be viewed from different angles. Although startling at almost six feet tall, the human figure, intertwining wood and man, did not seem particularly fatalistic. Rather, one could describe it as the gradual disappearance of man, and this has been enhanced as the growth of the branches and their wrapping around the body have increased compared to the opening day photographs.

Figure 6. *The figure of a black grouse looked deceptively like a real bird. Photograph by Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti 2022.*

THE NEED FOR A MORE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

Cultural transformation into a sustainable society takes place by influencing communities, but it is also essential to influence the worldview at the individual level. In the interview, the artist also refers to her own individual experience

and its effects on her. Particularly, mire art invites us to take an exploratory and empathetic approach:

> *I hope that* The Invited Guests *work could, at least in some small way, create a more respectful relationship with nature, a bit of what I experienced in the mires in Kainuu. That you can visit in different seasons, and you can just sit there and wonder, and respect the mire.* (Interview 22 June 2022)

In her book *Environmental Crisis and Art*, Eva Maria Räpple (2019) addresses some contemporary challenges of ignorance towards certain environmental problems. What is crucial in her mind, is the sensibility and ability to take the standpoint of others – including species and ecosystems – into human imagination. Recent research in education and health interestingly shows that arts-in-nature has supplied stimuli to increase nature connectivity, understand environmental issues, and to explore ways to prevent environmental disasters. Among children and young people this has led to a higher environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviors, and also a potential decrease in eco-anxiety (Moula & Palmer & Walshe 2022). In the interview, I asked whether Partanen had received any feedback from children in the mire. It turned out that children were fascinated by the art trail, and according to her feedback at the time, the importance of creating an opportunity for the mire to be seen was a highlighted point. Apart from the opening, she has not received much feedback on the work. But the reason for this (as she understands it) may lie in the fact that the work is outside in nature, and not indoors.

An ecologically sustainable human-mire relationship frames the interviewee's narration on change, and is reflected in the primary positioning of the non-human as the voice of the mire. Partanen wanted people to come to the mire themselves. The mire and stillness become part of the work, just as the artwork becomes part of the mire and the mire area. As an environmentally sensitive art form, *The Invited Guests* can influence people's 'cultural filter' (assumptions) so that they feel the need to broaden their thinking, and with this change, their own consumption behavior (see, e.g., Pepper 1984). Thus, art is part of environmentalism, seen as a transformative consciousness and awareness, with knowledge and an understanding of nature and human beings as part of it (e.g., Borgdorff 2010; Miles 2006).

CONCLUSION

Environmental artists respond to topical issues by challenging the idea that humans have a greater right to control nature than other living creatures. In the 2000s, the increasingly diversified work of mire artists continued to stress mire conservation, and in recent years, a future-oriented and sustainable paradigm. The aesthetic gaze of art on the mire has sharpened, and in the wake of the global environmental crisis, has been accompanied by a conscious effort to make a difference. Nature values, more-than-human thinking, and ecological choices in materials form the basis for what I as a cultural researcher have earlier called transformative art. The linked concept of process art is part of a certain environment and ecosystem.

In this article, I examined *The Invited Guests* artwork (2020) by visual artist Reetta Partanen in the Sahanneva Mire, in Seinäjoki, Finland. It provided a case study for examining the transformative aspects of mire art that decomposes in nature, and provoked emotions and thoughts among visitors. The non-permanent nature of process art highlights the parallel lives of nature and humans. My perspectives on the theme of change were built around transformative art, the changing environment, and the relationship of Partanen's own experiences of the mire and the need for a more respectful relationship with mire nature.

The mire opens up perspectives on art's intention to contribute to its time, in this case to the relationship of humans to nature and ecology, as well as to the local conservation process (see Kajander 2022: 139). It seems that despite the growing concern about nature, we need ecologically engaged art to make climate change a tangible issue, and to open our minds to complex problems and future dimensions (see Nurmis 2016: 507). As the interest in cultural tourism and eco-tourism grows, the phenomenon of mire tours may become common in Finland. In the United States, mire commodification for tourism can be understood as a process of social spatialization, and encountering mires as 'lived places' rather than as a zone of 'natural resources' is a novel product for those who are willing to pay for a tour (Keul 2013). Mire art also enlivens nature, even without a guide. Nature tourism should be managed, as large numbers of tourists are, however, uninvited guests of the mire. It is difficult to say to what extent people would still perceive the mire as a frightening environment if they had to go there alone to experience art. However, in this case study, the art aims to reduce any fear of the mire by placing the art trail in a safe area (Laurén 2022).

The artwork provides an art intervention with the possibility for repeated art experiences that softly show the power of nature in a work of art. The artwork was not created in collaboration with the communities, but the art trail is made up of five art pieces, and borders the mire as a local attraction. For

visitors, a mire art trail provides both material artwork and experiences of mire nature. *The Invited Guests* creates an understanding that humans must care for the well-being of the mire, and the well-being of nature also supports human welfare. The key to embracing transformative art is the artist's own worldview, values, and their relationship with nature. In the interview, Partanen talked about her own experiences and the phases in her human-mire relationship, and considered the world view of earlier generations that was constructed by narratives, folk beliefs, and other modes of intangible cultural heritage of the mire. The message the artist wants to convey is that a new kind of human-mire-relationship is vitally needed. Ecologically engaged art may become one of the transformative forces of our time, deepening our understanding of planetary boundaries, and even changing people's relationship with nature. The case study shows the challenges that many municipalities face in reconciling the material and economic benefits of mires, with the need to protect the human-mire relationship and mires themselves. Art placed in the natural environment may be one way to attract new people to nature, which increases the recreational use of nature. But changes in environmental thinking are influenced by people's own experiences in nature, so any exposures of this type are likely to have positive effects on the human-mire relationship.

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[1] The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation with its local associations is the largest non-governmental organization for environmental protection and nature conservation in Finland.

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INTERVIEW

Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti's interview with visual artist Reetta Partanen on 22 June 2022. The material will be saved at the Finnish Literature Society's Archive in Joensuu after the Mire Trend research project is completed.

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MESSY AFFAIRS WITH IMAGINED SWAMP CREATURES: THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN SWAMP MONSTER NARRATIVES

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Abstract: This article examines what kinds of expressions the human-nature relationship in mire environments have taken in the context of imagined swamp creature narratives, and what the presence of swamp monsters reveals about the wider changes in the human-nature relationship in mires and other wetlands. The theoretical framework of this study is based on environmental humanities, including environmental aesthetics and ecocritical theory. The analysis deals with a range of fictional narratives (comic books, TV-series, literature for adults and children, and video performances) and folklore which feature diverse swamp creatures. Mires have often been considered as strange and fearsome, and both mires and monsters are linked to anomalies and burdened by negative preconceptions. However, attitudes towards mires have slowly changed. For example, along with monsters who sometimes transform into heroes or non-human friends, people's fears of unpredictable mires are now transforming into fears for these unique environments. In conclusion, the imagined swamp creatures reflect the human-nature relationship of the mires, and at the same time, actively transform it.

Keywords: environmental aesthetics, fear, human-nature relationship, imagined environments, marginal places, mires, non-human creatures

INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on Western fiction and narratives of the 2000s about swamp creatures and monsters that share a culturally marginal habitat in the mire. Mires have been imagined to be home to a wide variety of supernatural beings over time (Giblett 1996: 179–201; 2014: 159–160; Wilson 2005: 48–60;

Laurén 2006: 98–108; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271). Despite their diversity, the imagined inhabitants of the mires share several common features that are worth exploring, in order to trace the relationships between humans and nature that these swamp creature narratives reflect. As natural areas, mires, bogs, swamps, marshes, peatlands and other types of natural wetlands vary from one geographical location to another. However, the word 'mire' is used in this article to refer to the mire environment, regardless of the site-specific habitat type. On the other hand, the word 'swamp' is used in connection with various swamp creatures because it is the most common description used in fiction. 'Monster' and 'creature' are the labels that are often used interchangeably, but the context they are used in highlights the difference between the two meanings.

Imagined and narrated environments play a significant role in the human relationship with the environment, and influence the attitudes to and interpretations of nature (Kaukio 2013: 304–312). In the field of environmental aesthetics, there have been vivid discussions about whether some background knowledge is relevant for an aesthetic experience of the environment. In ecologically oriented environmental aesthetics, which started from the aims of applied aesthetics, the knowledge provided by the imagination, art and fiction has either been ignored or considered as harmful to a proper appreciation of the environment (Carlson 2000; Eaton 1998). But fictional environmental narratives are not meaningless (see Kaukio 2013), and through an ecocritical reading they can reveal a multifaceted view of the relationship between humans and nature. They also shape the human mindscape and guide the perception and interpretation of our living environment. Here, it will be argued that fictional environmental narratives contribute to creating our cultural heritage, and not only reflect environmental attitudes, but also reshape our views and ways of using or caring for nature.

This article examines what kinds of expressions the human-nature relationship has taken in mire environments in the context of imagined swamp creature narratives, and what they reveal about the wider changes in the human-nature relationship in mires. As habitats of imagined non-human creatures, mires highlight themes of a marginal place. Human relationships with the mire environment have often been dominated by their use and management, and from this perspective, mires have been demanding places. In lowland mires frost may have destroyed crops, and in tropical mires, the scourge of various predators (alligators and other animals) and malaria-spreading mosquitoes is ever-present. The inaccessibility, unpredictability and submergence of mires have long aroused a sense of fear (Giblett 1996: 103–126, 180–183; Knuuttila 1999; Lehtinen 1999; Laurén 2006: 17–19). Accordingly, imaginary swamp creatures are often like monsters, that is, creatures who raise issues of fear or alienation.

Among monsters – represented as ambivalent non-humans and inhabitants of remote places – swamp monsters are not mainstream in monster fiction, and by empirical observation they nowadays mostly populate novels for children and young people, and popular culture products such as comics and films. There have been relatively few previous studies on swamp monsters. One reason for this is that, as folklorists have pointed out, compared to other natural spirits, the supernatural creatures of the mire in particular are relatively rare (Ranta & Ranta 1996: 22; Jauhiainen 1999; Laurén 2006: 38; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271). In the monster gallery of popular culture, swamp monsters have also formed a rather marginal category (Landis 2012 [2011]), as well as in so-called cryptozoology, a pseudoscience subculture that searches for animals whose present existence is disputed (see Loxton & Prothero 2013). So, rather than presenting a comprehensive swamp monster study, this study is based on observations of parallel phenomena and studies the human-nature relationship in swamp monster narratives, and is largely oriented to research material.

The research proceeds as follows: First, the research materials and interpretive methods are presented as the themes that have influenced the selection of the mire creature narratives under study, and structure their interpretation. The cultural and material contexts of the imagined swamp creatures are discussed next. In the following four sections, swamp creatures are analyzed through issues of fear, attraction, monstrosity, and their relationship with non-human beings. The study concludes with a reflection on the heritage that swamp creatures offer for the future relationship with the mire.

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND INTERPRETIVE METHODS

The study focuses on the cultural products of Western fictional narratives in the 2000s, but also refers to some earlier or more occasional descriptions of imaginary and supernatural mire dwellers. The narratives in question stem from both fiction and folklore. A detailed list of the works of fiction (6 novels and 7 comic books, both for adults and children) and audiovisual products (5 titles) studied is provided in the references. The examples of various swamp creatures are chosen according to the post-humanistic thought that fictional texts and other imagined representations of swamp creatures are not so much objects of analysis or interpretation, but rather ones that start a discussion of the human-nature relationship of the mires (see Lummaa & Rojola 2014: 22). In a way they also offer a test for possible future relationships.

The metaphor of 'messiness' referred to in the title is an idea that not all of the aspects involved are necessarily interrelated, but they can still have

relationships with each other (Hyttinen & Lummaa 2020: 7), and form part of a speculative way of studying swamp creatures. In the context of swamp creatures, this also means that ideas from different times and spaces overlap and create new narratives. Swamp creatures can be found in myths, old and modern folklore (for example in belief stories and urban legends), as well as in popular culture, superhero fiction and fantasy (Giblett 1996: 179–201; 2014: 159–160; Ranta & Ranta 1996: 22; Wilson 2005: 48–60; Laurén 2006: 98–108; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271; Landis 2012 [2011]; Eriksson & Blixt 2019 [2018]: 27). Imagined swamp creatures in general do not seem to have a single strong genealogy, and they do not have the same basic and well-established rules as seen, for example, in vampire stories. Instead, they are like collections of variable properties placed under test. The material basis of these creatures is found in flora, fauna, fungi, or combinations of different substances, and some of them have no material substance at all. Only the mire environment as their natural habitat is the common factor that unites them all. Sometimes, swamp creatures or monsters are presented without a specific definition or description, as if their features were predefined. These cases underline the fact that swamp creatures are subject to certain expectations that arise from the imagination of what kind of creature could possibly adapt to such a frightening or hostile environment. The most stereotypical features of swamp creatures are their sliminess and deformity. However, in their representations, swamp creatures can also challenge assumptions. As inherently marginal places, mires become narrative spaces where it is possible to present something both new and different. Consequently, these swamp creatures not only represent the human-nature relationship with the mires, but also create and modify it.

The research material used in the swamp creature fiction featured in this study was selected with considerations of the themes of marginal places, the element of fear as an affective relationship with the mire, and issues related to non-human beings. The mires are seen as marginal places because of their wild nature, remoteness, and wasteland status. Meanings of marginality specifically emerge in relation to the perceptions of culture and wilderness, which are defined by people in the same way that peripheries are defined in relation to the culturally central or conventional (Saarinen 1999; Wilson 2005: 62; Kaukio 2013: 35). However, mires have provided refuge in the face of various threats or social pressures, and the aspect of exclusion may also have been voluntary. In the light of these meanings of marginality, fear is not always the dominant feature when talking about mires. Mire use is currently under global scrutiny, as problems such as peat energy production are linked to climate change and biodiversity loss. One trend is that attitudes towards mires have been shifting towards a more experiential and conservation-orientated approach (Laurén 2006; Kaukio 2022; Laurén

et al. 2022). These changes are also reflected in the swamp creature narratives, which raises the question that if swamp creatures are no longer always feared, what might our new relationship with the imaginary non-human creatures of the mire be like? Considering this relationship reveals something about these imaginary fellow travelers in the mire, but it also reveals something about us humans.

The attitude towards imagined non-human creatures living in the mire is linked to notions of monstrosity. The swamp creatures of horror fiction represent a monster identity that contains fear and loathing, but also seduction. Overall, the concept of the monster has begun to be questioned in the swamp monster fiction of the twenty-first century. The theme of monstrosity is explored through Finnish author Marko Hautala's horror novel *Leväluhta* (2018), the title of which refers to an Iron Age water burial site in Finland. Reinterpretations of monsters and mires also continue through the children's book *Multakutri ja suon salaisuus* (Moldylock and the secret of the mire, 2017) by Jukka Laajarinne, and the shift from scary swamp monsters to non-human friends features in several other children's books that provide a background for the discussion.

Further ethical implications of the transformation of swamp monsters are examined in the television series *Swamp Thing* (2019), based on the 1960s superhero comics created by DC Comics' legends Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson (Fig. 1). However, Swamp Thing had already debuted in a single comic strip in the 1950s, and Marvel Comics published a Man-Thing comic strip based on a similar character almost at the same time as *Swamp Thing* came out.[1] In the 1980s, Alan Moore began to rewrite the *Swamp Thing* story as a continuation of Wein and Wrightson's character. Collections of Moore's *Swamp Thing* comics were published in six books in the 2010s. The comic strip and the television series are examined in parallel in this article, and both deal with the relationship between humans and nature through the mire environment in an era of eco-crises, and conflicting monstrous superheroes.

Figure 1. *The Swamp Thing saga began in the 1950s and continues in various forms today. A cosplayer dressed as the Swamp Thing with creator Len Wein at CONvergence 2005. Photograph Lex Larson, Wikimedia Commons.*

Finnish outsider artist Rampe-Raven has created his own version of the ecological monster hero called Hillasuon kummajainen (the freak of the cloudberry mire). My analysis looks at two of his performance videos of *Hillasuon kummajainen* published on YouTube in 2018, as evidence of a change in the perceived fear of mires in an era of environmental crisis. This "freak" character can be interpreted as part of the folklore tradition of supranatural beings, or as an updated version of it.

This study draws on environmental aesthetics theory to reflect on how imaginative narratives influence the experience of, and attitudes towards, nature (see Haapala 2002; Brady 2003: 146–190; Kaukio 2013). The analysis is based on an ecocritical reading complemented by speculative post-humanistic thinking. Both approaches challenge our assumptions about the relationship between human, non-human, nature, and culture. The ecocritical view focuses on nature which also exists apart from human thought structures. However, post-humanistic thinking emanates from the human being itself, and the questioning of its role as a producer of perceptions (Lummaa & Rojola 2014: 21–22; see also Braidotti 2013: 1–6). Although human belonging or exclusion from nature is a matter of constant rethinking, examining the human-nature relationship requires a conceptual distinction between the parties involved.

Interpreting the representations of swamp creatures as an expression of the relationship between human and nature in the mire extends the ecocritical premise that human responsibility towards nature should be included in the ethics of the texts (see Buell 1995: 7). This precondition is met only in part of the subjects considered in this study. The ecological orientation is clear in the *Swamp Thing* saga and "The Freak of the Cloudberry Mire" videos, but with the *Leväluhta* novel and most of children's books, it is more a result of an ecocritical reading practice which extends to cultural criticism. Ecocritical reading includes the idea of nature as a reality that is seen through linguistic signs, cultural symbols, and as a conventional history-bound means of representation and of humanly filtered experience. However, reading as an ecocritical tool does not ignore the sensory and experiential basis of nature, and any meanings of the environment are shaped both discursively and as a matter of material reality (Garrard 2004: 3–4; Lahtinen & Lehtimäki 2008: 16–18). In this study, ecocritical reading refers to the interpretation of representations of the mire and the swamp creatures as affective images that influence emotions and perceptions.

An ethical orientation is further embedded in the relationship between human and nature in the mire, and whether the mire is considered as a mere natural resource or valued on its own terms. Ethics is also seen as part of the human interaction with the swamp creature as a non-human. The concept of monstrosity is often associated with an attempt to control something alien and

alienated, and the need to overcome fear also justifies resisting or subjugating the monster. Through other-than-human swamp creatures, we can examine the ways in which human culture conceptualizes its non-human companions, and with what ethical consequences (Karkulehto et al. 2019: 1). As non-humans, swamp monsters can criticize the human position and distinctness from outside the human species (Raipola 2014: 48). The ecocritical reading in this study is justified by the fact that the relationship with nature presented through the swamp monsters deals in many ways with typical human practices that seek to manage nature. Mires have been seen as something to be tamed and exploited because of their nature that defies human capacity and has, to some degree, been morally resented (Giblett 1996: 180–181; Lehtinen 1999: 80–83). Consequently, ideas about what could, should, or should not be done to mires are based on the assumption that mires are for and under human control, which is the case even when humans are intent on protecting or restoring mires.

INHABITING IMAGINARY MIRES

The habitats of the swamp creatures are located not only in the mires, but also in the cultural environments where their narratives have taken root. One of the earliest swamp creatures was the multi-headed, snake-like monster known as Hydra (Fig. 2). In antiquity, hydra plagued farmers in southern Greece, so they were afraid to pass the mire where it lived on their journey to find water. Hydra was interpreted as a metaphor of human vice, a lack of morals, and a lust for extravagance, which were as difficult to eradicate as the monster's regrowing heads (Eriksson & Blixt 2019 [2018]: 27). Thus, fear was born in relation to humans' perception of themselves, which is a motif not lost in today's swamp creature narratives.

The supranormal inhabitants of mire in local folklore add their own imaginative layer to the swamp creature repertoire. For example, in Finnish folklore the creatures living in mires have been seen as guardians of the mire, and the guardian spirit must be asked for its consent to enter and work in the area (Sarmela 2009: 384–385). In comparison to other nature spirits, the mire guardian spirits have been depicted as relatively unknown, and seen as demure and ethereal, benevolent beings, such as the healing maiden called Hetteenhaltija (the spirit of the morass) (Ranta & Ranta 1996: 22; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271). As such, it is hard to find monstrosity in them. But it is interesting to note that in the mire that has oft been stigmatized as a place of illness (Giblett 1996: 103–126; Knuuttila 1999: 68–69), such beings have also been found to have healing powers in earlier folk narratives.

Figure 2. *An Attican amphora from the 6th century BC depicts Heracles and Iolaus fighting the Lernaean Hydra. Photograph Louvre Museum, Wikimedia Commons.*

People in modern Western culture have imagined monsters as disgusting, frightening or dangerous, although in earlier history, monsters also reflected 'otherness' and curiosities that were not always particularly scary, but otherwise rejected things (Lawrence 2018). But when monsters are interpreted as projections of human fears (Gilmore 2003: 6) and are seen to challenge prevailing cultural categories, norms and concepts, they provoke reactions of impurity (Douglas 1984 [1975]: 50–56; Carroll 1999: 31–32). This idea of impurity in a categorical sense draws parallels between the mire and the monster, as neither fits neatly into the categories given but remains in an impure intermediate state. Thus, as an object of mire-related fears, monstrosity cannot be uniquely delimited to include material creatures. For example, the monstrousness of a mire without a clear material monster figure has been explained by the mixing of archetypal elements – earth and water or water and fire (firelights) – and a disruption of the expected order of things (Giblett 1996: 3, 182–185).

An early version of the swamp monster in popular culture was introduced in the horror sci-fi film titled *Curse of the Swamp Creature* (1968), in which the swamp monster is a Frankenstein-like creation of a scientist who eventually destroys its creator. In the film, the swamp creature is a fish-like male character made to demonstrate the possibility of a kind of reverse evolutionary process, and is an example of man's dangerous attempt to rule nature. The hubris of the scientist character is linked to the fear that every new technology will get out of hand (Soikkeli 2015: 66–69). Swamp creature fiction is also inspired by urban legends known as modern folklore. For example, the Honey Island Swamp Monster in Louisiana was allegedly discovered by Harlan E. Ford in 1974. Sightings of this bigfoot-like monster were reported through various channels that were ignored by official scientific research (Holyfield 2012; Loxton & Prothero 2013, x–xi; Honey Island Swamp Monster 2014). But the presented interpretation of the creature as a missing link relates to the intermediate nature of both the mire and its monsters.

In the case of urban legends, monstrosity has often been the result of unexplained events. There are also cases where natural living species and natural phenomena have been 'monsterized', when something has not corresponded with previously acquainted objects dominated by rational understanding. An example of such a process is the attitude towards the giant squid, which only began to be considered a monster when naturalists could not fit the animal into their classification system. Accordingly, monster tales have emerged from the interaction between nature and humans and are tied to the culture and concepts of nature of their respective eras (Latva 2019). Swamp creature narratives can also be seen as a result of the interaction between nature and humans, and tell us about the concepts of and the relationship with mire environments. The attitude towards different entities in the intermediate realm can serve as a mirror for changes in the worldview. The imagery of monster-like non-human figures can serve as metaphors for existing things but can also describe possible futures (Raipola 2014: 50).

While the cultural environments of the swamp creature are diverse, so are the mires that can be found around the world. The *Swamp Thing* saga is set in Louisiana, where the wetland area includes swamp and coastal marshland (Wilkins n.d.). The Louisiana marsh is an environment of human livelihoods. Nevertheless, it is also a periphery and a wasteland that provides a hiding place for the people's shadow activities. So, rather than a geographical point, the *Swamp Thing* is set in a certain atmosphere, where the symbolic meanings of the marginal are accentuated.

In Hautala's novel, the sacrificial spring of Leväluhta can be located with the precision of GPS coordinates to the province of southern Ostrobothnia in

Finland. Leväluhta is an Iron Age water burial site, and archaeological research has revealed that at least a hundred corpses, mostly women, were buried in the marshy pond in prehistoric times. Leväluhta is as limited as possible as being defined as a mire, and further research has suggested that it is not a mire at all, but rather a small lake. But while there is no typical mire flora (Wessman 2019: 49–53; see also Maijanen et al. 2021), Leväluhta has been conceptualized as a mire, and this has influenced its experienced meanings which have intensified around the ancient mystery of the purpose of the site. In the *Leväluhta* novel, the source of the horror comes from events within fiction, and the imagery of the mire provides a platform for this horror. On the ground, however, the mystery of Leväluhta is more intriguing than frightening. But as an unsolvable mystery, the mire continues to resist any human ability to cognitively control it.

Imaginary mires do not always follow the characteristics of their geographical location, and instead, they are changing combinations of different mire imaginaries. A common undercurrent in the conception of the mire is that something is imagined to lie under the surface or be hidden. The theme of a different world beneath the mire appears in a range of narratives from folklore to children's books. In folk tales, treasure has been believed to be hidden under the firelights or 'will-o'-the-wisps' in the mire. It may have been guarded by a human or animal guardian, and to get the treasure you may have had to make a sacrifice or meet a difficult or impossible condition (Jauhiainen 1999: 293–302; Laurén 2006: 37; Laaksonen 2008: 267–269). These beliefs, myths and legends have their continuity in contemporary narratives. For example, in the Finnish children's book *Luke ja suosammakot* (Luke and the bog frogs), the protagonist guinea pig searches under a mire for a treasure that could save his frog friends from enslavement. The treasure is guarded by a hairy arachnid, and there is also an underwater temple similar to the ruins of ancient Atlantis under the swamp (Mäki 2010: 80–111).

The swamp of the *Swamp Thing* and the sacrifice spring of *Leväluhta* are both gateways to an alternate world. The monster of the *Swamp Thing* takes a classic journey into the underworld of the swamp to the afterlife in order to retrieve his beloved, and beneath he finds the Dantean circles of hell. Although, the mire itself has sometimes been interpreted as hell-like, because it combines elements – water and earth or water and fire (firelight) – into impure mixtures (Giblett 1996: 183). At the bottom of the novel's Leväluhta spring, another world with buildings emerges, with doors inviting you to pass through, and the enticing sight beckons visitors into danger. Imaginations about the dimensions that exist beneath the mires include the idea that there are laws that are different from the norm (Giblett 1996: 3). In Finnish folklore, when nature spirits were believed to live 'on the other side' (as in the twisted reality of subterranean

levels), it offered a projection of the present into an invisible, inverted, or opposite world (Sarmela 2009: 417–419).

Hillasuon kummajainen is an artistic performance filmed by its creator on the Finnish aapa mire, which could be experienced in its material reality. The depths of this and other mires in the physical environment, such as the thickness of the peat layer, can be determined by scientific methods and measurements. However, what is experienced in the mire, on the site, also involves images of the world beneath the mire. 'Bog eyes' are submerged, watery, moss-covered areas in a mire, and similar to the representations above, they can be seen as passageways to the underworld. In everyday life in the countryside, they have also been seen as scary holes into which grazing cattle or small children can disappear (Laurén 2006: 98–101). These bog holes have been the primary fear elements of the mire, regardless of whether they were interpreted through empirical experiences or mythical ideas. So, while the fears associated with the mire do not necessarily require monsters, the underworlds and alien dimensions are equated with monsters in their ability to mirror the familiar in an unusual way.

FEAR AND ATTRACTION OF THE UNKNOWN

There has long been a need for a conceptual takeover of an unpredictable and alien mire, and the fiction of the swamp monster has contributed to this task. In Finnish folklore, perceptions of the mire have traditionally been negative (Knuuttila 1999: 70–74; Laurén 2006: 36–43). Mire-related expressions are still used as metaphors for various negative features, both in everyday language and in various cultural products that are either wholly or partially detached from the natural mire environment. Also, in past and present crime fiction[2] the presence of corpses discovered in the mire tends to perpetuate negative images of the mires, even without the presence of non-human monsters. 'Uselessness' is an aspect often repeated in expressions related to the mire, and when the mire has resisted human efforts to exploit it, it has come to be seen as an enemy, or even a monster (Giblett 1996: 180–183; Lehtinen 1999: 80–83). Overall, negative images of mire environments are often associated with experiences of alienation and fears generated by the unknown. Thus, the swamp monster narratives can be seen as attempts to explain and deal with the unknown.

In the horror novel *Leväluhta*, fear is caused by a completely alien and incomprehensible non-human creature that draws people into another world through the bottom of a sacred mire spring. The creature has a spongy texture with black dots or holes like eyes on its surface. It evokes an overriding repulsion,

a kind of trypophobia or hole phobia, where the survival instinct associates the hole pattern with potential danger, for example from poisonous animals or images of rotting or corroding skin (Cole & Wilkins 2013; Hautala 2018: 172). At the same time, however, *Leväluhta*'s strange creature arouses a reluctant fascination and curiosity. The seductiveness of the creature is comparable to the way that the subterranean level of the mire has always fascinated as well as frightened, and in the novel the creature starts to have an obsessive effect on the people who have visited the site.

The Leväluhta mire is next door to the childhood home of the novel's protagonist, Meeri. Her father was found drowned there years before. Meeri's brother Lari is in a psychiatric ward where he was sent after diving into Leväluhta. It is possible that Lari's girlfriend Aino also disappeared into Leväluhta, along with others who had responded to its dangerous lure. Leväluhta is not a place to accidentally sink into. Rather, its attraction is mental, and Lari and the others have seen things like another world, buildings, a door, or a lost person under or through the bottom of the spring which is possibly a creature of Leväluhta imitating their loved ones. But not satisfied with dragging people into the depths, the monster is trying to get out of the Leväluhta mire and into the midst of people. It reaches beyond the mire, sometimes as a fungal mass blocking a car engine, but more often in the shape of a deceased person. The creature understands humans to the extent that it is capable of exploiting them. Humans, on the other hand, have no real means of understanding this non-human being.

Years earlier, Aino had carried a strange object resembling a mask from Leväluhta to Lari's home. It immediately aroused an instinctive revulsion, but its strangeness did not leave Lari alone. The monstrosity of the object is realized in its incongruity with any other known category. It is not a plant, although it can grow into an indeterminate shape. It is not an animal, even though it can move. The spongy texture intensifies the creature's disgusting character. A biologist in the novel defines the creature as a plasmodium: "In that form it... moves. It preys. It's basically a predator" (Hautala 2018: 175, transl. VK). But a biological taxonomy – which is a human-based theory of explanation – does not diminish the creature's frightening alienness. The goal of the Leväluhta creature remains a mystery, and its non-human consciousness is still unknown. If the creature is driven by a predatory instinct, its action appears to be only a mechanistic means of survival. But the natural science explanation of a predator organism does not absolve the creature of its monstrosity, because it does not dispel the sense of repulsion which is caused by the creature's ability to intrude into people's minds and private space.

In Hautala's interpretation, Leväluhta retains all of the old fear aspects associated with the mire, while introducing new prejudices and trepidations. One

character in the novel describes Leväluhta as "an archaeologically significant shit pit" (Hautala 2018: 74), and at no point does the mire, which serves as the milieu for the story, become any more charming. Its monster also retains its scariness and, above all, its revulsion from start to finish. While the novel does not challenge the reader's perceptions of the mire as a marginal place and narrative milieu, the mire offers a place to deal with one's own fears. As a symbol of wrong, evil or alien, or as a surprising and eccentric place, the mire stretches or breaks the narrow boundaries of normality, but at the same time allows for speculative interpretations. However, attempts to rationalize the scariness of a mire or demystifying it could be seen as underestimating its own unique quality, and the fact that a mire is scary is not always a negative assessment. Fiction is a good medium in which to safely deal with fear. At best, it can be seen as learning from fiction (Novitz 1983: 47), and literary and cultural texts can teach us by helping us explore what it means to live, feel, and think, and encourage us to imagine the world differently (Siperstein 2016: 37). From the mire's point of view, considering it as frightening is part of respecting it as such, regardless of human preferences.

REINTERPRETING MONSTERS AND MIRES

The written environment can be viewed as a description of an actual place, a description of the author's subjective landscape, or a description of a social situation (Porteous 1985; Brosseau 1994). In addition to these perspectives, in fiction the environment can function as a symbol or metaphor for something, but in such a way that the representation is not separate from the material environment, and the environment with its physical characteristics is an integral part of the symbolic meaning. A later meaning is essential in cartoonist Miha Rinne's comic book *Ison Mustan Pöön Suo* (The bog of Big Black Boo, 2011), where the mire as a symbol of fear is reinterpreted through the swamp monsters. The monster of Boo's bog is in fact fear itself. The bog is nestled in a crater surrounded by a lagoon that resembles a mangrove swamp. In the comic book, a rafter conducts travelers on a voyage to the bog (as a mirror of the ferryman in other underworld mythologies), and says that the swamp air can make visitors see hallucinations. In the bog, Boo is like a black fog and attacks people through their minds. This monster had no material essence at all, but its origin lies in negative emotions. The story of Big Black Boo presents the mire in the traditional way, with its mists and sinkholes, and its illusions and treasures, but the idea is that this is what a mire should be. Cultural material has constituted a fictional mire environment which bears only a trivial or stereotypical relationship to the mire

of the physical world. However, in this comic book the mire is not a source of fear, but rather, people bring fears there themselves in their own minds. Consequently, in the story the mire becomes a place of overcoming fear, and it is significant that the mire serves as a place for breaking down preconceptions.

The monster in Jukka Laajarinne's *Multakutri ja suon salaisuus* (Moldylock and the secret of the mire, 2017) also turns assumptions on their head. The book belongs to the 'cool kids' literary genre, in which rebellious child characters define themselves against adult expectations. It has also been argued that childhood tends to bring children closer to monsters, because the child deviates from the adult-led norm (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 125–126). In the book, the heroine Multakutri lives on the edge of the forest, on the margins of today's urbanized culture. One night, something has eaten one of the family's chickens. The incident paralyses both the chickens and Multakutri's parents, and in their helplessness, they become like each other. When food starts to run out at home, Multakutri takes action and heads for the forest. On reaching the mire in the fog, something splashes and rustles, and a creature is revealed but it is uncategorizable: it has hands, but it is not human; it has leathery wings, but it is not a bat; shiny scales, but it is not a fish; long claws, but it is not an eagle, and so on. Such a creature could only be found in a mire.

The creature grunts the word Kuklu (apparently its name), which sounds a lot like the name of the sea god Cthulhu, created by classic horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, and it even looks like a creature from Lovecraft's 1934 drawing (Fig. 3). Kuklu starts rumbling towards Multakutri, and chases her until she becomes too scared. But then something unexpected happens: the girl no longer dares to run away but turns around and shouts to the creature: "No! Stay!" (Laajarinne 2017, transl. VK). But here, fear is seen as what Multakutri says no to, and not the monster itself. Instead, Multakutri gets the pet of her dreams in Kuklu, who is, after all, a bit like a puppy. Nor in this story is the mire the initial source of fear, but rather associated with the ideas of powerlessness and overcoming fear. Consequently, the mire again serves as a place where norms are reconfigured by both the rebellious child and the anomalous creature.

The common theme found in children's books of taming the untamed is played out here (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 125), and in Kuklu's case it implies yet another version of the utilitarian view of the mire and of the relationship to non-human. Kuklu begins to guard the chickens, and the tamed swamp monster justifies its existence by becoming useful. Through the swamp monster, the book opens up the perspective of accepting difference to some extent at the expense of the monster, and taming it to make it less alien. But the mire is not explicitly redefined, and letting the mires be what they are (possibly frightening) suggests that there is nothing to change – they are good as they are.

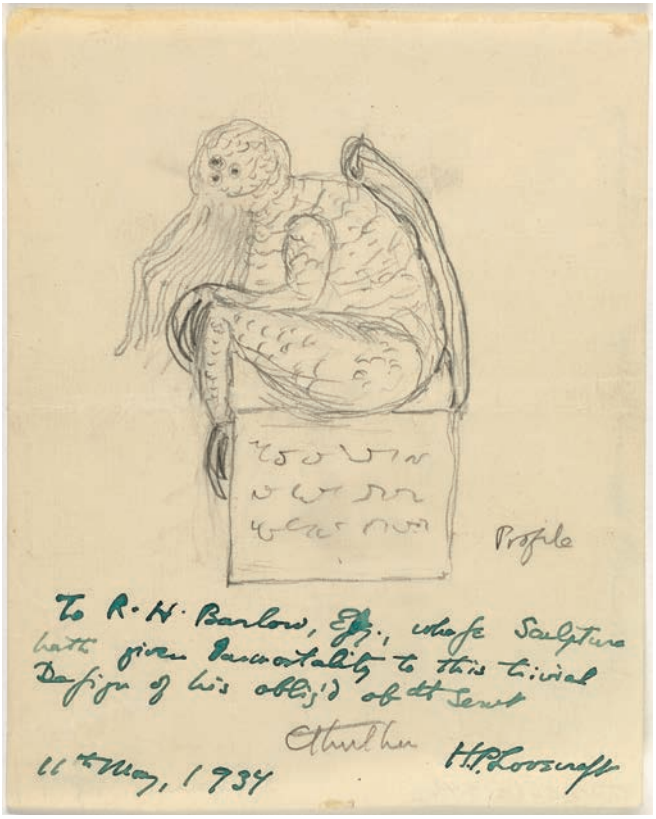

Figure 3. *Cthulhu in a pencil drawing by H. P. Lovecraft (1934). Photograph Wikimedia Commons.*

Popular culture has always loved its monsters, but monsters have also become more lovable, and seen as individual defenders of difference. The monsters that inhabit the mires of children's fiction are like a species of their own, for which the mire happens to be a natural habitat. They have also somehow become funny or playful. For example, in J. K. Rowling's novel *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them*, 'Imp' is classified by the Ministry of Magic as "harmless / may be domesticated", and prefers to live in a damp and marshy terrain, and is often found near riverbanks where it amuses itself by pushing and tripping up careless people (Rowling 2001: xxii, 22). Friendly swamp monsters are widely adopted in Western children's fiction. For example, in Harri István Mäki's children's books, talking sea captain guinea pigs, marsh herons, bog rats, swamp frogs, alligators and water spiders (Mäki 2010) as well as ghosts, slime creatures, dragons and scaly worms (Mäki 2004) all roam the mires, and the swamp monsters are not distinguished by their abnormality. Despite their frightening appearance, swamp monsters can be docile and kind (Mäki 2004: 55; 2010: 5, 46). French author Paul Martin describes the swamp monster in his book as follows: "the

small muzzle eyes and a voice like the bubbling of watery pea soup hardly added to its charm, but the warm tone of its voice indicated that its heart was gold" (Martin 2006 [2001]: 17, transl. VK). When the monsters in the mire are depicted as normal inhabitants, the mire is not a very strange place, simply different. Thus, the traditional educational purpose given to the monster in children's literature in the sense of dealing with fears (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 125) has been transformed into a form of tolerance education in the case of the docile supranatural creatures of the mire.

In Mäki's children's book *Sihis Haamusuolla* (Sihis in the Ghost Swamp, 2004), the swamp monster is at first grumpy because he has a toothache. When the main character Sihis – the world's smallest chihuahua – and its companions help the Swamp Monster by pulling out the tooth, and so make a friend of the monster (Mäki 2004: 36–46), in this story it is not so much about taming the untamed, because the other characters are equally non-human and untamed. But what makes the worn-out storyline interesting is that the monster is defined as a sentient and conscious being through the experience of pain. The capacity to feel suffering has been one of the tests of the extent to which animals have been considered to have minds of their own. For example, when fish have been scientifically found to experience pain (Telkänranta 2015: 169–172, 183), it has become problematic to treat them as mechanical, plant-like natural resources whose own experiences and needs are not valued. This may be too far-fetched an interpretation to apply to a swamp monster's toothache. However, an understanding is present that there is an intelligible reason for the monster's angry mood and that transcending 'monstrousness' can lead to an idea that the monster (or mire) is good in its own right, and may even be a friend to another species, and is the case for a fair number of swamp monsters.

Because fiction defines its own rules and values, it can explain any assumption or characteristic in any way that it wants. According to this principle, fiction can present the monster as lovable, seducing and so on. But the audience's emotional reaction to the monster is intended to be like that of the fictional character with whom the reader feels a connection (Carroll 1999: 149). The relationship to swamp monsters as non-humans is determined by the experience of this implicit reader. Empathy for the monster blurs the line between human and non-human (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 136), and friendly monsters shape the relationship between humans and non-humans accordingly.

The transformation from alienating monsters into expressions of accepted otherness has continued in the form of various commercial cultural products such as the Honey Swamp doll featured in *The Monster High* series, or the Swamp Creature featured in the *Lego* films. Toy swamp monsters' stories are created and brought to life in games, on TV shows, and on fan pages. The

temporary nature of play keeps the monster different, but at the same time it can bring the extraordinary into ordinary everyday life (Fig. 4). At best, the naturalization of swamp monsters can lead to a reduction in the generally negative value given to the culturally marginal mire environment.

Figure 4. *The stories of the swamp monster have always taken many forms. As part of play, monsters remain fascinating strangers, but become part of ordinary life. Photograph by Eveliina Kaukio 2023.*

A MONSTER AS A DEFENDER OF NATURE

The inability of humans to understand and their tendency to manipulate nature still leads to monstrous consequences in regard to human relations with nature. In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) added the previously unknown 'disease X' to the list of diseases threatening the world (see WHO n.d.). It is believed that it could have been created through genetic manipulation, accidentally or deliberately, as a tool of biological warfare or terrorism. However, zoonoses in which a disease is spread from animals to humans are considered more likely to cause disease X. In 2020, COVID-19 became seen as a disease X, but the classification did not eliminate the threat of an unknown disease in

the future. According to a report by the International Panel on Biological Diversity, the risk of new pandemics is being driven by the same human activities that are accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss (see IPBES 2020).

In the television series *Swamp Thing*, a schoolchild in a small Louisiana town gets sick in class and spits algae-like goo onto her desk. The unknown disease originated in a swamp where the girl's father had worked before suffering a fatal illness, in which the infection takes over the human body as a parasitic plant-like growth. It is nothing new that a dreaded disease has been said to have come from the mire. However, the developing story of *Swamp Thing* relieves the mire of the role of culprit, and like disease X, presents the disease as a risk caused by human activity. Thus, it fundamentally becomes the consequence of a hierarchical relationship of utility with the mire, which maintains the separation between human beings and nature. But, in this scenario, the ethical responsibility towards nature falls on the shoulders of the non-human being, the Swamp Thing himself.

The title character of the *Swamp Thing* television series and comic book is a huge, green, man-shaped plant organism. In both the comic book and the television series versions, the Swamp Thing is the result of a scientific experiment that has gone wrong or been sabotaged when a scientist – called Alec Holland in the story versions referred to here – ends up in a swamp as a result of an explosion. Although the creature is not a deliberately created monster, he carries with him an excessive scientific ambition that takes its toll. The Swamp Thing is a strange hybrid – a terrifying-looking swamp monster with supranormal powers, which doubles as a superhero. This makes him doubly non-human. As a monster, the Swamp Thing is something to be rejected, and it is also justified to exploit and control him by defining him as the opposite of human (see Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 127–130). However, the Swamp Thing's superhero qualities make him difficult to master. The frightfulness of the Swamp Thing lies not in his monstrosity, but in his combination of monstrosity and heroism, which questions humans' own goodness and humanity.

The origin of a monster has a part in determining how to deal with its alienation, and whether its strangeness can be overcome (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 127). As was seen with the Leväluhta creature, alienation is not necessarily an issue that is resolved in swamp monster fiction. The origin of the Swamp Thing lies in the fallible actions of humans, and through its origin, its non-humanity rises to a new level, and the human relationship with this different other becomes the central content of both the comic and the television series. Traditionally, superheroes have needed their opponents or monsters, and vice versa. Since then, powers that superheroes have acquired through mutation have become the rule rather than the exception. But in a way, Alan Moore broke the hero-monster dichotomy by writing a rebirth for the Swamp Thing.

In one of the key scenes in the comic and the television series, having just killed his archenemy, the Swamp Thing is caught up in an existential questioning of the meaning of his existence. In both storylines, the Swamp Thing is literally dissected into pieces, and it turns out that it is not Alec Holland who has turned into a plant, but rather a completely vegetable organism that thinks he is Holland because his consciousness has Holland's experiences and memories (Moore 2010a: 37–60; *Swamp Thing*, season 1, episode 9). The Swamp Thing blurs the nature-culture distinction, and is a hybrid creature that reminds us of the anthropogenic nature of that distinction, and that the distribution of species should not be taken as a given (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 133). When the human consciousness of the plant organism remembered that it had a heart and lungs, it grew them, even though they had no practical function. The human form keeps the creature in contact with the human world. The comics take the story further than the television series, which was only made for one season. Later in the comics it is revealed that the Swamp Thing can regrow itself from a seed, but it still repeatedly takes the form of a man, with variations reflecting the local vegetation.

There is also an important scene in the comic where the knowledge of false memories throws the Swamp Thing off balance, and it tries to uproot itself into the swamp vegetation. The creature is tempted to stay in the non-human green world (Moore 2010a: 93); however, it senses the presence of another kind of mind, an evil that is virtually linked to humans. While all organisms use nature to live, only parasites use it with the same ruthless exploitation as humans. As a consequence, the Swamp Thing wakes up to the threat posed to the swamp by man, and finds its own purpose as a defender of nature (Fig. 5).

Although nature's revenge on mankind is a recurring theme in horror films (Landis 2012 [2011]: 184–199; Hänninen & Latvanen 1996: 265–304), there have been few botanical monsters. Carnivorous plants, including the mire-dwelling sundew, are the best-known manifestations of plant monsters. However, plants are immobile, and their exaggerated size does not necessarily make them threatening (Hänninen & Latvanen 1996: 293–295). The Swamp Thing can move but appears to be quite powerless at first. The creature only uses his ability to grow super-fast and master the vegetation around him when someone attacks him or the people he loves. Those moments are dominated by human motives springing from memories, yet the humanity of the Swamp Thing is as frightening as its alien nature. As a striking example, his relationship with a human woman is considered inappropriate because it violates the species norm, and when Swamp Thing's beloved Abigail refuses to claim that she has been abused by the monster, she is paradoxically accused of a crime against nature (Moore 2015a: 15). In this way, categories that are defined as natural are questioned in the pluralistic space of the mire in the *Swamp Thing* saga.

Figure 5. *Swamp Thing did not like to be captured on the game camera and knocked it over. Screenshots from the trailer for the TV series* Swamp Thing.

Gradually the Swamp Thing lets go of his human mind. The greatest strength of the Swamp Thing emerges as his connection to vegetation on a global scale, and his ability to regenerate which makes him immortal. Through a connection to the botanical world, for example, the Swamp Thing protests against corrupt authorities, and the inhabitants of a city transformed into a beautiful jungle cheer on the monster. But those in power see a danger in this, and the monster ceases to be merely a monstrous and repulsive stranger, and becomes something that is to be got rid of once and for all. As a further extension to the story, the

regenerative core of the Swamp Thing, his consciousness, was sent into other dimensions (Moore 2016: 82–128). But the involuntary journey irreversibly changes the Swamp Thing's relationship with humankind.

When the Swamp Thing finally returns to his home swamp, he is faced with rethinking his own purpose. On his journey, he had saved a society that had shortsightedly destroyed the very nature that sustained life from famine. The Swamp Thing realizes that he would have the opportunity to become the equivalent of a savior of the Earth. But he chooses Abigail and retreats with her to the swamp to observe the world without interfering. The Swamp Thing ultimately proves to be a self-worthy individual, not bound by the demands of the heroic role, nor by the role of the monster as a rejected other. In the storyline, the reason for the decision not to seek revenge against humanity is driven by a lesson: there would be nothing to stop humans from continuing their greed-driven destruction of nature, even if the Swamp Thing were willing to save the world over and over again (Moore 2016: 196). Here the plant teaches people what humanity is, and what anthropocentric thinking taken to its extreme might mean: a responsibility of the human species for its own actions and deeds. As a monster, the Swamp Thing reveals frightening truths about human's relationships with the non-human, and the definition of the human species as non-nature highlights this separateness. In this narrative context, the human being is not seen as better than nature, but rather as being exiled from nature.

FROM FEAR *OF* THE MIRE TO FEARS *FOR* THE MIRE

The changes in mire-related fears are further illustrated through another eco-hero in the form of a creature who defends the mire. Outsider artist Rampe-Raven's work *Hillasuon kummajainen* (The Freak of the Cloudberry Mire, 2018) has a serious message for humans about their relationship with the mire. An ecocritical interpretation of his performance requires a slightly different approach than that taken with narrative films and comics. *Swamp Thing* deals with the issue of a responsibility towards nature as a question of humanity. Despite being video performances, this work brings the issue of responsibility towards nature closer and even under the skin of the individual audience member by emphasizing sensations rather than words. In these videos, the mire creature expresses its message in a non-human language, through a whirring, coruscating and peculiar music that comes from a didgeridoo made from a sewer pipe that is part of the creature's head structure (interview with Rampe-Raven 2020). The resulting 'voice' can be described as earthy, and imagined as having risen out of a mire similar to the Freak of the Cloudberry Mire itself.

In the first video (Rampe-Raven 2018a), the mire is seen through the eyes of a creature. Offering a creature's perspective to the human viewer blurs the line between human and non-human living beings. The nature of the creature is experienced through the sounds and movements it produces, and into which the viewer, as a corporeal being, can become immersed. The Freak rises from the soil at the roots of a scrawny tree, and begins to gaze out over the open mire landscape. Its breath rattles and the vegetation rustles as it moves. The sounds indicate that it is a fairly large living being. It hoots low and song-like tunes as if listening for others nearby to answer. The mire landscape is quiet and still. It is autumn, but the autumnal colors are not captivating, and no attention is drawn to the subtle details of nature. The summer of 2018 was very dry, which is visible in the autumn mire, and one can see why the mire may have been considered as a monotonous or unscenic landscape (Saito 1998). In the creature's mind, however, everything is as it should be in the mire. Nothing arouses its concern, not even the unresponsive silence. However, in order to reach this interpretation, one must also see the second video of *Hillasuon kummajainen*.

In the second video (Rampe-Raven 2018b), the perspective changes and the Freak is seen as an animal captured by a game camera: as 'the other', a non-human living being in the mire (Fig. 6). The creature again crawls up from the soil of the mire and begins its echolocation of the space. It is now possible to see its head which is formed by a gas-mask-like headgear and a trunk-like mouthpiece. The human-shaped figure is otherwise naked but has a breathing mask to cover its crotch like a garment of fur or bark. The Freak of Cloudberry Mire belongs in principle to the category of monsters: it is something strange and extraordinary, and as such, potentially terrifying. If it were, say, in a street without an art context, it would be intimidating because it would be in the wrong place. But in a mire, it is in its own habitat and as naked, for example, as a bear in its fur.

As a guardian of the mire, the Freak is part of a continuum of folklore narratives of supranormal natural spirits. Also, as a non-human creature belonging to the mire, the Freak has the right to criticize the human relationship with the mire. But the Freak of the Cloudberry Mire turns this question of monstrosity the other way round. Caught on a game camera, the Freak finds a plastic bag in the mire and becomes angry. It seems to say: Do you people have to come and litter the mires too? This message reflects real life events, and in the previous spring before the video, the newspapers had reported startling news that scientists had found a plastic bag nearly at 36,000 ft down in the world's deepest ocean trench (see The Telegraph 2018). Thus, the tragedy of the Anthropocene or the human era is encapsulated in this plastic bag.

Figure 6. *In the video* Hillasuon Kummajainen (part 2)*, the freak is seen as an animal captured by a game camera. Screenshot from the YouTube video.*

The angry Freak leaves the bag on a branch and stomps off into the desolation of the mire with a grumpy growl. As an argument, the burst is primordial, but as a solution it is powerless. But what else could the Freak do? In real life, the human impact on nature has become so overwhelming that the traditional spirit of nature seems to have become stunned. But in the artistic work, the Freak of Cloudberry Mire might also have come to the same conclusion as the Swamp Thing in the comics: let humans learn to take responsibility for their own actions. In the first video, things in the mire were also not as they should be. The dry and globally warm summer was one indicator of the changes in mires caused by climate change (Strack 2008). Today's swamp monster can still be seen in the 'eyes of the bog': not from the depths, but from the surface as a reflection of human interaction and perspective. Thus, the human is seen as a monster to the mire, and while this idea was already present in the *Swamp Thing* narratives, Rampe-Raven's performance takes it further – our fears *of* the mire have turned into fears *for* the mire.

THE MESSY LEGACY OF IMAGINED SWAMP CREATURES

In an ecocritical conception of reality, environmental meanings are shaped both discursively and as a matter of material reality. For example, the knowledge of the dry summer and its probable causes undoubtedly influenced the interpretation of the *Hillasuon kummajainen* videos. Also, people's lived experiences and

a learned or informed background knowledge can affect the interpretations of narratives. However, the effect can also be reflected the other way round, where experiences in imagined mires influence the perceptions of material nature. Art and other narratives therefore create images that influence attitudes and perceptions on the ground (Kaukio 2013: 111–137).

From the outset of this study, as messy images of our relationship with nature, imagined swamp creatures have revealed the problematic nature of the relationship between humans and the mire. Along the way, the works challenged initial assumptions. There was a hypothesis of an evolutionary process where the swamp monster would change from a terrifying alien to another kind of companion. While this was sometimes realized, alongside the evolutionary path there were other threads, and in swamp monster fiction, there are coexisting characteristics that both preserve and renew narrative conventions.

The perceptions of both the mire and its creatures raised in swamp monster fiction have both confirmed and challenged preconceptions. Ideas have been transferred from narratives to cultural and social memory. In the same way as has been argued that the English artist William Turner 'invented' the London fog (as a romantic notion) with his paintings (see Haapala 2002: 48–52; Kaukio 2013: 125–126), swamp monster narratives have created collective images of swamp monsters in people's minds that influence human relations with the mire. The imprint of such fictional images on people's minds has sometimes been argued to interfere in the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of the environment (Carlson 2007: 104–105). But while a fear of nature may have increased due to contemporary alienated lifestyles, swamp monster stories can hardly be considered to have induced this – and, in fact, quite the contrary. Furthermore, imaginations and descriptions can also help to 'tame' the landscape, making it understandable and homely (Sepänmaa 1986: 6–7). As such, both imagination and storytelling are ways of dealing with the unknown, and even defeating the monster, if necessary.

Swamp monsters have focused people's fears of the mire on the wildness of nature. Categorically ambiguous mires and monsters are not more easily subjected to conceptual ordering than to practical exploitation. But swamp monsters have caused a frightening dent in the human self-image because they have revealed the limits of the human ability, or even legitimacy, to control nature. The purpose of the monster in general is to be seen, so that its strangeness can be confronted. Monsters require you to look at the other and the different, and in the process to remake yourself. In this context, the effect of swamp creature stories can be seen as different from how, for example, a romantic painting can change the viewer's perception of an issue. Swamp creatures change not only the perception of the mire, but also the self-perception of the observer. In this context, swamp monster stories are essentially about people. The fear of losing control is still part of the

mire relationship, but it is addressed in several ways, as the fear *of* the mire has become a fear *for* the mire. Such a relationship is tinged with guilt and recognition that mistakes have been made in relation to the non-human that cannot be corrected by human efforts and abilities. The emphasis on environmental values in contemporary fiction is not limited to mire narratives. However, breaking preconceptions seems to have become one of the life-bloods of recent swamp monster narratives. This has brought to the surface the idea that something initially seen as alien and frightening can be good in itself. There is no need to defeat the mire, and instead, the mire can acquire meanings for overcoming fear.

Swamp monsters seem to suggest a fundamental change in our perspectives in relation to the environment, as their representations question the boundaries between the human and the non-human. The line is also blurred in seemingly simple children's books, where the swamp creature blends seamlessly with other species. The monster as an animal also offers humans a place as one of these species, although the concept of species in general can be questioned. The mire can also be thought of as a conscious, experiencing and feeling organism. Any activity that damages it affects all of those connected to it, and even drainage activities in real-world mires can be thought of as a mire's 'wounds' (Kaukio 2022: 78). Thus, in both fictional and non-fiction narratives, equating mire suffering with human pain is not just an anthropomorphization of our interpretation of nature. Instead, it raises the idea of the mire as an intrinsically valuable, non-verbal agent. While it is not possible to fully understand the non-human other, it is still possible to respect it. So, at their best, swamp creatures teach us to let go of prejudice and to take responsibility for our mutual environment, paving the way for a more equal relationship with non-human nature.

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NOTES

[1] See fandom internet pages: Marvel: Man-Thing and DC Comics: Swamp Thing. See also about the predecessor of Swamp Thing: DC Comics: Alexander Olsen (New Earth).

[2] See some recent crime novels: Elly Griffiths' *The Crossing Places* 2009; Susanne Jansson's *Offermossen* 2017 (The Forbidden Place), or Spanish film *El silencio del pantano* (The Silence of the Marsh) 2019; and Polish TV-series *Rojst* (The Mire) 2018 and *Rojst 1997* (The Mire '97) 2021–.

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MULTI-USE OF CRANBERRIES (*VACCINIUM* SPP.): HERITAGE AND PHARMACEUTICAL RESULTS

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Abstract: The European cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus* L., syn. *Oxycoccus palustris* Pers.) has a wide geographical distribution in natural bogs of Europe, Asia, and North America. The American cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon* Aiton, syn. *Oxycoccus macrocarpos* (Aiton) Pursh) is more easily cultivated in the northern regions of the world and is therefore an available source of bioactive compounds. They are both rich in polyphenolic compounds (i.e., flavonoids, anthocyanins, and phenolic acids), which have significant antioxidant and anti-immflamatory properties.

The cranberry fruits and their preparations represent important natural preservatives used against bacterial and fungal pathogens. Heritage related to its usage refers to the cranberry as a food plant and multiuse ethnomedical remedy. The results of the modern phytochemical and pharmaceutical research suggest using cranberry against urinary tract infections and as a preventive or curing plant against many other diseases. Today there are many new opportunities to draw attention to this plant, including cranberry tourism. In food and pharmaceutical industry the fruits are used most often, but leaves are also rich in biologically active substances, which can be sources for creating new medicines.

Keywords: cranberry, ethnobotany, ethnomedicine, pharmacology, phytochemical research, plant names, *Vaccinium oxycoccus, Vaccinium macrocarpon*

INTRODUCTION

Due to changes in environmental conditions in accordance with the increase in anthropogenic influence, a reduction in the areas of growth of (medicinal) plants was noted everywhere in the world. Marsh cranberries were no exception: they are a valuable source of various biologically active compounds, important as medical plants, as well as a valuable source of vitamins and food.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss two species of the subgenus Cranberry of the genus *Vaccinium* belonging to the family *Ericaceae*, and to evaluate their use as important natural preservatives against bacterial and fungal growth, and folk and economic use as food plants in ethnomedicine and pharmaceutical industry.

The European cranberry (marshberry, bog cranberry, swamp cranberry – *Vaccinium oxycoccus* L. (syn. *Oxycoccus palustris* Pers.) that grows in Estonia is the most common in folk traditions. The American cranberry (large cranberry, bearberry - *Vaccinium macrocarpon* Aiton (syn. *Oxycoccus macrocarpos* (Aiton) Pursh) is of great interest in scientific research as a source of biologically active substances in not only the fruits but also the leaves (Fig. 1).

V. oxycoccus plants include forms such as the little-leaf cranberry and the larger-leaf form. However, the taxonomic relationship between the cytotypes is uncertain, and nowadays *Vaccinium oxycoccos* is considered as a complex of diploid and polyploid plants (Côté et al. 2010).

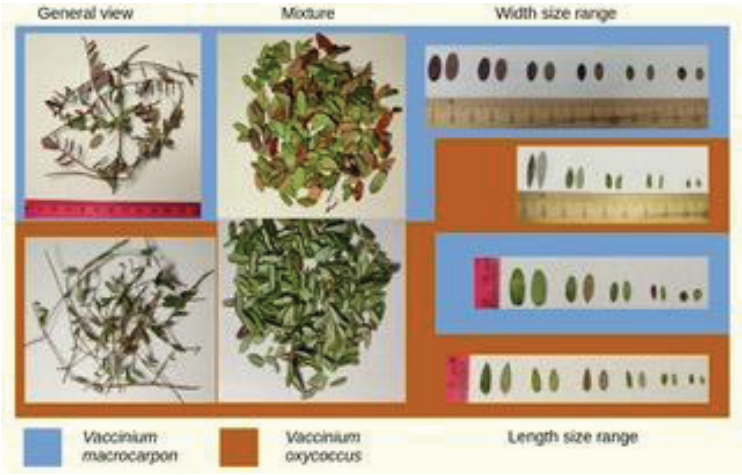

Figure 1. *American cranberry (*Vaccinium marcocarpon*) and European cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*).*

The American or large cranberry (*V. macrocarpon*) is mainly cultivated as an industrial crop in North America (Canada and north-eastern regions of the USA) since peat soils and wetlands, commonly occurring there, constitute the optimum substrate for cranberry cultivation; the crop is also grown in Europe, mainly in Latvia and Belarus, and, in recent years, in south-eastern Poland (Krzewińska & Smolarz 2008). The largest harvest in 2019 was recorded in the USA and amounted to 359,110 tons from a cultivation area of 15,580 ha. In Canada 172,440 tons were harvested from an area of 6393 ha, and in Belarus 235 tons of cranberries from an area of 101 ha (see FAOSTAT n.d.). There are approximately 200 varieties of the plant, and they mainly differ in terms of shape, size, colour of fruit, appearance of leaves, and fertility. The most widely grown cranberry crops are cvs "Ben Lear", "Stevens", and "Pilgrim" (Hołderna-Kędzia & Kędzia 2006). The cultivation of the American cranberry has been repeatedly tested, but it does not grow in the Estonian climate and does not bear berries.

In comparison with the American cranberry, the European cranberry has a considerably wider distribution. It occurs in forest areas in Europe, Asia, and North America. The species of this shrub are commercially widely cultivated in Russia and Estonia, and also in Lithuania (Česonienė et al. 2013). It is an evergreen shrub with creeping stems, which grows on peat in low drained sites. In European conditions it usually appears on sphagnum bogs in the north-western part of the European continent as far as North Asia and Japan. Cranberries ripen during late August and through September and can persist

on plants until spring. The berries have pink, red or dark red colour, strong acidic flavour, and can be pear- or egg-shaped, round, oval, oblate, or cylindrical (Jurikova et al. 2018; Česonienė et al. 2006, 2013; Jacquemart 1997). In Ukraine it can be found in swamps and in swampy pine and mixed forests in Polissia, in the Carpathians, and in Prykarpattia. *O. palustris* is included in the *Red Book of the Ukrainian SSR*.

For medicinal purposes ripe berries are used, which are collected from the onset of the first frosts and before the formation of a snow cover, and collection is resumed after the snow melts. Fresh berries are stored at a temperature of about 0º or poured into tubs filled with water. Berries can be stored for a long time, almost without changes in their qualities (Pro korisni 2021; Koshovyi et al. 2023).

Northern peoples used cranberries for food – they made pies with them, added them to pastries, sweetened with maple syrup, and fermented cabbage with cranberries. In 1683, in America, they began to make juice from them. Other parts of the plant are not used in officinal medical practice, but they are rich in phenolic compounds and can be prospective agents for creating new medicines. However, standardization parameters of *V. macrocarpon* and *V. oxycoccus* leaves were developed and proposed (Vlasova et al. 2022).

Unfortunately, cranberry-based preparations (i.e., tablets, capsules) and juice available on the European market most often originated from *V. macrocarpon*, and the fruit of *V. oxycoccus* was used very rarely (Witkowska-Banaszczak & Studzińska-Sroka & Bylka 2010).

Lifestyle changes and a higher proportion of leisure time in the last half-century have encouraged hiking and leisure in nature, including bogs. This has brought people closer to extraordinarily beautiful cranberry flowers and berries and enabled them to admire the bog landscapes. A new type of tourism – bog tourism – has also appeared with a natural and cultural programme. The COVID pandemic gave a boost to being in nature. The purpose of such hikes is not to pick berries or providing subsistence but learning about natural forms. According to the obtained overview of phytochemical and pharmaceutical results, we can expect a decisive expansion of the uses of cranberries in medicine and ethnomedicine.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article uses the corpus of plant and calendar literature to characterize the Estonian subject matter, and Ukrainian data to characterize Ukrainian folk uses, as well as the results of the study in the laboratories of the University of

Tartu. We selected data and used mixed methodology: pharmacology, botany, ethnobotany, ethnomedicine, and folkloristic methods. The purpose of the article is to give an overview of the current state and use of the cranberry, as well as the results of the academic study which formulates a ground for the future use of berries. The terminology, harvesting, preservation techniques and uses of cranberries are characterized in more detail, especially the (ethno-)medicinal use. Since this is a broader topic, the breeding and cultivation are introduced, not investigated. The research questions are: What has caused the major changes in attitudes towards cranberries? Whether and how do science and literature influence usage practices? What are the predicted uses of cranberries based on scientific results?

However, both the interpretative and philosophical sides and the determination of natural relations within the framework of the possibilities of folkloristics are as important as the collection. In the 1960s, the focus was on interpreting the relationship between humans and the environment and on making philosophical sense thereof. We point out only one term coined by a notable thinker: Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss started with the concept of 'Deep Ecology' – ecological awareness that goes beyond the logic of biological systems to a deep, personal experience of the self as an integrated part of nature (Næss 1973). From the point of view of our research Taylor's book *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, published in 2010, is remarkable and still remains an important resource today. Taylor provides an analysis of the processes of sacralizing nature in North America, which took shape in the nineteenth century, accelerated in their impact in the 1970s, and entered a new phase recently –Taylor calls it "the global greening of religion". In his historical reconstruction, the celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970 coincided with the renewal of and upswing in environmental movements in North America, as well as what can be called "nature religion" or "nature-as-sacred religion" (Taylor 2010: 5).

TERMINOLOGY AND DATA RECORDING

The English names of the cranberry refer to the place of growth and/or taste, and like the original Greco-Latin name, they also have additional names such as stork or bear berries. Estonian names are divided quite evenly into two: *kuremari* mainly in eastern Estonia, and *jõhvikas/jõhvik* known all over Estonia (VMR 1982). Similar to the main names are *jõvike* / *jovike* (Jõhvi, Vaivara), and jühvikas (Risti) as some more dialectal-phonetic variations. In addition, there are many local names (it is not possible to give a complete overview here), for

example, *karbala* (Kuusalu) (the same name as Finnish *karpala*), *pluukina* (Seto) (Rus. *клю́ква*), *siilu-arjak* (Karksi) (VMR 1982). Among the plant names by Vilbaste, there are also local ones: *kurvik* (Avinurme), *Pärdiaegsed marjad* (Jaani), and *rabamarjad* ('bog berries') indicating the place of growth – Jõelähtme; *soomari* ('swamp berry') (Tallinn) and even *viinamari* ('grape berry') (Kihnu) (Vilbaste 2014). Other plant names include *karu-mari* ('bear berry') and *(h)undimari* ('wolf berry') (VMR 1982), which are not associated with cranberry. Looking at the names of the Baltic Finns, the similarity of the Estonian-Votian border areas is obvious: *jõvikaz*, *jõvikõz*, *jevikaz*, *jevikõz*, *jeevikas (jõvikkaa)*, also Finnish *karpalo*, *karpolo* (VKS 2013), Livonian *gārban* (LEL 2012–2013); Latvian *dzērvene* (ELS 2015). Russian and Ukrainian *клю́ква* is probably related to the place of growth in the bog (*ключевина* 'bog') (see Etimologicheskie 1910: 320). The Latin name of the *genus oxycoccos* comes from the Greek *oxy* ('sour') and *coccos* ('berry'), referring to the taste of the fruit. In England, they were called *marshwort* or *fenberries*, as well as *cranberry* by the missionary John Eliot in 1647. The name *cranberry* derives from the Low German *kraanbere* ('craneberry'); apparently it is an American English adaptation of *kraan* ('crane') (see Etymonline). The reason for the name is not known; perhaps they were so called due to the fancied resemblance between the plants' stamens and the beaks of cranes. In seventeenth-century New England, cranberries were sometimes called *bearberries*, as people often saw bears eating them. According to the OED, the North American berries, and the name, were imported back to Europe by the 1680s, and the name was applied to the native species in the eighteenth century.

The study of the relationship between humans and nature has taken place throughout centuries. A. Ippolitova has published articles about the botanical illustrations and data in Russian manuscripts between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. On the one hand, these are the translations of the European encyclopaedic works in natural sciences, such as Johann von Cube's *Gaerde der Suntheit* and Hieronymus Brunschwig's *Liber de arte distillandi*. On the other hand, there are "folk" herbals of the eighteenth century that represent a "naive" version of botanical data (Ippolitova 2008). Actually, the original sixteenth-century Ukrainian manuscript turned out to be a thirteenth-century translation (Zapasko 1995). The dichotomy and division between the scientific use and popular use have been evident in herbal medicine manuals until today.

The somewhat sporadic collecting of ethnobotany began in the nineteenth century (Hurt 1989 [1888]) and continued only in 1920–1940, when the material was collected by botanist Gustav Vilbaste (1885–1967). In 1923, Vilbaste published a comprehensive questionnaire on ethnobotany, with a goal to fix regional names and especially areas of their use. He sent the questionnaire to

schools, and also distributed it through the society of botanists and naturalists (Kalle & Sõukand 2014). The questionnaire materials have largely not been studied, only the collected plant names were published by the Mother Tongue Society in 1993 (Vilbaste 1993).

In the past decade, ethnobotany focused on taxonomy, typology, systematic description of existing data, and interpretation of data. The creation of new methodologies (incl. the introduction of ethnobotany) and the observation of new phenomena played a major role, among which the development of the ecological direction is significant. Kristel Vilbaste in cooperation with Ain Raal authored a series of scientific review works (see Kõiva 2022), which combine pharmacy, botany, ethnobotany, and modern knowledge (Raal & Sarv & Vilbaste 2018; Raal & Vilbaste 2019), and Renata Sõukand and Raivo Kalle created important analytical tools and a database covering the subject (Sõukand & Kalle 2008).

CRANBERRY AS A LIVELIHOOD

In the twentieth century, walking in the nature became more popular, including hiking in swamps and bogs at different times of the year and admiring nature, not to mention the continuation of berry picking as a livelihood at the beginning of the century. Wild berries were a source of livelihood for poorer people, and the same characterized the years after the Second World War as well as the times of economic recession in the 1950s, 1990s, 1998, etc. Seasonal income from forest products and logging was important for subsistence and meant being in a closer relationship with nature. A significant part of the food and dietary supplements was obtained by making use of nature or directly from nature. Before independence, swamps and bogs, along with forests, were part of manor lands, and picking berries required agreements. After Estonia gained independence in 1918, people continued picking berries mainly in the bogs nearest to home. More detailed data on picking and selling cranberries date from the 1930s; for example, in 1938 and 1939, data on the harvesting of wild berries, nuts and mushrooms were examined by the State Forest Service by using questionnaires. Of the total harvest of wild berries, cranberries accounted for almost a half – 44%. It is estimated that the possible cranberry harvest from across Estonia was more than 2 million litres, or almost 1500 tons. Cranberries were sold to the townspeople in the market; they were used by confectionery, chocolate and candy factories, juice and soft drink factories and alcohol industries, as well as canneries and hospitals; berries were also sold for export (to Germany, England, the USA, less to France, Denmark, Finland, etc.) (Vilbaste 2014).

After the Second World War, picking berries in the forest to sell them was also an important financial support for those made to work on collective farms as there was no financial reward at all. People often went to harvest in an organized way, that is, they used cars or lorries to get to the bog. In the 1960s, about 1000 tons of berries were harvested per year. In the Soviet era, according to Vilbaste, a total of 1300 tons of cranberries were bought up per year. Starting from 1975, it remained below 200 tons, as purchasing prices were low and people's living standards improved (Vilbaste 2014).

In 1991, after the restoration of independence, it was the only source of income to alleviate unemployment in south-eastern Estonia and Ida-Viru County. In 1994–1998, companies bought 200 tons of cranberries or even more every year (Kalle & Sõukand 2014: 51). The small amount bought in was partly due to the fact that large-fruited cranberries had become more popular, while, on the other hand, the former system of buying and distributing had disappeared. The drainage of the swamps was most disastrous for cranberry swamps, because the edges of the swamps are the best habitats for cranberries. It had intensified in the nineteenth century, with the purchase of farmland, as ownership meant the desire to improve the land. During the Soviet regime, the development of new lands continued along the former edges of the swamps, but this time with more powerful machines. The land belonged to the state, and the creation of large agricultural arrays was considered promising; besides, larger machines also required larger areas of land to work on.

In 1910 the first nature protection area in Estonia was established, and after an interval, in the 1960s, the implementation of previous practices continued: nature conservation areas were established, and an inventory of existing natural resources was taken. In 1965, the topic of the inventory of prospective cranberry products of the Estonian SSR was included in the plan of scientific works of the Nigula National Nature Reserve. In 1973, after extensive research, 2.4% of Estonian swamps were taken under protection, and so were 22,705 hectares of cranberry bogs. In 1981, 30 swamps were protected on the initiative of Estonian botanist and ecologist Viktor Masing.

BREEDING OF CRANBERRY CULTURES

The beginning of the breeding of cranberry cultures in the world was the year 1810, when the first experimental plots were established in the US State of Massachusetts; near Berlin plots for the industrial production of cranberry were established in 1860.

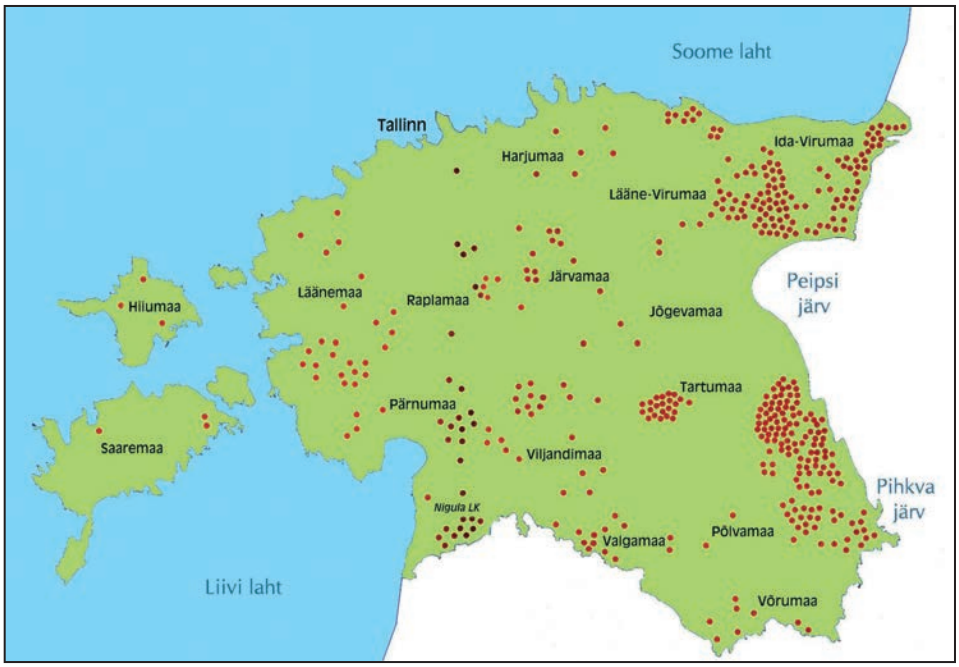

Figure 2. *The best cranberry bogs in Estonia by REGIO map published in Vilbaste 2014, adapted by A. Kuperjanov.*

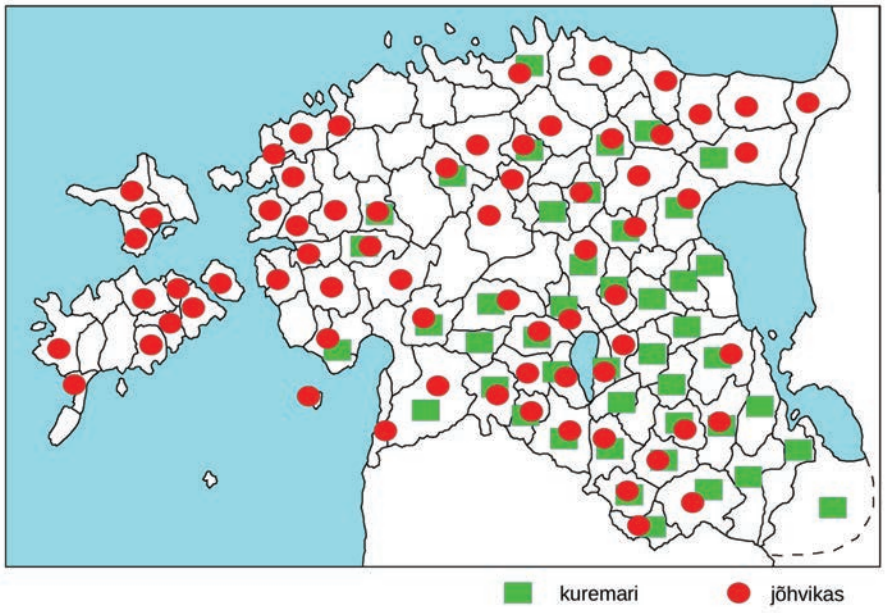

Figure 3. *Names of cranberry based on VMR (1982). Map by A. Kuperjanov 2023.*

The first attempts to cultivate domestic cranberries were made in 1966; a year later the Rahesaare test area was completed, which was modelled according to the plan for the establishment of a plantation and its irrigation system in America. The following year, Henn and Juta Vilbaste established the first test plot in Kilingi-Nõmme, with the plants brought in during the inventory of Estonian cranberry products. Initially, there were only cuttings from ordinary cranberry plants brought from Nigula and Rahesaare bogs. They were pricked into milled peat and given fertilizers necessary for growth. The cuttings took root within two weeks. By the next spring, the plants, about 20 cm long, were there. The plants were grown in 14-square-meter trays filled with peat and covered with glass sheets on top, from which plants were obtained for many years. In 1969, plants from there were planted in a single field in Rahesaare bog, located on 7 hectares near the border with Latvia, and until 1971 also in other fields.

The breeding of cranberries in Estonia can be divided into stages, where important dates are the following: 1967 – Henn and Juta Vilbaste established the first fields in Kilingi-Nõmme, with the cuttings from ordinary cranberry plants; 1973 – the establishment of cranberry crops on the sowing route (Alu bog) began; 1985 – 276.4 ha of cranberry crops were established in the remaining bogs in Estonia; the establishment of the Viira collection field for the preservation of the Estonian cranberry gene pool was started; 1989 – cranberry varieties bred at Nigula were officially approved in Moscow; 1992 – the Viira collection field had more than 800 different cranberry cultivars. Crops bred during the Soviet era spread all over Estonia; they were grown in many parts of the former Soviet Union, using the results and advice from the Estonian test areas.

Currently, several Estonian berry farms have cranberry fields, but the only special cranberry farm by Lake Võrtsjärv belongs to Toomas Jaadla.

FOODWAYS AND USE IN FOLK AND TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Cranberries were stored dry in a pantry or storage place, also in the attic on top of a layer of soil (E. Ernits' data, oral communication with M. Kõiva), but also in water (source, well, later in a bottle). Today homemade juices or berry jam, which can be stored in the refrigerator, is more widespread. Eating berries raw was limited to a few berries a day during the winter months and early spring. Berry drink and juice have been especially important in catering establishments from the second half of the twentieth century to this day, and industrially produced juices, jams, and other products to supply schools and hospitals have also found their way into homes.

In the home kitchen, cranberries were used with sauerkraut and fried meat, and later also as a salad with meat dishes. The periods of preparation of copious gourmet dishes remain in the twentieth century (the 1930s, and again from the 1960s). Today the uses have especially expanded, and the same is typical of Ukraine.

In the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries the cranberry was used as a medicinal plant in the fleet against scurvy, in severe cattle and human diseases (Wilde 1766), or against fever associated with several severe infectious diseases (typhus, scarlet fever, smallpox) (Jannau 1857).

It is interesting to note that the beloved Estonian folk writer Oskar Luts (1887–1953) was a pharmacy assistant in the Vitebsk military pharmacy in Belarus during the First World War. In September 1915, he was ordered to fetch from Tartu a health drink made from cranberry extract, which hospitals and taverns used as a precaution against typhus. Even before setting off, it was clear to the apothecary that if Russia had run out of this extract, it would hardly be available in Tartu, but the week-long business trip offered a great opportunity to see the family and friends. Luts returned without the extract (Kahu 1996), but the great importance of such a prophylactic against typhus is proved by the fact that he had to travel nearly 1,200 kilometres to fetch it.

After a long interval, the book *Eesti NSV ravimtaimed* (Medicinal plants of the Estonian SSR) was published in 1962 (Kook & Vilbaste 1962), which, among other herbs, introduces also bog cranberry. It is mentioned that cranberry berries (*fructus Oxycocci*, *baccae Oxycocci*) are used as a medicine, and extract (juice) is made from them, but it is no longer sold in pharmacies, but rather in food stores. This edition also introduces the folk use of cranberries: the juice drink is given to patients with high fever, and berries sweetened with sugar are eaten to lower high blood pressure.

After Estonia regained independence in 1991, the publication of medicinal plant books compiled by herbalists and naturopaths increased exponentially. In her book, T. Gorbunova (1993) pointed out that cranberry juice strengthens the effect of sulfanilamides (etazol, biseptol, urosulfan, etc.). Aleksander Heintalu or Vigala Sass (1941–2015), one of Estonian best-known healers, doctor of agricultural sciences, mentions cranberry (2003: 41) only in connection with its ability to neutralize the effect of penicillin and reduce the effect of blood pressure-lowering drugs. Alfred Vogel (1902–1996), a famous Swiss herbalist, naturopath and writer, mentioned that cranberries are excellent sources of vitamin C, and they are the only berries that contain an excess of acid (Vogel 2003 [1952]).

In the Estonian calendar literature, cranberry recommendations appear in the period 1739–1917 only in four publications, which is a very modest number. There is also surprisingly scant folk medicine data on cranberry in the archives we are using; most of the data comes from the twentieth century and rather from its second half. Below we give an overview of the use of cranberries in ethnomedicine and draw attention to some possible influencers.

Cranberry juice as a remedy against fever is still in use in folk medicine today. Since smallpox did not occur in the twentieth century, and the spread of many serious infectious diseases is prevented by vaccination, its use in this field is fading. Only measles is mentioned, which spread more widely in children's collectives. Cold berry drink and kissel were used in the treatment: "Measles is a childhood disease. Signs of measles: red spots on the skin, with a slight fever. Where the sick lay, the room was made dark. Cranberry drink was given to drink. A cold-water cloth was kept on the head, the cloth was often changed" (Text 13).[1]

Eating berries helps against sore throat and angina, and raw berries also help to lower high blood pressure (ICD I 10 et seq. Hypertension).

Raw berries are eaten to cure dental inflammations (K05) and digestive diseases (K 00), for example stomach acidity, and to promote appetite (Text 34). In addition to skin inflammations (L20), cranberries were also suitable for treating wounds (I 33.0) and bedsores, as well as parasitic scabies (B88.0); also, cranberry juice sometimes exterminated lice: "Lice were killed with sauna steam. Cranberry juice took away the lice from the head (according to the words of my mother-in-law Minna Trubok from Rakvere). Hair had to be completely wet with cranberry juice and kept under a towel for 0.5–1 hour" (Texts 27, 35). Cranberry juice was used against diabetes (D10) and as a headache relief (R51), as well as for the treatment of ear pain, or even carbon monoxide poisoning.

A separate group is made up of herbal mixtures, ointments, tinctures, and other multicomponent folk remedies, which were written down in home medicine compilations and from there they also entered the archives. Their origins and modes of transmission also need to be clarified, with a hypothetical possibility of transmission via the media, for example radio. For instance, components of the drug against hypertension (ICD I 10) are: 1/2 litre of cranberries, 100 grams of garlic, or 100 grams of horseradish, to which half a litre of hot water is added, strained, and taken 1 tablespoonful three times a day (Text 39). Another recipe includes honey, lemon, nuts, and cranberries, which are chopped into small pieces, fermented, and taken 1 teaspoonful in the morning (Text 52).

Honey, horseradish, garlic, and onions were favourites in the home treatment of the twentieth century, which is why they were recommended, for example, against influenza (J09): a mixture of 500 gr of honey, 250 gr of garlic, onions,

horseradish, and cranberries as a dosage of 1–2 tablespoonfuls per day (Text 40). Against rheumatism (RHK I00-102), a mixture of cranberries, horseradish as well as garlic and honey were recommended. Against several diseases (fever, kidney and bladder diseases, lack of sleep, nervous diseases, rheumatism, etc.), for example, a decoction of water and oats was prepared, to which cranberry juice was also added – this is the only recipe that was recommended to drink several glasses a day.

A totally new layer is formed by modern home treatment recommendations in online publications and books, which highlight medical indications and share recommendations. This is a completely independent type of publications – teachings relating to health science, that is, medical educational literature that raises awareness of health. To give an example here, we introduce a Ukrainian web page.

In Ukraine berries are consumed fresh or processed into juices, syrups, drinks, extracts, kvass, mors, jellies, marmalades, jams, etc. Juice diluted with water is used as a means to quench thirst in feverish conditions, and juice with honey – for cough, sore throat, rheumatism, and hypertension. Berries have tonic, refreshing, and invigorating properties, they improve mental and physical performance, and increase the secretion of pancreatic and gastric juice. They are used as an antipyretic and vitamin remedy, especially for hypo- and vitamin deficiency. As a remedy with diuretic and antimicrobial properties, cranberries are used for the prevention and treatment of kidney, urinary tract and bladder diseases, hypoacid gastritis, and initial forms of pancreatitis. Cranberry is contraindicated for patients with peptic ulcer disease and acute inflammatory processes of the gastrointestinal tract (Pro korisni 2021; Komarnytsky 2023).

CRANBERRY IN PHARMACOPOEIAS

The United States Pharmacopoeia includes Cranberry Liquid Preparation which must contain a certain amount of quinic, citric, and malic acids, as well as dextrose, fructose, sorbitol, and sucrose. The Canadian governmental organization Health Canada has accepted the preparation Dried Cranberry Juice which most complies with the U.S. Cranberry Liquid Preparation (Monagas 2018). Cranberry is also included in the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia (Cranberry fruit) and Martindale's 37th edition (Herbal Medicines 2013). The American Herbal Pharmacopoeia (2011: 689) describes a microscopic characterization of cranberry fruits and contains the following short statement: "Cranberry juice, powder and powdered concentrates are common ingredients in herbal supplements used for supporting a healthy urinary system."

It is logical that the use of cranberry is approved by the American Botanical Council (Engels 2007: 1):

> *Moving from beverages and mineral waters into dairy and confectionary products, cranberry is now also recognized as a key ingredient in the dietary supplement market. Because of the increased awareness of the importance of healthy nutrition, the future of cranberry as a food and dietary supplement appears certain, and it may eventually become a recognized medicinal product.*

But this is not concerned with bog cranberry.

The European Medicines Agency worked out a draft (2021) on the American cranberry, quoting expressed juice from the fresh fruit (DER 1:0.6–0.9) for herbal preparations. The drug extract ration means that 0.6–0.9 parts of extract (juice) is expressed from 1 part of fresh fruits. There are two rather similar indications: 1) the traditional herbal medicinal product is used for the relief of symptoms of mild recurrent lower urinary tract infections such as burning sensation during urination and/or frequent urination in women, after serious conditions have been excluded by a medical doctor (50–80 ml 2–4 times daily; 2) the traditional herbal medicinal product is used for the prevention of recurrent uncomplicated lower urinary tract infections in women, after serious conditions have been excluded by a medical doctor (15–80 ml twice daily).

Special warnings and precautions for use deserve serious attention and cast doubt on the traditional use of cranberries: the use in children and adolescents under 18 years of age is not recommended because the data is not sufficient and medical advice should be sought. The use in men and pregnant women is not recommended because lower urinary tract symptoms in these populations require medical supervision. Cranberry concentrate has a high content of oxalate, and there may be an increased risk of stone formation in the urinary tract in patients with stone history.

The antibacterial activity of cranberry works due to the inhibition of bacterial adhesion to mucous membrane of the urinary tract (Capasso et al. 2003). The adhesion activity of *Escherichia coli* is inhibited by fructose and by a polymer of a procyanidin type. The adhesive effect is associated with the content of proanthocyanidins in cranberries. It also inhibits the adhesion of *Helicobacter pylori* which causes many ulcers. Also, cranberry is suggested for kidney and bladder stones, incontinence, and for problems associated with enlarged prostate (Foster & Johnson 2006).

Information about American cranberry products on the market in the EU/EEA member states is given in Table 1 (Assessment Report 2021).

Table 1. *The American cranberry products on the market in the EU/EEA member states*

Active substance	**Indication**	**Pharmaceutical form, strength, posology, duration of use**	**Regulatory status (year, member state)**
Dried cranberry juice	To prevent and treat mild, recurrent urinary tract infections	2 capsules 3 times daily. 1 capsule contains 405 mg of dried juice from American cranberry	1996, Denmark, Iceland, MA
Dry extract, extraction solvent ethanol 70%	To help prevent recurrent uncomplicated acute urinary tract infections such as cystitis in women only, based on traditional use only	1 capsule daily. 1 capsule contains 195–216 mg of dry extract from the juice of American cranberry fruits corresponding to 36 mg of proanthocyanidins	UK (2016), TUR
Dry extract, extraction solvent ethanol 70%	To prevent the recurrence of acute uncomplicated lower urinary tract infections (cystitis) based solely on traditional use	1 capsule daily. 1 capsule contains 195–216 mg of dry extract from the juice of American cranberry fruits corresponding to 36 mg of proanthocyanidins	Spain (2017), TUR
Dry refined extract. DER 250:1	To prevent the recurrent urinary tract infection in healthy non-pregnant women	1 capsule contains 195–216 mg of dry extract from the juice of American cranberry fruits corresponding to 36–40 g cranberry juice and 36 mg of proanthocyanidine	NL (2019), TUR

Many EU countries indicated that there are no medicinal cranberry products on the market, but only a food supplement and/or food. These products are based on cranberry juice which is predominately made from fresh or frozen

fruits either by extracting in water or pressing. Juice concentrate is made by hot mash depectinization of fresh or frozen fruits. For example, dietary supplement Urinal (made by Walmark) contains capsules of dried cranberry juice (200 mg/cps) which helps maintain the urinary tract before or at the time of feeling signs of infection. The food supplements of the American cranberry are available in the USA, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Singapore, and elsewhere.

In 1997, the American cranberry was in top 10 of the preparations (fresh berries, juice products, gelatinized products, capsules, etc.) sold by herbalists in the USA. Both medicinal and dietary products of cranberry are sold outside the EU/EEA. The content of biologically active compounds differs markedly between products and is affected by the processing method (Assessment Report 2021).

CRANBERRY IN SCIENTIFIC MONOGRAPHS

On an international scale, it is important to take a look at the WHO compendium of medicinal plants, which essentially expresses the opinion of experts from around the world. A total of four collections of WHO monographs on selected medicinal plants (1999, 2002, 2007, 2009) contain the herbal drug *Fructus Macrocarponi*, which is fresh or dried ripe fruit of the large cranberry *V. macrocarpon* (WHO 2009: 149–166). As is typical of the publication, apart from the pharmacognostic aspects, among other things, the pharmacological properties of the drug are discussed in depth, including antimicrobial and antiadhesive activity, antioxidant activity, clinical pharmacology, paediatric populations, urolithiasis, adverse reactions, contraindications, etc. The section "Uses" supported by clinical data states (WHO 2009: 153): "Orally as adjunct therapy for the prevention and symptomatic treatment of urinary tract infections in adults." Results from clinical trials do not support the use of cranberry in paediatric population. However, bog cranberry (*V. oxycoccus*) is not included in the four volumes of monographs.

The E/S/C/O/P monographs (2003, 2009) combine the efforts of the experts of the European Scientific Cooperative on Phytotherapy, as a result of which, similar to the WHO monographs, the herbal drug *Vaccinii macrocarpi fructus* (ripe, fresh or dried fruits of the large cranberry) has been included in the collection of herbal monographs. The therapeutic indication of fruits of the American cranberry is the prevention of urinary tract infections. The recommended dosage for adults is 300–750 ml per day of the cranberry liquid preparation containing 25–100% of cranberry juice, divided into 2–3 portions; 200–500 mg of cranberry dry extract or juice concentrate twice daily (E/S/C/O/P 2009: 255).

The overall rating given to the juice and capsules of the American cranberry by the Natural Standard Herb & Supplement Handbook for urinary tract infections prevention is grade B (good scientific evidence); other possible activities have received just grade C (unclear or conflicting scientific evidence) or even D (fair negative scientific evidence) (Basch & Ulbricht 2005: 162–167). The Physicians' Desk Reference for Herbal Medicines mentions as "probable efficacy" of the American cranberry (PDR 2007: 239) the preventive use of urinary tract infections. All other uses (anorexia, blood disorders, cancer treatment, diabetes, diuresis, nephrolithiasis prevention, radiation damage to the urinary system, scurvy, stomach ailments, and wound care) have been listed as "unproven uses".

The comprehensive monograph titled *Herbal Medicines* (2013: 227) is more critical: there is some evidence to support the efficacy of cranberry juice for the prevention of urinary tract infections in women; all others have been mentioned as the traditional usage of cranberry. The term 'cranberry' refers to both the American cranberry and bog cranberry, which equalizes the possibilities of their use. In the academic publications on pharmacognosy and phytotherapy (Heinrich et al. 2004: 250–251; Mahady & Fong & Farnsworth 2001) only the American cranberry has been mentioned.

PHYTOCHEMICAL RESEARCH

The main part of experiments and research is done with the American cranberry and it is proven that the active substances of cranberries are tannins, flavonoids, glycosides (vaccinin and ethers), pectins, 3–4% of organic acids (ursolic, chinic, citric, benzoic, and others), 10–22% of ascorbic acid, 2.3–4% of sugars (glucose and fructose), micro- and macroelements, including iodine, copper, manganese, molybdenum, iron, etc. The phytochemical profile of cranberry fruits includes three classes of flavonoids (flavonols, anthocyanins, and proanthocyanidins), catechins, hydroxycinnamic and other phenolic acids, and triterpenoids (Neto 2007; Česonienė et al. 2006; Oszmiański et al. 2017). Among other constituents are catechin, triterpenoids, and organic acids. Cranberries, both fresh and dried, are a great source of vitamins (provitamins A, C, B1, B2, and B3), organic acids, mineral salts (potassium, sodium, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, and iron, sugars (glucose 3.1% and fructose 1%), dietary fibre, and pectins. The European varieties have a lower content of ascorbic acid than the American cranberries; however, the results for vitamin C amounts in these fruits are quite dissimilar (Povilaityté et al. 1998). According to other data (Tikuma et al. 2014), on the contrary, the amount of ascorbic acid is higher in fresh berries of *V. oxycoccus* in comparision to several cultivars of *O. macrocarpus*. By Viskelis et al. (2009),

the amount of ascorbic acid in American berries increases during ripening, from the beginning of ripening with white berries to 50% in reddish berries (9.3–14.2 mg/100 g), but slightly decreases in overripe berries (10.3 mg/100 g).

The content of polyphenols, carotenoids, chlorophylls, and triterpenoids was determined with the use of Ultra Performance Liquid Chromatography – Photodiode Array Detection – Tandem Mass Spectrometry method, although antioxidant activity was examined with 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl, 2,2'-azino-bis(3-ethylbenzothiazoline-6-sulfonic acid, and ferric reducing antioxidant powder assays in six cultivars of cranberry fruit grown in Poland. Anthocyanins (delphinidin, cyanidin, peonidin and malvidin derivatives), phenolic acids (*p*-coumaroyl, caffeoyl derivatives and chlorogenic acid), flavonols (sinapoyl, myricetin, quercetin and metoxy-quercetin derivatives), flavan-3-ols and procyanidins ((+)-catechin (–)-epicatechin and their di-, tri- and tetramers), carotenoids (lutein, 13 *cis*-lutein, all-*trans* ß-carotene, 9-*cis* ß-carotene), chlorophylls (chlorophyll b, pheophytin b and a) and triterpenoids (betulinic, oleanolic and ursolic acids) were identified and assayed in 6 cranberry cultivars. Also, analysis of their antioxidant activity was carried out with the use of ABTS, DPPH, and FRAP assays (Oszmiański et al. 2017). Procyanidin A2, B2, cyanidin-3-arabinoside, cyanidin 3-galactosideand peonidin-3-glucoside, peonidin 3-galactoside, myricitrin, myricetin, astragalin, quercetin, *p*-coumaric acid, protocatechuic acid, chlorogenic acid, ferulic acid, caffeic acid and benzoic acid were found in cranberry fruits (Han et al. 2019; Howell et al. 2005).

The amount of biologically active compounds among 40 genotypes (13 certified cultivars and 27 wild clones) of *V. oxycoccus* fruit of different origins (Estonian, Russian, and Lithuanian) was compared (Česonienė et al. 2015). A great variation was found in anthocyanin content, organic acids, and sugar content in fruits of cultivated types and wild clones; therefore, the content of presented compounds differs depending on the cultivars. Analogously to the berries of *V. macrocarpon*, the *V. oxycoccuss* berries also contain citric acid (10.8 to 54.3 g/kg), and malic (14.1 to 43.3 g/kg) and quinic (3.81 to 13.3 g/kg) acids as the main organic acids (Česonienė et al. 2015; Jurikova et al. 2018).

The total phenolic content varied from experiment to experiment: Borowska et al. (2009) showed that the total phenolic contents for American cultivars were in the range of 192.1–372.2 mg/100 g, and in European cranberry cultivars 288.5 mg/100 g. Also, the fruits of *V. oxycoccus* contained more trans-resveratrol (712.3 mg/g) than *O. macrocarpon* (533.4–598.2 mg/g). Povilaityté et al. (1998) got results that the berries of European cultivars accumulated 100.4–154.8 mg/100 g, whereas the American cultivars had a higher content (192.3–676.4 mg/100 g) of phenolic compounds. The main phenolic compound,

trans-resveratrol, is an important antioxidant (Ehala & Vaher & Kaljurand 2005).

The main representatives of phenolic acids in cranberries belong to cinnamic and benzoic acid derivatives. Hydroxybenzoic acid derivatives such as gallic acid (3,4,5-trihydroxybenzoic acid), dihydroxybenzoic acids (vanillic), 2,3-dihydroxybenzoic, 2,4-dihydroxybenzoic acids, p-hydroxyphenylacetic, hydroxycinnamic (coumaric) acids such as m-coumaric and p-coumaric acids, caffeic (3,4-dihydroxycinnamic), and ferrulic (4-hydroxy-3-methoxycinnamic) acids are presented (Abeywickrama et al. 2016; Taruscio & Barney & Exon 2004).

Flavonols including myricetin-3-galactoside, myricetin-3-arabinofuranoside, quercetin-3-galactoside, quercetin-3-glucoside, quercetin-3-rhamnospyranoside, and quercetin-3-O-(6″-p-benzoyl)-galactoside belong to the predominant flavonoids in cranberry fruit (Singh et al. 2009; Jurikova et al. 2018).

In cranberries, the amount of anthocyanins is much lower than in bilberries and significant genetic variability was found especially in the levels of total and individual anthocyanins (i.e., cyanidin-3-galactoside, cyanidin-3-glucoside, cyanidin-3-arabinoside, peonidin-3-galactoside, peonidin-3-glucoside, and peonidin-3-arabinoside) (Česonienė et al. 2015). Juices of cranberry fruit cultivars could be distinguished by prevailing individual anthocyanins with thermostable galactoside and glucoside conjugates (Jurikova et al. 2018). Four anthocyanin compounds – cyanidin-3-galactoside, cyanidin-3-arabinoside, peonidin-3-galactoside, and peonidin-3-arabinoside – predominated in the fruit samples of American cranberry cultivars grown in Lithuanian climatic conditions (Urbstaite & Raudone & Janulis 2022).

Proanthocyanidins belong to the class of polyphenols with repeating catechin and epicatechin monomeric units. Proanthocyanidins are the leading compounds of the phenolic compounds of European cranberry (Česonienė et al. 2015). The European cranberry accumulates 1.5–2.0 mg/100 g of proanthocyanidins (Määttä-Riihinen et al. 2004). Proanthocyanidins are responsible for organoleptic, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and antiviral properties of cranberry fruits (Jurikova et al. 2018; Česonienė et al. 2015). The three A-type trimers and procyanidin A2, which are the major bioactive compounds in the American cranberry, are present only in trace amounts in the European cranberry, and they are responsible for different biological activities and clinical effects of both cranberries, especially on the urinary tract (Jungfer et al. 2012). On the other hand, the losses of proanthocyanidins A2 and B1 that may occur during manufacturing processes and storage of cranberry extracts were detected by Boudesocque et al. (2013).

Both the American and European cranberry as traditionally used crops accumulated a high level of polyphenols. The results of the studies also pointed

out that the fruits of the European cranberry represent a more valuable source of caffeic acid and quercetin, with higher values of total flavonols in comparison to the American cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*) (Jurikova et al. 2018; Stobnicka & Gniewosz 2018; Marzullo et al. 2022; Gniewosz & Stobnicka 2018).

Berries of the European cranberry grown in colder climates, without fertilizers or pesticides, are characterized by a higher content of phenolics than the cultivars grown in milder climates. The differences in the accumulation of phenolic compounds can also be explained by various conditions of cultivation, region, weather conditions, harvesting time, and maturity stage (Häkkinen & Törrönen 2000; Viskelis et al. 2009).

The technological processes related to the storage of cranberry (*V. oxycoccus*) products also exert influence on the content of phenolics. Thus, in frozen fruits the content of phenolics is much lower than in freeze-dried fruits. Lyophilization of the fruits of this species resulted in the phenolic content reduction compared to fresh fruits (Mazur & Borowska 2007).

The peel of cranberry fruits contains a substantial amount of pentacyclic triterpenoid ursolic acid (Neto 2007). There are many fatty acids and phytosterols in fresh berries (Klavins et al. 2016). The GC-MS analyses showed main compounds such as benzyl alcohol, α-terpineol, 2-methylbutyric, malic, citric, benzoic, and cinnamic acids in addition to fatty alcohols and acids (Lyutikova & Turov 2011).

PHARMACOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Cranberry juice (450–720 mL daily) lowered urinary pH (Fellers & Redmon & Parrott 1933; Kahn et al. 1967; Kinney & Blount 1979; Jackson & Hicks 1997; Nahata et al. 1981), but it could not exert a bacteriostatic effect because it was not a rich enough source of hippuric acid (Bodel & Cotran & Kass 1959; Avorn et al. 1994).

The inhibition of bacterial adherence after the use of cranberry juice was first reported in 1984 (Sobota 1984). Since then, several studies have confirmed that the presumed efficacy of cranberry in preventing urinary tract infections (UTI) is related to its antiadherent properties (Schmidt & Sobota 1988; Zafriri et al. 1989; Ofek et al. 1991; Howell et al. 1998, 2005, 2010; Foo et al. 2000; Howell & Foxman 2002; Lee et al. 2000; Amin et al. 2022).

Further antibacterial adhesion studies demonstrated that cranberry constituents also inhibit the adhesion of *Helicobacter pylori*, a major cause of gastric cancer, to human gastric mucus (Burger et al. 2000). A subsequent randomized,

double-blind human trial found significantly lower levels of *H. pylori* infection in adults consuming cranberry juice (Zhang et al. 2005).

The results of clinical studies evaluating the effect of cranberry on urinary tract suggest a possible clinical benefit of cranberry juice in preventing the UTI or that it is effective in the prophylaxis of recurrent UTI (Raz & Chazan & Dan 2004; Stothers 2002; Kontiokari et al. 2001; Jepson & Williams & Craig 2012; Kiel & Nashelsky 2003). Another nonrandomized study (Terris & Issa & Tacker 2001) found decreased leukocyte counts in urine samples obtained from handicapped children (most with indwelling catheters) who drank cranberry juice. Nevertheless, ingesting large quantities of cranberries over a long duration may increase the risk of some types of urinary stones in high-risk patients because of the increased urinary excretion of oxalate and slight urinary acidification (Harkins 2000; Howell et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2012).

European cranberry extracts inhibited the growth of a wide range of human pathogenic bacteria, both Gram-negative (*Escherichia coli* and *Salmonella typhimurium*) and Gram-positive (*Enterococcus faecalis, Listeria monocytogenes, Staphylococcus aureus,* and *Bacillus subtilis*) (Jurikova et al. 2018; Lian & Maseko & Rhee 2012; Lacombe et al. 2013). Moreover, berry juice of *V. oxycoccus* displayed a binding activity of *Streptococcus agalactiae* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (Toivanen et al. 2010).

Cranberry fruit extracts possess anti-influenza viral effects (Sekizawa et al. 2013) and rank high among fruit in both antioxidant quality and quantity (Vinson et al. 2001) because of their substantial flavonoid content and a wealth of phenolic acids. Cranberry extracts rich in these compounds reportedly inhibit oxidative processes including oxidation of low-density lipoproteins (Yan et al. 2002; Porter et al. 2001), oxidative damage to rat neurons during simulated ischemia (Neto 2007), and oxidative and inflammatory damage to the vascular endothelium (Youdim et al. 2002). The antioxidant properties of the phenolic compounds in cranberry fruit may contribute to the observed antitumor activities of cranberry extracts, but recent studies suggest that cranberry's anticancer activity may involve a variety of mechanisms.

Because of the high antioxidant activity of *Vaccinium* species, especially due to the anthocyanins content, cranberry is able to inhibit the oxidative process related to tumorigenesis. Furthermore, the in vitro model experiment showed direct antiproliferative or growth-inhibitory properties of the in vitro model (Jurikova et al. 2018; Neto 2007; Weh & Clarke & Kresty 2016).

Cranberry powder obtained from fresh cranberry fruits by freeze-drying showed promising anti-inflammatory and anti-colon-cancer potential in HCT116 cells (Han et al. 2019). Also, anticancer properties of cranberry phytochemicals were confirmed by in vitro studies (Neto 2007).

The IC_{50} values obtained for cranberry juice concentrate (CJC) were 847.9, 637.4, and 440.6 µg/mL for 24, 48, and 72 hrs respectively. Change in the mitochondrial membrane potential and nuclear morphology was observed following incubation with the CJC. Flow cytometric analysis shows cells detected at early and late apoptotic stages after treatment with the CJC. Thus, the CJC has significant effects on MG-63 osteosarcoma cells and can be considered to supplement conventional therapeutic strategies (Hattiholi et al. 2022).

Dietary supplementation with cranberries (a product rich in antioxidants) in breastfeeding mothers during 21 days improved the oxidative status of milk. Several specific markers increased in the milk samples from mastitis-affected women, providing a protective mechanism for the newborn drinking mastitis milk. Cranberry supplementation seems to strengthen the antioxidant system, further improving the antioxidative state of milk (Valls-Bellés et al. 2022).

Cranberries are promising in reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases (Ruel et al. 2005), atopic dermatitis, Alzheimer's disease, macular degeneration, neurodegenerative diseases, and diabetes (Krishnaiah & Sarbatly & Nithyanandam 2011; Hannoufa & Hossain 2012; Gasmi et al. 2023), and show antimutagenic, anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties (Vattem et al. 2006; Mueller et al. 2013).

The regular consumption of cranberry fruits has a positive effect on hypertension, inflammation, oxidative stress, endothelial dysfunction, arterial stiffness, and platelet function. Polyphenols in cranberries reduce ROS (reactive oxygen species), decrease the concentration of inflammatory cytokines, and enhance endothelium – dependent vasodilation and inhibited platelet activation (Blumberg et al. 2013). The anti-inflammatory effect of the European cranberry could have a positive effect on blood pressure and vascular function (Kivimäki et al. 2011, 2012).

Cranberries could be effective also in the prevention of heart diseases and ulcer illnesses of the digestive system (Vattem et al. 2005). However, antiadhesion and anti-platelet bioactivities do not correlate directly with total phenolics, anthocyanins, or proanthocyanidin content, and the beneficial effect of fruit phenolics can be realized only after their digestion and absorption in the body (Kalt et al. 2007).

Daily cranberry supplementation (equivalent to 1 small cup of cranberries) over a 12-week period improves episodic memory performance and neural functioning, providing a basis for future investigations to determine efficacy in the context of neurological diseases (Flanagan et al. 2022).

Cranberry juice slightly improves the rotenone-induced behavioural deficit by protecting from apoptosis and α-synuclein accumulation in the midbrain of

rotenone-treated rats, demonstrating its neuroprotective efficacy for Parkinson's disease. These findings suggest that cranberry preparations may have a potential application in clinical practice or dietary guidelines for the prevention and/or adjunctive treatments of Parkinson's disease (Witucki et al. 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The European cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus* L.) has been less studied from the phytochemical and pharmacological point of view than the American cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon* Aiton). Cranberry-based preparations (i.e., tablets, capsules) and juice available in the European market most often originate from *O. macrocarpon*, and the fruit of *V. oxycoccus* is used very rarely. On the other hand, the geographical distribution of the European cranberry is wider (in natural bogs of Europe, Asia, and North America) and it is less demanding in comparison with the American cranberry.

The European and American cranberries are excellent sources of bioactive compounds, especially polyphenolic compounds (i.e., flavonoids, anthocyanins, and phenolic acids), which have significant antioxidant properties.

Popular use refers to cranberry as a food plant and as such it has been used in homes and catering establishments, schools, hospitals, etc. In ethnomedicine, it has the surest place as a reliever of certain symptoms – for example, fever – in the treatment of serious diseases. In the twentieth century, the uses expanded, but in Estonia they did not include urinary diseases, which are recognized by official phytochemistry and pharmacy. Obviously, the everyday use of cranberries as effective medical plants will increase in the near future.

Cranberry fruits and their preparations represent important natural preservatives against bacterial and fungal growth. Also, their anti-inflammatory properties can be helpful in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular problems and several types of cancer and neurological diseases. Considering various beneficial effects of cranberries on human health, also in folk medicine, the consumption of these fruits and their products is widely recommended.

Other parts of the plant, such as leaves, are also rich in biologically active substances, which can be sources for creating new medicines, so they require further in-depth phytochemical and pharmacological research.

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NOTE

[1] Hereinafter the data are available at https://www.folklore.ee/rl/fo/tegevus/wp/ressursid/Raal et al. Cranberry_final_AR_edit_AR_MK.pdf, last accessed on 20 July 2023.

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"HERE AND THERE ONE SEED SPROUTS, AND THEN IT SEEMS WE HAVE DONE SOMETHING": NURTURING CREATIVITY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: The Lisbon Strategy and other documents of the European Union advocating for a knowledge-based society have provided the ground for restructuring schools and changing pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, focusing on creativity and entrepreneurship. One of the approaches increasingly popular in Slovenia has been Edward de Bono's methodology. The article analyses the benefits, controversies, and potentials of de Bono's "lateral thinking" methods for increasing creativity when introduced to children in elementary school courses and extracurricular activities. Based on the qualitative study, it explores how this "pragmatic" approach to creativity is realised in Slovenian elementary schools, and reflects on teaching creativity in schools as a systemic approach.

Keywords: creativity, Edward de Bono, elementary school, lateral thinking, metaphors, Slovenia

INTRODUCTION

When my colleague researching contemporary short folklore forms told me about the workshop she had held with elementary school students, the most thought-provoking was her observation that all the proverbs and riddles they listed were traditional – in the sense of oral lore already transmitted to our generation from our parents, grandparents, or during school language courses. My main questions were thus: What has happened to creativity? Why didn't even direct encouragement produce something novel with the potential to become new school lore?

The situation was somehow expected – I had no grounds to believe that my children would perform any better than the workshop participants – but still puzzling. After all, children have been increasingly understood as "future human capital" and as "economic investments … [whose] returns are calculated in two ways: first, as the knowledge, skills, and competencies that facilitate the creation of personal, social, and economic well-being, and second, as a means of saving on welfare spending" (Millei 2020: 930–931). Strategic development of the educational system has reflected this notion. The Lisbon Strategy attributed a key role to education in making the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (Lisbon European Council 2000), while the Europe 2020 strategy recommended that governments should "focus school curricula on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship" (European Commission 2010: 11). Developing children's creativity is also defined as one of the educational aims of Slovenia (cf. Basic School Act 2006; Act on Gymnasiums 2007). This has created an ecosystem favouring and nurturing youth entrepreneurship culture (cf. Kozorog 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2021, 2023; Bajuk Senčar 2021; Petrović-Šteger 2021; Poljak Istenič 2021; Simonič 2021).

Since then, such an understanding of the educational system has provided the ground for restructuring schools and changing pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning (Millei 2020: 931). In Slovenia, schools – but also cultural institutions and non-governmental organisations – have been mostly concerned with talented children. Since the turn of the century, they have implemented enrichment activities and acceleration programmes in academic areas, sports and arts to enable the healthy psychosocial and academic development of talented children, cultivate their potential beyond compulsory schooling, and raise them into responsible citizens. The Centre for Research and Promotion of Giftedness at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana (CRSN), supports teachers in educating talented children and advocates for the latter (Juriševič n.d.).

Recently, some of the more popular approaches to "teach your child how to think" and develop "serious creativity" have been those of Edward de Bono, Maltese physician, psychologist, author, inventor, philosopher, and consultant who coined the term and methodology of lateral thinking. This is a methodology of making "a deliberate mental effort to change more automatic or steady responses" (Dingli 2009: 338), which *Forbes* magazine, at the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, described as "the most valuable skill in difficult times" (Lewis 2020). The concept of lateral thinking includes several methodologies (e.g., CoRT,[1] six thinking hats, simplicity, etc.), but they all aim to generate new ideas and question the existing concepts and perceptions. De Bono never published academic studies on his work and methods; he was primarily occupied with developing creativity in practice. Still, the productivity of his pragmatic

approach (Sternberg & Lubart 1996) has been attested by numerous publications (also) stemming from practice.

The aim of the article is to explore how this pragmatic approach to creativity is realised in Slovenian elementary schools. Relying on the interviews with the trainer and the teacher of de Bono's methodology, it aims to answer the questions of the perceived benefits of such an approach to children's performance, of potential dilemmas regarding its use, and of the possibility for a systemic change towards teaching creativity in schools.

METHODOLOGY

The article results from a long-term study on creativity. It started in 2014, with a focus on creativity as a survival strategy (especially) in times of crises, continued with studying the creative city as a brand, and is currently dedicated to approaches to teaching creative and entrepreneurial skills in elementary and secondary schools. It relies on qualitative methods – participant observation and narrative interviews. Between 2019 and 2022, I attended five courses on de Bono methods for teachers, non-educational workers (mainly employed in the media, publishing houses, developmental agencies, the NGO sector, art scene, public services, etc.) or researchers, which were organised by licensed trainer Nastja Mulej. I followed the courses and informally discussed the topics concerning creativity with the participants, and interviewed the trainer several times to contextualise the information shared with me by the participants. In the article, I mostly rely on these interviews. I recently also started to experiment with de Bono methods in research and teaching to provide auto-ethnographic insights on the effects of the methods on students' thinking, imagining, and creativity.

During my fieldwork focusing on schools, I recorded interviews with teachers, headmasters and students from different Slovenian schools on how creativity and entrepreneurship are encouraged in classes, and with a prominent entrepreneurship trainer of the skills presumably needed in contemporary society and business. The interviews were later transcribed and used for analysis focusing on the development of entrepreneurial skills (Poljak Istenič 2021). The findings were also contextualised with other interviews concerning creativity in different contexts, for example on artistic interventions or the creative city (cf. Poljak Istenič 2017), and with presentations of the teachers explaining to the participants of de Bono courses how they use the methods in their classes. The latter were recorded by the abovementioned trainer and given to me on my request.

One of the recordings, with Slovene elementary school language teacher Ana (a pseudonym), stood out not only due to the variety of settings in which

the teacher used de Bono's approach, but also because it partly focused on developing skills traditionally considered creative, for example writing and visual arts. I thus decided to build a case-study on her experience, as I found it illustrative and indicative of my argumentation. I additionally conducted an in-depth interview with her, and used the transcript to present my case.

The limitations of this study stem from a narrow focus and a lack of ethnographic research in the classroom. The modest ambition of this article is thus to introduce an aspect of creativity research in Slovenia not yet explored, that is, the usage of the de Bono methods in elementary school, with the prospect of supplementing it with ethnographic observation in the classroom in the near future.

In the article, I first explain the concept of creativity and contextualise it with de Bono's views on the topic, continue with the case study of implementing de Bono's methods in elementary school, analyse controversies stemming from such an approach, and conclude with a reflection on teaching creativity in schools as a systemic approach.

CREATIVITY: DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

In this article, I deal with creativity in a psychological sense, that is, as a characteristic of a person. In academic literature, psychologist Joy Paul Guilford is usually attributed a pioneering role in empirical research on creativity despite some earlier attempts in other academic disciplines (Albert & Runco 1999; Becker 1995). The first wave of studies in the 1950s and 1960s focused on personality psychology and attempted to define the "creative personality" (cf. Guilford 1950). The second wave of studies (from the 1970s) dealt with cognitive psychology and aimed to determine what goes on in the mind of people when they engage in creative activity. Finally, sociocultural approaches focused on complex relationships between individuals, groups, cultures, and organisations that affect creative outcomes (Sawyer 2012 [2006]). They rejected the "lone genius myth" (Montuori & Purser 1995; Weisberg 1986) and advocated that creativity is a social phenomenon depending on social interactions and teamwork. It was studied in managerial, organisational, and educational settings (Fischer et al. 2005; Watson 2007; Wilson 2010).

These studies produced more than a hundred definitions (Smith 2005), but none of these have become widely accepted, neither as a general definition nor in certain contexts or domains, for example, in educational settings. The most used in the latter has allegedly been that of psychologist Morris Stein's (Zupan & Stritar & Slavec Gomezel 2017: 171), which defines the creative work as "a novel work that is accepted as tenable or useful or satisfying by a group in

some point in time … By 'novel' I mean that the creative product did not exist previously in precisely the same form. It arises from a reintegration of already existing materials or knowledge, but when it is completed it contains elements that are new. The extent to which a work is novel depends on the extent to which it deviates from the traditional or the status quo. This may well depend on the nature of the problem that is attacked, the fund of knowledge or experience that exists in the field at the time, and the characteristics of the creative individual and those of the individuals with whom he is communicating" (Stein 1953: 311).

When we sum up academic definitions, novelty (originality, surprise) is the most underlined characteristic of creativity, closely followed by efficiency (functionality, adaptability) of the idea (cf. Sternberg & Lubart 1996; Simonton 2009). Some also stress openness, freedom, flexibility, unconformity and other features of uniqueness and usefulness. They focus either on the processes that generate creative ideas, persons who produce the ideas, or products resulting from the ideas; as summed up by Dean Keith Simonton (2009: 248), "[p]resumably, creative persons who have engaged in the creative process produce creative products".

In Slovenia, most of the research on creativity in a psychological sense has been linked to talented children (cf. Juriševič 2009, 2012; Žagar & Juriševič 2011; Juriševič & Stritih 2012; Košir et al. 2016; Torkar et al. 2018; Cvetković-Lay & Juriševič 2020; Licul & Juriševič 2022). As noted by de Bono (2018 [1991]: 2), "[i]n our intellectual culture, we have acknowledged the value of creativity but treated it as a special gift which some people might have and others can only envy. This view of creativity has applied mainly to artistic work". A commonplace school stereotype is thus that creativity is in the domain of courses concerned with aesthetics or manual work/creation such as visual arts, technology, music, and language (e.g., imaginative essay writing). This reflects the views that teachers of art (and in some circumstances also of language and technology) have "great potential … to have a powerful impact on teaching and processes in traditionally non-creative fields" (Gustina & Sweet 2014: 52). As noted by Ana, when the school needs to prepare an event, for example, for national holidays, "Who will do it? Let the teachers of Slovene do it, they are creative! And I always tell them: 'Do you think we had a graduate course on event preparation?' Indeed, such obligation absolutely tends to fall on the shoulders of the music, visual arts and Slovene language teachers" (Interview Ana 2022).

De Bono, however, was "interested in the creativity involved in the changing of perceptions and concepts". He stressed that his notion of creativity may overlap with artistic creativity, but that "[t]here is no reason to suppose that an artist will make a good teacher of creativity simply because the word creativity is involved in art" (de Bono 2018 [1991]: 9). He referred to "serious creativity" as the skills that permit and encourage the generation of useful novelty.

Creative, or lateral, thinking is thus an approach related to using systematic methods, which can be "learned, practiced, and used by everyone … Learning lateral thinking will not make everyone a genius, but it will supplement existing thinking skills with a valuable ability to generate new ideas" (de Bono 1993: 310). He further explained that "[p]eople who are talented in creativity find that the training and formal techniques enhance their skill. People who have never considered themselves to be creative find that the formal techniques allow them to build up a useful skill of creativity – and the creative attitudes follow from the use of the tools. People who are conformist and have hitherto believed that creativity is only for 'rebels' find that conformists can learn the 'game' of creativity and can become even more creative than the rebels. There is not an either-or polarization between talent and training. As with any skill, the two go together" (de Bono 2018 [1991]: 9).

Lateral thinking encompasses several methodologies; however, Six Thinking Hats (also called parallel thinking) and the Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT) programme are most often used in the educational setting. The former consists of six different modes of thinking, focusing on planning, facts, emotions, ideas, benefits, and risks, and helps to resolve conflicts, solve problems, make a decision or generate new insights (de Bono 1985).[2] The latter includes six programmes specifically designed for educational context with the aim to teach students "all the skills to use their own mind effectively" (Mulej n.d.).[3] The programmes develop the breadth of perception, organisation of thinking, the ways of interaction (argumentation), creativity (changing patterns and concepts), recognising information and feelings, and the ways to guide thinking (action). The article focuses on the latter, especially on CoRT 1 (breadth) and CoRT 4 (creativity), which are most often used in elementary schools in Slovenia.

Despite numerous books explaining the tools and advocating their usefulness, the key to master the methods is, according to my interlocutors, practice. As they explained time and again, they found the books useful only after they had attended the course, learned the tools, done some exercises and then continuously used them in practice. It is thus, in their experience, extremely important not only to introduce these to students and make sure students learn them, but also for them to use these consistently and regularly. This, in turn, also allows the comparison of students using the described methods regularly and those who think and create in a "traditional" way, that is, as practiced in school settings following conventional approaches to teaching and learning. All my interlocutors who used the CoRT methods during class or organised trainings as an extracurricular activity claimed that all children performed better in school, but also admit that they cannot "measure", or "grade", the improvement of creative thinking:

> *I think it can't be measured. Firstly, I think creativity is also a matter of subjectivity. We have different views of it; what right do I have to judge whether something is good or not. But on the other hand, I do recognise* [after all those years of teaching] *when someone creates something … that has not been created till then, or something that is really very good. Usually, the children can also recognise breakthroughs and different levels among themselves.* [You know that] *because they applaud* [peers creating something good]. (Interview Ana 2022)

However, several researchers did test the efficiency of de Bono's methods to improve creativity, using standardised approaches such as divergent thinking tests, attitude and interest inventories, personality inventories, and biographical inventories (Hocevar 1981). The most often used are the former, especially the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), which focus on fluency (number of relevant responses), flexibility (number of different categories of relevant responses), originality (the statistical rarity of the responses), and elaboration (amount of detail in the responses) as key elements of creativity (Torrance 1966). A study of Slovenian pupils from the 5th and 6th grades (i.e., children between 10 and 12 years old), who worked according to CoRT 1 and CoRT 4 programmes, showed that they generated significantly more ideas and improved their achievements in all parameters of creative thinking (fluency, flexibility, originality) compared to their peers who did not receive training (Gnamuš Tancer 2016). International studies confirm the Slovenian findings.

DE BONO IN SLOVENIA: FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF THE METHODOLOGY TO THE CASE-STUDY OF ITS PRACTICE

According to Nastja Mulej, the only licensed trainer of de Bono techniques in Slovenia and the beginner of de Bono courses in this country, Edward de Bono gave his first lecture in Slovenia in 2003 at the Ideas Campus, an annual summer school of creative thinking in Piran. Mulej became passionate about his methods: "I will never forget what it was like, you know, when a lecture changes you, when you finally understand, you have the feeling that you understand. That-that-that is it!" (Interview Mulej 2016). She thus decided to introduce de Bono's approach to Slovenian business and educational organisations. She continued to invite him to have lectures, started to translate his books into the Slovenian language, and when he suggested that she become a trainer of his techniques, she attended several courses and gained a licence to teach them

independently. She started training children and teachers in 2011 so that "there would be no rote learning that doesn't help children at all" (Interview Mulej 2021). Until June 2019, she educated 452 teachers from 253 institutions to work with children, utilizing de Bono methods.

One of the teachers who attended the de Bono courses was Ana, who teaches Slovenian at a Ljubljana elementary school. She learned about de Bono while mentoring a student who prepared a class on a book children read at home by using de Bono's Six Thinking Hats. She was intrigued by the method, so she bought several of de Bono's books, but because "de Bono is not to read, it's to study", she started to attend courses by Nastja Mulej. She has since used his approaches at a Slovenian language course for children from the 6th to the 9th grade, in a weekly extracurricular activity called "Thinking Circle", and in summer camps for talented children. "The biggest problem with the children of this time is … that they take thinking as exhausting," she explained the rationale for using de Bono methods; it is not so much a problem of motivation, but rather concentration. Children lack focus, and the biggest challenge she sees is maintaining and imparting the focus of thinking to children.

> *A child has to focus on some work and create something, … one product. They ask me: 'How much do I have to write?' … This productivity limit is very, very low for them. They fill in something and it's done, they do the task and it's done. It doesn't matter how well he thought, he thinks: 'I was thinking, I did the exercise, I wrote it.' … They are too quickly satisfied, unable to keep focus. … They must be taught that these things are not self-evident.* (Interview Ana 2022)

Deficiencies improved after using de Bono methods, and according to the knowledge standards, she has been able to give children higher grades.

When explaining examples of the use of these methods, she specifically underlined a creative camp for talented children she organises together with a visual arts teacher who is also skilled in de Bono methodologies. Its aim is to develop literary and visual creativity. At one of the previous camps, they focused on strengthening self-awareness and self-understanding of the children, and on developing their creativity by working on the metaphorical expression of their personality in literary and visual form. Using CoRT 1 methods (PMI, FIP, CAF, and APC), they developed personal logotypes reflecting their positive, negative and interesting characteristics expressed metaphorically. First, they worked individually and then discussed ideas in groups. Each participant visualised his/her logotype and then "read" his/her peers' logotypes (using APC) to master the understanding of metaphors. Then they also literalised their logotypes, describ-

ing themselves as an "object" expressing the personal characteristics (who they are, where and with whom they live, what they like and do not like to do, what they would like to become; for example, "pink leather spike on ballet shoes" which is "very driven, so I always dance to the end despite getting untied or forgetting the steps" and is "bitter and rudely sharpened" when in a bad mood). Using CoRT 4 (random entry and PO), they also created new metaphors; the tools "made the task interesting" and "encouraged them to become creative". The aim of using de Bono approaches was to "learn how to think, train thinking, and become aware that they will be able to use their talent to the maximum with perseverance and planned thinking" (Interview Ana 2022).

When inquiring about the oral lore in the Slovenian language course, she confirmed the findings of Saša Babič's (2019) analysis that it is mainly represented by folk tales and partly by folk songs, while short folklore forms are generally not included in school readers or children's magazines. They receive the most – although still very limited – attention in the first grades; in higher grades, idioms get the most attention when practicing the figurative use of language and metaphorical expression. As such, oral lore represents a productive material for practicing CoRT 4 methods. She experimented with this approach at one of the camps for talented children, focusing on proverbs and their visualisation, following similar steps than previously described with personal logotypes. The children started to visualise the chosen proverbs individually and then worked on group illustrations. They practiced art criticism and metaphorical understanding using the CoRT 1 tools, then moved to CoRT 4 to connect objects from the environment to certain proverbs and later used these proverbs as a stepping stone to create new stories built on metaphors and associations. The method proved successful, based on the number of ideas produced and the quality of their creations.

Despite Ana's statement that the evaluation of creativity is necessarily subjective, she has been convinced that children significantly improve in focus, productivity (quantity of ideas), quality of the content (the depth of thinking about a given subject), breadth of thinking, novelty of ideas, and thoroughness (stemming from in-depth research) when working with de Bono methods. However, the analysis of the creations she presented (illustrations and essays) implies the biggest improvement is evident in metaphorical thinking. In creativity research, metaphors – being a "fertile mental resource for combining two terms to explain the unknown … [by] finding similarities between new experiences and what is already familiar to us" – are understood as the means to which creative thinking resorts when formulating and solving problems and searching for valuable new ideas (Romo 2020: 150, 153). They are not only important in language acquisition (cf. Babič 2019), but also contribute to the capacity to

convey emotion and aesthetic sensations in the arts, render comprehensible complex knowledge in science, and serve to persuade people in advertising, design, and innovation within organisations. As explained by Manuela Romo, "the production techniques for creative ideas applied in these fields are based on metaphors, their production and their evaluation and selection. … All this leads to producing novel ideas that are useful in dealing with ill-defined problems in the mentioned fields" (Romo 2020: 155–156). The need for metaphorical thinking is thus recognised as necessary for persons entering the work life, which increasingly requires imagination within strategic decision-making. A case-study published by Ryman, Porter and Galbraith (2009) showed that participants in a business schools' experimental project were engaged in tasks similar to Ana's pupils at the creative camp. The pupils presented their personality in the form of a visual metaphor, and then translated it to linguistic metaphors in an essay; while the participants of the mentioned study transformed artistic images into metaphorical language and then translated metaphorical language into the literal language of business. The process focusing on the metaphor enhanced ways of knowing and learning; it enriched educational experience and promoted a deeper understanding of the business management concept.

THE ETHICS OF TEACHING: POTENTIAL CONTROVERSIES OF DE BONO METHODS

My experience with learning and working with de Bono methods presented me with three important controversies concerning individual vs. group work, systematisation of the process vs. creative results, and ethics, which can become a sensitive issue when working with children.

De Bono methods encourage writing down all sorts of ideas, including, to use de Bono's word, "crazy" ones which can be ethically controversial. When undergoing training, several ideas I wrote down while practicing different tools were such that I would censor them before sharing them with children, because the ideas were egoistical, anti-social, and generally against my own values and those of the society I live in. My interlocutors did not list many experiences of facing ethical dilemmas arising from the ideas students proposed, and the advice from Nastja Mulej on how to deal with such situations is to treat every idea equally, and not elaborate on it if we find it inappropriate. Ana confirmed she treated such ideas as any others, and did not evaluate them. She also pointed out the importance of authority; she would explain her values to children and stress that their idea was not in line with them. For her, authority implies mutual respect.

However, some situations do call for intervention. Ana recalled a case of a girl who had to predict consequences of a bad grade in mathematics (C&S tool from CoRT 1), and as a long-term consequence the girl predicted her death; as Ana recalled, she gathered that due to one bad grade, she would not be accepted to the desired school, would not get a good job, would become depressed and die of an overdose of antidepressants. Despite the absurdity of such a conclusion for adults, the child was in distress, so the teacher intervened and, in our conversation, reflected on the need to direct some ideas into another, more positive direction.

The lack of ethical reflection of my interlocutors and the simplistic advice on how to treat such examples might be rooted in the Western understanding of creativity, which pays more attention to people's individual characteristics. In comparison, people in the East more often view creativity as having social and moral values. Niu and Sternberg (2002) explain that morality is a unique conception in the Chinese's understanding of creativity, which also follows ethical standards; due to the collectivist orientation, group interests and morality play a more important role in understanding individual creativity in the East compared to the Western implications of the concept. The researchers also argue that the norms and values of the Eastern and Western cultures play a critical role in influencing an individual's creativity. Collectivistic Eastern cultures discourage the development of creativity on account of conformity and obedience, while more individualistic Western cultures advocate for self-exploration more than for following social norms.

This brings us to another dilemma regarding the use of de Bono's approaches, that is, individual vs. group work. De Bono underlines the importance of group work since "brainstorming has always depended on a group format because this is an essential part of the process. The presence of other people in the group provides the stimulation to set off new ideas and new lines of thinking" (2018: 7). Similarly, de Bono teachers also advocate working in groups, as "one can remember only a limited number of things, on account of being constrained by information and experience" (Interview Mulej 2016) and they report better outcomes compared to individual work. However, at the start of each exercise, children are expected to list their ideas on their own in order to share them with others later on, and to contribute as equally as possible to the final outcomes. De Bono himself also underlines the need to combine both ways of thinking, arguing that "individuals working systematically on their own produce far more ideas than when they are working together as a group. There is more thinking time and different directions can be pursued. Groups do have their value both as a motivating setting and also to develop the ideas that have already been started" (de Bono 2018: 7–8).

The experimental studies also show that individual work improved fluency compared to group work, while group work resulted in stronger flexibility and originality (Svensson & Norlander & Archer 2002). By encouraging both types of work, we can also allow and encourage ethical reflections of the ideas from the individual and social perspective.

The third controversy I find important to reflect upon is the premise that creativity is supposed to produce unique ideas, while de Bono advocates structure and systematics. Such unease with this approach was also mentioned by Ana, who illustrated her scruple with the metaphor of a keychain with twenty keys, which might open many doors yet limit us in the ways we open them. She attended an event organised with the help of de Bono methods that was very structured and made her feel "like a robot", as if she had to follow everything already defined in advance. She experienced the event feeling her values – spontaneity, intuition, empathy – might not be recognised enough, or were even stifled by the focus, systematisation and even routinisation implied by the use of de Bono methods. However, she is now aware that emotions are only one way (a "red thinking hat") of how to perceive phenomena, and that there is never only one option; there are hundreds of alternatives which "calm you down in this feeling of hopelessness" (Interview Ana 2022). Nastja Mulej, on the other hand, was frustrated by working long hours with the artists who understood creativity as "waiting for inspiration", so de Bono's notion of creativity as systematic came as a relief to her. She underlines creativity as being a "healthy lifestyle ... something that needs to be practiced daily ... There are always different options to develop a pattern inside our brain. And if I try, I'll know how to find it" (Interview Mulej 2016).

CONCLUSION

Despite numerous studies on de Bono's methods reporting the increase of creativity and improvement of children's performance in school, the introduction of the methodologies to the educational setting "stays entirely on the individual level, depending on those of us who use de Bono's tools ... we do not move any systemic boundaries here, however, we should change something in the curricula. So, teachers idealistically use them inside their bubble, are being creative, and believe in this approach" (Interview Ana 2022). Nastja Mulej, who is also a member of the strategic council for entrepreneurial behaviour at the Slovenian Ministry of Education now working towards a systemic introduction of creativity in education, underlines that "it is not systemic or structural, it

all depends on the commitment of the individuals, their enthusiasm to do it, and their courage" (Interview Mulej 2021).

However, in the past decade, the ministry did encourage different pedagogical approaches to develop children's creativity and entrepreneurial behaviour by implementing financial schemes for extracurricular activities, such as HOPES – Creativity, Entrepreneurship, Innovation (UPI – *Ustvarjalnost*, *Podjetništvo*, *Inovativnost*), COURAGE – Entrepreneurial behaviour, building block of young people's self-confidence (POGUM – *POdjetnost*, *Gradnik zaUpanja Mladih*), and FEAT – Entrepreneurial behaviour in the gymnasium (PODVIG – *PODjetnost V GImnaziji*); some of the mentors of these activities were trained in de Bono methods and used them to work with children, although this was not the goal of the activities. The latter two projects were short-term and also interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemics, which disrupted children's learning process and compromised the expected results. This, in turn, also prevented any serious consideration of systemic change based on the experience with creative approaches, so the effort to implement them in the school setting remains in the hands of enthusiastic teachers and headmasters, or the schools explicitly oriented towards raising entrepreneurial students (cf. Poljak Istenič 2021).

According to my interlocutors, they do make a difference as it is, though to a limited extent. "Here and there one seed sprouts, and then it seems we have done something," Nastja Mulej summed up a general impression of the pedagogical personnel developing the field of creativity in education (Interview Mulej 2021). The teachers who start to teach children that are already skilled in de Bono methods report a considerable difference in focus (concentration) and performance compared to non-trained children, and one gymnasium Slovenian language teacher underlined that she immediately recognised the children who had undergone de Bono training, on the account of their essay writing and thinking approach. The efforts of individual teachers thus might get us closer to a systemic change in teaching children how to think and be creative. In the words of Ana:

> *I always say: let's not complain about what we don't have, let's focus on what we have. I think the greatest value is to compel the rest of our colleagues. Then one attends training, and soon there are eight or eleven trained teachers* [in de Bono methods] *at one school – in this way we can produce shifts* [toward a systemic change]. (Interview Ana 2022)

To conclude, the article is a reflection on the potential of the pragmatic approach to creativity for the life of school lore. The curriculum envisages lifelong and intergenerational learning, where de Bono methods undoubtedly show potential

impact. Transmission of ethnological and folklore content can be improved with the described approach, and at the same allow folk material to perpetuate – differently, adapted to the milieu of younger generations – and not become a mere relic in social memory. The collecting of school lore could thus be widened by the inquiry of its recognition in different contexts, of new contextualisation, and its modification. And school lore, when examined through the CoRT methods, might even become a creative expression of the contemporary youth.

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NOTES

[1] Cognitive Research Trust.

[2] The main CoRT 1 tools aim to widen perceptions and guide students to (1) think about negative, positive and interesting aspects of the phenomenon (PMI tool); (2) consider all factors (CAF); (3) think about consequences and sequel (C&S); (4) define the aims, goals and objectives (AGO); (5) consider the first important priorities (FIP); (6) think about alternatives, possibilities and choices (APC); (7) consider other people's views (OPV); as well as (8) set up and challenge rules; (9) plan the tasks; and (10) make decisions.

[3] CoRT 4 tools aim to develop creativity and help students to change patterns and concepts by using (1) Yes, No and PO tool (a way of looking at things; PO stands for provocative operation); (2) Stepping Stone (to use an outrageous idea as a stepping stone to other ideas); (3) Random Input (bringing in something random/unconnected to the situation in order to trigger new ideas); (4) Concept Challenge (a way of not taking things for granted); (5) Dominant Idea (recognising the main ideas behind a situation in order to not be restricted by them); (6) Define the Problem (what is the purpose of thinking); (7) Remove Faults; (8) Combination (putting together things that have existed separately in order to create something new); (9) Requirements; and (10) Evaluation (evaluating the idea according to a specific situation).

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MOTIF INDEX OF PROPHETIC DREAM NARRATIVES: METHODS OF COMPILATION

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Abstract: The article proposes methods for describing and classifying invariant structures of stories about prophetic dreams in the form of a motif index. The author raises the question of what elements of prophetic dream narratives can be defined as folkloric and introduces a classification system of prophetic dream narratives (according to their invariants). Revealing invariants (narrative structures) in the prophetic dream narratives allows the author to create a motif index, which lets us understand the traditional logic of dream interpretation: the rules of generating prophetic dream narratives and the 'narrative grammar' lying in the core of stories about prophetic dreams. The motif index covers stories about prophetic dreams recorded by ethnographers and folklorists in the Eastern Slavic regions from the early twentieth century to 2020.

Keywords: prophetic dream narratives, motif index, narrative structures, semiotic analysis, invariants and variants, Eastern Slavs, oral tradition, dreams as folklore, symbolism of dreams, dream interpretation

The article presents methods for compiling the motif index of prophetic dream narratives. The index is not just a dictionary or thesaurus that helps navigate the accumulated material. It is an analytical tool that classifies and systematizes all these texts, following common principles. The motif index allows putting newly recorded texts into the developed coordinate system.[1]

The folklorists who have researched oral tales have paid attention to their similarities, common motifs, and plot structures. The Finnish scholars belonging to the geographic-historic school proposed the idea of the monogenesis of such texts from the once invented variant (Jason 2000: 24–25). Antti Aarne elaborated the tale type to reveal the original form of fairytales having a similar plot. Even though this idea was rejected, folklorists continued compiling the indexes (and tale types) and using the previous ones. The indexes allow systematizing the

vast number of recorded texts, describing them from the general plot structures to particular plots (Jason 2000: 63). In her book, Heda Jason published the list of indexes compiled by folklorists from different countries during the twentieth century (Jason 2000: 159–222).[2] Folklore researchers made indexes even for such narrowly thematic narratives as biographies of troubadours, humorous stories about priests, and legends about giants. But there are no mentions of any motif indexes of stories about dreams.

In the twentieth century, folklorists pretty rarely considered dream narratives as folklore. According to psychoanalytic theory, dream stories were usually regarded as reflections of unconsciousness (individual desires and fears), as well as humans' universals (principles of 'dream work'). Even social and cultural anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century researching stories about dreams told by natives (prophetic, shamanic, or incubated through traditional ritual dreams) focused on finding Freudian symbols in the dream plots (Seligman 1928; Lincoln 2003; Róheim 1949; Eggan 1952). In other words, dream narratives were by default understood as something utmost personal, an opposite to folklore texts, which are shared by a group. Thus, American folklorist Alan Dundes, defining the concept of 'folklore', spoke of 'individual dreams' as the complete opposite of 'collective folklore'. He wrote:

> *Collective folklore differs from individual dreams. Dreams appear to be similar to narratives in part because they are related in words. But a dream may or may not be sufficiently intelligible or interesting to be related by a second party to a third party.* (Dundes 1976: 1501)

At first, folklorists examined folk beliefs about dreams (primarily the notion that dream images have a meaning and can predict the future), not the dream narratives themselves. The investigation of the folk tradition of dream interpretation within the framework of folklore studies began with so-called oral dream books – lists of separately taken prophetic symbols well known in folk culture, for example, *berries (in a dream) portend tears*, *a canvas foreshadows the road*, *a cow stands for illness*, and so on. Scholars collected them to consider their mythological origin (Tolstoi 1993) or reveal cultural values and stereotypes reflected by these symbols and their meaning (Niebrzegowska 1996). Meanwhile, the process of dream interpretation was by default understood as simply detaching these conventional symbols and regarding them separately from the whole dream plot. So, other details of dream narratives, except these traditional images, were usually seen as irrelevant to folklore studies.

Folklorists also examined dream descriptions included in texts of various genres. For example, some fairytales mention dreams of characters (Bogatyrev

2006; Gulyás 2007), or sometimes legends contain depictions of dream plots that are parts of the whole story (Ettlinger 1948). So, we can find some prophetic dream motifs in indexes devoted to the systematization of texts of different genres. There are several motifs of prophetic dreams in S. Thompson's index, aimed at the "classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends" (Thompson 1955–1958). For example, "Dream tells of safety of absent person who has been in danger" (ThMot D1810.8.2.4), "Dream warns of illness or injury" (ThMot D1810.8.3.1.1.), "Dream warns of danger which will happen in near future" (ThMot D1810.8.3.2.), "Dream by a (pregnant) woman about fate of her unborn child" (ThMot D1812.3.3.8), "Bad dream as evil omen" (ThMot D1812.5.1.2). Russian folklorists often included a few very general descriptions of narratives about dreams in collections of demonic legends (Zinoviev 1987; Cherepanova 1996; Drannikova & Razumova 2009; Vlasova 2013). Some motifs of prophetic dreams are mentioned in Valerij Zinoviev's index of plots and motifs of demonic legends (section "Omens") (Zinoviev 1987: 320). However, as in Thompson's index, these texts are poorly presented there. Zinoviev mentioned only three motifs: "a girl saw her future husband in a dream", "a person saw a bad dream – misfortune happened", "a person saw in a dream what would happen in reality". So, scholars used to attribute stories about prophetic dreams to different genres (regarding 'a prophetic dream' only as a topic, which can be included in various types of folklore texts), not considering them as a particular group of narratives having their own features.

In the last decades, dream telling was more often examined as a communicative practice (Tedlock 1991; Vann & Alperstein 2000; Kilroe 2000), not only the phenomenon of an individual psyche. Anthropologists argue that "the 'remembering' of dreams is not strictly limited to the telling of the 'actual' dream" (Kilborne 1981: 175), "the dreamer 'remembers' the dream as a retrospective reconstruction, organized by the narrative conventions of the dreamer's language and culture" (Mannheim 1991: 48). The boundaries of folklore studies have also been expanding. Contemporary folklorists pay attention to personal experience narratives, admitting that "everyday" stories also contain cultural-specific clichés and elements of the mythological picture of the world. Finnish folklorist A. Kaivola-Bregenhøj in her article "Dreams as Folklore" reasoned that personal dream narratives could be regarded as a part of folklore (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1993: 211). She argued:

> *Dream narration and interpretation bear many of the characteristics of folklore: dreams … contain both idiosyncratic symbols, and symbols that are culture-bound, anonymous in origin, highly stereotyped and passed*

> *on from one person to another … Dreams have so far been studied as communal elements of culture chiefly by the anthropologists, but dreams and their narration are also an interesting field for the folklore researcher*. (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1993: 211)

Today, more and more works have appeared that consider stories about dreams as objects for narrative research. However, the problem of the description and systematization of dream narratives, and finding their place among other groups of folklore texts remains.

Because the article focuses on Eastern Slavic materials, I will pay particular attention to Russian and Ukrainian publications that concern prophetic dream narratives as cultural phenomena within the framework of folkloristics. The first Russian studies of dream narratives as a cultural phenomenon appeared in the 2000s.[3] E. Zhivitsa attempted to describe prophetic dream narratives in the form of an index (Zhivitsa 2005: 164–165). Similar to Valerij Zinoviev she regarded these texts as a subgroup of demonic legends (Zhivitsa 2005: 158). So, she systematized motifs of prophetic dreams according to the principles of systematization of demonic legends. For example, Valerij Zinoviev and Svetlana Aivazian divided their indexes into sections (characters) and subsections (typical actions or manifestations of each character) (Zinoviev 1987: 305–321; Aivazian 1975: 162–182).

Zhivitsa's index also includes three sections devoted to dream characters:

1) the dreamer and people from real life;
2) symbolic characters (a woman, a deceased person);
3) animals.

But prophetic dream plots differ from plots of demonic legends. The latter include a description of contact between a specific demonic creature and a hero. The number of demonic characters is limited. Every creature performs a set of typical actions in relation to the hero. That is why we can easily classify the plots of demonic legends according to characters and their actions. However, in the plots of prophetic dreams, we can hardly find a stable and limited group of characters.[4] E. Zhivitsa chose the dream characters pretty arbitrarily. For example, inside the section "symbolic characters", we can find the subsection "a woman". But female characters in prophetic dream narratives do not have such specific characteristics as, for example, "a mermaid" or "a witch" in demonic legends. So, we cannot single out a group of narratives about prophetic dreams in which all female characters have a specific set of functions and features.

Almost the same categories of dream characters are distinguished by psychologists K. Hall and R. van de Castle, who created a method of content analysis of dream plots:

1) people (acquaintances / strangers, women / men, etc.);
2) animals;
3) mythological creatures (Domhoff 1996: 13–15).

At the same time, the classification of psychologists was developed, based on the analysis of ordinary dream reports (recorded from students), not stories about prophetic dreams. This correlation shows that there is no specific character system in prophetic dream narratives. The main principle of motif description in Zhivitsa's index ("character + action") led to such clumsy constructions as "an animal is inactive" (Zhivitsa 2005: 165). This motif was found in the texts where actions of an animal were merely not mentioned, because the interpretation of a dream was based on other details of a plot.

After the list of characters was complete, the author added the last section of the index ("natural and material objects"). In this section, she described as motifs single symbols (not only material objects) mentioned in prophetic dream narratives. For example, "whirlwind", "land", "vegetable garden", "cemetery", "church", etc. (Zhivitsa 2005: 165). Several other researchers followed the same logic. Gennadij Berestnev proposed to create a "new corpus dictionary of dreams". It was supposed to be a collection of stories about prophetic dreams, including the attached list of symbols with links to the texts in which they are mentioned (Berestnev 2013). Ukrainian folklorists T. Shevchuk and Y. Stavitska published archival records of prophetic dream narratives. They added an index of signs and symbols (objects, characters, actions) at the end of their book (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 212–222). It lists the symbols mentioned in dream narratives, in most cases in the form of nouns, such as "war", "wreath", "wolf", etc. Such subject headings allow navigating the published materials more quickly. But they cannot solve the problem of classifying and systematizing narratives about prophetic dreams.

Elena Zhivitsa and other researchers regarded separately taken symbols or fragments of the dream plots, such as "an animal produces offspring", "women waving handkerchiefs" (Zhivitsa 2005: 165). Those ways of description partly correspond with the methods of describing plots and motifs of demonic legends developed by Zinoviev (character + its actions), and partly with the idea that the essential part of a prophetic dream narrative is a conventional symbol from oral dream books (not a motif or a plot). But it is important to take into account that dream narratives differ from both of these genres, nevertheless combining characteristics of both of them. They are complex narratives (as legends

are). At the same time, they consist of two parts: a dream plot and its meaning (which resembles oral dream book formulas). Like other folklore genres, dream narratives are constructed by the rules existing in oral tradition. But unlike such genres as fairytales, epics, or legends, the main idea of a prophetic dream narrative is not to tell a story but to interpret this story as an omen. A narrator presents a connection between a dream plot and a real event, which is not always obvious. This also distinguishes prophetic dream narratives from other folklore stories about visions or supernatural experience (contemplating another world or otherworldly beings). The latter also contain interpretations, but the meaning of the story is usually omitted (not spoken out) because of its obviousness to listeners. For example, a visionary observes the punishments of sinners in the other world – the main idea of such a narrative is to convince listeners to live a righteous life (everyone understands this didactic sense, even though the narrator does not say that directly). In the prophetic dream narratives, the interpretation is the central item of the narrative. Dreamers are not interested in a dream plot itself – they wonder what it means (what it predicts for them if we talk about folk tradition of dream interpretation). The correlation between a dream plot and reality is the main idea of such narratives. A dream plot is a riddle to solve, and the traditional ways of constructing prophetic dream narratives reflect the ways of solving this riddle.

Therefore, the description of a real-life event predicted by the dream is an integral part of each story about a prophetic dream, which cannot be cut off during the analysis or systematization of such texts. The specific two-part structure of prophetic dream narratives, which reflect the main idea of comparing the dream world and reality, allows us to speak about the peculiarity of these texts against the background of other folklore genres.

To compile a motif index of prophetic dream narratives, I started from the point that prophetic dream narratives are a specific genre, not a subgroup of legends or other types of texts. Therefore, it is necessary to develop principles suitable for describing these narratives. Any classification should be based upon carefully defined structural units of folklore texts and not contain the element of arbitrariness (Dundes 1962: 98–99; Jason 2000: 29). So, if we want to describe prophetic dream narratives in the form of an index, we should reveal repetitive narrative structures in these texts. As I have noted before, the general distinctive characteristic of prophetic dream narratives is their two-part structure. I applied the structural semiotic method to make a typology of prophetic dream narratives, revealing repetitive structures and their semantics in these texts. The structural semiotic analysis allows identifying the plot invariants of prophetic dream stories and presenting them as a coherent system of dream interpretation.

THE METHODS OF DESCRIPTION OF MOTIFS IN THE INDEX

The major part of stories about prophetic dreams is individual narratives. However, they contain folklore motifs and unique (not folkloric) details of a dream plot. The latter will be omitted if a story of a prophetic dream is transmitted and narrated many times. So how could we highlight the traditional motifs in the detailed personal narrative? At first glance, folkloric motifs are repetitive elements of a plot. This criterion is valid for many folklore narratives. But if we talk about dreams, we should notice that the repetitive elements of dream plots were also studied by psychologists (beginning from Freud), who defined them as typical dreams. Describing typical dreams, psychologists spoke about cultural universals because these elements manifested in the same way in the dreams of people from different cultures (Griffith & Miyagi & Tago 1958: 1173–1174). So how could we discern cultural universals and cultural patterns in dream narratives?

I assume that dream narratives become "culture patterned"[5] after and because of their interpretation. Erika Bourguignon, an anthropologist who researched the dream interpretation tradition of Haiti, noticed that interpretations (including those of dreams) reflect the traditional worldview:

> *To make sense of the new we must draw on the old. The unfamiliar and strange is understood by using the known and familiar. … In each case, these interpretations reflected the observers' own understandings of the world … They would draw on the same understandings in the interpretation of their dreams or those of others.* (Bourguignon 2003: 152–153)

In my previous works, I have shown that the traditional models of dream interpretation influence not only the way people understand the 'message' of a dream plot. They also determine the way people describe their dream experiences (Lazareva 2018: 84–89). So, revealing these models is not only about the meaning which people attach to their dream plots. It is about how personal dream experience becomes a stereotyped folklore story.

That is why I suggest defining repetitive motifs of dreams as folkloric if we can trace the same logic of their interpretation for a group of prophetic dream narratives. In order to explain what I mean by the folkloric motif of a prophetic dream narrative and give a more precise definition of this term, I will turn to two definitions of a motif. The first one was offered by Eleazar Meletinskii. He wrote that we could regard a motif as a "micro-plot" and compare its structure with structures of sentences (or utterances) (Meletinskii 1983: 117–118). I do

not follow the full definition of motif offered by Meletinskii, which is much more detailed. But I cite him in order to emphasize that, describing motifs of prophetic dream plots, I am looking for repetitive structures (resembling structures of sentences), not separate images and symbols (single words). Igor Silantiev wrote about the "semantic integrity" of a motif. It means that a motif cannot be divided into parts without losing its meaning (Silantiev 1999: 70). Giving my own definition of a motif, which should be applicable for the motifs of prophetic dreams, I draw on the works of both scholars. I reveal in narratives about prophetic dreams the repetitive plot structures ("micro-plots" as they were defined by Meletinskii (1983)), having the same semantics ("semantic integrity"), in other words – common logic of interpretation.

That is why my motif index of prophetic dream narratives differs from the previous ones. For example, E. Zhivitsa includes in her index the motif "a dreamer is naked". However, we cannot regard such an element of dream plots by itself as a folklore motif. Psychologists have described the 'typical dream' about public nakedness of a dreamer many times (Freud 2010 [1899]: 260–261; Saul 1966; Myers 1989; Fromm 1951: 73–78). But if we examine the traditional ways of interpretation of dreams about nakedness, we will see that they differ from each other in the following:

1) in some texts, nakedness is interpreted as a prediction of illness or death to a person seen naked. Nakedness in these texts is regarded as a disadvantage, weakness;

2) in other texts, being naked predicts dishonor. Being naked means looking inappropriate and is associated with public condemnation.

So, it makes sense to talk about two motifs in this case:

1) a person (or a dreamer) was naked in a dream – he or she became ill or died in reality;

2) a dreamer (or a person) was naked in a dream – he or she was condemned and felt shame in reality.

In other words, I consider as a motif not a single dream image or detail of a dream plot, but the structure of a whole narrative, including a dream plot and its interpretation. So, the motif index shows us that symbolism of a dream cannot be reduced to symbolism of a single image like it is presented in so-called oral dream books (for example, "a coffin in dreams predicts death"). The whole plot structure is significant for the interpreter.

The invariants of dream plots that have a common logic of interpretation can also be defined as interpretational models, because they are used as some kind of samples by dream interpreters and dream tellers. So, these narrative

structures can be described as frameworks on which the details of individual dream plots are built up. The description of these stable narrative structures makes it possible to visualize how the stories about prophetic dreams are generated – in other words, how people interpret their dreams and how this interpretation makes dream narratives typical.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIFS AND TYPES OF PROPHETIC DREAMS

Speaking about my designation of revealed narrative structures as motifs (not types), I want to point out that my motif definition also differs from that of Thompson's. Thompson described a motif as "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition" and a tale type as "a traditional tale that has an independent existence" (Thompson 1946: 415). This distinction is not applicable to the analysis of prophetic dream narratives. In the case of prophetic dream narratives, we should draw the line between prophetic symbols (for example, "blood" or "bright moon") and narrative structures. Symbols can be meaningful details inside a plot structure, and they are the smallest elements of the prophetic dream narratives that persist in tradition. However, I do not think we can define symbols as motifs.

My research aimed to extract and systematize the smallest repetitive plot structures having stable semantics. I determined them as motifs (not types, despite the fact that they can describe the entire structure of a brief dream narrative) because I suppose that we can reveal the number of sustainable combinations of these motifs. So, the term "tale types" will be more relevant for describing repeated sequences of simple (non-dividable) motifs in the future. I argue that there are three levels of prophetic dreams description and systematization:

1) **conventional symbol** – the smallest element in a prophetic dream narrative;

2) **motif** – the smallest repetitive narrative structure having stable semantics (= independent existence);

3) **type** – repeated sequences or combinations of motifs (in other words, the sustainable ways that elementary structures of prophetic dream plots form more complex ones).

THE DATA SYSTEMATIZED IN THE INDEX

In the motif index, I described oral stories about dreams regarded as symbolic predictions of the future, recorded by ethnographers and folklorists in Eastern Slavic regions from the early twentieth century to the current time, including materials published in 2020. The key sources are articles, theses, books authored by Russian and Ukrainian ethnographers and folklorists, devoted to researching and publishing dream narratives (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000; Dmitrenko 2005; Antsibor 2015; Safronov 2016; Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017; Stavitska 2018; Lazareva 2018, etc.). I also used materials collected by the students of the Center for Social Anthropology of the Russian State University for the Humanities (Kishkina & Meshcheriakova & Krasnova 2020; Krasnova 2020; Meshcheriakova 2020).

The texts described in the index were collected in:

- **Ukraine** (Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Vinnytsia, Volyn, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Mykolaiv regions);
- **The European part of Russia** (Arkhangelsk, Vologda, Novgorod, Leningrad, Moscow, Tver, Belgorod, Bryansk, Ivanovo, Rostov, Tula, Oryol, Yaroslavl, Astrakhan, Volgograd, Krasnodar, Ulyanovsk regions) and several other Russian regions (Kirov, Chuvash, Tyumen, Penza, Trans-Baikal regions);
- **Belarus** (Mogilev, Brest, Gomel regions).

As we see, most of the materials were recorded in Ukraine and the European part of Russia. The Belarus material is underrepresented in the index because I could not find any substantial publications of prophetic dream narratives collected in Belarus.

When compiling the index, I draw my attention to mechanisms of 'decoding' of dream plots. So, I did not consider narratives about dreams that contain no prediction. For the same reason, I did not describe narratives of prophetic dreams which were interpreted literally, when the dreamed plot was repeated in real life. For example, somebody died in a dream, and then that person died in reality. The ways of interpreting such dreams are transparent.

The dream plots are systematized according to narrative structures lying in their core. That is why I did not describe stories about prophetic dreams that are too short and explain the meaning of a single image (a fish, an apple, and so on), which is not a part of a complex dream plot.

I described invariants of prophetic dream narratives in the form of *a dream plot (structure) – its semantic (the real-life) event*. So, I did not pay any particular

attention to 'incubated' dreams (that a dreamer saw after special rituals made to provoke a prophetic dream). Such narratives should be described in a slightly different way: their description should include the ritual actions performed by the dreamer before going to sleep.

For the same reason, I did not pay particular attention to dreams that provoked a dreamer to take some actions. For example, a dream character advised changing the job. The dreamer quit the job and found a new one. That helped them to avoid problems (Zaporozhets 2002: 99). In this case, the ways of correlating between a dream plot and real-life events are more complicated than the scheme "something was dreamt about – something happened". These narratives have another structure, which can be described as: "something was dreamt about – *the dreamer reacted in a certain way to the dream* – as a result of this, something happened". For this reason, such texts require specific research.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MOTIF INDEX (THE TYPOLOGY OF MOTIFS)

The index is divided into 8 major sections:

A – Appearance and attributes of the dreamer (dream characters);
B – Actions of the dreamer (dream characters);
C – Emotions of the dreamer;
D – Sensations of the dreamer;
E – Verbal images (statements, thoughts, inscriptions, dialogues);
F – Objects (characteristics and metamorphoses);
G – Number of objects (dream characters, repetitions of actions);
H – Space (metamorphosis of milieu, movement in the territory).

The most frequent motif of many prophetic dreams is a metamorphosis of familiar milieus, objects, and people's appearances. For example, places can look unusual, objects can disappear or be lost/destroyed. People can have a strange appearance or attributes, or they can do strange things in dream plots. Such transformations are often regarded as omens. So, mentions of familiar loci, objects, and people were taken as the coordinate axes of the motif index.

The motifs from sections **A**, **F**, and **H** can be described as "something familiar (a person, object or milieu) looks unusual in a dream – something happens in the life of a certain person". Predictions of such prophetic dream plots concern the person who looked unusual in a dream or possesses the objects (or territory) looking strange in a dream.

The majority of the motifs within section **B** ("Actions…") can be described by the scheme "the dreamer or a person (familiar to the dreamer) is doing something – something happens to the dreamer / this person". Actions performed on familiar objects or aimed at transforming a familiar territory are included in sections **F** ("Objects…") and **H** ("Space…").

The motifs from sections **C** ("Emotions…") and **D** ("Sensations…") can be described as "the dreamer feels something (emotion or sensation) – something happens to the dreamer in reality".

Sections **E** ("Verbal images…") and **G** ("Number…") are based on such abstract categories as words and numbers. But the vast majority of the narratives described in these sections mention familiar objects, places, and people. And it is meaningful for the interpretation of dreams. For example, words that are said in a dream are usually addressed to a dreamer or to a familiar person (or they are said by a dreamer / familiar person, or a real person is mentioned in a speech). And it matters to whom the words are addressed, or who speaks, or who is mentioned in the utterance. These details show whom the prediction concerns. The narratives systematized in section **G** are not only about the number of objects (or repetition of actions). The information about a real person who repeated actions several times or who possesses several objects in a dream is no less meaningful.

The description of motifs starts from the general level (plot structures) and ends with particular examples (references to specific plots). Motifs (invariants) are described in subsections from more generalized forms (which are common to a big group of texts) to particular subgroups (which can be regarded as different variants of the common invariant). The further systematization represents a more detailed description of the revealed text structures ending with references to particular narratives about prophetic dreams recorded by folklorists. For example, the most general description of the model that lies in the core of a group of prophetic dream narratives is "objects as symbols of people (their owners)". The next level of concretization is to display categories of objects which usually symbolize people in dreams – houses, trees, personal items, raw meat, and heavenly bodies (this list is potentially open to expansion). The next step is to make more elaborated descriptions of structures common to groups of prophetic dream plots. For example, a tree dies in someone's garden – the owner of the garden dies (or gets ill). This plot structure is implemented in personal prophetic dream narratives in many ways. For example, the different sorts of a tree can be mentioned, the tree can be damaged in different ways (it can wither, be cut down or burnt, etc.), different persons die in reality (close or far relatives, friends, neighbors, acquaintances of the dreamer, etc.), but the general structure remains the same. The relations between the plot structure

(a tree dies in someone's garden – the owner of the garden dies) and its implementation (for example, the apricot tree from the garden of the dreamer withers – the dreamer's husband dies) can be regarded as a relation between *invariant* and *variant* or, according to Alan Dundes' definitions – *motifeme* and *allomotif* (Dundes 1962: 102–103).

Such a hierarchical organization of the index corresponds with the idea that we can reduce a group of folklore texts to a general schema, the carcass lying in their core. This approach was presented in the work of V. Propp, who described the general structure of fairytales (Propp 1958) developed by many other scholars, applying structural analysis to different types of texts (Dundes 1962; Greimas & Porter 1977, etc.). A. Lord wrote about the "grammar" of oral poetry, which he described as "a special grammar within the grammar of language" (Lord 2000 [1960]: 36). He wrote that "the formulas are the phrases and clauses and sentences of this specialized narrative grammar", and the singer learns to perform not by memorizing them but by understanding their habitual usage (ibid.). In this article I argue that we can look at prophetic dream narratives in much the same way. The dream interpreter knows the principles of traditional dream interpretation as a sort of language, including "words" and "grammar". To use this language (and therefore be able to interpret any dream), it is not sufficient to memorize the meaning of a bunch of well-known prophetic symbols ("words"). The interpreter should understand the narrative structures inherent in prophetic dream plots ("grammar"). The traditional dream interpretation is a process of finding these patterns in the chaotic dream plot (and then reducing the whole plot to them). There are sets of prophetic symbols most often appearing in the framework of each narrative structure, but these structures could be filled with any images. Symbols could replace each other, but the structures remain. That is why every personal dream plot containing original imagery can be interpreted in the traditional way.

The analysis of dream narratives shows that dreamers usually interpret a distorted image of reality (according to folklore models), not abstract symbols. Of course, there are some narratives of prophetic dreams with no references to familiar objects, people, and places. However, their plot structures correspond to the schemes described for dream plots containing elements from reality, which play a key role in the dream interpretation.

For example, you will see the motif F.1.1.3.2 in the fragment from the index published in this article, "someone's personal item (or other material object) drowns in a river (or floats away by water) – a person dies". Usually, the dreamers see an object belonging to their family members (or their own object), and the dream about its disappearing in water predicts the death of the person who possesses the object. If the object belongs to the dreamer, this dream 'predicts'

the loss of a family member or close friend of the dreamer. But in some cases, the drowning objects have no owners. For example, *a black cloud* that falls into the river predicts the death of the dreamer's son (Krasikov 2005: 217). In this case, the structure of the prophetic dream plot and the logic of its interpretation remain the same. We can conclude that all narratives presented in the subsection F.1.1.3.2 belong to the same type. The only difference between them is the extent of familiarity (or 'abstractiveness') of images seen in a dream. This conclusion concerns all the texts systematized in the index.

Why then did I create the typology of motifs based on the correlation between images seen in dreams and their prototypes in reality? As I said, the vast majority of prophetic dream narratives contain mentions of familiar images. By analyzing the narrative schemes of dreams about metamorphoses of objects existing in reality (people, places), we can reveal the narrative structures that are also applicable for interpreting dreams containing 'abstract' (not familiar for a dreamer) images. At the same time, it is impossible to derive invariants of the whole corpus of prophetic dream narratives from analyzing a few narratives where only 'abstract' symbols are mentioned. The interpretation of the first ones is more complex because it includes connotations of a familiar object (its belonging, characteristics, location in space, etc.) which determine the meaning of a dream.

In order to illustrate the explanations of how the motif index is organized, I would like to introduce one of the sections of the motif index. The index was published in my book (Lazareva 2020a: 187–231). Here is the translation from Russian of a fragment from it (with some small corrections), section **F** (ibid.: 216–222).

THE FRAGMENT OF THE MOTIF INDEX

Abbreviations

A dash "–" connects brief descriptions of dream motifs (left side) and their semantics (right side). We can replace it with the phrase "the dream is interpreted as". Words "in the dream" or "in real life" and their synonyms are omitted.

S – the dreamer

R – a person familiar to the dreamer

U – a dead person

N – "someone": the personality of a dream character does not matter for interpreting the dream (or it could be any real person or character), or we are talking about a character unfamiliar to the dreamer

F. Objects (their characteristics and metamorphoses)

F.1. objects as symbols of people (their owners)

F.1.1. the object (belonging to S/R) is ruined or lost – S/R dies (gets ill, suffers)
F.1.1.1. the house (of the dreamer or a neighbor of the dreamer)
F.1.1.1.1. the house of S/R is destroyed (dirty, in decline) – S/R dies (gets ill, suffers)

– the house of R is destroyed – R dies (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 66–68)
– the house of R is in decline (dirty, rotten) – R dies or gets ill (Leningrad, Nikolaev, Kyiv, Poltava regions) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 36; Antsibor 2015: 200; Lazareva 2018: 70)
– the house of R needs renovation – R gets ill (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 69)
– the house of S is smeared with soot – S is arrested (Khmelnytskyi region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 139)

F.1.1.1.2. the stove (in the house of S/R) is destroyed – S/R dies (or gets ill)

– the stove in the house of S is destroyed – a relative (the husband, the children) of S dies (Tver, Kyiv regions) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 30; Ivannikova 2005: 192–193)
– the stove in the house of S crumbles in half – the brother of S dies (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 487)
– the stove in the house of R is destroyed – R dies (Zhytomyr, Poltava regions) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 120; Lazareva 2018: 90–91)

F.1.1.2. a tree (growing in someone's garden)
F.1.1.2.1. a tree (in the garden of S/R) dies – S/R dies (or gets ill)

– the apple tree in the garden of R is cut down – the son of R dies (Novgorod region) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 22)
– the apricot tree in the garden of S withers – the husband of S dies (Kherson region) (Stavitska 2018: 273)
– the apricot tree in the garden of S is cut down – the husband of S dies (Kherson region) (Stavitska 2018: 273–274)
– the oak in the garden of R disappears from its usual place – R dies (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 116–117)
– a blossoming apple tree has a burnt root – the grandson of S (a young man) dies (Lazareva 2017: 147–148)

F.1.1.3. a personal item (material object)

F.1.1.3.1. a thing (personal item of S / R) is lost – R (or a relative or friend of S) dies (or gets ill)

– the clothes (the jacket, the sweater) of R are lost – R dies (Northwest Russia, Kirovsk region) (Razumova 2001: 102–103; Lazareva 2018: 76)

– the handbag of S is lost – a friend of S dies (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 183)

– the gloves of S are lost – the brother of S dies (Vlasova 2013: 15)

– the shoes of S are lost – a friend of S dies (Belgorod region) (Krasikov 2005: 216)

– the galosh of S is lost – the husband of S dies (Kherson region) (Stavitska 2018: 274)

– the gold jewelry of S is lost – the mother of S gets ill (Moscow) (Kishkina & Meshcheriakova & Krasnova 2020: 6)

– the carpet is missing in its usual place in the house of S – the husband of S dies (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 120)

F.1.1.3.2. a personal item of R / S (or any material object) drowns in a river (or floats away by water) – R (or a relative of S) dies

F.1.1.3.2.1. an object belonging to R drowns in a river – R dies

– the handkerchief of R drowns in the river – R dies (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 78)

F.1.1.3.2.2. a personal item of S (or any material object) drowns in a river (or floats away by water) – a relative of S dies

– the headscarf of S drowns in the river – the daughter of S dies (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 488)

– two chests that belong to S float down a river – the husband and the son-in-law of S die (Zhytomyr, Poltava regions) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 91)

– two boats are carried off to the sea – two people die (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 100)

– a log (a shovel) sinks in the water – a member of the family of S dies (Tver region) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 4, 39)

– a black cloud falls into the river – the son of S drowns (Kharkiv region) (Krasikov 2005: 217)

F.1.1.3.3. a personal item of S / R (or any material object) is damaged / destroyed – R dies (gets ill, suffers)

– the dress of R is rotten – R is unhappy in marriage (Tver region) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 38)

– the wheelchair of R breaks into small pieces – R dies (Moscow) (Zaporozhets 2002: 101)

F.1.1.4. raw meat

F.1.1.4.1. raw meat (a corpse) gives signs of life – R / S dies (or gets ill)

– pieces of dead people's bodies are stirring in a meat store – a typhus epidemic begins; S gets seriously ill (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 124)

– a piece of raw meat breathes – a relative of S dies (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 95)

F.1.1.4.2. raw meat is baked / taken away – R dies (or gets ill)

– raw meat is heated in an oven – a member of the family of S dies (Khmelnytskyi region) (Ivannikova 2005: 195)

– pieces of meat are baked – people die during a fire (Vinnytsia region) (Prisiazhniuk 2005: 182)

– raw meat is taken away by a horse – a relative of S dies (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 95)

F.1.1.5. Heavenly body

F.1.1.5.1. a heavenly body hides (is down, dims) – a relative of S dies

– the moon is down – the husband of S dies (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 180)

– the sun is down – a relative of S dies (Tver region) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 27, 28, 53)

F.1.2. an object is created by S or appears in the home territory of S – a child of S is born / family members of S remain alive

F.1.2.1. Tree

F.1.2.1.1. a tree appears in the garden of S (or is planted by S) – a child is born / family members remain alive

– S plants a tree – S is pregnant (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2002: 298)

– a large tree appears in the garden of S – family members of S stay alive during the cholera epidemic (Khmelnytskyi region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 139)

F.2. an object as a symbol of the collective (family) or the household of a dreamer

F.2.1. a part separates from the object that belong to S (or R) – a relative of S (or R) is 'separated' from the family (dies, leaves the family) / S suffers a loss
F.2.1.1. a part of the house of S (or R) collapses – a resident of the house of S (or R) dies (leaves the family)

– a wall (a corner, the roof/ceiling) in the house of S/R collapses – a member of the family of S/R dies (Zhytomyr, Poltava region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 88; Lazareva 2018: 81–88)
– a wall in the barn of S collapses – the husband of S dies (Vinnytsia region) (Prisiazhniuk 2005: 177)
– a part of the roof collapses – the wife of S dies (Pinsk region) (Tolstaia 2002: 202)
– a beam falls off the ceiling in the house of S – the husband of S dies (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 99)
– clay falls off the wall of the house of S – the niece of S dies (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 487)
– a part of the building that S enters breaks away – a relative of S dies (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 98)
– the roof of the house of S collapses – the son of S is imprisoned (Tver region) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 25)
– the stove in the house of S is destroyed – S divorces her husband (Rostov region) (Zhivitsa 2004: 84–85; Lazareva 2018: 93)

F.2.1.2. a part of the stove (or an object standing in the oven) in the house of S/R is destroyed – an inhabitant of the house of S/R dies

– elements of the stove in the house of R are destroyed – several members of the family of R die (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 92)
– pots in the stove in the house of S are destroyed – members of the family of S die (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 123)

F.2.1.3. a part of the tree (in the garden of S/R) is separated – R (a relative of S) dies

– an apple is plucked from the tree that grows in the garden of S – the daughter of S dies (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 130–131)
– two apples in the tree in the garden of R are ripe and ready to fall – R and his wife die (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 96)

F.2.1.4. a piece of the clothing of S falls off – a relative of S dies (S suffers a loss)

– the sole falls off the shoe of S – the child of S dies (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 121)

– the sole falls off the boot of S – a pig from the household of S dies (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 81)

– a part falls off the wristwatch of S – the mother of S dies (Ulyanovsk region) (Trushkina 2002: 145–146)

F.2.1.5. a part of the body of S/R is separating (missing) – S/R loses a friend or relative (suffers a loss)

– a tooth (several or all teeth) of S falls out – a friend or a relative of S dies (Tver, Volynsk, Ulyanovsk, Khmelnitsky, Zhitomir, Lviv, Poltava regions, Northwest Russia) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 10; Razumova 2002: 300; Gura 2002: 76; Trushkina 2002: 146; Ivannikova 2005: 195; Safronov 2016: 491–492; Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 65, 81, 92, 121, 130; Stavitska 2018: 254; Lazareva 2018: 146–148)

– a tooth of S falls out – a relative of S is taken to the soldiers (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 112)

– a tooth of S falls out – S loses her money (somebody has stolen it) (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 104)

– the leg of S falls off – the father of S dies (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 490–491)

– the lower halves of the bodies of S and R are missing – S divorces her husband, the husband of R dies (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2003: 391)

– the eye of R is missing – the grandmother of S dies (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 90)

F.2.1.6. an object lacks its part – a relative of S dies

– a mirror is without a corner – a relative of S dies (Volgograd region) (Zhivitsa 2004: 62–63)

– a fish is missing its head – the son of S drowns (Zhytomyr region) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 185)

F.2.2. N cuts something off (cuts an object into pieces, destroys a part of the object) – a relative of S dies (or S breaks up with someone or suffers a loss in the household)

F.2.2.1. N cuts something off – a relative of S dies or leaves S

– N is going to cut off the finger of S – the mother of S dies (Ulyanovsk region) (Trushkina 2002: 147–148)

– S cuts off her daughter's hand – the daughter of S leaves the parental home (she gets married) (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 160)
– S cuts wood – the brother of S dies (Tver region) (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 3)
– S mows rye – a relative of S dies (Poltava region) (Lazareva 2018: 112)

F.2.2.2. S cuts something off – S suffers a loss in the household
– S cuts her hair – S suffers a loss in the household (a duck has killed her ducklings) (Kharkiv region) (Krasikov 2005: 228)
– S mows rye – S suffers a loss in the household (her pig kills the piglet) (Zhytomyr) (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 166)
– S cuts a slice of bread for U – S suffers a loss in the household (a calf dies) (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 421)

F.2.3. an object grows (or restores its integrity) – the family of S grows (or family members reunite)
F.2.3.1. an object grows – the family of S grows
– a tooth grows in the mouth of S – a relative of S is born (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2002: 300)

F.2.3.2. an object restores integrity – S reunites with loved ones
– S inserts the lost tooth in her mouth – the husband of S returns from the war alive (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 489)

F.2.3.3. S receives a part of the object – S reunites with loved ones / a new member is included in the family
– S receives a piece of the loaf – the mother of S returns home (Northwest Russia) (Razumova 2001: 96)
– S receives the braid belonging to R – child of R is adopted by the family of S (Ulyanovsk region) (Safronov 2016: 478)

As we see from section F.1., objects in dreams can symbolize a person (usually their owner). Negative metamorphoses of objects are interpreted as predictions of misfortune (in most cases, someone's death or illness). The most frequently mentioned objects in those narratives are houses, stoves, trees, clothes, pieces of raw meat, heavenly bodies. Here are some examples of the dream narratives described in this section (the texts below were translated from Russian and Ukrainian).

I had a dream about my neighbors. At that time, the grandfather, the grandmother, and the daughter were all still alive. In my dream, ***their house was askew and then collapsed*** *... After that,* ***the grandfather*** [who lived in that house] ***became ill and died*** *(Poltava region).* (Lazareva 2018: 67–68)

A neighbor of the Guks often saw Guk's mother-in-law, Sofia Yurievna. She used to cry and feel sorry for her daughter, who had married Guk. And then she had a dream ***that the stove in the Guk's house collapsed****. In two weeks,* ***Guk*** *went to Kyiv and* ***suddenly died there****. It was on May 10, 1925 (Zhytomyr region).* (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 120)

When my brother was at war, my father wrote a letter that he had a dream that all the apple trees in our garden were black, and ***his favorite apple tree was cut down****. After that, we received a message that* ***my brother had been killed in the war*** *(Novgorod region).* (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 22)

Before my father died*, my mother had a dream that she was washing clothes and his handkerchief in the river. This* ***handkerchief floated away and drowned in water****. My mother failed to fish it out (Poltava region).* (Lazareva 2018: 78)

When my daughter finished basic school, we went to Andreapol with her to buy her a prom dress ... And then I had a dream that somebody brought me a dress, supposedly ***her dress*** *… I took this dress –* ***it was rotten*** *… Well,* ***she got married at 17, quit studying, and everything went bad*** *(Tver region).* (Lurye & Chereshnya 2000: № 38)

Motifs included in sections F.2.1. and F.2.2. can be described by the scheme: *a part separates (or is separated by someone) from the object – a relative is 'separated' from the family*. In some cases, such plots are also regarded as predictions of losses in the dreamer's household. Below, you can see some narratives mentioned in these sections of the motif index.

Before my mother died *(she was then in hospital with a heart attack), I had seen in a dream that* ***the wall in our house had collapsed****. When I woke up and began preparing to visit her at the hospital, I was called and said that she was dead (Poltava region).* (Lazareva 2018: 82)

On the eve of Good Friday, I had a dream that an apple hung on the apple tree in our garden. I climbed onto that apple tree ***to pick this apple*** *... In*

the same year ... ***my*** [daughter] ***Olya died*** *(Zhytomyr region).* (Shevchuk & Stavitska 2017: 130–131)

Before my brother died*, I had a dream that* ***my tooth had fallen out****. I will remember this dream for the rest of my life. A healthy tooth had fallen out. I cried so much* [in the dream] *that I woke up and could not calm down (Arkhangelsk region).* (Lazareva 2018: 147)

We lived in the Far East with my mom and dad ... ***My dad was killed****, a driver killed him. And before that, I had a dream that* ***my leg (below the knee) separated from the body****. I tried to attach it again. But after I took a step, the leg fell off again (Ulyanovsk region).* (Safronov 2016: 490–491)

Objects and their parts in such dreams are various:

Table 1. *Objects and their parts in the dream narratives from sections F.2.1. and F.2.2. of the motif index.*

Divided object	**Part of the object**
house	wall, corner, roof (ceiling), stove
stove	element of the stove, pot standing in the stove
dreamer's body	tooth, hair, finger, arm, leg
dreamer's clothing	sole of the shoe, detail of the wristwatch
tree	fruit, tree branch

The interpretations given to such dream plots are also various:

- death of a family member;
- parting with loved ones (divorce, leaving for the army, the departure of the daughter to her husband);
- loss in the dreamer's household.

But every interpretation fits into the general narrative structure described above: losing a part of the object in the dream 'predicts' losing something in real life.

The scheme from section F.2.3. (an object grows or restores its integrity – the dreamer's family grows / family members reunite) is an inversion of the previous narrative structure. For example, losing a tooth in the dream is regarded as a prediction of death. But in some dream plots, a tooth grows in the dreamer's

mouth, or the dreamer inserts the lost tooth back into the mouth. Such dreams, on the contrary, are associated with the birth of a child or family reunification:

> *Before* ***my cousin was born****, my mother had a dream that* ***a tooth had grown in her mouth****.* (Razumova 2002: 300)

> *I had a dream that* ***my tooth fell out****, and I kept it. "Why are you holding it? Throw it away! Insert the gold!" someone said to me. "No, I need my own," I answered. And* ***I inserted it back****. I was told that* ***my husband would come back from war, I would stay with him****. And so it happened.* (Safronov 2016: 489)

Although all these plots could seem quite different at first glance (various images are mentioned, various things happen with them in a dream, various life events are regarded as predicted by such dreams), we can find the same logic, the same metaphors, the same narrative structures in the core of them.

Some of these plots may seem unique (for example, a dream about growing a new tooth or obtaining someone's part of the body). But the logic of interpretation of such plots is pretty traditional and repeats in many prophetic dream narratives. For example, an object symbolizes the dreamer's family and its part – a family member.

CONCLUSIONS

The motif index shows us that plots of prophetic dreams are not as individual and diverse as it seems. I reduced a substantial corpus of prophetic dream narratives (published by ethnographers and folklorists in Eastern Slavic regions over the last century) to the 171 narrative schemes described in the motif index. These invariants illustrate the traditional logic of dream interpretation. It cannot be explained by describing the meaning of a symbol without its context. The structure of the whole narrative should be taken into consideration to understand this logic.

We can regard the symbolism of prophetic dreams as a language presenting the folk tradition of the dream interpretation as a semiotic system. Dream images (such as a house, a tree, an apple) are words of this language. Narrative structures of prophetic dream plots and their semantics are the grammar of this language. Revealing these structures, we begin to understand this language and gain the ability to "speak" it. For example, I described the scheme "a part separates from the object – a dreamer's relative is 'separated' from the family".

We can construct our own prophetic dream narrative, which will fit into this scheme, by substituting "the object" and "its part" (from the general description "a part separates from the object") for any images. The generalized interpretation ("…a relative is 'separated' from the family") is supposed to be replaced with various specific life cases (someone's death, divorce, breaking up, etc.). Therefore, we can construct an infinite number of stories of prophetic dreams, indistinguishable from authentic texts. Invariants presented in the index help us understand how people generate their stories about prophetic dreams (in other words, how they interpret dreams because interpretation determines the form of the narrative).

All these schemes are interconnected. They represent common metaphors, such as "an object is a symbol of a collective" or "an object symbolizes its owner". In other words, we can talk about the traditional system of dream interpretation. It allows regarding prophetic dream narratives as a specific group of folklore texts corresponding with this system, developing the typology of prophetic dream motifs and, finally, the motif index of prophetic dream narratives.

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NOTES

[1] The research was prepared within the framework of the project "Creation of a Type and Motif Index of the Folk Tales about Dreams (East Slavonic Material of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries)", which was implemented at the Russian State University for the Humanities in 2020. The motif index of prophetic dream narratives was published in my book (Lazareva 2020a: 187–231). The main principles for compiling the motif index were presented in several articles (Lazareva 2020b; Lazareva 2021). The current article summarizes everything written on this topic, reworks it, supplements with significant additions, comments, and examples which were not made in the previous works, and translates this research into English to make it more visible.

[2] Among the genres are novellas, narrative songs, medieval ballads, romances, myths, etiological legends, legends about heroes, Christian legends, lives of saints, stories about the devil, jokes, epics, conspiracies, riddles, proverbs.

[3] A detailed review of these works is presented in the first chapter of my PhD thesis devoted to the study of the symbolism of dreams in Eastern Slavic culture (Lazareva 2018: 16–60).

[4] As an exception, we can mention deceased people and saints in dreams, which, as was shown in the research of E. Safronov, have a stable set of roles (Safronov 2016). The author managed to divide such plots into subgroups depending on the character's actions (ibid.) because the plot structure of this group of dream narratives (designated by Safronov as "dreams about another world") is similar to the structure of demonic legends.

[5] The term "culture pattern dreams" was introduced by J. S. Lincoln, who researched dream narratives among native American tribes (Lincoln 2003: 22). He wrote that "the culture pattern dream of each tribe conforms to a definite stereotyped pattern laid down by the culture" (ibid.: 23).

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NARRATING ETHNICITY IN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS: LIFE STORIES OF PEOPLE RESETTLED FROM ESTONIA TO GERMANY IN 1941

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Abstract: This article demonstrates the possibilities of using oral history sources in the study of ethnicity. Interviews conducted with people who resettled from Estonia to Germany in 1941 were analysed for this purpose. It was asked why some interviewees are remarkably vague in their ethnicity narratives while some others present highly firm statements. The analysis that relies on the Communication Theory of Identity shows that interviewees' pre-war ethnic, cultural and linguistic background was relatively insignificant. Instead, the most important distinguishing factor was involvement in the Baltic German or exile Estonian communities after World War II; the former was rather related to vagueness and the latter rather to firmness. Thus, it depended mainly on this factor what were the narrating strategies the interviewees made use of to present themselves in a desired way during the interview. In addition, the expressions, both vague and firm, were related to the widespread understanding of the primordial nature of ethnicity to which the interviewees tried to fit their own, often inconsistent, ethnic background and life stories. The results suggest that to understand the appearance of ethnicity in oral history interviews, the patterns of how ethnicity is narrated would be useful to trace and common perceptions on ethnic identity should be considered.

Keywords: Communication Theory of Identity, ethnicity, Late-Resettlement, migration, narratives, oral history

Oral history sources have been and will remain highly important for identity research. However, life stories transmitted through oral history interviews are narrative constructions of one's life and 'self' which the narrators use to present a desired picture of themselves in the communication process (Bamberg 2011). Thus, interviews cannot reflect the essential characteristics of narrators. Considering this aspect, contemporary researchers therefore tend to pay

more attention to the ways that people narrate their identity in interaction with others (see, e.g., Bamberg 2014 [2009]; Lee & Roth 2004; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2000; Nesbitt 1998).

Ethnicity as an abstract manner of grouping and self-identifying defined by various cultural and linguistic connections between individuals (see, e.g., Barth 1998 [1969]) is one of the most perplexing aspects of the complex social identity (Roccas & Brewer 2002). The complex appearance of ethnicity has caused endless discussions among researchers over its nature; the argumentation is broadly divided between constructivist and primordialist viewpoints, that is, around the question whether ethnicity is variable and situation-dependent or essential and innate characteristic of an individual (Eller & Coughlan 1993; Hale 2004; Zagefka 2009). It has been shown that the ethnicity of an individual can, in certain circumstances, be dynamic and/or multiple, but usually develops in childhood and early adolescence and then stabilises (Phinney 1990), which may facilitate primordial thinking.

Due to the complexity, oral history researchers who seek to analyse interviewees' ethnic identity often encounter several obstacles. For example, one may want to ask to what extent it is important how interviewees understand and interpret ethnic belonging in general (a study on Estonian diaspora shows numerous different interpretations; see Ojamaa & Karu-Kletter 2014). Researchers may also face the question of how to interpret vague expressions and, consequently, may shift the focus away from the concept of identity to other concepts such as positionality (Anthias 2002). However, instead of a conceptual shift it would be worth to focus on factors that affect interviewees' reflections on ethnicity, such as the environment and background of the interview, interaction between the interviewer and interviewee as well as wider socio-political framework which both sides live in. Interviewees' previous life experiences can also influence their stories. Based on these assumptions, this article aims to clarify the methodically complicated field by examining how ethnicity is narrated in oral history interviews and by formulating possible approaches for using oral history in research on ethnicity.

The article is based on a group of people who resettled from Estonia to Germany in 1941. The so-called Late-Resettlement was an aftermath of the resettlement of Baltic Germans which took place in 1939–1940, and was the start of numerous resettlement waves of Germans living in wide areas of Eastern Europe (see, e.g., Ahonen et al. 2008). These resettlements were directly connected with the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which divided Eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union, leading to the annexation of the Baltic states by the latter in 1940 and subsequently to extensive repressions (Hiio & Maripuu & Paavle 2006). Thus, in Estonian historiography the

Late-Resettlement is known as an event during which, along with about 3,000 Germans, about 4,000 Estonians used the opportunity to escape the Soviet repressions (Rand 2006: 43). However, research in recent years has shown that the ethnic background of these people is not as unequivocally clear as the previous research suggests (Liivik & Tark 2016; Plath 2016; Tark 2019). Interviews conducted with the former late-resettlers have been a very useful resource in achieving this result. However, since these interviews have not been systematically analysed yet, major conclusions remain to be drawn.

As of now, it is known that numerous interviewed late-resettlers are remarkably vague when they reflect their ethnic belonging, while several other interviewees are, on the contrary, remarkably firm. Clearly, such results do not correspond with the unambiguous categorisation in the early studies and statistics. Yet, there is no obvious explanation for such patterns either. Additionally, late-resettlers' ethnic identity and how it is presented during interviews is expected to be affected by their migration experience (see, e.g., Plath 2016) since in several studies it is shown to be a crucial cause of identity shifts (see, e.g., La Barbera 2015; Vermeulen & Pels 1984). With such characteristics, interviews with the late-resettlers form a good sample for examining the difficulties occurring when researchers aim to interpret ethnicity expressions in oral history interviews.

INTERVIEWS

The article is based on thirty interviews conducted between 2013 and 2019 under several research projects on the Late-Resettlement and people who left during this neglected migration wave.[1] Based on the state of research at that time, the initial aim of the projects was to identify Estonians among the late-resettlers. This aim, however, changed over time and, subsequently, the focus was set on collecting material about late-resettlers and their background without attempting to differentiate them based on their ethnic belonging. Regardless of the time of the interview and aims of the projects, ethnicity remained one of the core topics of the interviews, which is, in one way or another, reflected in every interview. The emphasis on the ethnic belonging was closely related to the peculiarity of the Late-Resettlement as a clearly ethnicity-based action since formally only Germans were eligible to leave.

Invitations to share their stories were distributed mainly in the organisations of exile Estonians and Baltic Germans as well as in the periodicals of both groups. After the first network of contacts was formed, researchers used a more personal approach and some of the interviewees were found with snowball

sampling. As a result of such sampling methods, it appeared that interviewees were or had been in the past more or less active members of or had been in contact with the exile Estonian or Baltic German communities. Numerous people outside of these communities as well as those who do not attach much importance to the Late-Resettlement in their lives or perhaps do not want to talk about this event were therefore inevitably left out of the sample. Such sampling peculiarity has a major impact on the analysis and results. Approximately half of the sample is broadly divided into two parts: first, interviewees clearly connected to exile Estonians and, second, those connected to the Baltic German communities while the connection with one or another community is not fully excluded in several other cases either. This peculiarity allowed to identify significant differences between the two groups.

Among the interviewees were 15 male and 15 female respondents. They were born between 1918 and 1938, more than half of them after 1930, and only two were 18 years old or older at the time of the Late-Resettlement. Over the decades, the interviewees had settled all over the world so that at the time of the interview their permanent residences were in different countries. Sixteen interviewees, that is, more than a half lived in Germany, six and five interviewees lived in Sweden and Estonia, respectively, two interviewees resided in Australia and one in the United States. Regardless of the places of residence, interviewees tend to be multilingual, and this has affected their performance during the interviews. Although all interviews were conducted in Estonian or German, occasional code-switching was usual during the interviews. As it will be shown below, the interview language is, however, not related to the enacted ethnicity of the interviewees.

All the interviews are semi- or unstructured and performed as narrative life stories. The interviewees usually begin with the descriptions of their childhood and ancestors and move on until the post-war years and often to the present. The Late-Resettlement, although being the impetus for conducting these interviews, is not at the forefront of all interviews, and the interviewees have used the opportunity to talk in detail about other events and nuances in their lives as well. Thus, the interviews are relatively long (however, the length varies widely) and detailed. With five respondents one or two follow-up interviews were conducted, in four cases by different interviewers. A total of three researchers conducted the interviews, their research interests and questions to interviewees varied, and the interviews as a result of the choices of interviewers differed in structure and content to some extent.

Although the following analysis is mainly based on the interviews, it does not rely merely on them. In certain cases, information collected from other sources has been used as well to add depth to the interpretation of the statements

made during the interview. Such supplementary sources are several archival documents, newspapers as well as questionnaires that half of the interviewees filled in before the interview.[2] Interviews as well as all the additional sources are used in a manner that preserves the anonymity of the interviewees. Respondents are referred to with the indicator combined of gender and birth year of the interviewee and date of the interview.

COMMUNICATION THEORY OF IDENTITY AND NARRATING ETHNICITY

To interpret migration-related interviews in identity studies, the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) developed by Michael Hecht (Jung & Hecht 2004; Hecht et al. 2005) has been hitherto used by several researchers (e.g., Bergquist et al. 2019; Mutua 2017; Urban & Orbe 2010). However, the emphasis in the studies is put on the impact of processes and events outside the interview, while the role of the latter as a communication process which inevitably influences the complex appearance of identity is rarely considered. Thus, the possibilities of the application of the CTI to oral life stories has not been fully explored in the current research. In the following, it will be explained how the CTI can be useful when analysing how ethnicity is narrated in oral history interviews.

The CTI is a complex theory that models the structure of identities in interpersonal communication. Jung and Hecht (2004) distinguish four frames of identity. First, the personal identity is formed by the self-image of an individual. Second, the enacted identity is the identity that is expressed in the communication process. Third, the relational identity is formed by four levels, that is, development of identity under the influence of how other people see the individual, individuals' self-identification through their relationships with other people, the relationship of individuals' multiple identities and, finally, the relationship between two or more people itself forms an identity. Fourth, the communal identity as a final frame is a collective self-image, that is, how whole collectives define their identity. All these frames are intertwined with each other but not necessarily always overlapping. Discrepancies between the frames may thus lead to identity gaps. In the communication process, however, people seek to be understood (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2000: 200) and reduce the potential identity gaps to feel comfortable with the situation and achieve satisfaction from the communication (Jung & Hecht 2004).

In this article, interviews are treated as a communication process between the researchers and respondents, during which the identities of the latter are

constituted as a complex intertwinement of the identity frames. Particularly important is how interviewees enact their ethnic identity during the conversation with the interviewer. Gaps between the enacted identity and other identity frames can appear in various parts of the interview and in different terms. As a characteristic example, the interviewees may enact as Estonians while describing how their families resettled as Germans. In such situations, they point out aspects that explain the discrepancy and should lead them to the feeling that the interviewer has understood their 'self' as desired. Otherwise, their satisfaction at communication will be reduced. The contexts in which ethnicity is discussed in the interviews determine which other frames of identity in addition to the enacted identity are relevant and which gaps occur in between them. While personal identity is inevitably left out since interviews cannot provide insights into the interviewees' thoughts, different levels of relational as well as communal identity are present as are the gaps in between them with which the interviewees deal, using different narrating strategies.

The CTI can be a valuable tool to understand the rationale of how identities are manifested in interpersonal communication; however, when applying it to narrative biographical interviews, a significant obstacle occurs. Particularly in terms of ethnicity, it is not always unequivocally clear which frames and gaps in between them are reflected in the stories. When interviewees, for example, interpret their ethnic belonging through families and the circle of acquaintances, such a contextualisation can refer to both relational and communal frame at the same time, that is, interviewees self-identify themselves through their relationship with other people, but they may also indicate the common understanding of what it means to belong to one or another ethnic group. Furthermore, gaps between the identity enacted during the interview and references to the identity enacted in the past relate to the relational identity frame caused by the communication process between the interviewer and the interviewee, that is, interviewees may want to present their ethnicity as different from the one enacted by themselves in various situations in the past. Therefore, fragments of interviews referring or related to ethnic belonging are followingly not categorised based on the model of the CTI but rather analysed as comprehensive narrations of the 'self'. The appearance of identity frames and gaps will be interpreted in the context of narrated life events.

The 'self' of the interviewee is intertwined with the life events performed during the interview (Peacock & Holland 1993). Life events of the interviewees fulfil the purpose of revealing their 'self' (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2000: 204). During the story telling, references to oneself are made in different ways: first, they occur as a response to the explicit question of the interviewer; second, references to oneself have grown out of the specifics of the communication situation;

or third, they occur as an explicit initiative of the interviewee (Bangerter 2000: 449–450). The interviewees may define themselves by mediating the words of others or relating themselves to other people (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2000). Unlike the strict question-answer structured interviews, biographical interviews contain reactions of interviewers which, on the one hand, makes the conversation more natural and the transition between the representation of oneself and the description of events smoother (Bangerter 2000). On the other hand, such a setting of interviews makes the narratives more dependent on the choices of the interviewer since the interviewees may refine their stories according to the reactions of the interviewer.

Ethnicity in the interviews with the late-resettlers is clearly addressed as intertwined with the life stories of the interviewees. The respondents describe the ethnic identity of themselves and their families of origin when they narrate their life events. Ethnicity always acquires meaning in the context of the stories and is not reflected as a fully separate abstraction. Two aspects are important here. First, ethnicity can be discussed as an organic part of the life stories, but it can also be a reaction to the respective question of the interviewer. Contextualisation in one or another case differs and, as a result, discrepancies between different parts of the life stories can occur. These discrepancies appear as identity gaps since they reveal confusion or inconvenience of the interviewees in addressing their 'self'. Second, although several life events of the interviewees may have been memorised and repeated in different contexts in the past, ethnicity as a part of the stories does not usually seem to be a nuance prepared in advance. Thus, the strategies to address ethnicity are rather spontaneous and strongly affected by the communication with the interviewer.

Ethnicity likewise with the life events is discussed in two different time-spaces in the interviews (Perrino 2011). The interviewees' statements about their ethnic belonging in the past as well as those of their families of origin may not necessarily reflect how they self-identified themselves in the past. Most of the interviewees were small children at the time of the most crucial events, that is, during the Late-Resettlement, and their ethnic identity was not fully developed yet (Phinney 1990: 502–503). The distance between the past events and the time of the interview also influences the interpretation of the ethnicity. Various factors that have influenced the lives of the interviewees during decades between the events in the context of which ethnicity is discussed and the interview may have affected the outcome, for example, the migration process itself, the social and cultural environment the interviewees lived in before and after the Late-Resettlement, geopolitical changes and altered perceptions of ethnicity during their lives.

ETHNICITY IN INTERVIEWS

Although the interviewees' ethnicity narratives differ from each other in both wording and content, it is still possible to detect some remarkable patterns. The most striking general pattern is extensive vagueness; however, there are interviewees who express their ethnicity relatively firmly or, conversely, explicitly refuse to associate themselves with any ethnic group. These groups are, however, not easily separable from each other since an interviewee may express confusion and vagueness in one part of the interview and give firm expressions in other parts. That said, while the interviewees express vagueness and firmness in various parts of the interviews and not only when answering a respective question, denying statements are always a reaction to the interviewer's interest in the interviewees' ethnic identity. In such cases, stories are clearly more dependent on the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer rather than the interviewees' life paths. This indicates that the role of the interaction may have been crucial in other cases as well. Sometimes, the self-identification occurs rather implicitly throughout the interview and is not expressed straightforwardly. In such cases, the implicit self-identification is revealed, for example, through the descriptions of belonging to the exile Estonian communities or ethnicity is indicated explicitly in the questionnaire filled in before the interview, as a result of which the interviewer had no reason to address the issue separately.

The phrases the interviewees use to describe their ethnic belonging are various, including explicit statements such as "I am a mixed-blooded but true Estonian" (W1925, 12.11.2013), "I am nothing other than an Estonian, everyone in our family was Estonian" (W1933, 28.12.2016), indications on belonging such as "I was looking rather for Estonians" (W1936, 27.8.2013), "I have been in connection with Estonians all the time" (W1918, 13.11.2013), and self-identification through antithesis such as "we were not Germans" (M1928, 7.7.2015), "I never felt myself like a German" (M1930, 29.4.2016). Almost all the quoted phrases are organic parts of the interviewees' stories, except for the statement from a woman born in 1918, whose answer given during the second interview was a reaction to the confusing question caused by a misunderstanding between the first and the second interviewer. Such phrases are narratively connected with the life events, the former being explained and/or justified through the latter and vice versa.

While intertwinement of the ethnic 'self' and the narrated life events is a common feature of the interviews, particular stories followed the direct question about the interviewees' ethnicity. Vague statements tend to be the outcome of this scheme. Instead of giving a concrete answer, the interviewees provided

a detailed overview of their family and ancestors. These descriptions often contain or are followed by phrases like "I can't tell whether I am a German or an Estonian" (W1934, 14.11.2013), "I am such a typical *Vermischung*" (M1927, 19.11.2016) or even "as long as Estonia was not free or [I] didn't go to Estonia that much, I was German, but now my acquaintances here ask, 'Who are you actually?' I don't know. In fact, sometimes one, sometimes the other" (W1927, 21.12.2013). Such descriptions show that the interviewees seek to explain their hesitation to the interviewer, and perhaps they also try to self-reflect on their belonging at that moment.

It is remarkable that the vagueness generally applies only to the statements made by the interviewees about themselves. When talking about their parents, relatives and ancestors, the interviewees usually give much more concrete and clearer answers compared to their own vague self-identification. With only one clear exception, who stated that she did not know how her father self-identified (W1935, 13.10.2015), the interviewees use firm ethnonyms such as 'Estonian', 'German', or 'Russian', accompanied by colourful adjectives such as 'native', 'full-blooded', or 'pure'. One interviewee gives an archetypically characteristic answer: "There it comes, quite a big question, a big difficulty, so my father is a full-blooded Estonian and my mother is a pure German, so what am I now, what am I, fifty-fifty or…" (M1926, 1.11.2014). Such a discrepancy between the statements on the ethnic identity of oneself and the ethnicity of others seems to reflect the interviewees' perceptions of the nature of ethnicity.

The interviewees connect the issue of their own ethnic identity clearly with the ethnicity of their parents and ancestors. Usually, they do not express multiple or dynamic identities clearly, except for the above-quoted woman who explained her dynamic identity by geopolitical changes. The interviewees' approach to the ethnicity suggests that their understanding of ethnicity is mainly primordial, with only one clear exception, who stated that "ethnicity is something one feels" (M1937, 2.2.2018). Thus, the interviewees implicitly interpret their ethnicity as inherited and unchangeable and express the feeling that they cannot be both at the same time. Their hesitation is thus drawn on the assumption that their own mixed origin does not allow them to be members of any particular ethnic group. However, ancestry is important also for those interviewees who, in fact, present their ethnic identity firmly and explicitly. Such interviewees seem to doubt whether their statements are convincing enough if they do not provide a detailed overview of their ancestors. The expressions of the interviewed late-resettlers are thus in line with the view that people may sometimes consider their origin and roots to be an important part of their identity (Hecht et al. 2005: 265). However, it needs a more detailed explanation why some interviewees enact firm and some others vague ethnicity in this regard.

The vagueness or firmness of the interviewees is related to their various life events, which they describe in detail in the interviews. In these descriptions, three common patterns appear which are analysed and explained below: first, the multi-ethnic family background and childhood; second, the role and meaning of the Late-Resettlement and third, post-war community choices. Since these patterns appear in the interviews mainly in chronological order, this scheme will also be followed in the analysis.

MULTI-ETHNIC BACKGROUND

The interviewees grew up or were born in Estonia before the outbreak of World War II, and spent the first years of their lives there. Although most of them did not have very clear memories of that time, they did describe their childhood and family background in detail. Therefore, it is possible to find general patterns in their childhood experiences and draw links between these descriptions and how they narrate the ethnicity of themselves and their families of origin.

The interviews reveal that numerous respondents were born into mixed families whereas half of all the interviewees describe their mixed families explicitly. According to the stories, the interviewees were born into German-Estonian, German-Russian, or German-Swedish families. As they grew up in such families, they tended to describe their multilingual environment, earlier migration stories of their families, roots of their parents or ancestors, Germanisation of ancestors and tensions regarding their ethnicity. However, the mixed family background itself does not define the ways that the interviewees narrate their ethnicity, and it is not possible to convincingly conclude that the vagueness is directly related to the mixed origin and the firmness to the monoethnic background without accompanying factors.

It is remarkable that several interviewees from mixed families (but also from families described unambiguously as Estonian) report that their home language was, exclusively or among other languages, German. This peculiarity is related to the aftermath of the centuries-long so-called Germanisation trend. Since the higher social layers in Estonia were German-speaking, as a result of social mobility numerous people abandoned their first language and culture and had to adapt to the new environment (Jansen 2003; Leppik 2008). The next generations grew up already in German-speaking environment. However, in independent Estonia some of these people started to reconsider their ethnic belonging, especially since by that time the Germanisation had evolved into a condemned phenomenon in society (Tark & Liivik 2019). Consequently, some people identified themselves publicly and officially as Estonians but were

German-speaking at home and preferred to send their children to German schools. The interviewees with such a background do not pay much attention to their Germanised ancestors in their stories or seemingly try to avoid this topic to reduce the gap between their enacted ethnicity and various elements that define the communal and relational frames of ethnic identity. One of the stories shows the inconvenience caused by such a background expressively. The respondent identified himself and his parents as Estonians but had to admit that he attended a German school, and the home language of his family was German. He avoided expressions that could show his family as Germanised and instead drew a link between the choices of his family and the importance of language skills:

> *Both* [parents] *were Estonian, full-blooded. ... I am constantly being asked* [why he went to a German school]*, it was just intelligence, because how much easier it was for us than for Estonian children when we went to Germany; we got into a German school right away. ... But the German language was almost common, everyone knew German almost fluently. ... There was no political or national betrayal, just logical thinking of how hard it is to learn a language correctly and we knew it from an early age.* (M1925, 2.4.2016)

In other interviews, the issue of languages is addressed in a different way; the language does not appear as a justification of the choices but rather as a natural part of everyday life. As a repeating motif, 'three local languages' is mentioned. This phrase is a reference to the fact that three languages – German, Russian and Estonian – were publicly used in Estonia before the declaration of independence (Hennoste 1997: 59), which meant that at least educated people living in cities were fluent in all the three languages as were also those who had left for some other parts of the Russian Empire in search of work but later returned, not to mention those who had immigrated and settled in Estonia before or after the declaration of independence in 1918. According to the life stories of the interviewees, it seems that the home language was often German but outside home they and their family members used other languages as well. As a result, several interviewees did not have any problems changing the language during the interview. That said, the interviewees' childhood primary, secondary, or tertiary languages or the language they used during the interview are in no way connected to their enacted ethnicity.

It is, however, noticeable that the more the interviewees' families were included in German-speaking social life, the more they enacted themselves rather as Germans or hesitantly. The latter could be related to the fact that they were not isolated from the Estonian-speaking environment either. In this

regard, positive or negative tonality of the descriptions of such contacts is to some extent also related to the ways ethnicity is enacted. Two excerpts illustrate such patterns vividly. One interviewee, for example, said that her father was Estonian on his father's side while his mother was a little bit Swedish, a little bit German. The interviewee went on:

> *My mother was a Russian, born in Saint Petersburg, her grandfather migrated from Germany to Russia, married a Russian there. ... I am a mixed-blooded but true Estonian. ... It happened that my classmates and friends were all pure Estonians. ... I was indeed more like an Estonian. ... I grew up so that my first mother tongue was Russian, because of my mother, I suppose; she didn't speak Estonian at first, then there was our servant Anna, she was an Estonian, from her I learned Estonian at home as a little child;* [father] *spoke both, German with his mother, with me often more Estonian, wait wait wait, it means, mother – Russian, Anna – Estonian, grandmother, father's mother spoke German with me.* (W1925, 12.11.2013)

It seems that attending an Estonian school and having Estonian friends may have influenced this interviewee in some way to enact herself as an Estonian in her later years. Likewise, with this quote she refers to her constant relationship with Estonians also in the context of her later years. Her enacted ethnicity in various time-spaces is entangled with relational identity. The described personal relationships play a role here as an explanation for her enacted Estonian identity during the interview. However, emphasising the ethnicity of her ancestors, she also implicitly refers to the common perception that ethnicity should be defined by the line of ancestry.

The above-quoted story suggests that descriptions of inter-ethnic contacts with rather positive tonality are accompanied by firmer ethnicity narratives while rather negative tonality is related to vagueness and confusion. Another interviewee who also went to an Estonian school and had Estonian friends enacts his ethnic identity in a remarkably confusing way, although he did not have such a mixed origin like the aforementioned interviewee. His description of his pre-war life refers to the impact of ethnic conflicts on his enacted ethnicity:

> *Damn Germans, we said, do you understand, I was in an Estonian school, had Estonian friends, we were the only Germans in Suure-Jaani, only my father and mother were Germans, and I was as well, but I didn't want to be. ... This is always a big question, damn Germans, ...* [they] *were not so loved in the country. ... I didn't want to speak German, do you understand, an Estonian boy doesn't speak German.* (M1928, 1.3.2015)

The interviewee who, on the one hand, refers to his family as Germans, enacts his past identity as an Estonian in the context of this particular story. Here, one can notice the occurrence of a relational identity frame: not a very warm attitude to Germans in society in the small town could have made the interviewee want to consider himself an Estonian, which would have caused a double gap between the enacted and relational identity. The relationship with his German family and the relationship with his Estonian friends competed in his enacted self-identification. His confusion to self-identify himself during the interview occurs like a mirror of ethnic conflicts experienced in the childhood.

The stories contain a wealth of childhood details that could potentially have affected the manner that the interviewees narrated their ethnicity during the interview. The multilingual environment and interethnic relations that shaped their childhood determined some of the strategies they used. The interviewees sought to present a coherence between who they and their families were and how they self-identified themselves during the interview. Since such a coherence is not always naturally achievable, gaps between the enacted, relational and communal identities appear in a complex and intertwined way, not always clearly separable from each other. However, childhood stories do not form such a pattern that would clearly show a general rationale of how early experiences affect the interviews. The latter differ even in cases where the interviewees' background and environment have been relatively similar. Therefore, experiences of the Late-Resettlement and post-war life tend to be more significant than the interviewees' childhood.

THE ROLE OF THE LATE-RESETTLEMENT

According to various sources, a few thousand Germans still lived in Estonia and Latvia after the Soviet Union had occupied and annexed the Baltic States in the summer of 1940 (Hehn 1984: 178; Rand 2006: 36). To organise another resettlement in these new conditions, Germany and the Soviet Union concluded an agreement on 10 January 1941, guaranteeing the right to leave only for Germans and their family members; however, leaving it unclear how to determine who is and who is not German (Tark 2019: 75). During the negotiation process for the agreement, life in Estonia and Latvia had become dangerous and unpleasant for numerous people, and as a result of this they were looking for ways to escape the grip of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, many people who self-identified as Germans but for various reasons had not joined the previous resettlement wave in 1939 were now trying to correct the mistake (Thomson 1960: 6). On the other hand, now that an opportunity to escape arose, a number of people

were ready to prove their Germanness, even if their self-identification at that time did not correspond to it (Rand 2006: 42–43).

In connection with the Late-Resettlement, the interviewees reflected on dilemmas, issues related to fixing ethnicity during the registration for resettlement and conflicting feelings for the whole process. The Late-Resettlement seems to have deep and long-term effects not only on their later life path but also on the self-identification during the interview. Broadly speaking, three major topics that help to explain this influence are repeated in the interviews in an intertwined way: first, opportunities and motivation to leave; second, attitude to German citizenship, and third, the hybrid nature of the Late-Resettlement as a combination of organised resettlement and escape. As it will be shown in more detail below, while the first and the third are characteristic of almost all interviews, the issue of German citizenship is emphasised in the stories of those respondents who identify themselves as Estonians.

The interviewees describe the leaving in 1941 as an undesirable inevitability. Therefore, regardless of the self-identification, they do not consider it a mistake to stay in Estonia after the end of the first Resettlement wave. They refer to the decision to stay as a conscious choice or completely and explicitly rule out the possibility of leaving earlier. The latter may, of course, seem perfectly understandable if the interviewees identify themselves as Estonians. However, the interviewees who are vague in their ethnicity narratives or identify themselves rather as Germans also seem not to regret staying in Estonia in 1939, although they did not have obvious reasons to describe the situation in such manner. Leaving in 1941 was primarily an escape in the eyes of the interviewees, even if they refer to other motives for leaving as well, such as the takeover of property by the Soviets or the overall chaos in society. In some cases, the interviewees reflect conflicting opinions within their families in 1939 about whether to go or stay. One of the most striking stories described by a respondent from a mixed family, who had clear pre-war German ties but was vague during the interview, sounded as follows:

> *Yes, that was also quite, I think, historically quite an interesting thing, my mother was a true German after all, she spoke only German and poor Estonian, she wanted to go to Germany with her relatives, my father did not want, ... he said, I think, already in '37 or '38 that Hitler was* geisteskrank*, ... he said, I don't want to go there, I don't have any connections with this country. ... In 1939 everything in Estonia was fine, Estonia was free, everyone was afraid that something could happen but, on the other hand, nothing happened after all, only in the summer of '40 the Russians came. ... My father said, I now have two options, to go to*

> *Siberia or to Germany, and Germany he then preferred, so we went to Germany.* (M1927, 19.11.2016)

When describing the resettlement as forced leaving, the interviewees also hesitate to connect it with their own ethnic identity, although the initial aim of the operation was to resettle only Germans and their family members. Furthermore, it seems that the interviewees tend to interpret the spring of 1941 and the events of that time as a confusing period in their lives, which does not fit well into their otherwise smooth narratives. Descriptions of the process of registering for resettlement illustrate these attitudes vividly. Unlike the above-quoted man to whom the right to resettle was obvious and not even worth discussing in detail, the interviewees who identify themselves as Estonians feel a more urgent need to explain how they managed to prove their German roots when they considered themselves and their families as Estonians. Explanations vary and depend to a large extent on the family background of the interviewees. In some cases, according to the narratives, documents left behind by a distant German ancestor allegedly helped the family to escape. In other cases, membership of German congregations or organisations was crucial. Some interviewees refer to pastors who helped them to obtain the necessary documents. However, the interviewees are not very specific about the documents submitted to the resettlement commission by their families. Although the interviewees who were children during the Late-Resettlement may not have known anything about such nuances, it is also striking that they clearly refuse to associate the documents with their and their families' 'real' identity. At the same time, the interviewees do not explicitly state that their families used forged documents, contrary to the authors of some published memoirs (e.g., Mäe 1993: 158–159; Raamot 1991: 189).

A characteristic example of the retrospective interpretation of how the Germanness was proved before the commission was presented by an interviewee whose father was clearly more connected with the Baltic German community than the Estonian one before the war. Although most of her paternal relatives resettled already in 1939 and although her first language was German (she reveals all these facts in the same interview), she described her family unambiguously as Estonian during the interview, perhaps trying to meet the interviewer's assumed expectations reflected, for example, by the question "your mother ... herself was still an Estonian?". However, regarding the Late-Resettlement, she argues that her mother and not the father received the needed documents in a suspicious way, implying possible forgery:

> *She had a schoolmate, a minister, and she went to him and got a certificate that we were Germans, although we were not Germans. ... Maybe it* [the ethnic origin of the interviewee] *was from the mother's side. ... Women had all German names but whether they actually were Germans, I don't know, I have not studied it myself.* (W1938, 28.6.2015)

Since the interviewees describe the whole action of the Late-Resettlement as an undesirable event, it is also natural that they portray the German citizenship as unwanted. Although the issue of citizenship is not a common nuance in the stories, which means that most of the interviewees do not consider it to be an important detail in their lives, stories that touch upon the issue are all the more expressive. The interviewees describe the process of applying for citizenship as forced by the German authorities and in terms of propagandistic pressure. They also feel the need to emphasise when they did not acquire the German citizenship at all. The interviewees who reflect the issue of citizenship enact themselves predominantly as Estonians while the issue of citizenship does not arise or is addressed in passing in the stories of those interviewees who do not emphasise their Estonian identity.

One interviewee described the forced citizenship remarkably expressively and interpreted it as a violent attempt to Germanise her family, although in other parts of her interview she described her ancestors and relatives as being of mixed German-Swedish origin. This multi-ethnic background could be one reason why the issue of citizenship was a confusing one for her in the first place; being Estonian seemed to be not self-evident for her family before the war but rather a result of a conscious choice according to the story:

> *They* [aunts of the interviewee] *were formerly of Swedish origin, these people, they considered German a more noble language.*
>
> [Later in the same interview]: *Ah, it was awful, we were made Germans, it was a very dirty thing; well, already the fact that ... we had to accept the German citizenship which no one really wanted to get internally. ... I was very upset with my father,* [the interviewee said] *'How could you, you have always said that we are Estonians'. ... I was very angry with him and then my father said, 'You know, I tell you why, if we refused ... to take it, then we would be killed. ... Inside we are still Estonians'.* (W1931, 16.9.2015)

Not only the action of the Late-Resettlement but also the fact that late-resettlers fitted well neither to the resettlers nor to the refugees had an impact on the interviewees' stories. Those interviewees who reached displaced persons (DP) camps and/or were in refugee status after the end of the war, felt their uncomfortable

status most. Not all of them had the experience of being "kicked out" (W1933, 28.12.2016) of a DP-camp for being resettlers but several interviewees had various controversial connections with refugees, nonetheless. The interviews show that the refugees who left Estonia in the summer and autumn of 1944, during the offensive of the Red Army, did not consider the late-resettlers to be as equal to themselves. Sometimes they did not understand and tolerate the people who had left Estonia a few years earlier because of the suspicious way of their migration. Furthermore, the ethnic background of the late-resettlers caused confusion among the refugees. For example, there are interviewees who, regardless of whether they had a DP-status, took the opportunity to attend the Estonian-language schools that were established in the DP-camps. Their background and habits which differed from those of the refugees sometimes led to conflicting situations, for example, in connection with the language usage: "One could not speak German there [at the Estonian school in Geislingen DP-camp], then others would have immediately said, 'What you are doing here?" ... They were not very friendly, these children" (W1935, 14.9.2016). Such descriptions reveal gaps between enacted, relational and communal frames of identity that could have been present in the past and affected the identity formation of interviewees in later years.

The Late-Resettlement is the most important event in the lives of the interviewees, which evokes gaps between the ethnicity enacted during the interview and at the time of the event. Being late-resettlers had probably been a burden for years and not only during the interview. However, it seems that they have successfully found the way to deal with this nuance in their lives, otherwise it is unlikely that they have agreed to take part in the research projects, particularly those focussing on the Late-Resettlement. Interpreting the situation as escape is one of the most important coping mechanisms which allows to reduce the primary identity gap in the stories: if back then the interviewees' families 'faked' their ethnicity to escape, it could not call into question their enacted ethnicity during the interview. However, this only applies to the interviewees who self-identified as Estonians during the interview.

POST-WAR COMMUNITY CHOICES

As stated in the beginning, half of the interviewees divide into two dominant groups, that is, respondents either connected with the exile Estonian or Baltic German communities. Although there are interviewees whose post-war community choices are not apparent or who returned to Estonia during the war and did not leave again, their narratives do not form significant patterns compared

to the first two groups. It appeared that all the interviewees who are related to exile Estonians identify themselves also as Estonians while all those explicitly related to the Baltic German communities present rather vague or confused ethnicity narratives.

The interviews also suggest that primarily the community choices are related to the ethnicity narratives and not the countries of residence. The interviewees related to the exile Estonian communities live in various parts of the world where there are large Estonian populations, that is, in Australia, Sweden, and the United States but also Germany. All the interviewees connected with the Baltic German communities have resided in Germany most of their post-war life. However, in their stories the interviewees do not draw any connections between their ethnicity and home country while the communities they are related to form an important context for the ethnicity narratives.

Exile Estonian and Baltic German communities are structurally very different. The former is a typical diaspora whose members' identity is mainly based on orientation to the old homeland (Brubaker 2005). Members of these communities engage in certain practices of preserving identity, such as joint activities and gatherings; remembering the common history and fate; preserving and reproducing common culture, language, and values through various publications; establishing organisations and schools, etc. (see, e.g., Ehala 2017; Keevallik 2010; Laar 1990). For the members of the exile Estonian communities, explicit self-identification as Estonians seems to be an important part of their lives at least situationally. On the contrary, Baltic German communities established and acting mainly in Germany are not really a diaspora. Although they still consider the connection with the old homeland important (Pabst 2013), they are an organic part of the German society both linguistically and culturally. Thus, connections with Baltic German communities do not have an impact on the self-identification of individuals as compared to the exile Estonian communities.

Those basic differences between communities had their effect on the life stories and ethnicity narratives of the interviewees. Although the interviewees who were involved in the exile Estonian communities self-identified themselves as Estonians during the interview, they had in fact no unambiguously Estonian background and roots. Furthermore, as described above, the circumstances of their migration were suspicious in the eyes of the refugees in direct post-war years. Although the interviews do not confirm that hostile and suspicious attitudes continued decades after the end of the war, it does not mean that joining the exile Estonian communities was easy for the late-resettlers. With a vague or mixed family background and the burden of emigrating as Germans, the late-resettlers first had to prove that they belonged to that ethnic group they

wanted to join during the post-war years. Therefore, it is natural to assume that their integration to the exile Estonian communities was not always smooth and without frequent identity gaps.

It seems that the interviewees and their families of origin had to work intensively with their identity to be part of these communities. It was not uncommon that during the post-war years they obscured the fact that they were late-resettlers as well as their Germanised ancestors if the latter was relevant. For example, active members of the exile Estonian communities were often portrayed or mentioned in the community newspapers. Such stories contained several biographical details but only rarely information about the Late-Resettlement, usually in cases where it was not possible to hide it. Similarly, in their life stories, such interviewees pay more attention to the details that connect them with exile Estonians, such as returning to Estonia and escaping again in 1944, post-war activities, or the fact that they never applied for German citizenship. During the interview, they often felt the need to emphasise that they were Estonians if they had a feeling that the interviewer might have doubted their ethnic belonging.

One interviewee who, incidentally, had been portrayed in the exile Estonian newspapers several times, without mentioning the fact that he was a late-resettler, described in his interview, lengthily and in detail, his escape to Sweden after his return to Estonia during the German occupation in 1941–1944. This description was preceded by the following statements:

> *We never had the* [German] *citizenship, no, we never got the citizenship. ... I have those old papers, but they are just residence permits, we never acquired citizenship, maybe it was a* Fremdlingspass *or something like that. ... We never applied for citizenship. ... And the return was quite natural when there was no Soviet government, when there were no Russians. ... It took a while until we got the permit to return, it was in '43. ... I don't know why it took so long.* (M1927, 20.9.2015)

The interviewees involved in the Baltic German communities did not face obstacles comparable to those of the above-described group. Usually, they did not have experiences from DP-camps and their community ties were rather formed with the help of already existing networks and contacts. As one interviewee described it, it was no problem to join a Baltic German organisation after the war: "There was a Deutsch-Baltische Landsmannschaft here and we were members there. ... Nobody asked who we were back then, some wondered only later that our father was an Estonian" (W1927, 21.12.2013).

The background and origin of the people connected with the Baltic German communities were in fact also not unambiguous and they usually had close ties with both Baltic Germans and Estonians before the war. Despite the rather similar pre-war background, their stories are remarkably different from those of the interviewees related to the exile Estonian communities. The interviewees from Baltic German communities tend to emphasise their mixed origin, as well as persistent contacts with both Baltic Germans and exile Estonians as well as with people living in Estonia. At the same time, they neither emphasise nor obscure their Germanised ancestors or Estonian origin. For them, compared to the former group, these details seem to be no issue at all. However, floating between two communities, the interviewees from the Baltic German communities express more vagueness and hesitation than those interviewees who are related only to exile Estonians.

Identity gaps regarding community choices thus appear in almost every interview but in different ways. The post-war environment in which the interviewees spent their youth and adult life had a crucial and meaningful role in shaping their ethnicity narratives. Due to the community ties and personal contacts, the interviewees who identify themselves as Estonians feel the need to express their ethnicity more firmly and explain in detail the choices of their families to be understood by the interviewer during the interview, but at the same time, the gap between their pre-war and post-war cultural and lingual environments that form the relational identity frame becomes apparent. On the contrary, in the life stories of the interviewees from the Baltic German communities the identity gaps are rather related to their persistently diverse environment. Thus, their solution to reduce the gap between the enacted and relational identity and to build a satisfying narrative is to express vagueness and hesitation.

CONCLUSION

The interviews conducted with the late-resettlers from Estonia show that ethnicity narratives presented during interviews depend on the combination of various elements including the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Both pre- and post-war developments in the lives of the interviewees played their roles, but the latter were more crucial in a specific way. The main distinguishing line runs between those who had joined either the exile Estonian or Baltic German communities. The former group is generally firmer in enacting ethnicity but at the same time they feel a greater need to clarify the circumstances of their resettlement and are sensitive to their ancestors' identity

changes, as these details do not fit very well into their ethnicity narrative. The members of the latter group, however, enact their ethnicity more vaguely and more ambiguously but do not attach much importance to the circumstances of resettlement and to the identity changes of their ancestors. The narratives of these interviewees rather do not contain such discrepancies between pre-war and post-war life that are characteristic of the former group.

Regardless of the post-war community choices or family background, the interviewees in their ethnicity narratives tend to attach more importance to their origin and ancestors rather than cultural and linguistic background, which indicates a widespread primordial thinking. Consequently, this aspect has led to uncertainty and confusion. Having a multi-ethnic background, the interviewees seem to think that they do not fit well into certain ethnic categories which they actually consider natural and self-evident. Therefore, it is not surprising that the interviewees do not usually struggle much when categorising other people, including their own parents and ancestors, but they do have difficulties with self-identification.

This study thus demonstrated how enacted ethnicity and identity gaps accompanying the ethnicity narratives appearing during the interview relate, first, to the need to justify and explain the choices made during life and second, to the widespread understanding about the nature of ethnicity. The interview was an event during which the interviewees processed and reconsidered their ethnic belonging and, in this sense, this study showed once again that interviews are not mere reflections of one's self-image and their content is affected by the communication between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Two suggestions can be provided for future research. First, a fruitful choice would be to trace the patterns in the interviewees' narrating strategies to interpret their ethnic belonging in the context of their life events and to detect in connection with which events identity gaps emerge. Second, common perceptions of ethnic identity should be considered. If, for example, ethnicity is widely perceived in the primordial sense, it affects how the interviewees present themselves during the interview. Depending on the background of the interviewee, primordialism may be used as a reasoning in enacting the desired ethnicity or, conversely, it may increase confusion and thus create identity gaps. The CTI can be a useful auxiliary tool to interpret the ethnicity narratives; however, a clear-cut categorisation based on this model should be avoided since fragments of narrative interviews do not fit well into predefined boxes.

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NOTES

[1] Materials collected during seven projects have been used in the article (titles are not official but translated by the author): "*Nachumsiedlung* and Estonians", PI Tõnis Liibek (2013); "*Nachumsiedlung* and Identity", PI Olev Liivik (2014); "The Self-Identification and Geographic Mobility of the People Resettled to Germany in 1941", PI Olev Liivik (2015); "The Ethnicity of the Late-Resettlers, Its Changes and Influencing Factors", PI Olev Liivik (2016); "The Ethnicity of the Late-Resettlers, Its Changes and Influencing Factors (II)", PI Olev Liivik (2017); "From Ostland to German Reich. Resettlement from Estonia to Germany before the Great Escape in 1944", PI Olev Liivik (2018); "From Ostland to German Reich. Resettlement from Estonia to Germany before the Great Escape in 1944 II", PI Olev Liivik (2019).

[2] Questionnaires were distributed among the late-resettlers within the framework of the same projects used for conducting the interviews. Filling in the questionnaire was not a prerequisite for the interview and thus not all the interviews are accompanied by a questionnaire. The questionnaires are laconic and do not provide significant additional information on narration strategies. Although they contain a separate field for the ethnicity of the respondent, it proved to be of little avail as it was often confused with the citizenship by the respondents.

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Triin Tark (PhD) is a historian who received her doctorate at the University of Tartu, Estonia. She specialises in the appearance of ethnicity both in formal and informal settings, particularly in relation to migration, state bureaucracy and non-territorial autonomy.

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IN MEMORIAM

DAN BEN-AMOS

September 3, 1934 – March 26, 2023

Dan Ben-Amos, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, folklorist, and member of the editorial board of our journal, died on March 26. He was a kind-hearted and incredibly creative colleague, whose idea of folklore as an artistic creation of small groups as well as research into the relations between text and context influenced the development of folkloristics in the 1970s and also later on, considerably widening the perspectives of folkloristics.

Dan Ben-Amos grew up in Petah Tikvah, Palestine. His parents came from Belorussia and Lithuania, and left these countries in search of better opportunities. As he came from a religious family, he started, after military service and being a member of the unit that guarded the Prime Minister of Israel, studies at the Department of Bible Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, yet continued at the Department of Hebrew Literature, focusing on comparative folklore studies with Dov Noy, one of the most renowned Israeli folklorists. He received his bachelor's degree in 1961 and continued his degree studies at Bloomington, the only university in the USA awarding degrees in folklore, where he defended his master's degree in 1964 and doctoral degree in 1967.

In Pennsylvania his teacher was Richard Dorson, and together with other young folklorists – Roger Abrahams, Alan Dundes, Robert Georges and Kenneth Goldstein – they formed a group who started to expand and reform folkloristics. One of the landmarks on this way was Ben-Amos's essay "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context" (1971).

Ben-Amos started teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, and in 1977 became professor of folklore and folklife. After the reforms of 1999, he continued

work as professor of Near-Eastern languages and civilizations and folklore, also being chair of the graduate program in folklore and folklife.

Ben-Amos's scholarly interests included Jewish and African folklore, humor, the history of folklore, and structural analysis of folklore. He was editor of several folklore series (*Translations in Folklore Studies*, *Jewish Folklore and Anthropology*), and editor of the *Journal of American Folklore*, always an amiable mentor for his younger colleagues, and interested in the folklore and folkloristics of different peoples.

Dan Ben-Amos was a humorous and profound lecturer, who visited Estonia twice. After the Göttingen congress, we started with the process of translating his articles into Estonian, and Dan was very helpful with obtaining permits and cover letters. For most our translators-folklorists this was the first in-depth contact with African and Jewish folklore.

Dan suggested an idea to compile a new overview of the development directions of European peoples' folkloristics, especially concerning the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. When I took it up, I realized that in many European countries folkloristics was undergoing a period of stagnation – not in the meaning of the number of congresses and conferences or various studies, but great personalities and theorists had left, and new ones had doubts about stepping up. On the other hand, however, exciting developments had taken place in the republics of the Soviet Union and national regions in the 20th century, and in the 20th and 21st centuries folklore studies of many small and big nations had evolved, and new trends had emerged and were still doing so. This is what we should write about and what time was ripe for, I suggested at the folklorists' congress in Miami. Yes, why not, it is something unexpected, he agreed.

During his career, Dan Ben-Amos was fortunate to meet excellent and enlightened academics, talented colleagues, yet he was also profoundly influenced by fieldwork in Benin City, Nigeria, where he studied Edo culture, as well as delving deeply into the folkloristics of his own people.

Mare Kõiva

NEWS IN BRIEF

NEW PILGRIMAGES IN NORWAY

Hannah Kristine Bjørke Lunde. *Pilgrimage Matters: Administrative and Semiotic Landscapes of Contemporary Pilgrimage Relations in Norway*. Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, 2022. 382 pp.

In her thesis in cultural history, defended at the University of Oslo, Hannah Kristine Bjørke Lunde highlights the innovation of trails of pilgrimage, pilgrimages and pilgrimage centers that, starting in the 1990s and on into the 2000s, emerged in Norway. This is something new that at the same time dates back to medieval Catholic time.

In Norway, the Holy Olav played a great role after being killed in the battle of Stiklestad on July 29, 1030. He became a symbol of Christianization in Norway. Pilgrimages to the cathedral in Nidaros, today Trondheim, were numerous in the Middle Ages.

Similar pilgrimages also took place to the island of Selja on the western coast of Norway, to celebrate the memory of Saint Sunniva. She is said to have been a daughter of an Irish king. She fled to Norway and together with her entourage lost her life on Selja Island in the 990s due to the collapse of a stone shack. She is the oldest Norwegian saint and the only woman among Norwegian saints. The pilgrimages came to an abrupt end though, because of the implementation of reformation in Norway in 1537. Thus, it was almost 500 years until they reappeared in Norway in our time.

The main objective in the thesis is to track how the reintroduction of pilgrimage trails and pilgrimages has successively grown. The issue of cultural heritage appears next to the religious dimension that dominated in the Middle Ages. This aspect, toned down in pilgrimage contexts in present-day Norway, is still front and center in pilgrimages in Catholic South Europe with Santiago de Compostela in Spain as the focal point. I could personally experience this as the international congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) was held there in the spring of 2019. In Santiago de Compostela, the destination for the pilgrims is to reach the grave of Saint Jakob. In present-day

Norway, the trails by themselves have become as important as the destination in Trondheim or on the island of Selja. The present-day pilgrimages, taking place in the summer with predominantly somewhat elderly participants, are supposed to be performed at a slow pace. They are linked to similar catholic activities in the sense that both the pilgrims and those planning the current trails in Norway, called pilgrimage agents, all to a large extent have been on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. This way they have collected ideals that they are bringing back home to Norway. At the same time, the present-day pilgrimage agents connect back to the Middle Ages that thus becomes an 'absent presence'. This expression is borrowed by the author from cultural geographer Kevin Hetherington. Thus, there is a flexibility between catholic present-day European and medieval Norwegian role models/ideals. That way, the pilgrimages become somewhat different from regular tourist travelling for recreational purposes only. The pilgrimage agents have experienced some difficulties to find appropriate locations for the medieval trails in the current landscape. The trails of Olav are land-based, while the trails of Sunniva to Selja are mostly carried out by boats over water.

The thesis uses a combination of a number of sources in the analysis. Printed sources are newspaper articles, maps, brochures, and guide leaflets but also hagiographic sources showing the saint cult and saint legends in the Middle Ages. The author has also been able to get plenty of information from the internet sites such as pilegrim.no, pilegrimsfelleskapet.no, pilegrimsleden.no, and sunnivaleia.no. These have more focus on the trails than on the pilgrimage destination. At the destination, the participants present their pilgrimage pass holding stamps received along the pilgrimage route, and get their final stamp upon arrival. To receive the St Olav letter at the Trondheim destination, the participants are required to have been hiking the ten last Scandinavian miles (100 km) on foot or covered the last 20 miles (200 km) by bike. Specific ceremonies at the pilgrimage destination take place at Olsok in Trondheim on July 29 and at a service on Selja Island on July 8. The July 8 ceremony is held in the memory of Saint Sunniva.

The author herself participated in parts of pilgrimage hiking tours both to Trondheim and Selja in 2019–2021. The COVID19-pandemic in 2020 and 2021 did somewhat hamper the field studies, though. And so they had to be postponed, thus deviating from the original plan. After careful consideration, the author has been more of an observer than a participant. "I carried no visual signifiers making me recognizable as a pilgrim," she says (p. 294). As a scientist, she wanted to keep a certain distance from the individuals being studied. I myself have taken a similar approach in field studies of folklore movements, although

a field worker can never be totally neutral. The scientist's interest in the field is an important driving force.

Alongside the observations, the author has interviewed a number of pilgrimage participants, both Lutherans and Catholics, primarily Norwegians, but also foreign participants, about their thoughts and experiences. This way a number of individual experiences are revealed rather than common views in the narratives. One individualistic trait stands out. The aspect of the experience regards the so-called inner journey versus the externally observed, dealing with, for example, the hiking rod, hat, and a pilgrimage logo on the backpack. Most of the author's interviews were with pilgrimage agents that had been planning the pilgrimage trails and centers. These interviews were mainly of an administrative kind.

Pilgrimage centers have emerged in the 21st century and have distributed information in the form of maps, brochures, and guidebooks. A national pilgrimage center has been established in Trondheim and also additional twelve centers along the pilgrimage trails. The Selje regional pilgrimage center was opened in 2020, as well as a corresponding center in Bergen. Both of them focus on the coastline trail to Selje, which was installed by Queen Sonja at the Selja-service on July 8, 2018. This trail has a special logo in the form of a Celtic cross with sea waves underneath.

During the field studies, the author recorded interviews, kept a field diary and was an active photographer. The photos taken have also been used for the scientific analysis and not just as illustrations. A digital list of questions, 2068 Pilegrimsvandringer, was produced by the Norsk Etnologisk Gransking (NEG – Norwegian Ethnological Research) archive in Oslo and was published on the website minner.no. This way 18 answers were collected.

The author has presented her methodological considerations and choice of methods in detail in her qualitative investigation – a so-called bricolage method or pluralism method based on a number of different categories of sources. The author has been well aware of the ethical aspects when gathering field material. Keeping interviewed individuals anonymous is common practice today. However, the author has, with the informants' consent, decided to make the names of the pilgrimage agents public. The reason for that was based on the idea that these individuals are already well known due to their public work in the pilgrimage communities. The pilgrimage hikers, on the other hand, are kept anonymous as are also those answering questions on the NEG's list of questions, 2068 Pilegrimsvandringer.

In her analysis the author carefully relates to the theoretical role models she is referring to in the introduction. Among those are, for example, anthropologists

Victor and Edith Turner, folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and sociologist Erving Goffman and his concept of "frame". The author takes great care to discuss definitions of the concepts she is using. The connection between theory and empirics in the thesis stands out.

The author can be considered to have carried out pioneering work in Nordic ethnological pilgrimage research regarding the recent development over the past decades. Sweden has undergone development parallel to that in Norway which remains to be investigated. This involves, among others, pilgrimages to Vadstena Monastery where the Holy Birgitta (Bridget of Sweden, 1303–1373) resided and where a present-day pilgrimage center can be found. Local pilgrimage trails have been established in Sweden in several places, using Olav's logo. The logo was approved in Norway in 1997 as a symbol for St Olav's hiking trails running towards Trondheim. Such trails also exist in Sweden, crossing the country border into Norway. In 1997 the pilgrimage trail between Olso and Trondheim was opened, when the latter celebrated its 1000th anniversary. In 2010 the St Olav's trails received status as one of the European cultural trails because of the fact that they run also outside Norway to the other Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Denmark. In Sweden I have studied modern-day pilgrimages in the charismatic Oas Movement that was established in the 1980s. These journeys have taken to Israel and to places related to St Paul the Apostle's New Testament journeys in present Turkey.

In German-language ethnology, investigations into pilgrimages in the Catholic areas in southern Germany, but also in Switzerland and Austria, go way longer back than in the North. In particular, ethnologists Wolfgang Brückner in Würzburg and Helge Gerndt in Munich, who I have been able to follow to investigated pilgrimage places, can be mentioned. The author of the thesis could have mentioned this research. Possibly the German language has presented a barrier for her, though.

To me, reading about hiking tours and journeys to the island of Selja with its church and monastery ruins is of special interest. I have vivid memories of an excursion which took place during the Nordic ethno-folklore congress in 1975 in Nordfjord, Norway, located around 60 kilometers away from Selja. The excursion participants were fascinated by the stories about Selja and Saint Sunniva told by the excursion guide, professor of folklore in Oslo, Olav Bø. He himself had presented his doctoral thesis on Saint Olav in 1955, based on the way this individual is pictured in Nordic narrative tradition. Thus, our excursion in 1975 took place long before the pilgrimages to Selja started in the 2010s.

The text in the thesis is significantly detailed, resulting in quite a few reiterations. Nothing is left to chance in the argumentation, pointing to the

carefulness of the author. The thesis was originally written in Norwegian and then translated into English. The text reads easily and effortlessly. The author has gone the extra mile to help Norwegian readers to do a critical review by providing notes in Norwegian of translated Norwegian citations. The thesis has an extensive number of notes, also including discussions, which is unusual today in doctoral theses in Nordic ethnology / cultural history.

I would also like to mention a formal aspect regarding readability. Presenting notes in small-size letters and with a single line spacing comes across as a disadvantage. It could give the reader the impression that what is stated in this hard-to-read style is of less importance. A thesis is primarily written for a scientific audience, so all that is written is equally important for the critical reader.

In summary it can be said that it was inspiring to read this deliberately written thesis, and it can be recommended as an important research contribution to cultural history and ethno-folkloristics.

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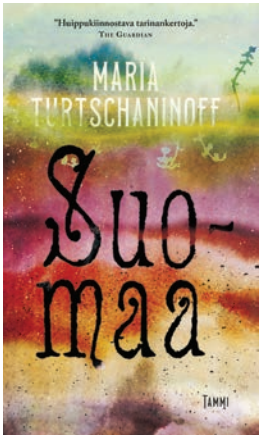
BOOK REVIEW



FOUR CENTURIES WITH THE MIRE: MARIA TURTCHANINOFF'S GENERATIONAL NOVEL UNRAVELS THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HUMANS AND NATURE

Maria Turtschaninoff. *Suomaa*. Translated by Sirkka-Liisa Sjöblom. Helsinki: Tammi, 2022. 371 pp. In Finnish.

This review dives into Maria Turtschaninoff's (b. 1977) novel *Suomaa* (Mire Land, 2022). The novel focuses on Finnish nature, and especially on its many mires. Especially, *Suomaa* deals with the cultural, spiritual, and utilitarian relationship between humans and nature. Turtschaninoff is an award-winning Finnish-Swedish writer, and was born in Finnish Ostrobothnia – the county in which the action of *Suomaa* takes place. The rights of the novel have been sold to over 15 countries, so the story has been a success. The original Swedish name of the novel is *Arvejord*, which means inherited land.

Finland is certainly a land of mires since 1.8 million ha (28%) of its land area is covered by them (Virtanen 2008: 29). Literally, *Suomaa* means the land of mires. In the Finnish language, Finland itself is called *Suomi*, and while the etymology is not entirely clear, one explanation could be through the word *suo,* which means mire (Kulonen 2000). This book review focuses on the elements of Finnish folklore that are linked to mires, but also touches upon surrounding contrasts that relate to the mire, the most important of which is the one between Christianity and folk beliefs (Sarmela 2009: 20–21). The novel comprises five episodes set in different eras all the way from the seventeenth century to the present day. Each episode delves into the relationships of the people living on the Nevabacka family farm, which is a fictional location in Finnish Ostrobothnia.

Mires are an important part of Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala* (Lönnrot 1849), so their cultural significance is rather indisputable. The runes of the *Kalevala* present Finnish mythology and folklore, such as shamanistic acts and human encounters with the supernatural. In the runes, the mire is, for example, the setting for a competition between the two wizards, Väinämöinen and Jouka-

hainen, in which the older one sings the younger one into the mire. Mires also play an important role in the first part of Väinö Linna's Finnish literary classic trilogy *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* (Under the North Star) (1959), in which the opening line introduces a solitary man clearing a mire with a hoe to gain land for agriculture. This work-filled description of the history of the Finns has been irrevocably imprinted into the collective memory of Finns, and as a contemporary work, Turtschaninoff's novel illuminates both Finland's mythology and history with the mires and interprets how the human-nature relationship has changed throughout the centuries.

The relationship between the Nevabacka mire and the central characters of the novel (both humans and supernatural beings) is quite complex. The author presents the mire as a scene for many supernatural encounters, both platonic and sexual. Right from the seventeenth-century opening of the novel, the inhabitants of Nevabacka have had a deep respect towards the mire, and the supernatural creatures or so-called "forest people" living in it. According to Finnish folk beliefs, supernatural beings control different parts of nature. So, if one wants something from nature (for example, from the forest, lake, or mire), they must ask permission from a natural spirit controlling the area, or otherwise their plans will fail (Sarmela 2009: 424–425). Accordingly, for some of the characters in the novel the mire is a commodity, while for others it is a place that simply attracts them with its magic.

Living with the Mire

The Nevabacka family consists of many different people with different ages and roles, like hosts and hostesses, soldiers, and priests. The viewpoint taken in the novel changes considerably, but all of the stories of the protagonists link closely together. The mire near the Nevabacka farm is simultaneously a center of attention, and also a hidden power that guides the lives of the Nevabackans. The relationship with nature is strongly connected to the mire, which offers people benefits, but also requires plenty of work. That is the main lesson that is learnt by the local people living near the mire. The mire offers, for example, possibilities for farming, and provides a safe place for some residents. Some of them have a special relationship with the mire, and they retreat to the mire when they feel like being alone or seeking shelter. But when people exploit the mire selfishly, without any respect for it, the mire takes its revenge. One example of this is when a first-generation Nevabackan soldier named Matts drains the mire in the hope of turning it into a field for farming. The mire protects itself

in the form of a supernatural forest lady who enchants Matts and bears him a baby boy. Thus, the Christian man and the wild forest lady form a forbidden alliance. Later, as Matts proceeds to drain the mire, he realizes the mire will not surrender very easily. This moment captures the reader, and when the forest lady takes the child all for herself, this is seen as an act of revenge by the mire. Matts realizes he has made a big mistake, and this can be seen as an attempt to represent a need to achieve a balanced coexistence between human activity and the mire. This balance consists of mutual respect, with both parties treating each other with care. But it also carries a warning that if one party breaks this balance, there will be consequences.

In the book this is a symbolic scene, since during the seventeenth century, Christianity strictly banned the practices of folk religion, which it considered to be superstitious. However, people still took part in them, usually in secret. The alliance between Matts and the forest lady also discloses a sexual connection with nature. The mire has a power to reveal one's deepest desires, but in Matts' case, his intentions to drain the mire are stopped by the forest lady. Thus, in this context their alliance can be seen as a form of resistance against the church which tries to erase the elements of folk religion. But it also brings attention to the power relationships between humans and nature, and Matts' willingness to benefit from or dominate the mire changes into a feeling of desire towards it.

In the novel, the human is seen as rather greedy when it comes to the mire, or to nature in general. There are characters who cherish the mire, but some see it simply as a commodity. The greed is also connected to real life, as some of the Finnish mires have been harnessed for the benefit of Finnish economy in a variety of ways – especially those connected with agriculture and forestry (see Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland). Even today, many people have fears concerning mires, such as a fear of sinking. These fears may not be connected with supernatural matters as before, and in Turtschaninoff's novel's modern day the fear is more linked to uncertainty and not really to understanding the surrounding nature. However, there is still curiosity and an element of yearning towards nature, and one example in the novel is a character called Stina – a twenty-first-century Nevabackan who considers selling some of the forests surrounding the family farm. Stina is described as a clueless city-dweller, but she still feels a connection towards Nevabacka and the surrounding nature, because it reminds her of permanence in an ever-changing world. Even though the familiar nature is not always present, it is in her heart. So, as a reflective element, the modern complexity of one's relationship with nature is quite well personalized in Stina's character.

Humans' Eclectic Relationship with Nature

In the novel, even the most devout Christians are aware of the mire's mythic character. One example of this is a chaplain who ends up in Nevabacka during the Great Northern War. Although he is a man of God, he becomes enchanted by the mire, and in the narrative it seems as if the mire releases the chaplain from his prejudices concerning folk traditions and beliefs. After eating the food offered by the forest people, he becomes free from the strict shackles of Christianity and gets closer to nature. Christianity has separated the chaplain from nature and its supernatural wonders, but now he is free to find joy not only in faith but also in nature. Nature can be viewed as a place of sanctity, and one can experience it as something that is somehow holy. In her dissertation, folklorist Kirsi Laurén describes that this sort of experiential relationship is one way of understanding the mire: namely that the mire is not merely a material commodity – it can also be an experience that gifts one with spiritual liberation (Laurén 2006: 152). Thus, in the book the chaplain's new relationship with the mire emphasizes both the cultural and spiritual significance of our mires.

Turtschaninoff describes the mire as being its own entity, full of secrets, practices, and laws. The mire is a whole other reality that clashes with the Christian community around it. The author has captured this complex relationship by drawing on folk beliefs. These beliefs include, for example, gifting butter and other goods to the forest people in the hope of good luck and safety. In addition, death is shown in the book in the form of a black woodpecker, and this motif pops up throughout the novel. Also, the feature of a rowan tree pops up here and there, and it has been seen as a holy tree and an exorcist of evil spirits in Finno-Ugric folklore (see Rowan). All of these things are well known amongst the Nevabackans, but they really do not talk about them because of their fear of the church. Christianity and folk beliefs therefore exist simultaneously, and this has an impact on the Nevabackans' relationship with nature. Later in the novel, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Christianity does not have the same weighting, and nor does folk religion – with both losing their meaning in everyday life. Earlier Christianity prevented people (Christians) from communicating with nature in superstitious ways, but for some, folk beliefs enabled a joyful connection with nature. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, people were also seen to slowly diverge from nature in the sense that the nature which surrounded them became unfamiliar to them.

In the last episode of the novel, which takes place in the twenty-first century, there is a list of instructions made by an older Nevabackan for the modern-day residents. One of them is that one must not cut down the rowan in the yard,

as it would mean bad luck. So even if the reader is not familiar with Finnish folklore, they will possibly learn to follow the folkloric codes that are woven into Turtschaninoff's story. The last episode of the novel especially captures how our relationship with nature has changed over the centuries. For example, the modern Nevabackans do not recognize different types of plants or animals without using their smartphones. Although this could be seen as something entirely negative, it somehow feels that the smartphones and plant-identifying apps are a way for modern people to restore this lost connection and become familiar with the surrounding nature again. Of course, the connection changes if it is filtered through the screen of a mobile device. But, on the other hand, in the previous centuries there were other factors – such as religion – that distinguished us from nature, which leaves a feeling that maybe there will always be some sort of mystery, but some people will always hear the enchanting call of nature.

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vol. 89

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