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7 LOSS OF ENDEMIC KARELIAN LAND USE: PAANAJÄRVI AND THE WAR OF 2022

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Introduction: A short history of Paanajärvi

The Russian-Ukraine war has had tremendous impact on all forms of scholarly and people-to-people interaction in the North. While these are secondary compared to the horrors and tragedies brought by the war to the citizens of Ukraine, the war has altered the framework of collaboration, cultural context, and established communication networks developed during the post-Soviet Era. Therefore, documenting new cultural complexities and assessing the effect of the War are important tasks for the international polar community in a time of crisis. This article explores one of such "project on hold" – a study of the largely unknown cultural and traditional land use practices and associated histories of the Karelian community of Paanajärvi, located in the White Sea cultural area in the Republic of Karelia, Russia (Virtanen 1950; Björn 1991; Kokkonen 2005; Sarmela 2007; Lavonen and Nieminen 2008). The Karelians are considered a national minority in Russia. Approximately 60,000 Karelians live in the territory of the Russian Federation (Lavonen and Nieminen 2008; Rugojev 2009; Minority Rights 2023).

The community of Paanajärvi has undergone several transformative periods and events over the past 120 years, from the period of the short-lived Karelian "autonomy," during which it largely determined its own pathways (see Virtanen 1950, Björn 1991, Kokkonen 2005, Sarmela 2007) to the arrival of the Soviet rule and of the Great Terror of the 1930s (Lehtinen 2009), the Second World War, industrialization, the end of the Cold War, the following era of supported re-traditionalization-revitalisation and, most recently, a period characterized by the active outmigration (Nieminen 2023).

This article explores the community history using the theoretical framework of the "endemic existence" (Mustonen 2014), an approach that presumes the existence of unique and/or preserved biocultural systems (Berkes 1999), or, at the least, the remnants of such systems. We believe it is applicable to Paanajärvi, since the community is often cited as the "earliest known village" in the White Sea Karelian cultural area (Nieminen 2023). The concept of endemic cultural knowledge is supported here by the examination of oral histories collected from two highly respected knowledge holders, cousins Risto Dementyev and Teppo Dementyev, as well as via interviews and textual materials from other people involved in the re-traditionalization/revitalisation efforts that took place roughly from the 1990s to 2022. I frame these revitaliza-

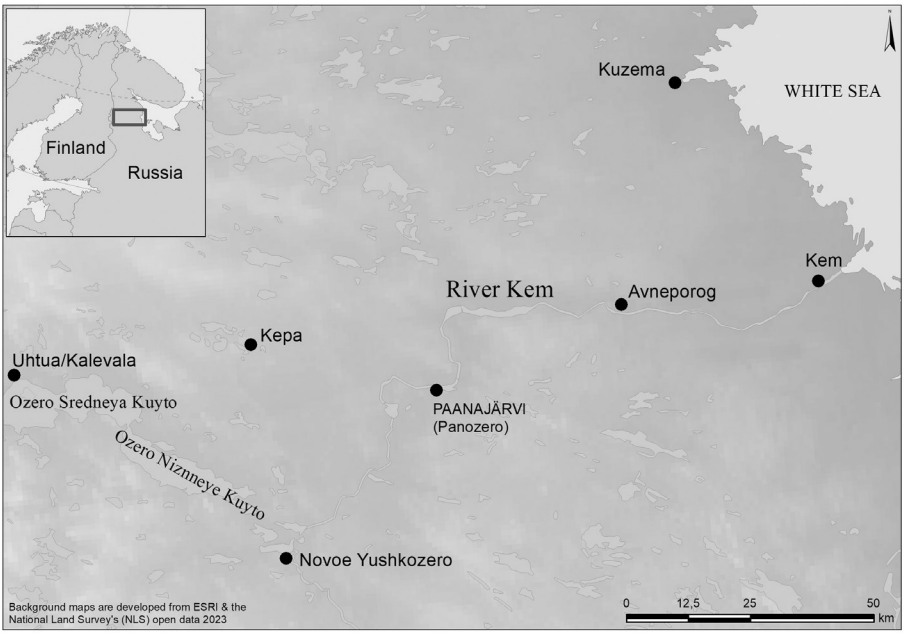

Fig. 1 Paanajärvi in White Sea Karelia.

tion efforts in the context of a forced restructuring of the traditional spatial, temporal (Tuan 2004), and land-based arrangements ("orders") that the people of Paanajärvi had prior to the 1930s. Central to these land-based orders were what Huntington and others (2017) defined as "autonomous response spaces." In the case of Paanajärvi, such spaces involve the ways the community was able to produce means of well-being, survival, customary law and culture – mainly through fisheries, hunting, small-scale farming and reindeer herding – on its own terms.

Paanajärvi and the village cultural complex have been largely absent in academic literature (see Siikala 1994). With the start of the Russian-Ukraine War in 2022, all possibilities to conduct research in the community have been effectively stalled. Closure of the Finnish-Russian border in fall 2023 created physical barriers that made any crossings from outside of Russia impossible.

Paanajärvi (in Russian *Паноzеро*, Panozero, in White Sea Karelian *Puanajärvi*) has been a site of human occupancy since the last Ice Age. The earliest information on the inhabitants of Paanajärvi area are from Finnish archaeologist J. W. Juvelius, who discovered Stone Age habitation in the Valkeakoski rapids area in 1886 (Nieminen 2008).

The present-day village of Paanajärvi was prior to the 1400s a Forest Sámi winter village called Päännijäur (Mattsson 2018). According to his interpretation, the *siida*,

or Sámi traditional territory, associated with Päännijäur would have covered a northeast-southwest stretch of waters and lands from present-day Kuittijärvi to the Kemi River. The present day village of Paanajärvi would have been a seasonal center (winter village) of the *siida* (Aikio 1992).

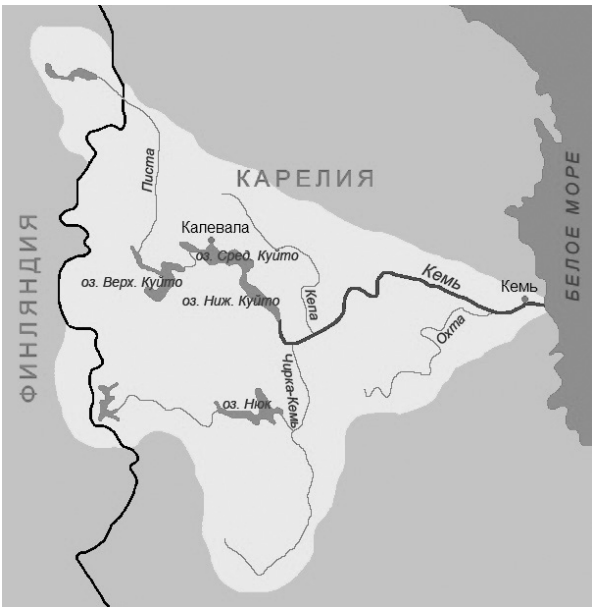

Fig. 2 Kemi river basin.

During the Viking Age Paanajärvi was at a crossroads of Scandinavian and Byzantine trading routes (Nieminen 2008). Though documentation efforts in the region during the 1800s were scarce, Paanajärvi has associations with the Kalevala epic poetry tradition (Kemppinen and Nieminen 2008). Paanajärvi was an important cultural location known to Finnish Kalevala scholars of the 1800s, such as I. K. Inha and D. E. Europeus (Lavonen and Nieminen 2008).

The earliest records of Kemi River fisheries go back to the 1400s. Sources from 1459 mentioned land use practices in which "forest lakes" formed a part of the seasonal round and could be rented and traded. Kemi basin taxation documents from the mid-1400s featured individuals who owned lakes and indicated that inheritance of fishing rights was passed down through families. Records of the "Forest Sámi" living in the Kemi basin prior to the arrival of Karelians can be found in the old Russian documents (Virtanen 1950).

The community was referred to as the "oldest" village in the region in several sources (Virtanen 1950). The Karelian population first moved to Paanajärvi from Yushkozero (Jyskyjärvi) and Soposalmi villages.

The Church of Eliah the Prophet is the central monument of Paanajärvi. It is associated with the celebration of the Day of Eliah on 2 August. The Church was first established in 1596; full construction was completed by 1624 (Kapusta and Orfinsky 2008). A local legend recounts how a villager named Motan Malovets went to Kyiv on foot to acquire the necessary building materials for the new church, which later burned down in 1660.

In 1879 Paanajärvi had roughly 64 houses. In 1905, according to the official census, the village had 73 houses and 427 inhabitants. At that time, the Paanajärvi district included eight other villages, with a total population of 1,029 people. Over the next 150 years, the population has dropped dramatically.

Year	Registered population	Year	Registered population
1879	427	2010	59
2000	100	2013	52
2002	89	2023	30*
2009	56		

Fig. 3 Paanajärvi Population Change, 1879–2023. (* Summer population doubling the community size between June and September).

The district's first road opened in 1929 (Nieminen 2008). In the early 1930s a collective farm (kolkhoz) was founded in Paanajärvi, ushering in the era of Soviet collective life (Pozdnyak 2008). Most of the village's men were forcibly removed from the community at the end of the 1930s, during the era of Stalin's "Great Terror." This resulted in tremendous damage to the structure and functionality of the village. This period of male depopulation and cultural repression also brought the loss of Karelian festivities and traditions. Rugojev (2009: 610) called these years a time of "death and de-population" of Karelian villages.

Plans for large-scale hydropower development threatened the village from the 1970s to the early 2000s (Nieminen 2008). Dozens of communities were flooded in the White Sea Karelia area under the Soviet-era hydropower development in the mid-1900s. In preparation for the proposed relocation of the inhabitants of Paanajärvi, the authorities built a timber village of "New Paanajärvi" in 1967. However, while hydroelectric development plans led its construction, the dam and subsequent flooding of the original village never materialized. The original village and its Karelian houses remain. Our study focused on this "original" Paanajärvi settlement.

At the end of the Cold War the Finland-based Juminkeko Foundation enacted a programme for the revitalization of Karelian traditions, folklore and village life that lasted until 2022 (Lavonen and Nieminen 2008; Nieminen 2023). The benefit of this "thaw" in relations between Russia and the West in the early 1990s enabled cooperation on important projects of revitalization and documentation in the region that had been divided in two by the international border at the end of the Finno-Soviet War in 1944. The revitalization attempts should be also understood as a mechanism that was motivated by Karelian cultural unity and collaboration across a border created by two nation-states on a minority culture's homeland. Several scholars stressed the importance of the village's well-preserved Karelian architecture, arguing that it makes Paanajärvi worthy of recognition by the UNESCO (Grishina and Orfinsly 2008).

Fig. 4 A view of traditional houses and the island in Paanajärvi, 2006.

Ecologically Paanajärvi is located in the boreal forest region, a landscape characterized by peatlands, old-growth Scots Pine and spruce forests. The "soul" of it is the Kemi River, which flows east to the White Sea. The river is 191 km long; its basin is 27,700 square kilometers. In the western part of the basin, a large iron ore deposit was developed into one of Russia's largest mining and processing plants in the city of Kostamuksha. Environmental discharges from the plant have had a negative impact on the upstream reaches of the Kemi water system.

In its natural state the river had more than twenty rapids, but during the Soviet time, five hydropower stations were constructed along the river course (Mustonen 2006). Of the five stations, the Krivoporozhskaya hydroelectric power station (HPP) is the closest to Paanajärvi. This hydroelectric station was constructed between 1974–1991, with the Krivoporozhskoe reservoir built to supply water for the powerplant. Krivoporozhskaya HPP is a part of TGC-1 PJSC (Mustonen 2006), the leading producer of electricity and heat in the northwest region of Russia.

Before the construction of these stations, the Kemi River had an Atlantic salmon stream run (Nieminen 2023), but this iconic species has been lost from the upper parts of the basin due to hydropower development that blocked the fish migration routes. Other fish species in the Kemi River at present include brown trout, pike, perch, roach, ide, bream, whitefish, vendace and smelt.

Studying Paanajärvi historical landscapes

The histories and endemic land uses ("time-spaces" – Mustonen 2014) of Paanajärvi emerge through the analysis of several types of narrative material. The first sources are oral histories collected from the community's most knowledgeable elders: cousins Risto Dementyev (1933–2010) and Teppo Dementyev (1935–mid-2010s, exact date unknown). Both men maintained their cultural fisheries, hunting practices and memories of the self-organization of the traditional activities on the land until their deaths. I recorded these oral histories in the 2000s, during research visits to Paanajärvi. Interviews and exchanges took place on the ice, while fishing with Risto, and while participating in meals prepared from the catches. This paper also draws on interviews and written statements from people involved in Paanajärvi's re traditionalization-revitalization efforts from 1991 to 2022 (see summaries in Lavonen and Nieminen 2008; Nieminen 2023). Previous studies of Karelian traditional knowledge, culture and hunting-fishing societies have not focused on Paanajärvi (Björn 1991; Kokkonen 2005; Sarmela 2007).

The oral history samples selected for this paper explore the main themes of traditional, endemic land uses: the transmission of traditional knowledge, specific knowledge associated with cultural fisheries (e.g., fish traps, seining, harpooning), endemic distribution of rights of harvest and access, salmon fisheries (now extinct in Paanajärvi), numbers and quality of fish; tenure and system of hunting; the role of European brown bear as a hunted species; animals as sentient beings; observations of starlore; weather and climate change; and, lastly, dreams and traditional healing practices. I used digital MP3 recorders to record these oral histories and produced written transcripts in the White Sea Karelian dialect, which I reviewed with both men to ensure accuracy. Archives at the Juminkeko Foundation in Kuhmo, Finland provided supplementary contextual information, as did certain historical documents. Virtanen's study of the fishing communities in Eastern Karelia (Virtanen 1950) provided extensive documentation of historic land uses, especially in relation to fisheries in Russian Karelia. The earliest records of Karelian fisheries from the 1400s pointed to the important role of salmon rivers that flow into the White Sea. Early settlement records also referred to whitefish-spawning rivers. Russian archival sources mentioned the village for the first time in 1582-88 (Nieminen 2008).

This study assessed these and other relevant materials in the context of the forced restructuring of Paanajärvi's temporal, spatial and cultural orders through the years of collectivization, Stalin's Terror, the Second World War, industrialization, and the (failed) revitalization efforts of the post-Cold War era (Pozdnyak 2008). Methodologically, I assessed the autonomous response space and preservation/loss of the elements of endemic lifeways (Mustonen 2014) to understand the significance of Paanajärvi's failed revitalization during the era of unprecedented cultural and environmental change in the Russian North.

Traditional knowledge of Paanajärvi

Aspects of traditional knowledge from Paanajärvi are reported in a range of Russian and Finnish sources, from taxation documents of the 1400s-1500s to the revitalization period of the 2000s. These sources discussed the vital role of the village as a cultural landscape and a repository for the development and reproduction of Karelian traditions. They named certain famous historic individuals, such as Uoti Vasilyev, a "witch doctor" from the community who narrated many mythical stories to visiting Finnish scholars in 1889.

Konkka (2008a) reported on several expeditions by Russian scholars, such as David A. Zolotarev (1885–1935), who spent time in the community in the 1920s. A large corpus of ethnographic photographs and notes from these expeditions has been preserved in the Russian archives. When we position Paanajärvi culture into a regional (Fennoscandian) context, we may determine some special points of interest. For example, traditional knowledge associated with waters and life beings in the water has been preserved in the community until modern times (cf. Lavonen and Nieminen 2008). This highlights the deep significance of the Kemi River, which is so vital to the community. Konkka (2008b) also stressed the role of *karsikko*, pine trees, as a system of remembrance and connectivity central to the elements of ritual life of Paanajärvi. Karsikko traditions have not been documented from the Russian part of Karelia.

Endemic elements of Paanajärvi knowledge

Positioning Paanajärvi knowledge and endemic cultural practices in academic literature is not easy. The Karelians have a history of continuous occupation of the region from the 1400s to the present (people of other ethnic backgrounds, such as Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians, also live in the community today). Karelian occupants speak the White Sea Karelian language that many community members often call the best means of conveying endemic or specific knowledge of their culture.

The assembled oral history corpus highlights the role of hunting and fisheries as central components of a Karelian continuum in Paanajärvi. Agricultural practices and other folklore traditions from Paanajärvi are considered to be an amalgamation of Russian and Karelian cultural practices and are not discussed at length here (see Pozdnyak 2008).

The old cosmological-shaman poetry was present in the Karelian oral tradition, worldview and culture, as documented in 1800s. Its presence in the oral history corpus of Risto Dementyev and Teppo Dementyev can be seen mostly in their discussion of hunting and fishing practices. Risto clearly conveys the indivisible nature of poetry, shamanism and land-uses (original oral history segments are presented here as translated cultural texts):

> The old people always sang when they went seining. They sang all sorts of *runo* (*epic poetry – author)* whilst seining.

Risto's testimony reveals that in his youth, spanning the 1920s and 1930s, the old people associated the collective seine fishery with the need to sing. He remembered that his father, also named Risto and born around 1904, stressed that the Paanajärvi community had existed for centuries due to inhabitants' ability to maintain "good relations with the forest." These good relations manifested themselves in dreams of the animals that were hunted:

> […] My father saw things in dreams. When he saw them in dreams, he would receive European Pine Marten (Martes martes) the next morning. He would say: Boy let 's head to the forest now. We can say he had so-called 'forest blood.'

On the question of dreams and hunting his cousin Teppo stated that "*you are shown the things for tomorrow's hunt in dreams. I am shown that. I follow it*."

Risto remembered that the old people could predict weather month-by-month. Risto associated this traditional, endemic knowledge of Paanajärvi with "being a man of the forest." This was a gendered term, even though there is no gender division in the White Sea Karelian language.

Fig. 5 Teppo Dementyev (left) and Markku Nieminen from Juminkeko Foundation during the oral history documentation, 2006.

Reciprocal exchange and thanksgiving were a vital part of the cosmological knowledge (Siikala 1994), or "deeper layers" of knowing, as defined by Berkes (1999), that were part of Teppo and Risto's world. As Risto shared:

> You are a forest man when you thank the lake after receiving a fish. Always be thankful. When catching a bear, equally so, always be thankful, thank the forest. You need to be thankful for that spot of the forest where you received the catch.

Risto believed that most of the endemic Karelian names for stars have been lost, assimilated into Russian names, such as *Bolshaia Medveditsa*, meaning the Great Bear, in English, the Big Dipper. The stars, in particular the North Star, were used for navigation and timekeeping. Teppo mentioned that he had heard northern lights (aurora) making sounds, the fact proven scientifically (Ravillious 2023; YLE 2016). Teppo also emphasized the role of the moon in animal behavior. Hunters observed that the full moon was an important time to go into the forest.

In the oral history corpus, the statements which offer the greatest insight into remaining "mythic" knowledge were those in which animals were seen as sentient and knowledgeable beings. For example, Risto mentioned that:

> Fish know. They know the weather, everything. Also the animals in the forest. When a bear is looking for its den for the winter, it knows which is the warm and which is the cold side. All animals have knowledge. The forest grouse go and dive into the snow to keep warm. They know.

Lavonen and Nieminen (2008) name famous historic individuals such as Uoti Vasilyev who were masters of the taiga knowledge that had been present in Paanajärvi in the late 1800s. Teppo and Risto's oral histories referenced individuals who knew plants, especially the uses of berries. Additionally, they alluded to individuals still with "powers" to heal people using the sauna. These individuals and their powers were not discussed openly, however.

Traditional land use: fisheries and hunting

In the context of Paanajärvi, the "autonomous response space" (Huntington et al. 2017), or endemic relations to the river and forest (Mustonen 2014), manifest themselves through spatio-temporal organization of hunting and fisheries. They constitute what Berkes (1999) identifies as building blocks of traditional knowledge and the basis of land use patterns and practices.

Paanajärvi men made trading trips to Finland from the 1700s to the 1920s. This meant that women stepped in and were also seasonally actively involved in the fisheries of Paanajärvi in the "traditional times of the 1890s" (Virtanen 1950). In the early 1900s, the villagers of Paanajärvi gill-netted salmon in a stretch of the river that started at Lammaskoski rapids (located approximately five kilometers from the village) and stretched 30 kilometers downstream (Virtanen 1950: 22). A court complaint

from 1824 points to the established rights and uses of the salmon river and agreed harvesting spots.

According to Virtanen (1950), the salmon fishery in Paanajärvi usually began in mid-September and lasted six weeks, until the end of October. People harvesting salmon with gill nets would also go out at night to harpoon salmon, using birch bark fires for light. One communal fishery (in Russian *tonia*) technique that involved the entire village relied on the use of a dam 30–40 meters wide. In seining and gill-netting, the role of rotational rights and access were determined by the village. In Paanajärvi the head of the village, *starosta*, called a meeting where the rights to seining would be determined through oral agreements. A draw would take place using sticks of various lengths. The person who pulled the shortest stick would get the sites closest to the village, and so on.

The division of the rapids in the Kemi River was based on specific harvesting locations (*paikka*), which were divided using natural markers such as stones, rivulets, large trees, and so on (Virtanen 1950:76). All harvesting spots were on the left bank. Altogether, five fishing locations could be found along the Lammaskoski rapids. Each *paikka* was about one to two kilometers long. Rights to harvest could be decided by the community meeting or through a draw. Each spot was then allocated to a specific fishing crew for that season (see Virtanen 1950:77, citing Jakobson's data from 1911, for harvesting spots in the early 1900s).

Seasonal huts on the paikka were reflective of the cycles of harvesting. Virtanen (1950) points to the concept of *kevätys-kevättämä* – spring lakes and rivers. A typical seasonal hut consisting of round Scots Pine logs had no chimney, a roof made from planks and was occupied by two to eight people (Virtanen 1950). Non-associated owners could also stay in the hut, as the place was shared. The spring fishery was carried out with seines, traps and gill nets, depending on the wealth of the house and individual. In the context of White Sea Karelia, older men led the *kevätys* spring harvest, as younger men were undertaking trading trips to Finland.

Traditional spring harvesting activities could take place up to 25 kilometers from the main village on forest lakes. Activity started towards the end of April and lasted six to seven weeks. Pike, perch, roach, and ide constituted important catch species. Spring travel could happen with horses, skis or by walking. The return to the village in early June was done with boats. According to Virtanen (1950), some people in the early 1900s conducted their *kevättämä* fishery close to the village, at a distance of just one to three kilometers. The spring harvest could consist of 30 nets and 35 fish traps (Virtanen 1950).

The word *korko* specifically means gill net locations around rocky parts of the lake for the purpose of catching whitefish. Customary law defined the way the nets were used at the site and who had the rights to use them. The seining close to Paanajärvi took place in Lake Ponkamajärvi, where people from three villages gathered to seine (Virtanen 1950). The pulling sites, apaja, were named according to weather, fish and

aquatic conditions. The catch was divided based on the ownership proportions of a seine or sometimes by a draw.

Risto mentioned during our interviews that "fish traps were mostly made from young spruce in the old times." These traps were mostly used in the small forest lakes. He explained the customary rules that governed fishing: prior to the 1930s the entire village decided and divided the catch places "together." Once a harvesting place had been allocated, others could not come there during the season.[1] He also specifically mentioned the *korko*, the whitefish net locations identified by Virtanen (1950). However, Risto used this concept to point to the household locations along the rapids and the river.

In reference to the *korko* sites, Teppo added that three to four households could use the same site/s, but outsiders were not allowed access. He described that villagers had specific names and ways of behaving at different parts of the rapids. These names, according to Teppo, were sometimes associated with people's names. He noted that the first *korko* downstream of the main village was called "Women's korko." Other examples of *korko* names he shared include *Metsonkorko* ("Capercaillie/wood grouse" fishing spot) and *Jyrinkorko* (Jyrki's fishing spot).

Salmon featured prominently in both Risto and Teppo's oral histories. Both men recalled how salmon were harpooned by using the light of burning birchbark. According to them, between the 1930s to 1950s, prior to the building of the Krivoporozhskaya hydroelectric power station, fish catches were high. Trout has rarely been caught more recently. Risto remembered that seining was carried out with 50-meter seines.

Hunting was a central part of Teppo's youth. Even during his school years he hunted, always going to the forest. In line with Virtanen's account (1950), Teppo described the system of using huts – *metsäpirtti* – in the forest during these trips:

> There were many *metsäpirtti* – forest huts. You could stay there for a couple of nights and check animal tracks or the trapline. Each family had their own hut and each family had their own lake where they fished. It was also possible for two houses to go together and use the same hut. They would also be fishing in the spring (*kevättämä*). They would salt the fish and get them with horses in the wintertime. Now all of these huts have fallen apart. They are all rotten.

Both Risto and Teppo identified the enforced imposition of the collective farm system as a key historical moment. Teppo said that it meant the end of the "old systems" of hunting and fishing:

> With the war ending those that had been able to survive, hunted. Then the kolkhoz came and took all the people in. Until that time all people hunted and fished. When the kolkhoz came the old system ended.

1 Risto implied that hay gathering areas would be divided in the same manner.

The most important endemic land uses preserved in the oral histories of Teppo and Risto were the knowledge and understanding of the *korko* fisheries and the *metsäpirtti* hunting huts in the forest. Teppo was still able to convey lived experience of how the sharing of fishing resources was carried out in practice by the community, reflecting notions of autonomous response spaces (cf. Huntington et al. 2017). His knowledge was fully in line with the data that Virtanen (1950) has been able to extract from historical sources focused on Karelia in the early 1900s.

The use of seasonal huts in the forest and on the lakes around Panaajärvi were comparable to the seasonal land use across the northern taiga and Arctic region, including to the land use and occupancy practices of the Khanty of Siberia, and the Innu, Gwich'in, and other boreal First Nations of North America. Both Teppo and Risto stressed on multiple occasions that each family/household owned and used their own territory and lakes, implying that these were customarily owned.

Risto mentioned that in the past winters were "dry and with long frosty spells." Both men noted that this changed significantly during their lifetimes; they observed that winters and autumns in the 2000s had warmed appreciably. Whilst not directly a focus of the oral history, climate change featured prominently in Risto and Teppo's testimonies.

They also observed changes to the ecosystems surrounding Paanajärvi. They attributed these changes, in large part, to the construction of hydropower stations and, more recently, large scale timber harvesting:

> We needed to look for the forest now. It was all cut down recently. All around us it was cut down. Now we have to walk long distances to be able to hunt capercaillie.

These knowledgeable men linked ecosystem changes and industrialization to the loss of biodiversity and natural resources that were plentiful in their youth. Their oral histories point to the ways in which Paanajärvi's self-organized land use and occupancy were severely affected during the Soviet era. Despite these impacts, the practice and memories of endemic acts of engagement with the Kemi River and the boreal forest emerged clearly from Risto and Teppo's narratives. Most importantly, their narratives demonstrated the fundamental difference in the value systems underpinning recent forestry and hydropower development fromt those underpinning the traditional life-ways of Paanajärvi people, which supported the village's ability to self-regulate its endemic relations with forest, lakes, rivers and living, sentient animal species.

Lehtinen (2009) raised the question of environmental justice and equity as a central component of climate solutions in northern ecosystems. In this context, the annexation of natural resources and repression of traditional practices by the Soviet state, via the imposition of collective farm economy, was an unlawful act that deprived the communities like Paanajärvi of their traditional ownership models and capacity to maintain endemic lifeways.

The re-traditionalization-revitalization efforts, 1991–2022

The oral history work with Risto and Teppo took place in the context of a unique era that may be called "re-traditionalization-revitalization." Revitalization in this context refers to efforts made by villagers and the Juminkeko Foundation to foster the comeback of village-based culture and work processes, and to rebuild and renew the heritage of Paanajärvi. Coinciding with this were actions in "re-traditionalization," defined as efforts to enable a return to seasonal land uses, the rebirth of village means of self-transport (boats and skis), and narrations of Paanajärvi's histories, both internally and to a wider audience of Finnish tourists and scholars. Taken together these actions can be seen as attempts to re-member and re-attach the people to the wider socio-ecological landscape of Paanajärvi that have taken place in earnest between 1991 and 2022.

Lavonen and Nieminen (2008) developed a large collection of different social and cultural initiatives and texts that summarize these actions at around the mid-point of the re-traditionalization-revitalization process. Reading their collected accounts, one gets a sense of a hopeful, if uncertain, future. Sometimes in a hopeless context, extraordinary efforts, such as in Paanajärvi, can enable a breakthrough if not interrupted by outside forces.

Nieminen (2023) names the employment of 10 local people through the year as one of the main achievements from the period. Most of the men employed gained new skills in carpentry, restoration of buildings and boat building. Women trained in weaving and Karelian traditional handicrafts, including ceramics. A local shop reopened. Three completely new houses, in traditional pine-log style, were constructed in the village, and all houses in the old Paanajärvi village were restored to some extent. In 1999 a sawmill opened, which was used to build boats and saunas and other buildings for export to Finland, to earn income for the villagers. Risto and Teppo hosted Finnish cultural tourists, produced handicrafts, and reaped some financial benefits from the revitalization era.

Nieminen (2023) points out that as long as the projects designed to support the revitalization efforts continued, these processes were alive. However, no individual took it upon themselves to form independent businesses that drew on new physical and cultural assets delivered by these projects, so that all operations ultimately ended. Many of the men trained during this period moved to the towns of Kostamuksha and Petrozavodsk in search of better-paying jobs.

A bright spot of these years was ethno-cultural tourism that brought support to the village (Nieminen 2023). Teppo conveyed similar visions:

> So few young people stayed in the village, as they had no work. All the youth goes to town. There is no forest work either, and hunting has no role as so much has been logged.

As of 2023, the era of re-traditionalization-revitalization efforts has mostly ended in failure. Paanajärvi has not been reborn as a Karelian village re-associated with its immediate natural surroundings and traditional means of production. This failure can to some extent be explained by larger societal changes affecting the region, including global trends of outmigration to cities. It is particularly notable that many of the young people in Paanajärvi do not speak White-Sea Karelian, but only Russian, which is becoming the language of "power" amongst the youth of this ethnic minority group. As well, the COVID pandemic and the war condemned the attempts to encourage ecological tourism (see below).

Cultural heritage recognition, such as the Europa Nostra Award in 2005, point to the success in raising the profile of the community. Oral histories shared by individuals, such as Risto and Teppo, allow meaningful connections to, and illuminate the lived realities of historic data on, how the Karelian communities self-organized their life worlds, especially in the context of hunting and fishing (cf. Virtanen 1950). Teppo's ability to name the exact holders of korko fishing spots and dynamics of seasonal landuse, as well as Risto's knowledge of dreams used as a source of knowledge in hunting and reciprocal relations with the forest, are unique sources, but they share many similarities with other bodies of Indigenous and traditional knowledge from the larger boreal forest region (cf. McCartney and Gwich'in Tribal Council 2020). In the context of Paanajärvi, these endemic knowledges are now transforming and translating into the world of heritage and archival materials that must now be preserved for humanity, through translation and archiving .

Discussion

Paanajärvi's recent era of re-traditionalization and revitalization is over. Outmigration, loss of sawmill operators, White Sea Karelian language decline, an exodus of young people, the decline of local stores and other building blocks of village economic, social, and ecological life all lead inexorably to this conclusion (Nieminen 2023). Russia's war has further impeded efforts toward this end. Yet the future remains open and uncertain.

The oldest known community in the Kemi River basin has undergone many seismic transformations. We know from Virtanen (1950) and other sources about the self-organization and ordering of spatial and temporal realities developed by the Karelians of Paanajärvi. Evidence from oral histories of contemporaries such as Risto and Teppo, as well as historic evidence (Virtanen 1950; Lavonen and Nieminen 2008), revealed a way of life intertwining small-scale farming, reindeer herding and wild reindeer hunting, salmon and other fisheries in cosmo-mythical coexistence. It revealed a sense of purpose and direction as a village (area) consisting of independent, autonomous Karelian families who chose a head of the village, *starosta* to govern

the commons, mainly fish resources. Paanajärvi, as well as the other White Sea Karelian villages traded west to Finland, serving as a foci of east-west west as far back as the Viking Age. These villages formed relations with the Solovetsky monastery, the Russian State of Novgorod and the wider Russian Empire on their own terms (Virtanen 1950). This era of self-organizing independence, lasting until 1917, or, arguably, until 1945, should not be idealized. Yet it can, for analytical purposes, be characterized as a period of endemic village existence (Mustonen 2014), in which the community reproduced specific, unique and relevant biocultural ways of existence in ways that were relatively sustainable.

The arrival of Soviet power altered this life via violent restructuring and depopulation. Household labor was concentrated into collective farms. Men were taken, many never to return, by the state-sponsored Great Terror of the 1930s. World War II led to further losses in cultural practices, ceremonies, and endemic beliefs. The Church of Eliah the Prophet was disbanded in 1945. In the 1970s, the Kemi River became the target of large-scale hydropower development. The Valkiakoski rapids, home of endemic fisheries governance, as demonstrated in Teppo's oral histories and in Virtanen's records (1950), were threatened by the plan to flood the village and its surroundings. The community of New Paanajärvi was constructed as a forestry center. Though the dam was not built, the plan caused further destabilization.

Pozdnyak (2008) discussed the loss and reawakening of Karelian traditions in the village over the past 100 years. She noted spontaneous revivals and acts of remembering that emerged from the maintenance of village life through the seasons in the boreal forest context. The last thirty years, 1991–2022, witnessed concerted attempts to actively rebuild a traditional village. Despite decade-long effort by villagers and Finnish foundations and organizations, at the end of this period outmigration had left just 30 people in the village. Few youths remained, due to a lack of economic options. Conscription efforts from Northwest Russia have most likely also targeted the Paanajärvi and White Sea Karelia, impacting the younger men of the region. Revitalization efforts for the most part have ended.

The Paanajärvi experience can be positioned into the context of larger post-Soviet re-traditionalization efforts that have taken place across northern Russia. Pika et al. (1999) described processes of "neotradionalism" through which Indigenous and minority communities across the region have attempted to reconnect with and re-build their spatial and temporal orderings and lifeways with their homelands after the end of the Soviet rule (in many locations forced also by the economic hardships of the era). These processes can be understood as efforts to address the past 70 years of cultural, economic, and ecological damage, and as a means of enabling cultural survival in the harsh conditions of the 1990s in Russia.

Another attempt to conduct community revitalization in eastern Siberia was in the form of Chukchi nomadic schools which were initiated to keep the children in their nomadic communities as opposed to sending them to village boarding schools

(see below). The novel concept of nomadic schools was coined and developed by Indigenous scholar and leader Prof. Vasili Robbek in the 1990s, as a mechanism to combine survival in the post-Soviet world and a re-enactment of nomadic engagement with the tundra and taiga. By the late 2010s the nomadic school experiment was for the most part over in the Chukchi communities of Sakha-Yakutia, even if attempts continued in its southern regions. In western Siberia, the Nenets reindeer herder Yuri Vella moved to the forest with his reindeer and navigated pressures from the oil industry whilst producing cultural and educational solutions for a bio-culturally-relevant future (Toulouze and Niglas 2019). Central to these revitalization efforts were, as Robbek defined it, attempts to achieve distinct, endemic biocultural co-existence in the post-Soviet era (Mustonen 2013; 2014).

Whilst the Paanajärvi process can be seen through the lenses of Finnish organizations, backed by EU funding and with an interest in a neighboring, linguistically and culturally related area, the similarities of intent to the initiatives from Siberia, Vella's work and other similar initiatives that Pika et al. (1999) contextualized mean they can be considered together. Not many of these initiatives have fared well and the early accounts of the Russian-Ukrainian War of 2022 point to severe impacts on minority and Indigenous peoples that may further worsen the situation (Cultural Survival 2023).

We could dismiss these processes, initiated between 1991 and 2022 across the unique Russian context, as doomed to fail from the start. The reality is that many have failed. Without Paanajärvi, Chukchi nomadic schools or Yuri Vella's efforts, we would have had no evidence or models for re-territorialization and re-traditionalization in the Russian boreal and Arctic zone. We must also remember that, despite the eventual outcomes, these attempts delivered years, even decades of the new experience, during which the pursuit of revitalization and endemic lifeways produced completely new, or perhaps '"re-dreamed" versions of the spatial and temporal order.

Many Indigenous knowledge and local community leaders have led these efforts as their contribution to sharing knowledge. However revitalisation efforts were often facilitated by cooperation with foreign entities as well as with scholars from Russia, and financed with foreign funds. The war has stopped all such forms of collaboration. Yet, in this way, the immense efforts of these communities helped write a new chapter in our awareness that the taiga and tundra have something completely "other" to offer; a sentiency, as Risto described it, that holds more relevance and importance than any given era, economy or time-bound human concern.

In Teppo's words:

> If only humans had such a life as a bear has – if we could lie down winters, resting, and in summers walk around with not a worry in the whole world.

Epilogue: Reflection in a time of war

Here we are. It is early November in 2023 (at a time of writing). The war in Ukraine is entering its third winter.

> Snowchange fisherpeople have returned to base from the fish traps at Kangasvesi. The morning after their return, a female fisher informed everybody that she could not sleep during the night. Border patrol helicopters had been flying along the border and in the Värtsilä area all night, bringing their deafening, sleep-defying noise with them. Mimicking a tactic previously aimed at its borders with Poland and the Baltics, the Russian State has begun another hybrid war action against Finland by sending people from the third-party countries to the Finnish border seeking refuge.

For the first time since the last war, the Russian-Finnish border will be totally closed to ward off this Kremlin-backed pressure.[2] This is the state of play in the NATO-member Finland as 2023 draws to a close…

I learned my greatest lessons about humanity and the self-reliance and resilience of northern peoples in remote Russian Indigenous and traditional communities. Those who started to visit and collaborate with Russian Indigenous communities in the 1990s experienced hope, dreams, pain, loss and perseverance experienced with an unparalleled intensity. Coming from a Finnish fishing family, my work in Paanajärvi and other distant communities in the Russian boreal unlocked in me some deep reflections on the pride and self-esteem of all forest peoples and traditions. I was lucky enough to play a part in the early Sámi-Inuit-Finnish initiative that eventually led, in 2000, to the establishment of the community organization known as "Snowchange." For 24 years (until the Russian-Ukraine war) the staff, Indigenous and local members and partners of this organization have advanced the notion and practice of solutions for this new millennia "by the North, for the North" at the village level. Our work has built on the dreams of the 1990s and the concept of "re-awakening" that this essay has explored in the context of White Sea Karelia. Personally, as a non-Indigenous person from a family of a Karelian and Savo descent in Eastern Finland, my deep motivation to pursue this work has been two-fold.

First, in 1991 I was old enough to realize that the world was to change immeasurably when the Soviet Union collapsed. Despite the horrible instability of the 1990s, which gripped Russia and Finland (with the historic economic slump instigated in part by the end of bilateral trade and economic relations with the Soviets), we knew the "Terror" had ended. The terror that had ceded Karelia, Petsamo and other parts of Finland and Sápmi (the Sámi home area) from Finland to the Soviet Union in 1940 and again in 1944. The terror of the Gulag camps and of other forms of oppression were associated with that era. The collapse of the Soviet Union stimulated thinking

2 It is to continue until May 2024 at least.

and renewal across the Russian North, exemplifed in this paper by our collaborative work in Paanajärvi.

Second, despite inviting occasional (and welcome) criticism, I have been pursuing efforts to render the concepts of "endemic timespaces" (Mustonen 2014) or a "rebirth" (Mustonen 2013) of the unity of living in the boreal forest as a member of the Finno-Ugric cultural and linguistic continuum, in the academic world. The Russian Arctic and boreal zones, with its local-traditional and Indigenous peoples, attracted much international and domestic research. The standpoint of many efforts across decades and centuries has been that of an outsider looking in, or on some occasions through and with the framing of a "shared" Russian experience. That is, these efforts have adopted an "etic" viewpoint, rather than an array of "emic" perspectives.

The articulation of the ordering of life, time, space and scale, culture and the quietness of the forest as a partially shared/cultured approach of wider Finno-Ugric and taiga lifestyles remains under-explored in academic terms. Let us be clear: many such lifestyles have been "lost" in Finland and parts of the Russian North. As this paper discusses they have also been undertaking processes of reawakening. The late Even scholar, Prof. Vasili Robbek has described these ways of "being-in-the-world" as "boreal civilisations" (Mustonen 2013) or Borealia.

In this time of war, it is appropriate and important to reflect, through personal and organizational lenses, on the work of re-awakening pursued over the past 25 years, and what role it has today. Across the Russian North, our Snowchange Cooperative has been involved in decades-long community-to-community processes in the following ways:

- By invitation of the Sámi Council, Snowchange supported and assisted processes that enhanced understanding of the Kola Sámi community knowledge of climate change and environmental priorities. Later, through collaborations with the Skolt Sámi (today located in Finland) and Ponoi River communities, Snowchange has supported the innovation and reform of aquatic governance and rights;
- Approached by Udmurtian rural villages, the Finnish Karelian villages enabled traditional knowledge trainings, exchanges, and school-based cultural reflections on taiga forest traditions;
- We supported the White Sea Karelian knowledge documentation and oral history work;
- We supported work on Indigenous Khanty issues with the "Save Yugra" organization and local villages, in addressing climate change, support for local fisheries and the establishment of Festivals of Northern Fishing Traditions;
- We assisted Chukchi and Yukaghir reindeer herders, schools, and female leaders to work with and support scientific and Indigenous-led development of nomadic

reindeer herding in the Lower Kolyma region, including the funding of nomadic schools;

- We helped advance solar electrification of the outpost fishery camps and reindeer tents in Sakha-Yakutia to foster energy independence among nomadic peoples of the Russian North;
- Upon the wishes of the Evenki leaders, including Keptuke, we helped document Indigenous knowledge, oral histories and climate observations in Southern Sakha
- We engaged in the protection of the Izhorian coastlines through the United Nations biodiversity processes, with community leadership and direction.

Such large-scale community exchanges and cultural processes could simply be read as a list of project or research initiatives. What would be missing from this view is a certain understanding of what I may term a "deep taiga being:" a quiet, perhaps occasionally reserved but ever-present, shared co-existence with the boreal forest and, in the case of the Kolyma and Sámi communities, with the tundra. I argue that this "deep taiga being" is a lived totality.

The scientific and ethnographic expressions of this lived totality are manifold and it is in various states of loss and re-emergence throughout the Eurasian North. However, my key point is that this totality is alive today. It stays alive in the local dialects, poetry, fishing trips, reindeer camps, handicrafts, reading the clouds for the weather, seeing the dead in dreams, sensing things to come, living out the bodily commitments that we have with our forest home, or what is left of it after the incursion of forestry and the extractive industries.

Such lived taiga life will not yield to the attentions of a scientific paper or ethno-futuristic urbanity. These views may be related to it or reflect on issues within, but what is often missing is the primary engagement with the living taiga and tundra systems: a source we can still access within the forest, despite everything. Such primary engagement is the key to preserving and eternally renewing, in distinct ways, the life of the Khanty, Udmurtians, Komi, Sámi, Karelians, Livonians, Finns, Nganasan, and others. These peoples, members of Vasili Robbek's "boreal civilisations," have decided, generation after generation, to develop this primary engagement in both shared and localized ways of being across millenia. American anthropologist Richard K. Nelson was convinced of such a bending of time-space in his years of life and work with the Koyukon in Alaska (e.g. Nelson 1983).

The new war will not end such lived taiga life, but it will foster another long pause, ending 30 years during which we had time and space to think with the communities about how to remain a distinct set of assemblages of human beings in the largest ecosystem on the planet, the boreal forest, on "our" own terms.

Coda

At the time of this writing, at least four Russian Sámi boys have been slain in Ukraine because the empire has decided to sacrifice their lives. The terror is back. We need to deal with it. After the beginning of the war, Snowchange enabled a large cultural archive of Russian Indigenous and traditional knowledge in diaspora to maintain and protect the precious heritage of what Robbek called "boreal civilisations." Curated oral histories in Russian, local languages and English are being released through outlets online, such as the "Evenki Atlas"[3] and the Arctic Seas portal.[4] Until the connections with our sisters and brothers in Russia are safely resumed, we will maintain, remember and resist through non-violent, beautiful, and triumphant approaches of knowing what is still in the forest, the lake, and the peatlands, as seen from within.

I write in the "we" form because it is also the time for the Finnish, Sámi, Karelian, Livonian, and other Finno-Ugric communities to wake up. Wake up to preserve, maintain and reform our forest minds on this side of the border. This requires our villages to understand the need of how we are to live through these historic time, and as the paper has discussed, learn from the 30 years of rebuilding that happened in the Russian areas. This remains a powerful position and it will outlast the empire because the empire has never truly known what the Taiga is or what resides within our vast forest home.

And we thank the empire for that. *Palokärki lensi juuri pääni yli.*

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