Reflecting the “Field”
Two Vepsian Villages and three Researchers

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Abstract: For social researchers a field site is continuously made by the interactions between the researchers and the ecology, including ideologies, present at the time when research is conducted. Such interactions and their interpretations change over time due to the dynamism of life in the field and the emergence of new methods and academic discussions. In order to do this, we have taken two Vepsian villages and three researchers of different background—including ourselves—and compared our working ways. This has enabled us to appreciate the strengths as well as the weaknesses of our own practices and to recognize the value of self-irony as a method of exploration and discovery. The dialogic approach of the article matches our theoretical scope as we have developed an understanding of field as a space where an honest and open discussion is possible.

Keywords: field, history of anthropology, North, reflective anthropology, Veps

In this article we problematize the concept of the “field” in social research, stemming from and expanding the discussion presented in the introduction to this issue. We demonstrate that for social researchers a field site transcends the geographical place itself; rather it is continuously made by the interactions between the researchers and the whole environment where research is conducted. What is more, such interactions and their interpretations change over time due to the dynamism of life in the field and the emergence of new methods and academic discussions (see Dubova 2015; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Stocking 1992 on the importance of fieldwork). In order to do this, we have taken two Vepsian villages—Päžar’ and Pondal in Vologda oblast (see figure 2), and three researchers: Aleksei Peterson, who used to be the director of the Estonian National Museum (ENM) in Tartu, Estonia, and led a
few expeditions around the Vepsian territory from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, when Estonia was still part of the Soviet Union; and the two authors of this article, who have separately made field trips to Päžar’ and Pondal between 2010 and 2015. Stemming from our field notes and Peterson’s field diaries held at ENM, we show how our interaction with these two villages, and how our in situ and post factum reflections, confronted us with a multilayered comprehension of the “field” that surpassed our expectations as well as possible pre-concepts on what it means to conduct fieldwork.

Since our article develops from personal observations and shared reflections on the methods and theoretical approaches we employed during research and field experiences, we structure it in a rather conversational manner, alternating episodes of our individual field experiences with a discussion on the concept of the field. For this reason we also use the first-person singular pronoun in those sections of the article that we wrote separately and in our personal descriptions of the events that took place in Päžar’ and Pondal and elsewhere. We are hoping the reader finds that this decision grants an easier access to the field episodes that stimulated our conversation and the consequent draft of this article. The first episode we present took place in Pondal in July 2015 when Laura was conducting her fieldwork there:

I knew that Larisa Ivanovna (pseudonym) would soon be visiting Pondal since her niece and friends had told me so. And when on 16 July 2015, I saw her in the street and she invited me to join her to her best friend Elizaveta Mikhailovna’s, I simply followed her. We had not met since my last field trip to Pondal in 2013 and I was eagerly waiting for her visit since I wanted to show her some old pictures that I had found at ENM in Tartu. One of the pictures portrayed her father, with whom Peterson became acquainted during one of his expeditions in the mid-1970s (Fig. 1).

I sat together with two close friends, figuratively traveling through time as they recalled some past and present life events. They recounted episodes from their childhood, their first love and married life, and made a few remarks on how life in the village had become something different, and not for the best. Before I even got to show the old photo with Peterson, they included him in the discussion on the villagers’ low self-esteem and little care for Pondal. In fact, Elizaveta Mikhailovna was then leading the discussion since she was very upset that the villagers do not cherish their own possessions and give them away easily. At this point Larisa Ivanovna reminisced on how, indeed, she gave an old icon to Peterson when he visited Pondal. She told us how
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his persuasive manners and “the permission of her parents” convinced her that this was the right thing to do, despite her initial hesitation. Yet she admitted that she “had only seen similar icons at the Hermitage.” She spoke Russian since she is more fluent in that language, although most villagers in Pondal are bilingual in Russian and Vepsian, their heritage language. Balancing out the vehement reaction of Elizaveta Mikhailovna, who took this statement as an explicit confirmation of her previous remarks, Larisa Ivanovna explained that, “such objects would have got lost either way. They might have rotted in one of the houses or even been stolen.”

As I witnessed this discussion, I immediately delved into reflections, which I later shared with Madis, on social research and what ideologies might be leading our work in the field, such as in the case of Peterson and his controversial and debatable data-gathering methods. The remarks made by Larisa Ivanovna indicated that these cumulative
methods and their corresponding ideologies might also bring some advantages. Her story also added a diachronic dimension and historical depth to our reflections on the concept of the field as it established a bond between our work done in the 2010s, and Peterson’s work in the 1960s–1970s, through the places where all three of us have conducted research. Our work extended spatially thanks to those objects and materials that had been accumulated during the expeditions and later kept in Tartu. Indeed, I brought Peterson’s photographs, held at ENM, back into the field and Madis engaged with his personal field diaries also held at ENM (on the relevance of stories behind photographs; see also Martin-Jones 2011; Peers and Brown 2009). The photographs facilitated trust between locals and me, and initiated possible discussions. Thanks to those diaries, Madis could also reveal a more complex personality that made us reconsider our initial impression of Peterson as a stereotypical Soviet social researcher whose main scope was to collect and remove objects from the field in order to record remote and nationalities that often suffered discrimination.

When we met and discussed our work with more resolve, we decided not only to demonstrate how our interaction with Päžar’ and Pondal partly reflect our concept of the field and fieldwork, but also to show how the field itself has influenced our work in its methodology and interpretation, bearing in mind what Bourdieu (2003) refers to as “participant objectification.” In his words, “participant objectification undertakes to explore not the ‘lived experience’ of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility—and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely of the act of objectification itself” (Bourdieu 2003: 282). In order to do this, we have set ourselves the goal of investigating the ideologies that have influenced our own and Peterson’s fieldwork by addressing: the notions of a close or remote field, team-based or individual fieldwork, short-term or long-term expeditions/fieldwork, data gathering/collection or participant observation, and language use in relation to this dynamic concept.

**Vepsian Villages**

Let us briefly introduce those Vepsian villages, Päžar’ and Pondal, which metaphorically speaking have acted as the crossroads of our three different research trajectories.

Päžar’ is a Vepsian village in the Babaev district of Vologda oblast with approximately one hundred inhabitants, as Madis observed during
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his fieldwork. It is divided into smaller areas, in Vepsian ag’, which are now divided by swampy areas, forest and copse. These are Minatšag’, Vas’kinad, Palatez, Fenitši, Rand, Rod’k, Juišag’, Jeremag’, and Jogentaga. This comprehensive territory is called külä in Vepsian, or at times also derun (from the Russian derevnya) since every ag’ had its own identity, possibly feast, and/or chapel. The image and social status of Päžar’ have changed from those when Peterson and his team visited it some forty years ago. Some of the bushy areas were then fields, and, in fact, there are still a few hayfields since some household still keep cows. A small number of cows and bulls move freely around the village, in contrast to the situation when they were more numerous and people used to keep them in forest meadows. There is no longer a kolkhoz (Rus. collective farm) anymore. The former school was abandoned and took on a desolate appearance, now without doors and windows and surrounded by bushes. This is where the youth still hang out. While the local village shop was open daily in 2014, the year after it was open only for a few days a week. As in many other Vepsian settlements located near extensive forested areas, Päžar’ has become a transit point for timber trucks. It could be argued that Päžar’ has become the end of civilization since the road that used to run through the village to Šimgär’ is no longer in use. Due to the policy launched by Khrushchev that divided villages into those with prospects and those without prospects, Šimgär’ fell into disuse and it became impossible for people to live there. The village ag’, Rand, situated on the shores of the Lake Kod’ar’, presents a similarly desolate picture because of the remains of Preobrazhensky church, which was turned into a military hospital during World War II, and later into a storehouse for the kolkhoz. At approximately fifteen kilometers from Päžar’, this time heading toward civilization, there is the administrative hub, Piazhelka. This village has been upgraded to be the center of the local sel’soyvet (Rus. village soviet) and of the regional forest industry. In Piazhelka there is a school, some shops and administrative institutions. Despite such a dispiriting picture, the inhabitants of Päžar’ have maintained a small library and Dom Kul’tury (Rus. Culture House). The very same woman runs the Dom Kul’tury, the library, and the post office. She supervises the children’s hobby circle and although she is not Veps herself and does not speak Vepsian, the children practice Vepsian folk songs and dances, which they perform at local festivals. In the former kolkhoz office there is a small village museum dedicated to the Vepsian traditional way of life. Indeed, every summer a Vepsian festival called Elon pu/Drevo Zhizni (Veps./Rus. Tree of Life) is celebrated along the shores of the Lake Kođar’. This place is also used for fishing.
Pondal is also a village in the Babaev district of the Vologda oblast. It is divided into six ag’, separated by the river Ivoda and the forest. These are Sür’g, Rand, Slobod, Aksintanaz, Turžin, and Kindaevo. Pondal is approximately sixty kilometers from the regional hub, Timoshino, and about twenty-five kilometers from the closest village, Kuia. In 2013, the village’s infrastructure consisted of a Dom Kul’tury, an ethnographic museum, a shop, and a medpunkt (Rus. clinic). The old kolkhoz and bakery had long been shut and only their remains were left. Likewise, the old school had burnt down and never rebuilt. Between 2013 and 2015 Dom Kul’tury had also been shut down, as had the museum, due to a lack of funding. Despite this, the villagers tried to keep up their cultural activities and the local choir was expecting to receive some instruction from the local authority in order to perform at the Elon Pu/Drevo Zhizni festival in Kuia in the coming August. In 2015, approximately thirty-five permanent residents lived in the village, most of whom had retired. They spent most of their time in the garden, growing vegetables and fruits, or in the forest, gathering berries and mushrooms, or fishing, or at home looking after their grandchildren.

**Figure 2. Vepsian Territory.**

The authors adapted this map from Mullonen (2012). The two striped sections in the center of the map represent the territory covered by contemporary Vepsian villages.
who often spend the summer there. Apart from those activities, a couple of younger villagers took care of a few cows thanks to which they could earn a living and also make local dairy products, such as rahtod (Veps. cottage cheese). Some of the villagers were also engaged in reconstruction work, fixing stoves and windows and overall getting ready for the winter.

Most elderly villagers in Päžar’ and Pondal are bilingual and switch between their heritage language, Vepsian, and Russian. Yet, they tend to speak Russian to their grandchildren. The Vepsian language is a minority language within the Russian Federation and is classified as severely endangered by UNESCO. Despite language revival efforts, which began in the mid-1980s in the Republic of Karelia, the number of Vepsian speakers continues to drop and the census carried out in 2010 showed that only 3,613 out of 5,936 individuals reported having some kind of competence in their heritage language (Puura et al. 2013: 18; Strogal’shchikova 2013). While it was an interest in minority language revival movements that led Laura to work with Veps, Madis and Peterson were driven by a different kind of relationality with this Finno-Ugric minority group. This is the long-standing tradition of Finno-Ugric studies that has been developed in Estonia.

**Aleksei Peterson: The Field, His Diaries, and the Man**

For Estonian researchers the relationship with kindred peoples speaking Finno-Ugric languages and living in Russia (such as Veps) has always been rather exclusive. The main reason for this possibly stems from an awareness of Finno-Ugric linguistic affinity that scholars brought to the fore in the nineteenth century (Marcantonio 2002: 19ff.). In particular, Estonians and Finns (less so Hungarians) construed this affinity as one of the cornerstones of modern national identity (e.g., Hofer 1995: 223–229; Laakso 2011: 17–18). In the second half of the nineteenth century Finnish, Finnish-Swedish, and Balto-German researchers at the Russian Academy of Sciences set up a research tradition that matched such theories, and whose tone was partly colonial (in the case of Finnish scholars, see Anttonen 2003: 56–58). Later on, during the prewar period when Estonia and Finland were independent countries, having access to the peoples living in the territory of the Soviet Union was unimaginable (Dragadze 1978). However, the situation for the Estonian scholars changed after World War II with the incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union, at which point extensive research
in the territory inhabited by Finno-Ugric peoples became of the greatest importance once again.

During the Soviet period, the Estonian National Museum, founded in 1909, was reformed into an ethnographic museum and in 1952 it was renamed the Eesti NSV Riiklik Etnograafiamuuseum (EEM; The Government Ethnographic Museum of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic) (Viires 2008: 22). At the time, doing ethnography conveyed a different meaning, implying the study of the material culture of the country people as well as their traditional working habits. This research conduct was based on the evolutionary ideas of society as expressed by Friedrich Engels in his well-known book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Viires 2008: 22). Soviet rule considered this research approach a rather harmless activity, unlike studying traditional religiosity and folk beliefs, which were ideologically not always tolerated. Because of the latest focus on material culture in research, one of the main scopes of EEM was now the collection of material items, alongside drawings, maps, photographs, and audio-visual recordings.

It is no surprise, therefore, that under the leadership of Aleksei Peterson at EEM, collecting objects amongst the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia became a particularly active endeavor. Peterson worked as the director of EEM/ENM between 1958 and 1992. In fact, the present-day magnificent Finno-Ugric collection at ENM is the direct result of the decades-long and dedicated work of Aleksei Peterson, who managed to broaden the collection by approximately 60 percent from its previous status. Peterson also introduced new research practices to the field, such as filming in order to record material culture and the working habits of local village dwellers. In his mind, “the film snapshots can reproduce exactly ways of working, working tools and their use, and also different events of daily life, etc. All this [can be reproduced] dynamically as it develops and transforms” (Peterson 1983: 31). For Peterson the films were also a research document. And their main value was that they provided historical truth, or “historism” as he calls it (Peterson 1973: 7, 1983: 34). Peterson personally directed ethnographic films about Estonians, Veps, and Udmurts.

Peterson’s interest in Veps as one of the most remote Finnic ethnic groups was logical and enduring. In his eyes, this easternmost Finnic group had to be unquestionably interesting since it had lived for more than 1,000 years without intense contact with the Western world. In the second half of the twentieth century, elderly Veps used to know and partly practice slash-and-burn cultivation, they were able to make dugout boats, and remembered other traditional practices that were
no longer practiced among other groups living in this northwestern Russian forested zone. With high expectations, Peterson began to organize expeditions to the different Vepsian settlements. He ran fifteen expeditions between 1966 and 1983, most of which were to the Vepsian villages in the Bogositogorsk district of Leningrad oblast, and to a lesser extent to the Vologda oblast and other regions.

Peterson and his research team(s) visited Päžar’ in the summers of 1970 and 1977. He also went to Pondal and the surrounding villages twice, in the summer of 1974 and 1978 (Topographic Archives of the Estonian National Museum). The exact dates of the expeditions are 8–21 July 1970, 2–20 July 1974, 20 August–2 September 1977, and 29 August–12 September 1978. As Dragadze (1978: 67) mentions, generally Soviet fieldwork was carried out in the summer, which she refers to as the “fieldwork season.” The research team usually consisted of four to six people, including Peterson as team leader and a lorry driver (Dragadze 1978: 66). Indeed, transportation was essential for the success of the expeditions since the main goal was to collect miscellaneous items of various dimensions and to bring them back to EEM. There was also always someone within the team who was able to draw ethnographic vignettes, and/or a photographer/cameraman who could depict and record moments in the lives of the villages. The main duty of the other team members was to collect as many objects as possible by persuading the owner to part with them (ideally giving them away for free); and when this plan did not work, they were allowed to try and purchase them. For this purpose the team was given a conspicuous budget prior to the expedition. Due to his role as team leader Peterson took care of the practical side of the expeditions, such as, for example, maintaining contact with the representatives of the local authorities, arranging accommodation, and so on. He also kept an eye on the work of the other team members, instructing them if necessary. In concurrence with these duties, Peterson also collected miscellaneous items and recorded interviews with local residents, touching topics such as working practices, architecture, and material culture in broader terms.

Estonian linguists and folklorists appreciated the importance of conducting interviews in the heritage language of the local villagers since this could enable them to record linguistic samples, to get a better understanding of the native ontology, and to be depicted as non-Russians. Peterson understood Vepsian to some degree; however, during his expeditions he generally spoke Russian, as he stated in his diaries, where he also complained about his language constraints. Yet he did speak Vepsian to Larisa Ivanovna’s father who, she recollected,

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was particularly impressed by the fact that a researcher was able to speak so well ičemoi kel’ (literally, “one’s own language” in Vepsian). And this strategy proved effective since it granted Peterson confidence and possibly secured him Larisa Ivanovna’s icon. Overall, he believed that what spoke to him were mainly the ethnographic items, the materials and the environment where these resided, and that the spoken word only supported nonverbal, material culture.

In addition to the miscellaneous objects, photos, films, drawings, and stories, what we know about the EEM expeditions to the Vepsian villages can be found in the unpublished field diaries written by Peterson, which are also kept at ENM.8 The diaries reveal two intrinsic aspects of his work: his personality and role in the field, and the work itself, its complexity and scientific purpose. Both aspects are tightly intertwined and at times it is hard to separate them. Peterson never post-edited his diaries and this implies that some of the data might have been incorrectly recorded (e.g., names, numbers). Yet the spontaneous style with which the diaries are written reflects the perception that Peterson had of the place while still in situ. The diaries are written in Estonian, and generally in the present tense. They are filled with descriptions, often portraying the conditions that the researchers were enduring during fieldwork and are sometimes colored by some personal comments.

The diaries portray Peterson both as an expedition leader and as a person. His style is not metaphorical or scenic; rather it is often plain and straightforward, at times even harsh since he does not take the time to choose his words carefully. It could even be argued that his unvarnished style resonates with his family background. Peterson comes from a southern Estonian peasant family, which he used to regularly visit. Indeed, in addition to the administrative work at the museum he was constantly involved in beekeeping and rose-growing activities. He used to give a hand to his relatives, above all his mother, by making hay and by participating in any other seasonal work in the countryside. It appears that Peterson held on to his way of behaving as a farm master in his capacity as museum director. Indeed, his straightforward and pragmatic conduct also mirrors his writing style and behavior in the field. It is important to mention these convoluted relationships between family life and work since they problematize approaches to the field and to writing styles, which reflect the multiple social roles and activities in which people were involved at the time.

Peterson was mostly concerned with reporting the outcomes of the work done in the field, even if this was at the cost of his communicative manners. In his diaries he describes what he sees and what
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seems important to him. As Sokolovskiy (2011: 212) and Arzyutov and Kan (2013: 47) also clarify, during the Soviet period the main goal of researchers was not phenomenological, that is to answer the questions how and why, rather it was descriptive and material-oriented, that is to answer the question what. Peterson is overwhelmed by his duties and responsibility, which he does not necessarily enjoy but has to convey. He is only able to evaluate his own conduct post factum since he often responds rather promptly to the several situations he faces, as was expected from his role as museum director.

A dispirited tone dominates his writing, especially when he notices the flaws of village life. Yet he does not empathize with the local villagers and does not take moral responsibility for any direct link that might exist between the Soviet policies and life in the villages. Despite his role as a museum director, he feels rather detached from the Soviet (felt as Russian) system since he is de facto Estonian and not Russian.

Despite the Finno-Ugric common background between Veps and Estonians that sparked the interest in such research, for Peterson the Vepsian villages are felt and remain somewhat remote. And this complicates the claim made by Arzyutov and Kan (2013: 46) in that Russian and Soviet ethnography can be depicted as “native anthropology” since many researchers “made home exotic” rather than looking for the exotic far away. Peterson does not feel at home in the Vepsian villages. They are hundreds of kilometers away from homely Estonia. Upon their arrival to the Vepsian settlements, Peterson and his teammates behave like intruders, aiming to gather as many objects as possible and bring them back to the museum in (Soviet) Estonia. In fact, in his writing Peterson puts a lot of emphasis on the difficulties they encounter on the way to the villages; thus reinforcing the physical distance that exists between the Vepsian rural settlements and home. He starts describing the road and the road conditions as soon as the team leaves Tartu. Because essential technical aid and fuel was carefully scrutinized during the Soviet period, Peterson felt the continuous need to check the condition of the lorry and the fuel reserves. In his diaries he systematically describes the road and the meteorological circumstances, often comparing them with the previous years and whether or not he could detect any positive or negative change. A considerable portion of his diary is dedicated to the road; likewise a lot of attention is also paid to camping. In this regard, Peterson also described and evaluated the personal qualities and practical skills of his companions.

In the diaries Päžar’, Pondal and the surrounding villages are depicted mainly as material geographical space. Overall, Peterson
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minuteley describes the buildings and the planning of the villages, which he studies merely as architectural objects, although in some cases he is less meticulous and relies on photos and drawings to provide this kind of information. At times he also allows himself to delve into description of nature alongside the weather conditions. Again he gives this type of information for practical reasons rather than because it reflects his state of mind. Peterson writes for a specific audience, an imaginary inhabitant of this northern territory who has a similar cultural background to his own, as an Estonian.

As mentioned above, a successful trip meant gathering as many objects as possible and bringing them to EEM. For this reason, in the diaries the local people appear mainly in connection with the items or in relation to some pragmatic aspects of the trip, such as finding accommodation, arranging meals, and having a bath (possibly at someone’s ban’ya [Russian sauna]). In the description the villagers generally remain nameless and are briefly characterized pertaining to their gender, age, appearance, and personality. In fact, the length and depth of the description often depended on whether or not this person could provide items for the museum. It is no surprise that the person and the object(s) are often paired in the diaries. As a practice, Peterson used to write the name of the place first, followed by a description of the nameless person, then the objects in which he was interested and which were linked to that person. Peterson wrote what objects he was interested in whether or not the villagers gave them to him. It appears clear that people are seen mostly as keepers and potential donators of traditional, local materials. In Peterson’s view the objects have much more value than the people.

Peterson believes that the villages are disappearing and, while he cannot provide any support to the people, he can take the objects away, either physically or by photographing and filming them, and preserve them at the museum where they can be used for scientific purposes. He does not show any sympathy or regret for the loss of rural life. His main concern is that he might not be able to obtain items that could be useful at EEM. And for this reason he complains a few times in the diaries that he has to compete with the museum in Vologda. He conveyed this as an unfavorable part of his fieldwork.

This should not mistakenly portray Peterson as a greedy and selfish collector who cunningly gathers objects for his personal interests. Indeed, his main goal was to enrich the Finno-Ugric collections at EEM and in this he remained earnest until the end of his active working career. He demonstrated himself to be a dedicated worker who took
his responsibility very seriously and aimed to fulfill his professional duties as was envisioned at the time. For this reason, both his personal experience and emotions, and those of his colleagues and local villagers came second to the goal of gathering objects and expanding the Finno-Ugric collection at EEM. Indeed, this is possibly the more interesting side of his diaries since they show how he did not even try to connect with social life in the villages, but rather how much he cared and was concerned about the wellbeing of EEM. He embraced the principles and policy existing at the time in his own work (Dragadze 1978, 2011) and combined them with his own personal practices as a farm master in the Estonian countryside. In other words, his own approach to the field and work in the field responded dynamically to the ecology in which he lived, by complexly merging various aspects of his life (Arzyutov and Kan 2013: 45; Bourdieu 2003). Peterson describes the work of the team and intergroup relations, and displays his relations with colleagues to whom he has to answer as a boss. More than Veps-centered, for him the field appears to be team-centered and, even more, material-oriented.

The Concept of the Field in Language-Based Folklore Research (Madis)

Like Peterson, I am Estonian and work in Tartu, although not at ENM but at the University of Tartu, as a folklorist (see Fig. 3). For the past twenty years I have been conducting research in the territory inhabited by Finnic minorities in Russia, and since 2004 I have been working with Veps. My field trips, which I often make in the company of colleagues, usually last two or three weeks. As a folklorist my research is shaped by an interest in folklore genres (Abrahams 1976; Ben Amos 1992; Honko 1989), that is a certain speech act on a topic with characteristic formal features that sometimes match specific practices. A folklore genre can be a song, a lament, a legend, a fairy tale, a phraseological unit, and so on. In folklore studies, scholars assume that a hypothetical genre system exists in every culture and that life in its multiple expressions can be arranged by different genres. Indeed, folklorists believe that no single genre can provide a comprehensive understanding of life; rather the more overarching system of genres is the lens through which we can better appreciate life's complexity. For this reason, folklore scholars also pay particular attention to the performative and expressive side of a given piece of information that, in fact, can often only be embedded in
some specific genres (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2000; Siikala 2000). Since I am particularly interested in folk belief and magic, my favorite genres are memorates, legends, and stories from personal experience in which the teller often reveals encounters with the supernatural. I am also interested in burial customs and strategies of communication with the dead, which, for example, can be observed in ritual lamentations, a practice still found in northern Russia. Although my focus is not anthropological, people to whom I refer as “informants” play a big role in my work since the material I gather is very personal and unique and highly embedded in their voices and stories.

Language represents a substantial part of my work. Just as different folklore genres encode and reflect the complexity of life differently, so too do languages (e.g., Hymes 2000). I was trained to focus on the heritage language of Finno-Ugric minorities during my student years. In the second half of the nineties on my first field trips to Setos and Votes I was instructed to use the heritage language of my informants. Thanks to my semi-active command of south Estonian, understanding and communicating with Setos was not a problem for me. My Votian gradually improved as I worked through the handwritten volumes of Votian ethnology by Professor Paul Ariste, and as I begun to speak to those for whom Votian was their heritage language. Learning Vepsian has almost entirely taken place in the field while communicating with Vepsian native speakers. Admittedly, being a native speaker of Estonian enables me to understand other Finnic languages, although occasionally I might not fully comprehend what is said and find some difficulty in expressing my own thoughts.

Votes and Veps tend to be bilingual and to communicate in their heritage language with each other, yet they switch to Russian when talking to their grandchildren. In a way, the elderly might appreciate that their heritage language is no longer “the language of youth” (see also Grünthal 2011). They might find it striking that someone younger than them, like me, comes from another country and endeavors to communicate in this presumed language of the elderly. Unsurprisingly, many of them automatically switch to Russian, possibly assuming that this must be the only language I can understand. This has happened even when the discussion was already going on in Vepsian. However, I want to comprehend in more depth their experiential and cultural ontology, which I believe is embedded in the use of their heritage language. In addition, I appreciate that this is important since the heritage languages of most minorities in Russia are often gradually losing their domains of use.
Because I am Estonian and speak Vepsian with Veps, I have possibly acquired a unique social position and am sometimes perceived as unique, at least linguistically, being not so much tied to the labored process of linguistic encoding and decoding (Davies 1999: 76–77). I stay beyond the boundary of Orthodox cultural space and out of the Russian identity sphere, and this might also be because Russo-Estonian relations remain tense. As already stated, Estonia was a postwar part of the Soviet Union, regaining independence only at the beginning of the 1990s. Estonians tend to view the Soviet period with some discomfort and bitterness.

My first period of fieldwork with Veps took place among the northern Vepsian villages in the Republic of Karelia along the southwestern coast of Lake Onega in 2004 and 2005. Since 2006 I have been working in central Vepsian villages along the Oyat’ River. In 2012, I visited central Vepsian villages in the Vologda oblast for the first time. I visited Päžar’ twice in 2014 and 2015. The central Vepsian villages have charmed me with their older and partly historical way of life. Here the use of Vepsian in everyday life has endured more than in other places, as have some folklore genres.

In August 2014 I went to Päžar’ with three colleagues in their early middle age, two linguists and one ethnologist who was interested in the
ethnic processes of twentieth-century Russia. Our short visit lasted four days, after we had been to Pondal and before moving on to the southern Vepsian villages in Leningrad oblast. Our trip to those villages was facilitated by the fact that we had our own car and had arranged our accommodation in advance, just as Peterson used to. We reached Päžar’ through a road that had been damaged by the continuous coming and going of timber trucks, and moved on to Juišag’ where we met Vladimir Trishkin.\textsuperscript{11} We had met Vladimir during our visit to Pondal. He is in his sixties and proved to be a rather active and well-known individual in the village. He used to work as a bookkeeper in the kolhoz, and as soon as this was shut down he established a local ethnographic museum. He also carried out the census in the village, which proved useful for one of my colleagues. Thanks to Vladimir Trishkin and his family members (i.e., his wife Shura and his mother Maria) we had a good introduction to Päžar’, its surroundings and archaic lifestyle.

In Rand we met another informant, Valentina Karpova, in 2014.\textsuperscript{12} She was an active and optimistic person in her eighties, and our visit seemed to entertain her. She shared her experience of the supernatural with us, speaking in Vepsian throughout. Among other stories she told us how she communicated with her house spirit by standing on a particular floorboard facing the icon corner of the room. It is clear that what may be supernatural for us, people from the modern Western world (e.g., encounters with animistic beings, omens, dreams, folk magic), Veps often perceive as part of everyday life. We left, almost sure we would not see each other again. Yet I decided to maintain contact with her by sending a Christmas card together with some pictures I had taken during my visit. When she saw us again in 2015, she was caught by surprise. I had come to Päžar’ with a colleague for a week. As we dined together, Valentina Karpova opened up even more than during our first visit, having grown confident. She revealed dreams, predictions, etc. In addition, we had first-hand experience of generational language loss since Valentina Karpova and her granddaughter, who lives in Saint Petersburg but was visiting, could only speak Russian to one another.

Folklorists apply a rather dialogic method in order to gather relevant data. The research enterprise is understood as a continuum and the data material is produced during the encounter between the researcher and the informant(s) (Vasenkari & Pekkala 2000). During this trip I made an interesting methodological reflection, which emerged from an unplanned event in the field. The summer of 2015 was quite rainy, so as soon as the weather conditions allowed, the villagers ran outside
to work in the fields and engage in other seasonal chores. On a drier day, we joined in and decided to help Shura (Vladimir Trishkin’s wife) to make hay and put it together in a stack. This is when I appreciated in more depth the importance of taking part in the activities of the villagers and when I realized how important it was to show to the informants that a researcher is not necessarily only somebody who asks questions, but is in fact a real person, able to engage in different activities. Showing that we were able to make hay and find our way in the forest changed the attitude of the informants towards us and created a deeper bond with the locals, which was also useful for our research.

During this trip something new happened to me. Contrarily to Peterson’s practice, I have never declared my presence in the sel’sovet and never registered at the police office. I have always assumed that, although ignoring power hierarchies may irritate the authorities, it also allows me to avoid their control. However, in 2015 a car approached us as we were packing our car to leave. For the first time I faced the police major and a person in civilian clothes who demanded passports and visas, and asked me whether or not I carried prohibited literature and was making any propaganda. My colleague and I might have been mistaken either for agents from the West given the delicate political relations between Russia and Europe, or for non-Orthodox (possibly Baptists) believers. Since we did not make any political or religious propaganda, I had the chance to introduce our folklore-based research. It is interesting to note how folk belief research could have created problems to Peterson due to the political ideologies dominant at his time. Instead, they enabled us to create a bond with the police officers. The personal tone of our talk helped to smooth the situation and at the end of our conversation the police officer mentioned that his wife was also Veps.

As stated above, my main research objective in the field consists of using and recording the heritage language of Finno-Ugric minorities and more precisely, folklore genres that are embedded in language and matching practice. I have always thought that my work as a folklorist and my research methods provided me with enough data to answer my research questions and share (at least partly) the reality of my informants for two reasons:

First, the material I work with is relatively intimate. A linguist might collect his/her material by asking informants to translate a few sentences and by recording the morphological, syntactical, and so on, forms for later analysis. For linguists the topic of the conversation and/or the personality of the informant is often secondary, if not confusing.
As we saw earlier, Soviet ethnographers mainly collected things. Long-term anthropological fieldwork enables the researcher to engage in daily activities and to take time to let the more complicated data crop up by itself. Instead, my work often means that I have to interest people in talking over things that no longer belong in daily life. It needs work to persuade them to let me invade their convoluted world of genres. Investigating beliefs can be difficult when some interesting feature has lost its actuality or has been displaced by some other (newer) phenomenon. I often witnessed how an informant suddenly stops after an enthusiastic beginning when understanding that he or she is talking to somebody out of his or her circle about comparably unusual things, which might make him or her more alert.

Second, the sensitive nature of the belief world requires an opening on my behalf. I would argue that this is the most challenging aspect of my work and methodology, as it is not only ludic, but also tests the limits of research ethics. When working in a particular area (such as a group of small Vepsian villages) I consider my first trip an occasion to make myself acquainted with the locals. People often show distrust on this first occasion and my first impression might be that there is no interesting material to collect, or, if there is, that people are not eager to reveal it. In line with Honko (2002: 15), I believe that it is important to maintain a connection with informants in the intermediate period between field trips. The informants start appreciating that the first contact was not occasional since I come back to the same places. And this is when a significant shift can occur: I must have inspired confidence and trust since people even come to see me of their own accord. Humanity is repaid by humanity.

My long-term work in the field and continuous engagement with locals make me appreciate that there are other ways of conducting research that I had not taken into consideration, and that these add depth to my claim of humanity. I am referring here to the idea of engaging in activities other than interviews as the main investigation method, and letting the unexpected occur and shape the research in unpredicted ways. Thanks to this continuous work and reflection during and after fieldwork, my view of the work of the researcher has also gained more depth. Indeed, the researcher is not someone who gathers objective data and genres during interviews, rather his or her social role acquires multiple facets in the field due to the unanticipated nature of fieldwork.
I came to Russia with the purpose of working with Veps and of taking part in daily activities and observing the revival of their heritage language in 2009, when I was still a doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, UK (see Fig. 4). At Aberdeen I was introduced to the discipline of Anthropology, having a background in foreign languages and literatures (major: Russian) from my undergraduate studies at the University of Pisa, Italy. Fortunately, some of my personal interest in ethnographic descriptions and creative writing, and participatory approach to research, matched some of the ways anthropology was discussed at Aberdeen. In both taught classes and informal discussions in the corridors and cafes I came to appreciate, and to a certain degree embody, some of the practices integral to the discipline of anthropology, such as a deep appreciation for long-term engagement with the people, non-human beings, and the environment. I also learned the importance of participating actively in daily activities in order to better understand local ways of being (Sayer 1984). This comprised speaking the language used locally, which meant refreshing my Russian skills and learning Vepsian, initially at Petrozavodsk State University and later when engaging with Vepsian villagers and activists. The study program in Aberdeen expected students to spend at least one full year in the field, testing, and pushing our skills as researchers (often in a trial-and-error manner). While support was available from my supervisors and my institution more broadly, I did not feel the need to turn to it during my first year in the field. Many Veps I worked with let me become part of their world and often supported me, possibly because they had the time to observe my actions and to develop a certain level of trust in me.

My postgraduate training also meant exploring different ways of writing academic papers with the purpose of simultaneously doing justice to the material gathered and created together with the locals, and of advancing the discipline in new directions, including challenging its boundaries—this article is partly an example of that exploration. Therefore, being on my own in the field for an extended period of time, engaging both in local practices and in self-reflection was something I took away from Aberdeen and made part of my own craft as an anthropologist, even when I worked in other academic settings.

My first trip to Pondal took place in September 2013 when I joined some activists and journalists from Petrozavodsk whom I had known...
for a long time. In 2013, I had already left Aberdeen and was working with Madis at the University of Tartu, where I was employed as a Research Fellow in Anthropology. It was at that time that we regularly discussed our work, and reflected on our different methods, often expressing the desire to be innovative in our research and writing practices. In fact, innovation took place regardless of my (semi)conscious effort toward it due to the new ecology in which I found myself. Indeed, in Tartu I developed a passion for archival work that emerged from a closer observation of some research practices adopted there and also in Russia, where I could visit more often than during my studies. In the archives at ENM I held in my hands old ethnographers diaries, I watched ethnographic films (yet to be edited) and tasted with my whole body miscellaneous crafts gathered from the Vepsian villages. Admittedly, such an opening combined with an honest confrontation with Madis has added depth to my work.

It is no surprise, therefore, that even though I had not been to Pondal before, it felt like coming back to a familiar territory. This was mainly because of my previous long-term work in the Vepsian villages of the Republic of Karelia and Leningrad oblast, as well as because of
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the foundation work I had done in some of the archives in Tartu. My research questions were new, having shifted from an analysis of the Vepsian revival movement to an investigation of local healing practices with a focus on enchantments. This fieldtrip was similar to what Burawoy (2003) refers to as a “reconstructivist revisit” in that I engaged with a different kind of theory, although my intention was not to modernize previous theoretical approaches, rather to expand them by focusing on ways of speaking that I had not managed to explore before. I came to Pondal with the intention of understanding how people cured one another through verbal art.

And in order to answer my research questions, I knew I would merge with village life and dwell in it; in other words, experiencing village life in its multiple facets with my whole body would enable me to get a closer understanding of the local practices, metaphors, ways of speaking, and engaging with human and non-human beings. So I reached Pondal with a crew from Petrozavodsk, and while they left after a week, I stayed on for another month. I came to the same village once again in July 2015. While during my first research trip I spent the whole year in the field, in the recent years I have gone to Russia only in those months when I am not busy teaching and/or participating in other academic events. Thanks to my position as a researcher rather than lecturer/professor, I have more flexibility when organizing my time and, for this reason, I have made trips both in the summer and winter.

As mentioned above, the idea that the researcher would be alone in the field was standard practice during my postgraduate training, with only a few scholars embarking on a trip with their families and/or colleagues. I assumed that this was the best way to get rather close to the ways of living and to perceiving life in the village, given also that I appreciated it as a pedagogical method that stretched one's abilities to their maximum potential. I certainly wanted to test my skills and to learn on my own what it meant to be an anthropologist when I was a postgraduate student in 2009. The times had changed and my assumptions had to be revisited once my husband reached me in Pondal towards the end of my stay there in July 2015. Many of the babushki (Rus. grandmothers) I had been working with discreetly disclosed that it was good that he visited, as I was now a married woman (I got married in 2014) and “should be looking after my husband.” While they might have understood the reasons why I remained in Pondal for a month in 2013, it was unconceivable for them that I would leave my family behind in 2015. The locals generally went away to live elsewhere when
the services started to shut down and there was no work left for them in the village. Otherwise, they would rather stick together and endure whatever difficulty came along. Most villagers in Pondal are related to one another and even those who had left make an effort to visit regularly, especially in the summer. The youth comes to the village as much as they can, also maintaining contact with one another when living in larger urban centers. My husband’s visit enriched me with a personal history and depth, which the villagers could not grasp when I was by myself. It also drew out some observations that otherwise would have been kept hidden from me.

But that was not all. My approach to fieldwork with its primary focus on participant observation was looked at with curiosity. For many of the villagers working as a social researcher meant that I should go and interview people, record what they said and write reports. They had worked with Madis before, and also with researchers from Finland and elsewhere, and were expecting me to do a similar work; some even demanded to be interviewed at random hours in random places. Elizaveta Ivanovna appeared at the front door one evening in 2013, expecting me to interview her there and then. Mariya Dmitrievna also came to see me at home on my last day in 2013, and told me off because I had interviewed “everyone” except her. I made up for this by going to her house on my next trip. As Nadezhda Vladimirovna told me once, “I saw you off this morning going to interview [someone] and I thought to myself that the day had properly started then.” In their eyes, my work consisted of interviews, writing reports, and also taking pictures. When I engaged in these activities, I showed that I was a dedicated worker and that was valued. In contrast, when I asked to join them to the forest to pick berries and mushrooms, to go fishing, or to join the choir, it looked as though I wanted to take a break from my research work. However, I knew that this was adding depth to our level of intimacy and trust, even though many did not acknowledge that as part of my job.

The local villagers also cherished my effort to speak Vepsian with them, although I admit being more fluent in Russian due to my previous academic education. On my second trip I conducted all the interviews in the villagers’ heritage language, something on which they commented positively. During an informal chat Tat’iana Igorevna praised me: “You speak a lot better now”. Some villagers got used to speaking Vepsian with me and continued doing so in the shops, the clinic, and in the streets every time I bumped into them. The fact that I spoke Russian did not surprise them, as everyone else around them
speaks (or is expected to speak) the state language, as was already the case in Peterson’s days. Interestingly, my Italian and British affiliations were discarded and felt remote, distant; nobody seemed to grasp what differences and challenges speaking Russian and/or Vepsian had for me. There were days when I would be able to speak more fluently and switch between Vepsian and Russian ways of speaking rather consciously; that is, depending on who I was talking to, what we were talking about, and why. However, when I dropped my guard or simply needed a rest from this continuous linguistic challenge, I added random Italian or English words to some sentences and was less in control of my own code-switching practices. People did not seem to care much, though, possibly because they were already used to my accent and at times clumsy expressions. And for this I am extremely grateful since their attitude did not prevent me from trying, and their praise encouraged me.

This linguistic entanglement is also reflected in my field notes as I write inconsistently in Italian, English, Vepsian, and/or Russian. Generally I write in Italian if I want to write faster since my handwriting flows better in this language. I write in Russian and Vepsian when I record what I have heard without processing it, and I write in English when I aim to prepare the notes for future use. Nonetheless, apart from this general observation words get mixed and, admittedly, some notes would need a translator to be deciphered. Apart from their linguistic form, my field notes appear unstructured and random in their content since, just like Peterson, I record everything that catches my attention, even if it is not related to the research questions I am aiming to answer.\textsuperscript{14}

Yet I am systematic in typing them into my laptop as I schedule an appointment with myself, often at lunchtime and/or after dinner, when I sit and record more thoroughly what I have observed that day. Indeed, I would argue that taking notes comprises two separate writing stages: initially I write my notes in small handbooks that I carry around and/or take short notes on the mobile phone that I write in full on my laptop as soon as I can. To answer Cook’s (2004: 104) question, “Do communication technologies change the way people speak/write, or do these media reflect established patterns and norms of verbal interaction?” I can only provide an ambiguous answer. The scattered and varied writing of my field notes matches a fluidity that I also maintain in my handwriting; yet what mainly differs is that I can more easily organize the notes afterward thanks to programs such as InVivo and ALTAS.ti. I rarely write about my own emotions, although this has occasionally
happened. And I write the names of those I work with, along with their patronymic and date of birth, if known.¹⁵

I also draw random sketches, sometimes portraying a specific episode, people, or just trying to represent an emotion that emerges by engaging with the environment. Once again, the idea of drawing came from Aberdeen as there is an interest in the connections between art and anthropology in the department, as well as from a personal passion. The villagers never enquired what I was writing about, but they happily saw some of my drawings and also photographs and asked if they could watch some of the videos I had made. I have provided ENM with some of my photographs from my field trip in 2013 in line with dissemination and exchange ethics. The idea of archiving data might seem to contradict a more fluid research method, such as participant observation, the epistemological approach that enables the researcher to better understand different ways of living by experiencing them from within, as mentioned above. Yet I have experienced its benefits both in my writing, as it often adds diachronic depth to my work, and also in the field. Taking Peterson’s pictures to Pondal was an enormous resource that enabled me to take something back to the field. This not only matched ethical practices in social research, but also provided immense emotional benefits for both the villagers and me. A couple of elderly women were particularly moved when they saw pictures of themselves from forty years ago. They felt important and loved, and were surprised by the fact that someone had not forgotten about them. The pictures allowed them to recollect and re-live memories from their past. The pictures enabled us to become emotionally closer and establish a deeper relation. I had come to work with the people, to get a deeper understanding of what it means to live in a village of thirty-five or so residents. The pictures allowed me to get more of a glimpse of the reality of the loneliness and relative social isolation that some people might experience here.

While Peterson generally responded to the academic environment in which he lived, and Madis focuses on folklore genres, my work aims to put people at the center. Stemming from what people say and how they live, I am later able to engage with scholarly literature and academic debate. The starting point appears different. The local villagers in Pondal allowed me to revisit some of my initial assumptions, that is conducting research by myself or not, appreciating the social importance of interviewing, along with fieldwork and the relevance of the archives. I also had to reconsider my attitude towards ‘data-gathering’ methods as thanks to previous research and the archives I could engage
more deeply with the villagers, and other researchers, by understanding how they related to the ecology in which they lived and what choices they made. What’s more, spatially and temporally the village and the villagers opened an academic comparison that has reinforced dialogue and mutual understanding, rather than making the denial of past practices the strength of the academic world.

Conclusion, or Space for Reflection

In this article we brought together two villages (Päžar’ and Pondal), three researchers from different institutions (Aleksei Peterson from EEM, Madis Arukask from the University of Tartu, and Laura Siragusa from the University of Aberdeen), and three disciplines or research activities (museum work, folkloristics, and anthropology) to allow us to reflect on the concept of the field and investigate its dynamicity and multifaceted aspects. We demonstrated how the researchers are in constant negotiation with the ecology in which they live, sometimes conforming to the expectations of the institutions they work for, sometimes questioning them, and, thus, developing a more independent approach to their work. Such fluctuations might develop in relation to the people with whom they work in the field and the observations they make, and might also develop in relation to open discussions with other colleagues on their doubts, challenges, ambitions, and interests.

In his diaries Peterson demonstrated himself to be thoroughly devoted to his work as director at EEM, something he treated almost as a mission to be accomplished. All areas of his work reflected this commitment, that is his relations with his colleagues, his field notes, and the way he behaved towards the locals. In his position as director his attitude matched that he used to have when fulfilling other duties in his homeland. Thus, he showed that he had embraced a role that extended beyond his job and the physical boundaries of the institution he worked for, and reached out to the territory inhabited by Finno-Ugric peoples, including those in his homeland, Estonia.

Similarly, we (Madis and Laura) have deeply connected with the disciplines in which we have received our training and developed first research questions. For Madis, exploring specific genres in context and investigating folklore practices are still the main goals of his work; for Laura, exploring ways of speaking in relation to the broader ecology in which people live still dominates her research. In this article we have pushed ourselves (with a pinch of irony and self-criticism)
and our disciplines forward by comparing our research practices and appreciating their possible applications in different situations, such as conducting fieldwork on our own or together with a team, relying mainly on participant observation methods or adding a diachronic element to our work by bringing back to life the material stored in the archives, and by questioning the duration and seasonality of fieldwork. We decided to push ourselves and our respective disciplines, not with the intent of denying and/or ridiculing their long-term traditions, but rather with the aim to show that a dialogue between researchers and disciplines is possible in an honest and direct manner, encompassing practices of anonymous criticism and their limits.

Being ironic and self-critical has taught us that change is possible within our own research practices. We have experimented with our writing techniques and styles by constructing this article in a dialogic manner. We have done this in conformity to our idea that the field is construed relationally, at times pushing us to engage more with the pre-determined research questions, at other times surprising us with events that unfold in front of us. Reflections on the notion of the field have also emerged while writing and confronting our practices and, hence, have allowed us to grow.

We have also let our common themes emerge throughout in order to weave together our different experiences, just as has happened in our lives. Our work has both temporal and spatial dimensions that intertwine in a complex relational grid in which the researcher continuously negotiates his or her position. For this reason the notion of the field has expanded in front of us, bringing together different people, disciplines and temporal dimensions, yet maintaining the strong belief that real comparisons are possible when one puts one’s heart into one’s work, thinks critically, and demonstrates self-irony and the capacity to self-reflect on acquired and learned practices.

To conclude, our joint work began for us an understanding of the field as a space where comparison is possible and, indeed, takes place. The notion of the field is not limited to the conceptualization and applied methodology it has for each discipline. On the contrary, its application brings together different approaches and embraces different geographic territories, and people with different backgrounds and life histories. It clusters temporal gaps through the means of verbal art; that is speaking and writing in different languages, and material cultural, such as Peterson’s diaries, objects, photographs, and films stored in the archives. This space for comparison creates possibilities for the individual researcher as it helps him or her to grow, as well as
creating possibilities for the individual discipline since it pushes their constructed boundaries while still relying on their long-term traditions. Testing new ways of writing in terms of form and content meant for us attempting openings in academic writing practices that go beyond more standardized knowledge production processes and aim to challenge other practices, such as anonymous criticism and its limits. The field encompasses these practices, too, since this space for comparison requires continuous self-reflection in relation to the broader ecology in which researchers operate in the hope to improve its conventions and methods. We want to advance an understanding of the field that appears more transparent both on the ground and in the knowledge production process.

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Notes

1. Peterson completed his tertiary education in ethnography at Tartu State University in 1956. In 1991, he completed his kandidatskaia (Rus. Candidate of Sciences) at Kunstkamera in Saint Petersburg, where he also received his PhD in 1993 (see Eesti Teaduse Biograafiline Leksikon).

2. While Arzyutov and Kan (2013: 45) talk about “excursions” when describing the work done in the field by early-Soviet academics, these were later called “expeditions” (Est. ekspeditsoon). However, this work is now referred to as fieldwork (Est. välitööd).

3. We use Vepsian names for the villages (see Joalaid 1998).

4. In a similar manner Laura presented a paper with Dr Noora Pyyry titled “Knowing with the Field: Moments of Trouble and Enchantment” at the Nordic Geographers’ Meeting in June 2015. A meeting that also brought together scholars from different disciplines.

5. I decided to employ pseudonyms throughout the article since the very same villagers are protagonist of a couple of previous papers that have more sensitive content and I want to compromise neither the villagers of Pondal nor our previous work, which was highly contextualized and responded to specific academic discussions. I will point out when real names are used.

6. Admittedly, the presence of the researcher in the field has an influence on how the discussions are created (Blommaert and Dong 2010: 27). On recollecting memories and photos, see Krupnik and Mikhailova (2006).

7. The last name, Kindaevo, is in Russian since we do not have record of its Vepsian name.

8. It might be worth mentioning that his diaries about the Udmuritian expeditions between 1977 and 1989 were published in the Estonian-Udmuritian edition “Udmurdi päevikud. Udmurtjos dorõn tšaklam-gožjamjos” (Udmurt diaries) in 2006.

9. Seto are a small ethnic group (around 8,000 speakers) in the southeastern Estonia and partly in Russia (Pskov oblast), linguistically close to south Estonians but culturally different. Votes live in the western part of Leningrad oblast, Russia. Today they are entirely assimilated and speak mainly Russian.

10. Paul Ariste (1905–1990) was an Estonian linguist, professor at the University of Tartu, and one of the leading Finno-Ugric scholars of the twentieth century. He studied the Votian language devotedly and maintained close contact with Votes for many years.

11. I will not employ a pseudonym for Vladimir Trishkin due to his easily identifiable position in the village.

12. I do not use a pseudonym for Valentina Karpova because the description I am providing is not controversial and is in line with academic ethical research practices.
13. Stocking (1992) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997) explain how doing fieldwork has become the only-accepted method to gain anthropological knowledge. In addition, the idea of going away to a remote area is often understood as intrinsic to anthropological practice (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 15).


15. I owe my gratitude also to Madis who spent an afternoon telling me the names of some of the villagers, given that he had been to Pondal before.

References


