



Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education/Department of Archaeology and Social Anthropology

Reinventing traditions: Rustic Banya in successful urban Russian lives

Leonid Savelyev

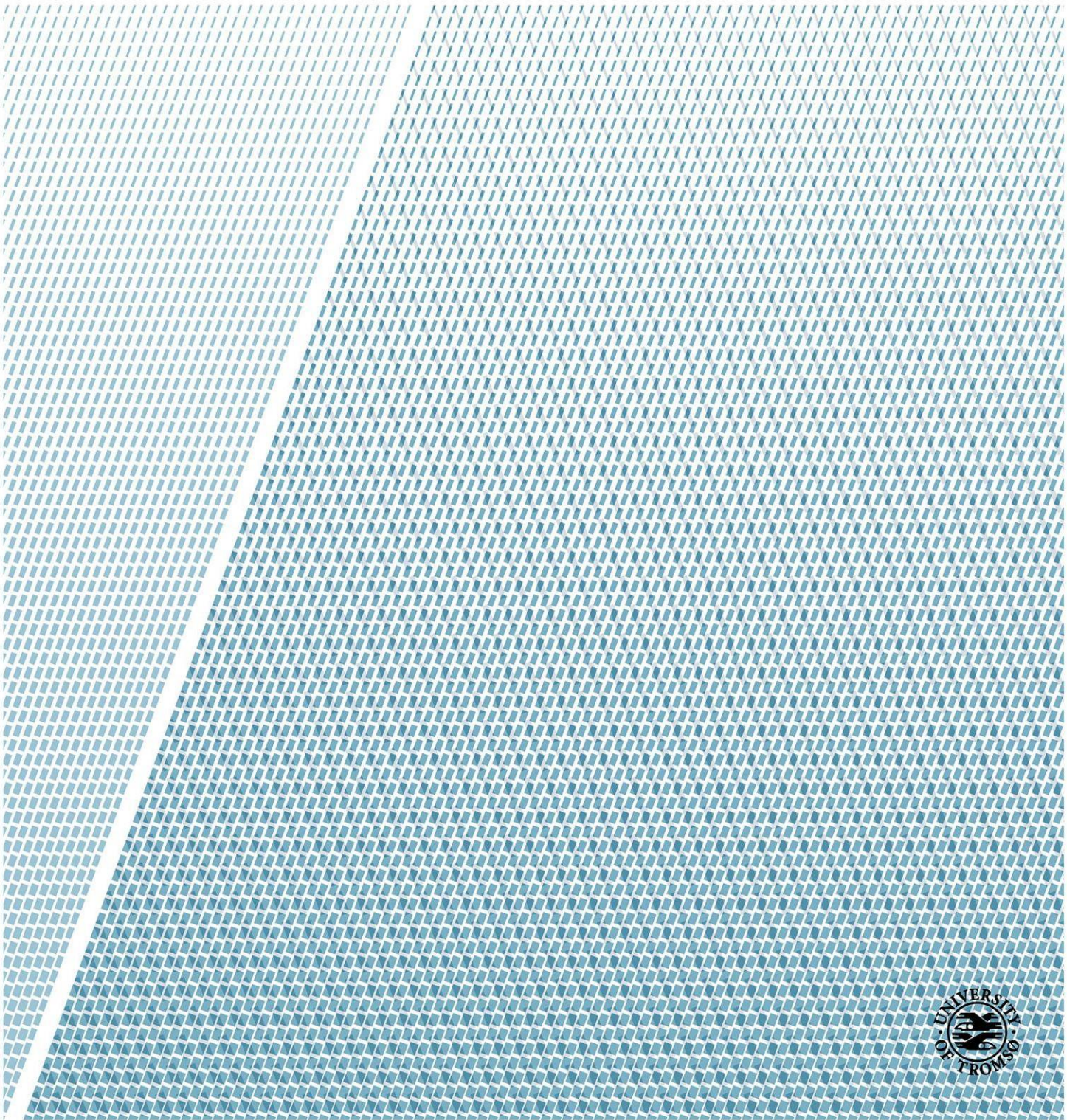
SVF-3903: *From Fieldwork Experience to Ethnographic Film and Text*

Master's Thesis in Visual Cultural Studies

May, 2014

Supervisor: Trond Waage

Department of Archaeology and Social Anthropology



Reinventing traditions: Rustic Banya in successful urban Russian lives

By

Savelyev Leonid Vladimirovich

Master of Philosophy in Visual Cultural Studies

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

University of Tromsø

Norway

Spring 2014

Supervised by

Associate Professor Trond Waage

To my family, my friends and banya associates!

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my project supervisor, Trond Waage. His support and ideas were always timely and fruitful. Special thanks to Lisbet Holtedahl, Bjørn Arntsen and Peter I. Crawford for their help and encouragement during the entire process of my studies in Visual Cultural studies.

I would like to thank Uriri Francisca Prudence and Andreas Buch for their highly professional advice and guidance during the editing of my film. Warm thanks to all my student-colleagues and to all staff of VCS at the University of Tromsø.

I am really grateful to the Norwegian State and University of Tromsø for the funding support and sponsoring my research and my studies.

Thanks to my informants and to all people who helped and allowed me to carry out this project. Thank you!

Abstract

The aim of my master thesis is to explore the reasons for the reproduction of the tradition of rustic private Russian bathing or *banya* in contemporary Russia. In order to do that I conducted my field work in Russia. As a result I made a 33 minute documentary and wrote this thesis. The film and thesis captures how *banya* is experienced by a specific group of informants who has reinvented the tradition of Russian bath in relation to modern Russian realities. Finally this research reveals a transformation in the usage and perception of the *banya* tradition that has taken place in Russia in the last 30 years.

One of the main findings achieved during the project is that my informants used *banya* as an *arena* where they experience a kind of *timeout* from various social responsibilities and duties imposed by their statuses. In the following pages, I reflect upon an idea that *banya* can also be interpreted as a socially constructed space where the practitioners have a unique kind of experience. Further analysis of this will bring me to a discussion about *liminality*, *communitas*, states of “peace and quiet” and states of lightness and happiness that might be experienced by the *banya* participants in one way or another. The thesis also argues that *banya* can be interpreted as an arena with strict rules for inclusion and exclusion or a kind of key club. The participants of this key club implicitly or explicitly take part into a process of identity negotiations and accumulation of their social capital.

Keywords: *banya*, Russian bath, liminality, structure, antistructure, timeout, *communitas*, happiness, “peace and quiet” states of mind, key club, social capital, Russian identity

Table of Contents	xi
1. Introduction	1
2. The context	5
2.1. Location and maps.....	5
2.2. List of terms.....	6
2.3. Banya today: social and physical context.....	6
2.4. The important social situations within the bath session.....	9
2.5. My motivation, the motivation of my informants and historical context of the tradition.....	13
2.6. My informants.....	14
3. Methodology	18
3.1. The obstacles of filming, access and negotiations.....	19
3.2. Doing anthropology “at home”.....	22
3.3. Researching the self-evident.....	24
3.4. Using film footage in discovering process.....	26
3.5. Ethics.....	27
3.6. Cross-connection of the film and the paper.....	28
4. Banya in the context of social statuses of the contemporary practitioners	31
5. Analysis of Banya tradition and its “antistructural” symbols	37
5.1. Making yourself inaccessible.....	37
5.2. Banya and “ <i>structural</i> ” dirt.....	37
5.3. Nakedness as stripping off social statuses.....	38
5.4. Banya and foul language.....	40
5.5. Laughter, humor and “ <i>bricolage</i> ” creativity in banya.....	40
5.6. Banya and close body contact.....	42
5.7. The <i>communitas</i> of banya.....	43
5.8. Banya as a “ <i>psychotechnique</i> ”.....	44
6. Banya and happiness	46
7. Rustic Russian private bath as a key club	49
7.1. Exclusion and inclusion at rustic private Russian bath.....	49
7.2. Banya in comparison with modern leisure practices of the consumer society.....	49
7.3. Banya's membership as an access key to the social capital.....	50
8. Rustic private Russian bath and Russian identity	52
9. Conclusion	54
10. References	56

1. Introduction

The last century was a time of great external and internal shocks for Russians. Over the last hundred years the country participated in two world wars, a civil war, suffered several revolutions and political upheavals accompanied by large-scale economic, ideological and cultural crises. This long-suffering century left its mark on the cultural and historical memory of the Russian people. The ending was marked by transition towards democracy and a capitalist market system and by freedom from communist ideology and planned economy. Unfortunately it led to a total social disorientation during period of transformation both economically and spiritually.

Today new challenges connected with the development of the consumer Society and globalization have evoked a very severe crisis for Russian cultural identity (Berezkin, 2012; Uryutova, 2012; Fedotova, 2003). Although “an identity becomes more complicated and hierarchic in a modern world” cultural traditions are still its foundations (Ledovskaya 2006, 10). And amidst the recent diminution of many cultural traditions the tenacity of some others arouses strong research interest.

One of the Russian cultural traditions that has not gone out of practice is the unique Russian take on bathing. Contrary to other many cultural traditions Russian bathing has actively been spread to new regions, becoming more popular and even acknowledged by large segments of the Russian population (Lipinskaya 2004, 196).

According to data from “The International Association of the Art of Bathing”, one-third of the Russian population use *banya* regularly (Juravleva 2012). According to analytical research of “Business Port” agency and AllSauna.ru, about 10% of the population of such big Russian cities as Saint Petersburg or Moscow have their own *saunas* or *banyas* in a rustic area (Evplanov 2011). “The All-Russian Banya Championship” has been held in Russia since 2010, and the “Russian Banya Festival” has occurred every year since 2012. In the last decade several large organizations such as “The International Association of the Art of Bathing”, “Ruspar”, and “The International Federation of Sport Bathing” have been created. Each of these organizations are engaged in reproducing and promoting the tradition. Joining supporters and practitioners of *banya* into international social networks is another goal of these organizations.

Thus despite of the decline of other cultural traditions, the great persistence of Russian bathing and its strong revival in recent years makes it an important topic for research.

In order to examine this phenomenon I conducted a four-month field research in my home country in Russia where during for months I was studying a group of four practitioners of Russian bathing. I have belonged to this group myself for more than 10 years. Although my first meeting with the tradition happened when I was a child I really managed to merge into it and to see its beauty only when I became a member of this group. This group of associates has enhanced my addictiveness to this tradition. This became simultaneously one of the reasons and the inspiration that initiated this research project. My field work resulted in a 33 minute documentary film called “Light as steam” and also this thesis. The film tells about four Russian men, old friends who come to a rural isolated farmstead in a small village in the northeast of the Leningrad Region. They come there once or twice a month to take a Russian bath. In order to convey unusual emotional experience of my characters I tried to use the *poetic form* of film narrative (Bromhead 1996, 122). The focus of my thesis is exploring the explanations for the reproduction and conservation of the tradition of rustic private bathing (*banya*) within the context of modern Russian society. The following research questions were posed:

1. What kind of interactions usually takes place within the bath session between the participants?
2. What do these interactions possibly mean? How can they be interpreted?
3. What is the motivation of practitioners of the *banya* tradition to keep it alive? Why do they include this tradition into their daily routines? Why do they want to repeat the experience of the *banya* again and again?
4. What kind of experience do the participants have during the bath session? And what way does it contribute to their daily life.

Thus using the case of a local group of my informants this paper will focus on what the tradition is for its practitioners in the context of their social statuses and livelihood strategies. The empirical data collected during my fieldwork supported by various perspectives will assist the analysis of the tradition of rustic private Russian *banya*.

More over, I am going to trace the impact or the consequences of membership of the tradition for my informants’ daily life in order to clarify what way and how it can contribute and affect their life beyond the steam room of *banya*. Thereby and within a “*thick*” ethnographic description (Geertz 2006, 238) of *banya* I also intend to examine how this tradition affects modern Russian society.

Not long ago the grandparents and parents of my informants used *banya* for hygienic purposes or a kind of leisure practice. However, on my own field work observations I may

state that my informants use *banya* rather as a guide or as a means to reach special states of *happiness*, *wholeness* and self-confidence. From this point of view, the tradition gains new cultural meaning or *connotation*. To explain this new meaning and to develop my research I formulated the hypothesis:

Today *banya* can be considered as a scene or arena for specific activity of my informants that (within a bath session) produces some liminal states experienced accumulatively as a timeout of various responsibilities and duties imposed by social routine and statuses of the participants and as a temporary state of happiness. Such states increase and facilitate communication, consolidate friendship and trust relationships between the members of *banya*.

In order to develop the above ideas and examine the research questions the thesis includes the following chapters:

Chapter 2. **“The Context”** gives short description of the tradition. Subchapters “Locating and maps” and “Banya today: social and physical context” introduces the location of my field research and gives general overview of how it is presented today. Subchapter “My motivation, the motivation of my informants and historical context of the tradition” gives some historical background of the tradition and explains the motivation of my informants as well as my own motivation to be involved in the project. Subchapter “My informants” introduces my informants.

Chapter 3. **“Methodology”** presents a full inventory of research methods and methodological tools that I used during my fieldwork. It reveals the main (economical, technical, psychological and etc.) problems I encountered as well as ways I tried to solve those problems. Subchapter “Doing anthropology at home” tells about challenges that I met being a researcher at my home country in Russia. Subchapter “Ethics” deals with general and some special ethical challenges that I met filming naked people. Subchapter “Using film footage in discovering process” tells about analytical profits of the feedback that I got in screening of rushes to my informants within my fieldwork and later to an academic audience during the seminars (my students and teachers). Subchapter “Cross-connection of the film and the paper” presents the inner logic in division of my data between writing (thesis) and visual (film) parts of my work.

Chapter 4. **“Banya in the context of social statuses of the contemporary practitioners”** is to be the main one of four content chapters that give analytical description of my field work data according to the above referenced research questions. This chapter

considers the rustic private tradition of banya within the context of the social statuses of my informants.

Chapter 5. **“Analysis of Banya tradition and its “antistructural” symbols”** consists of 8 subchapters. These eight subchapters illustrate several manifestations of the *“liminal”* states of my informants that can be observed within a bath session.

Chapter 6. **“Banya and happiness”** explores the contribution and influence of the Russian bathing tradition on way of life of its practitioners and also decodes “peace and quiet” states achieved within a bath session in terms of the concept of *happiness* that my informants may have.

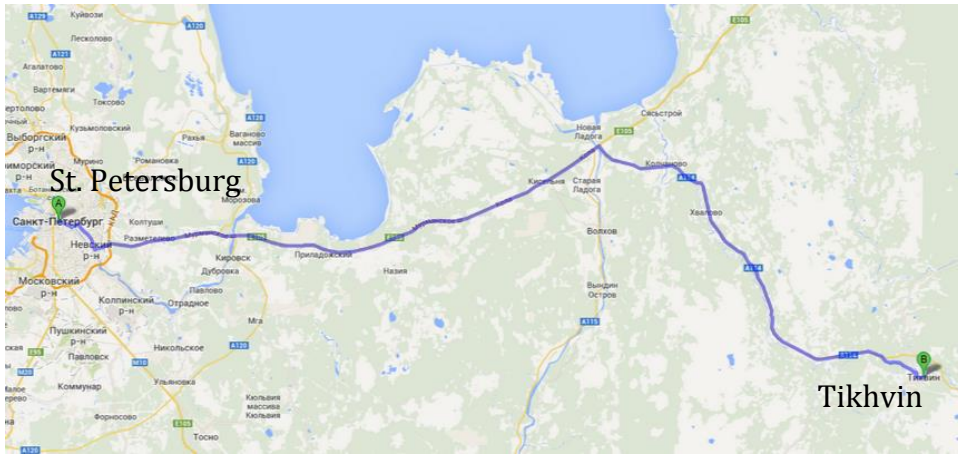
Chapter 7. **“Rustic private bath as a key club”** shows possible gain and loss that the members may have from their *banya*-membership and demonstrates some crucial differences between public urban and the rustic private baths. Subchapter 7.1 tells about special filter features of rustic private bath. Subchapter 7.2 illustrates types of social relationships between my informants with regard to their *banya*-membership and considers *banya* as a potential access key to the social capital of modern Russian society. Subchapter 7.3 gives the main differences between the rustic private baths and widespread nowadays leisure practices imposed by the consumer society.

Chapter 8. **“Rustic private Russian bath and Russian identity”** reveals an important interrelation between “Russian way of bathing” practiced by my informants and their emphasizing of Russian identity within the bath session.

Chapter 9. **“Conclusion”** summarizes all the previous ideas, hypotheses findings about rustic private Russian bathing (*banya*) and its reproducing and gives all main implications I made during my analytical research.

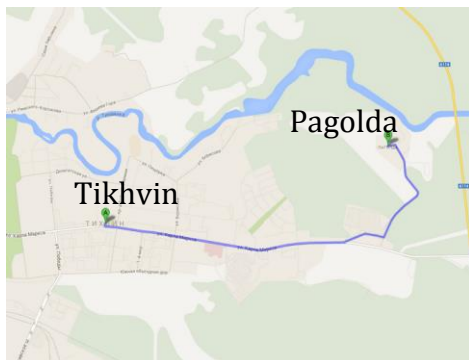
2. Context

2.1. Location and maps



Map of the North-West of Leningradskaya oblast region: source Google Maps (accessed 19.05.2014)

My field work was conducted in the North-West of Russia in one of the villages of Leningradskaya oblast region. The village is called Pagolda. It is situated 4,4 kilometers from a town called Tikhvin (with population about 60 000 people) which is 220 kilometers from Saint Petersburg (the second largest city in Russia).



Map of Tikhvin and Pagolda: source Google Maps (accessed 19.05.2014)

The resident population of Pagolda is about 100 people, but during the summer season it can reach 300 with the arrival home of families visiting their relatives while on vacation. My field work was conducted since the 14th week of 2013 (01.04.2013) until the 30th week of 2013 (22.07.2013). Totally it took almost 4 months with short number of breaks when my informants could not take part either because of vacation or because of their health condition.

The majority of all filming was during the weekends inasmuch as the Russian bath tradition is a calendar rite and usually comes around at the end of every workweek.

2.2. List of terms

Certain **keywords** will be used in this thesis. Below some crucial and helpful words to an understanding of *banya* practice are given and I have contextualized them:

“banya” – the Russian sauna; “zahod” - a call, or a circle or a lap of steaming in the steam room; “mochil’shik” – a hitter or a “beast”; “ban’shik” - a professional bathhouse attendant; “leopard skin”; “ptobit’ ” – to make somebody have a “leopard skin” or “leopard effect”; “pod’dat’ ” - putting on steam; “S leh’kim parom!” - Enjoy your steam!; “to throw a small one”, “to throw a big one”; “zapet’ “ – “to start singing”; “gonyat’ par” – roll the steam (pumping of the steam in a hot room by circular motion of bunches of green birch twigs (rods) in order to replace the hottest steam from up level to down; “Prigotovlenie banyi” - literally in English it will be “to cook a banya” but in Russian it also means “to prepare banya before the usage”. This complex process usually includes a supplying of water, firewoods and towels, preheating the stove in the bath house and some other preparations.

2.3. Banya today: social and physical context

Usually Russian bath or *Banya* is a small wooden framework house, equipped with body washing facilities that uses simultaneous forces of hot steam and cold water. *Banya* can

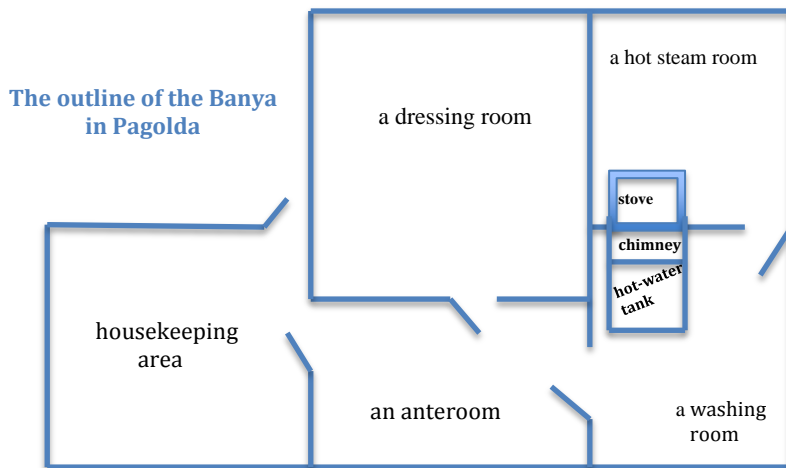


be both private and rural but also public and urban. In both cases, the main principle of *banya* is the same – it is a well isolated wooden room with hot steam (usual temperature: +80 degrees by Celsius). In my case *banya* in Pagolda was a kind of building extension and the picture below demonstrates it very well.

The traditional *banya* must have a place for cooling: in the countryside it is usually a lake or river, as it was in Pagolda. And my informants used a special wooden platform on the bank of the river for jumping and diving into the water. During winter it can be even a snowdrift or an ice hole near such a platform with a water temperature about: +3...+6 degrees Celsius. In urban locations special cold pools are used.

Fundamentally this is a collective and calendar rite that usually takes place on

weekends. The traditional banya house almost always has three main sections: hot room, washing room and spacious dressing room, where people not only get dressed but also drink tea and relax after and between bathing. There was a difference in space planning in the bath house in Pagolda, because it had



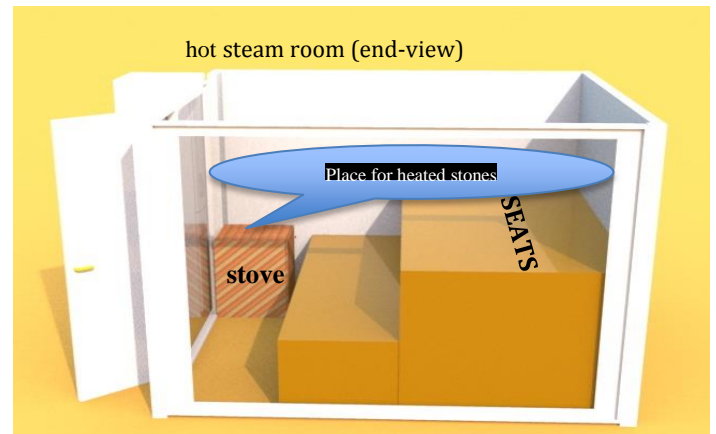
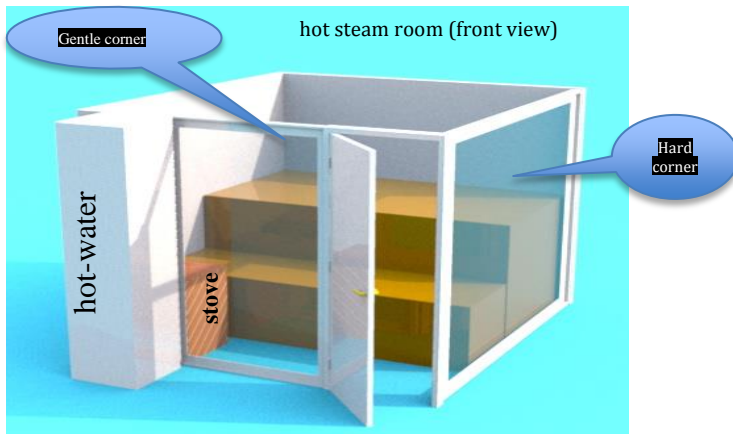
additional housekeeping areas. But the main rule of banya's design was saved as it is shown by the drawing.

Consumption of alcoholic beverages of any strength is traditionally not advised at all stages of the bathing session. Practically people follow this rule but sometimes after the bathing they might treat themselves to several bottles of beer. My informants, however, never drink alcohol after nor before the bath session. It's also not recommended to have a meal at least a couple of hours before the beginning of the session. An exception to this rule could be made for having tea and turn-out. During my field work every bath session was preceded by a tea-party.

An average bath session lasts 3 to 6 hours and has a cyclic structure. During this period the participants have time to make a few calls (or laps or in Russian "zahod") at the hot room and are subject to drastic temperature changes. At first they go to a hot steam room, then briefly visit the cooling area and relax in the dressing room. Inside the hot steam room there is a back part of a stove that has a metal tub with special heated stones. The visitors occasionally pour hot water on the stones adding more steam. This is the special feature of the wet steam Russian bath in contrast with dry steam Finnish sauna. There are no strong rules, but usually each call to a hot steam room takes from 10 to 30 minutes and is accompanied by friendly unhurried conversations. Each new round time spent in a steam hot room extends but then reduces gradually although it may depend on the stamina of the practitioners. However the very first call is the shortest because it is for initial warming and getting used to a steam room.

Thus the main arenas for interactions for my informants moving within such cyclic structure of the bath session were the house and, particularly, kitchen, dressing room, hot

steam room, washing room, small patio in front of the house, and wooden platform near the river. All the most important social situations that usually took place during the bath session were bound up with all those locations. The central place in this list had a hot steam room. In fact the hot steam room was the heart of the bathing process. It gave the rhythm, tempo and atmosphere of every part of the bath session. Everything that happened inside of it had crucial effects on the whole process of bath session and affected a lot of events outside of it. Here are two 3D models of the hot steam room in Pagolda:



Moreover in connection with the hot room there are a lot of concepts that are popular with the practitioners. A clear understanding of how the hot steam room works is a compulsory condition in understanding the real meanings of all those concepts. Generally the practitioners of banya can be divided into 3 categories in accordance with the stamina of each individual (Maslov 2011):

- 1) The “hitters” or "cosmonauts” or “beasts” (the most experienced people);
- 2) The “average people” (average level of experience);
- 3) The “youth” or “boys” (inexperienced people).

In my specific case at least two of my informants identified themselves as “beasts” or “hitters”. Sometimes this classification and experience level of participants can determine the rules of the seating inside of the steam room. So the most popular place for seating among “youth” or “average people” is a “gentle corner”. Usually it is situated close to the stove and the metal tub with stones because of thermodynamics of *banya*. The steam reaches there after all the others and does not burn that much. A “hitter” or “mochil’sch’ik” would prefer a “hard corner” (far away from the tub) or another special place which is called “na razdache”. The last one is much closer to the tub with stones and equipped by a ladle and by a small bucket with hot water. In order to increase the heat inside of the hot room the individual who is

sitting there can easily regulate the intensity of steam by pouring small portions of hot water on the stones.

Occasionally after several calls the participants beat each other with steamed bunches of green birch twigs (the rods). Either “hitter” or even a professional bathhouse attendant so-called “ban’shik” (trained in different methods of bathing and rod massage) is in charge of the bath process. This person is a leader of the bath session who like a band director coordinates the actions of other participants. “Ban’shik” is the one who is responsible for cooking banya. He preheats it or decides upon whether or when to ventilate it or not. Usually “ban’shik” is an owner of banya or the most experienced practitioner.

2.4. The important social situations within the bath session

Based on my own observations and collected data there are several social situations that take place during bath session. In my opinion they play the process-forming role in the tradition of the Russian bath. Firstly they were the most often repeated situations and this repetitiveness probably points to important structural elements of the bath session. Secondly those situations had line and seriated type and they were the turning points of the each bath session that I observed. Thirdly, all of those situations included the most active interactions between the participants:

“Prigotovlenie” or “cooking” a banya. Generally the owners of *banya* are the hosts and they are responsible for all the details. And this is accepted by the participants. To cook a *banya* means to preheat it properly and to keep a sharp lookout for how it is running hot. A person who cooks *banya* must control a heat degree in the stove and put some more wood on the fire making it burn up in case if the firewood were burnt away. It is strongly recommended to ventilate a hot room from time to time especially to avoid fumes from the stove accidentally building up inside. Cooking a *banya* implies a large supplying of water for cooling or for washing after the steaming. An important part of the cooking includes brewing up bunches of green birch twigs to make them soft, elastic and aromatic. The owners of *banya* prepare in advance a large supply of towels or white sheets and drinks (kvass, fruit drink or tea) in case someone needs these things during the bath session. Usually guests are not involved in the process of cooking *banya*. Of course they may help to do that or inspect the process from time to time but usually they prefer to wait for the bathing smacking their lips drinking tea, reading books, chatting with each other or walking around in near by pine trees.

They have enough time for these activities because running a *banya* is a long process and usually requires 6 or 7 hours to preheat it properly. This time before the actual *banya* is a period of socializing and comradery. The guests may walk in a forest, talk to each other, drink tea or play chess, for example.

Tea-drinking before and after the bathing. This custom has several functions. Firstly it can prevent dehydration during the bathing. Secondly psychologically the tea-party displaces the meal because eating on the eve of the bath session is considered harmful for health. To satisfy hunger the participants drink tea immediately upon the bathing. And it is normal when after the bathing one feels hunger and healthy appetite like after long sport training. A tea-drinking takes place in the kitchen of the house. Before the bathing it is accompanied by chatting, joking and sharing news. The tea-party that takes place after the bathing is much more quiet. There are no any special preferences for tea, but usually people drink black or green tea.

Taking off the clothes and getting dressed. This takes place in the dressing room before bathing. The practitioners encourage each other before the bathing while removing their clothing. And men often used strong masculine humor for that. After the bathing the participants were more introspective and quieter, their movements were slow and stately with lack of coordination. Even though humor is allowed such exchanges were not so lively.

Steaming. This is the opening phase of the bathing that has several stages. It takes place when the participants are gradually getting used to the temperature in the hot room after they have just come inside. At this stage “ban’shik” doesn’t increase the steam by pouring hot water on the heated stones. During this phase the participants are adjusting to the sitting. They begin to sweat, adjust themselves on the wooden seats, and silently enjoy the dry steam while listening to their own private thoughts. This stage has the longest duration but this shortens with every next call, or lap. Such smooth and gradual prelude is considered as very important technique of the bathing because it helps the participants to save strength and stamina for the procedures that follow. Sometimes in order to increase this adaptation period “ban’shik” doesn’t proceed to the next stage during the first call. The second stage of the steaming is called “putting on steam” and starts when one (a “ban’shik” or a “hitter”) is putting small portions of hot water on the heated stones using a ladle. This regulates the rate of humidity inside the steam room because it is very important to save proportions between the temperature and air humidity inside the steam room. The correct proportion is when

temperature varies between 60 to 80 degrees Celsius and air humidity reaches about 20 - 40 %. Such balance makes it easy to breath inside the steam room and also makes the process of sweating more intensive. A dry or less humid steam room makes it hard to sweat properly. In some sense this stage is designed to make the practitioners sweat as much as possible. But every “ban’shik” or a person who is in charge of the steam room has their own rhythm and pace for this process. It does not mean that this person does what he or she likes. Rather it means that “ban’shik” is the only one who makes a decision taking into account their own feelings as well as the feelings of the other participants. Encouraging people and responding to reactions, the “ban’shik” starts to be more and more active and even “aggressive”, sometimes even turning into a real “hitter” or a “beast”. It means that such a “beast” can gradually shorten the breaks between pouring hot water and makes the steam scalding and sharp like glass. All this affects the physical and psychological atmosphere inside the steam room and evokes the next phase of the bath session.

The apogee. It is a moment when the steam inside the steam room is the strongest one and becomes almost unbearable. It seems that it is impossible to stay there any longer but the participants remain seated, enduring the intense conditions. The temperature can reach 80-90 degrees Celsius and the wet and hot steam can start to burn but for the “hitters” it is a mixture of pain and pleasure to stay there longer and longer. At that moment my informants were crying, growling, moaning, cursing, yowling, singing and even rocking themselves from side to side. Many of them fell into some sort of trance. Only the most experienced practitioners are able to stand during this phase, less experienced people usually leave the steam room. Sometimes inexperienced “youth” can feel competitive in this situation and start to be ashamed of their inexperience. But such situations did not take place during my research I was surrounded by experts of the tradition who knew that *banya* is not a place for sport competitions nor for demonstration of one’s superiority. Each of them clearly understood the importance of listening to ones own body in order not to unintentionally harm themselves.

Beating each other with rods. Usually this phase starts not before the 3rd call but this is not an ordained condition. This procedure requires absolute trust between a person who beats and another one who is supposed to be beaten. Mostly the first one is a trained and experienced “hitter” or “ban’shik”. The rhythm and power of the slashes makes a great difference and involves both serious knowledge and skill. An experienced “ban’shik” knows a lot of special methods of rod massage. In my case, “ban’shik” practiced the so-called “brush technique”.

But the idea of all methods as my informants explained me is to reach the most relaxing effect. Some years ago one of them had visited China and encountered needle therapy. After this journey he believed that the effect of the beating by rods in the tradition of Russian bath is likely close to the effect of Chinese acupuncture. After such a harsh procedure “ban’shik” becomes as tired as the participant and both of them need to cool down well.

Cooling. In order to cool themselves my informants showered with cold water or jumped into a river. During the winter season there were affusions by well-water, jumping into a snowdrift or into an ice hole. The process of cooling has great significance. My informants suggest that it is physically and psychologically necessary to neutralize the overheating that took place in the steam room. They considered the effect of the “leopard skin” when their body or some parts of it became covered with red and white spots as a good marker of cooling. Usually this effect is reached not before 3rd or 4th call or even closer to the culmination or apogee phase. Inadequate cooling shortens the stamina of the participants. It can cause discomfort and headache and does not give the psychological effect of overcoming and being subject to drastic temperature changes. Even the most experienced practitioners have very strong psychological discomfort before jumping into cold water. However they believe that later this overcoming effect will be rewarded with an incredible cathartic feeling of rejuvenation.

Sitting after cooling. Usually this took place on the wooden platform near the river and very rarely inside the dressing room. When the participants got out of the river they preferred to sit for a while with no speaking in order not to disturb the moment and extend as much as possible the state of inner silence and equilibrium. They were listening to nature around them, whispering of trees and singing birds. Sometimes they had short conversations but then became quiet again and all seemed relaxed. It was the most interesting and mysterious part of the bath session when the participants were able to achieve some strange non-ordinary states of consciousness. Later through the interview the informants described such states as the deepest inner integrity or a feeling of the total absolute purification. To name such effect and states, the participants often used special term “doiti do kondicii” which in English is close to the expression “come into its own” or “when one comes into one’s own”. In fact this was the culmination of the whole process of bathing. Achieving this state was considered by my informants as a good result of the bath session.

2.5. My motivation, the motivation of my informants and historical context of the tradition

The idea of my research is indissolubly related to my informants and their involvement in my life. The first time this idea came to me was on Christmas Eve during winter recess while I was visiting my old acquaintances in Tikhvin. That time I was a first year master's degree student in Visual Cultural Studies program of UIT and by order of our teachers I was looking for a potential subject of my research. One day after a long steam bath session while drinking tea and sharing their impressions of bath, my friends told me a lot of interesting facts about Russian banya or the Russian sauna, its rules and healthcare effects, its importance and influence on their daily life. Moreover, I was really intrigued by some of their stories about unusual states of mind achieved during the bath session. They told me their stories well into the night giving me more and more examples of the unusual mental effect of *banya*. I found that many of the feelings of my friends have much in common with my own experience of *banya*. I have been practicing banya more than 17 years and so I am a "hitter". However I have never actually thought deeply about the banya experience or what attracts people to it and makes them want to keep reliving it over and over.

Another interesting observation I made from that conversation was that for my informants to be part of such a centuries-old Russian tradition means to belong to the rich culture of Russia and its history. When comparing Russian baths with bathing traditions of other cultures my informants insisted on Russian banya's uniqueness, originality and superiority in regard to such traditions as Turkish bath, Finnish sauna or Japanese-*ofuro*. Many stories, sayings and legends about banya were narrated during my project and all are linked with the heroic past of Russia and its literature. The first references to the tradition of banya can be found in first Russian chronicle called "The Tale of Bygone Years" from the twelfth century. This chronicle narrates about banya in the context of some curious historical facts and events. For example, there is a vivid story about the Russian princess Olga (lived in the tenth century) who invited the killers of her husband to banya and burnt them there in order to revenge. Another episode is dedicated to a contract agreement between Russian and Byzantine merchants. One of the compulsory conditions of this agreement for Russians was to provide their Byzantine guests with a visit to Russian banya. My informant B. told me of the ritual of ancient and contemporary Russian warriors to have a bath before an important battle. According to this ritual described by many military Russian historians the warriors take a bath and so to be clean when in facing possible death in a battle (Rakovskii 1989,

Mihin 2006, Alexandrovsky 1956). So for example in 1812 year in the battle of Borodino, one Russian battalion was bathing when the army of Napoleon suddenly attacked (Ivchenko 2002, 55). During the next hour Russian soldiers had to repulse an attack of eight thousands French soldiers. For the first fifteen minutes twenty-seven Russian officers and also six hundred and ninety-three duty men were killed there. The French army was taken aback by the towering rage and organization of the naked Russian troopers. The rest of eight hundred Russian soldiers repulsed eight thousands French soldiers.

Listening to my informants I heard the unabashed pride that they felt while telling me these various stories. In my view, this admiration and sense of pride in the Russian bath tradition were directly linked to the pride in being a part of Russian history and culture. In this sense the tradition of Russian banya referred to the very important issues of my informants' identities and particularly to their national identity or being Russian.

All these legends, stories and ideas about banya caught my attention and inspired me to find out the modern cultural meaning and the explanations of reproducing the Russian bath tradition. So on my return to Norway I called my Russian acquaintances and made them a proposal to be my informants in the research project about banya. They liked the idea and accepted the proposal. So when I left Tromsø in March of the last year I had a subject of my research and I could imagine who would be my informants and how I would do it.

2.6. My informants

Thus in the past I was well-acquainted with my main informants and over the past 10 years I have kept in touch with them. Almost all of them have been well-acquainted with each other and often have meetings in Tikhvin or Pagolda, although they used to live in different cities.

On the first stage of the project I wanted to include in my field work as an informant the father of my old friend A. That man has been living in Pagoda for a long time and with his two sons-in-law has built a very good type of Russian bath house. However, he opted out of being my informant and film character because of his health.

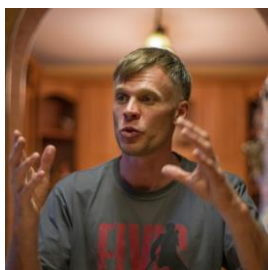
It did not destroy my plans at all. Finally I had an agreement about participation in the project with the husband of A. (who also was a friend of mine), her brother-in-law I. and with two our mutual friends (among whom was my classmate M. and his friend B.). In fact this group of individuals had a long practice of meetings for steam bathing in Pagolda and I was one of their member from time to time.

Among the participants involved in my project there were four men and one woman. However, she gave her consent to be filmed once in a while and didn't participate directly in the bath sessions with the rest of the male informants.

The majority of my informants were my age, and belonged as I did to one and the same ethnic group (Russian). They all were married, and all of them (except one) had higher education although in different fields. Half of them were related to each other.



A. is an old acquaintance of mine since 1997 when I visited Tikhvin. A. was born in Tikhvin. She is 39 years old, married and has one daughter. She obtained a higher education in Saint Petersburg in 1994. She is an economist by profession. A is interested in jazz music, yoga and singing and she is irreligious. She is the one who put me in touch with her husband N. (a main figure in this project). She also gave me her consent to be filmed, although during the project she was trying to avoid cameras and took part in filming only occasionally. As her husband and her father she is a great fan and practitioner of the Russian bath, but she takes it in company with other women of her family (her mother, daughter, sister and her mother-in-law) and in “women's time” that usually means after the men's bathing. I had no permission to film women in banya or to be with them during those women's hours with camera or without it. A. is a wealthy woman, a rentier. Her annual income is about \$100 000. She and her husband owns several apartments and houses with Russian baths in Tikhvin area and in Saint Petersburg. Their resident house is located in Tikhvin. There is another house in Pagolda where now A's parents live and one more house house in the village Shugozero (80 km far from Tikhvin). All the houses were built with the Russian baths. However *banya* in Pagolda has the most beautiful location because it is situated not far from Tikhvin on the bank of the river and near to a picturesque pinery and that's why it is the most popular with A. and her family. From my observations A. is an experienced bather and so a “beast”, or a “hitter”.



N. is a husband of A. He is 39 years old. He was born in Tikhvin. He is an economist by profession. He graduated in 1994 in Saint Petersburg After graduating he returned to Tikhvin where he met A. and married her. He is irreligious. N. is a wealthy person, a rentier. He owns several small shops in Tikhvin. He also owns his recording production studio. His annual income is about \$100 000. He is engaged in sound engineering and well-known among jazz musicians in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. N. is fond of poetry and author of

many songs. I got acquainted with N. in 1997. By that time I had already been quite familiar with the tradition of the Russian bath, which I first learned from my father but then N. showed me the breadth of this tradition and taught me many techniques that I either did not know previously or just only had heard. Since the 1990s, I have been bathing in all *banyas* of N. In my opinion he is also an experienced bather and can be considered as a “beast” or a “hitter”. Moreover, he was our “ban’shik” and a leader during all the bath sessions that we had.



I. is a brother-in-law of A. and a good friend of N. I. was born in Tikhvin. He is 36 years. He is married and has a son who likes the Russian bath. I. does not have a higher education. He is irreligious, drives a car and lives in Tikhvin. He is occupied in building and construction work. I. works in a company of N. He enjoys hiking, nature photography and mountain climbing. His annual income is about \$18 000. I. has friendly relations with N. and always accompanies him in all kinds of sport activity. As well as N. and A. he is a great practitioner of the Russian bath who usually tries not to miss a weekend with bathing. N. put me in touch with I. in 2004. According to my field work observations his experience level is a “beast” or a “hitter”.



M. is my classmate and my common friend with N. and A. M. was born in Odessa. He is 34 years old, married and has two sons. M. obtained a higher education and PhD in ecology, but now he works a journalist-freelancer as well as interpreter. He is also a professional poker player who participates major online and offline tournaments such as World Series of Poker in Las Vegas. His annual income is about \$ 60 000. M. is irreligious, does not drive a car and lives in Saint Petersburg. He enjoys chess, swimming, writes poetry and short novels. I put him in touch with A. and N. in 1999 – since that they have been friends. When he has spare time he often visits Tikhvin for taking a bath – during that he usually stays with A. and N. in their residence. From my own observations I would consider his experience level is just a little bit higher than “average”.



B. is our common acquaintance with M., A. and N. He was born in Saint Petersburg. He is 39 years old, married and has a son and a daughter from different marriages. He is irreligious, drives a car and lives in Saint Petersburg. B. obtained a higher education in 1996 in Saint Petersburg State University and has PhD in economy. He works as a spokesperson of a major Russian shipbuilding company and a GR-manager of an international company in Saint Petersburg. His annual income is about \$ 58 000. B. is a president of the

Association of Slow Pipe Smoking in Saint Petersburg. He is fond of poetry, writes poetry and historical plays. He owns a house in Gatchina. M. put me in touch with B. in 2006. Since then we have often been meeting in Tikhvin or in Pagolda. B. has very friendly relations with M. and N. Sometimes they arrange home concerts with chess or poker tournaments or poetry-parties. To do that they usually have meetings in Tikhvin or Saint Petersburg. From my observations I concluded that his experience level is just a little bit higher than “average”.



Alexander Lemeshev is my friend and former colleague. During the whole project he was my assistant. Despite the fact that Alexander had no experience in filmmaking and bathing, he helped me in many cases, assisting in all kind of problems.

Although there are some obvious differences in the economic situation of my informants their group can be characterized as relatively socially homogeneous one. All the informants have very similar list of social status and interests. In addition to their interest in the Russian bath all these people have very high level of mutual credibility, a number of joint creative projects and long history of friend and business relationships.

3. Methodology

The main method that I used during my fieldwork was participant observation. My participant observation was extended on *banya*-activities of my informants as well as to their daily professional life. I followed my actors (of course, by their consent) almost everywhere. I invited them to participate in the very filmmaking to show comprehensively their favorite tradition. I was analyzing carefully obtained data immediately within the fieldwork process correcting the further collection of information in accordance with a cyclical pattern of ethnographic inquiry (Spradley 1980, 26). I did not use structured interviews in my fieldwork because of the sensitivity of the chosen topic. I preferred using semi-structured interviews or even non-formal semi-structured conversations.

During the period of the fieldwork I took part in more than three bath session as one of the participants - from the very beginning up to the last stages of it such as sitting and resting near the river with conversations, or the final tea drinking. The other thirteen times I participated only as a filmmaker. During the fieldwork I made the field notes and records on my camera, using not only the university's camera Sony HRV-V1E, but also my own compact and lightweight portable waterproofed HD-cameras.

I kept fieldwork notes, a fieldwork journal that contained “a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork” (Spradley 1980, 71) as well as special log-sheet for logging some important records and scenes on my tapes. I wrote my field notes as an “expanded account” (Spradley 1980, 70) that was conducted in the evening or in the next morning after my observations. The material on tapes was used as a “condensed account” during the analyzing and editing.

In order to increase my self-reflexivity and awareness I changed the location of my research from time to time. For that I visited three times famous public urban Pine Tar bath in Saint Petersburg that is also known as Degtyarnie *banya*. Unfortunately the owner did not allow me to film inside the bath but I had the chance to practice a comparative observation. That comparison of the public urban and the rustic private baths let me not only see their similarities and differences but also to find some very important consistent patterns attached particularly to the subject of my research.

During the project I found that methods I used inevitably affected the direction, the pace, the results and final findings of my research. Thus the strategies of observation within the bath sessions, negotiations with my informants, ethic limits of filming naked people and

further screening of rushes, teachers' advice and impressions of reviews of the final cut film merged into one ceaseless kaleidoscope of methodological consequences that formed the course of my research.

3.1. The obstacles of filming, access and negotiations

In my case, the most prominent difficulties that appeared immediately on the first phase of the project were technical problems. There were problems with the stability of the camera, especially during the filming in motion, and some problems with well-timed focus in changing between Close-up Shots and Medium Shots. Another problem in sunny or snowy days was overloading by light. In order to avoid that I used all the built-in filters and adjusted IRIS to maximum numbers.

The second complicated problem was the permanent shortage of light in the hot steam room. For filming inside of the hot room I bought two Hero 3 Gopro cameras with waterproof plastic boxes. And although they had HD mode and auto-focus, but they were very sensible to poor lighting. Trying to solve the problem I had to buy special waterproof lamps, because without them the image filmed in such conditions was too grainy and useless for editing. This became obvious after the first shots in the hot steam room. All the material that I made then went down the drain. Unfortunately, I had a very limited budget and I could not manage to fix the problem completely. I did not have enough money to provide the required level of lighting in the hot steam room, but I persisted in my attempts to film despite adverse conditions.

Occasionally the camera batteries in the strong conditions of the hot room became overheated and turned off. Struggling with that my assistant and I developed a rotate system of cooling of the cameras in buckets with cold spring water. We had to do it every time the participants came out of the hot steam room to cool themselves. Such synchronization of processes required efficiency. The whole process was delicate. I did not want to interrupt the filming process and nor damage the expensive equipment. Of course before every bath session I tried to prepare in advance all the necessary equipment choosing the required accessories for filming (spare boxes, fixtures, home-made protective covers for microphones and batteries). Such advance planning helped me in many ways.

As the saying goes "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs!" Two portable tripods made in China were melted being subject to extremely high temperatures and heated steam. The Gopro cameras were without zoom function and in order to be able to change shots during the filming I made two iron hinged-type connecting rods, which allowed me to

approach to or remove cameras from the participants in stable motion and without shivering. This unusual design for a small space of the hot room sometimes caused psychological and physical discomfort to my informants. So several times I had to change the locations of the rods with cameras to give the participants more space.

Probably those technical difficulties and in some cases my overreaction might have provoked a problem of another type. In the beginning of my field work my informants experienced in photo issues were always on the qui vive to give me “expert” advice in such things like frame composition, white balance, lighting and etc. They often commented on my every step as a cameraman and wanted to discuss filmmaking. Sometimes all their numerous “expert” tips did not give me a chance to concentrate either on the process of filming, nor on observations. Finally I was able to stop it in very short period of time by simply not informing my characters about any technical issues, even if I had some.

Often I had to explain to my informants again and again the goal and nature of my project. They had that widespread stereotype of filmmaker as a person who makes a film with a multiple number of takes, and always trying to shoot the best one. According to this stereotype, they offered “to simplify” my work by reenactments or suddenly posing as a film director asked me “to retake a scene”. I was ready for such behavior from the beginning and recognized this as the provocative effect of the video camera that by its very presence affects the behavior of characters. This problem was solved eventually when the participants became accustomed to the camera and were fed up by my ceaseless explanations of the differences between the feature film and ethnographic documentary without reenactments.

Having been acquainted with me for a long time the informants could fully trust me. Thus I had no problem with access and was accepted by them from the beginning of my field work. Actually I started to use the camera during the first days of the project. A good knowledge of the subject of the research and my previous experience in Russian steam bathing facilitated my adoption by informants in my new role as a filmmaker.

During the entire process of filming I tried to maximize the interest of my participant in my project by so-called method of “sharing anthropology” (Rouch, Jean. 2003, 224). I encouraged them to cooperate and took into consideration all their ideas, even the most fantastic ones.

So one of the informants suggested that I shoot a home singsong that my informants arranged one day after the bathing. It was a very late evening and quite dark. And despite the fact that all participants were sitting over the fire I thought the idea of making a film in such poor light conditions was hopeless. I voiced my doubts to the rest of the informants, but they

liked the idea, stopped the singsong for a while and helped me to arrange additional lighting. After twenty minutes I shot an evening home singsong.

Many ideas from my informants contributed to my project. It illustrates very well that almost all data gathered during researching were “very much cooperative product” between researcher and informants (Davies 2008, 9). A lot of interesting scenes of Mr. B’s and Mr. M’s working activity, some important situations at the wooden platform and some shots of procuring of the bath rods appeared exactly in this way. Thus in spite of the unusual situation the reaction of my informants to a pure presence of camera was eventually positive. And I often consciously used my camera as “a catalyst that helped create the context in which it was used” (Pink 2001, 85). I learnt not to be afraid of contaminating the results of the research by my own invasion. In fact I found that taking into account the influence of the video camera, the presence of a researcher and the implicit presence of an audience enriched my research.

Although my film implied the intrusion on private and very intimate spheres of my informants’ life like shooting them naked, they were sympathetic to this aspect of the film. I promised them that rushes will be shown only to an academic audience. One of the participants (Mr. B) specifically asked me to make visually illegible most intimate areas of the body, if I showed the final cut film to a wider audience. I gave him my word and later kept my promise.

There were some problems with harmonization between the schedule of my research and the personal schedule of every informant in the beginning. Of course I had to collaborate with them. In particular, I postponed filming several times in April and June, when the owner of the *banya* in Pagolda had to leave Russia for a few weeks on vacation.

Towards the end it became clear that participation in the project was not only my work but was also taking its toll on my informants. Their initial ebullience was gradually fading, while psychological tiredness was increasing more and more. Several times at the end some of the informants expressed a wish to finish the project as soon as possible explaining that only the fact of the presence of camera made them tired. To defuse those tensions and at the same time in order to practice participant observation, I alternated shooting with participant observation without camera as in my case it was physically impossible to combine shooting with participant observation!

3.2. Doing anthropology at home

My informants were really proud of the *banya* tradition, the “Russianness” of the tradition and their own skillfulness at it. That’s probably why all of them were totally convinced that the tradition of rustic private Russian bathing would be very interesting for a foreign audience. And through the project they never voiced any doubts about this point. They did, however, have some doubts whether my film would ever convey the “real” meaning of all that they did or show in front of the camera.

My main informant Mr. N. (the owner of *banya* in Pagolda) quite often asked me “to show everything properly”. Once I even put a direct question to him about what he understood by that comment. He answered straight off that “to show everything properly means to show everything in a beautiful way because it is *banya* and one has no right to film it in another way”.

During such moments I felt of myself as an “ambassador” who was sent by his friends, *banya*-co-members with a mission to show the beauty of this Russian tradition to a Norwegian or European community. This attitude made me feel a responsibility to my informants for the entire project.

Although my informants were well-informed about the goals of my project it did not stop them having interest in a foreign audience. They repeatedly voiced a hope that a “beautiful topic” of my research would be able to put a new face on modern Russia. They often gave an opinion that a foreign audience “is already fed up with image of Russia as a fascist corrupted state dressed in black Putin’s suit” and they wanted me to present our home country by a vital tradition with people who practice and follow it.

In my opinion such great possibility to represent themselves, their traditions and worldview to a foreign audience was the most attractive feature of my project for my informants. Perhaps they unwittingly used my status of an “ambassador” as a tool of such self-representation and self-identity while I unconsciously used it as one of the strategies in interactions with my participants (Davies 2008, 110-111).

Of course I also had my own ideas about the project and interests of a foreign academic audience and those ideas definitely affected my interview questions, my actions during the research process and my choice of the situations for the observation and shooting. Taken from this point of view my thesis and film can be considered as a cooperative product of “all three actors situated in the field of knowledge creation” (a researcher, informants and audience whom the research will be presented for) (Arntsen and Høltedahl 2005, 68).

Methodologically, my research project was directly related to the process of doing anthropology at home in Russia, a country where I came from. I didn't use any cultural broker because I am a native speaker.

Importantly, this study was based on strong trust and friendship between my informants and me. I suppose that no one anthropologist would be able to come to this particular banya and be there with camera for four months. Thereby this specific arena couldn't have been studied by others than me - a friend and a member of the specific group of banya practitioners. In some sense for me it was not only anthropology at home. This project was also anthropology among my close mates, friends and banya associates. Of course, this gave me a lot of advantages in getting access to empirical data.

At the same time this acceptance and closeness with informants, my longstanding intimate familiarity with Russian bath tradition together with well-known cultural surroundings of my home country made me culturally short-sighted or culturally blinded as a researcher and turned into great disadvantages. So although I did not have any serious issues with access from the beginning I faced no less fundamental problems going into details and losing critical sight. This was for me a kind of double challenge because sometimes it held me to almost contradictive research strategies. As a full "legitimate partner" of *banya*-membership I had to increase my reflexivity during the entire research process in order to overcome my cultural short-sightedness. At the same time as a native anthropologist I had to learn to listen to my own feelings more carefully. This means choosing the most appropriate strategies for participant observation and further analysis. As a Russian and a long standing co-member of this particular *banya* I was an insider but to increase my research awareness I had to remind myself that I was also an outsider as a researcher.

For example, I often interpreted a lot of situations that took place inside or outside of the hot steam room as something extremely obvious, self-evident and negligible for the research. In some cases it definitely did not let me see the implicit meanings of the observed events and interactions and I often felt myself physically bogged down in the shadow of such "selective inattention" (Spradly 1980, 55) framed by years of *ordinary participation* and taking for granted things that could be totally unobvious for an every foreign fieldworker. In order to reinforce my reflexivity and overcome my cultural shortsightedness I followed the idea of *thick ethnographic description* (Geertz 2006, 238). It means that during my field work and even further during the editing of my film while I was analyzing the gained empirical material I did not rely only upon my factual observations. In fact I tried to find as much as

possible interpretations and explanations of what I had observed. I played with these interpretations in my mind during the entire process of field work and discussed them with my informants and my teachers. That is how such obvious at first sight elements of the bath session as inaccessibility, nakedness, foul language and close body contact became further a central matter of the theoretical discussion of the thesis.

Another way to “transform my cultural familiarity into systematic knowledge” and increase my *explicit awareness* was to develop my own techniques in gathering and further in analyzing of the gathered data (Gullestad 1992, 138).

3.3. Researching the self-evident

Mostly, however, these above-mentioned techniques boiled down to using myself as one of the resources in the field work. Being a native anthropologist and full “legitimate partner” of *banya*-membership I decided to listen to my own feelings more carefully and better rely on my own experience and strategy of selection of situations for my participant observation. For example, I set out to focus my observations on the same situations that recurred again with great frequency and on the situations that seemed to me as the most obvious and self-explanatory ones. In practice certain “frequency of recurrent activities” (Spradley 1980, 50) and their most intensive “evidence” for me served as a signal to increase my research self-reflexivity.

Of course, at the very beginning I tried to note and record almost everything that happened during the field work, but later I found out that the selective approach was also fruitful. This approach became a strong foundation for the further analysis and theoretical generalizations and a start point of the search for the explanatory theories of Turner, Goffman, Bourdieu and Bauman.

Every bath session had a cyclic structure and it was not too hard to find the most recurrent activities within it (as demonstrated in the chapter “The important social situations within the bath session”). I made an inventory of those recurrent and “obvious” events.

For example, I put nakedness, laughter and foul language during the bathing into the list of the most obvious or self-evident things. Calls or “zahod” at the hot room, tea-drinking or sitting on the wooden platform near the river had very strong characteristics of the recurrent activities and were listed separately. If a situation had characteristics of both types of activities I put it into the both lists.

Further detailed observation of those situations revealed additional patterns and showed advantages of such a selective approach. For instance, the “obvious” taking off clothes before the bath session was often accompanied by humor and foul language. This gave me an idea about the communicative function of nakedness. At the same time the oft-recurring tea-drinking and sitting on the wooden platform were always accompanied by philosophical and poetic conversations. The final dialogue of my film where my informant N. shares his ideas about life, can be a good example of these conversations. Very often such types of heart-to-heart intimate conversations and frank confidential exchange of opinions revealed the inner feelings, senses, thoughts, emotional experience and impressions of my informants that were the most valuable data for my project. And my position of the insider gave me at this point an advantage because outsider-researcher probably would disturb that kind of philosophical reflections.

Eventually those situations and dialogues showed themselves to be a more informative and useful resource for the research than ordinary semi-structured interviews. They gave me an opportunity to get access to very internal experience of my informants and to such kind of data that in terms of Geertz can be defined as “experience-near” (Geertz 1983, 57). Such resources let me as a researcher seek and discern the implicit meanings of my informants’ activities more efficiently “not so much by directly asking actors what matters to them, but more indirectly and inferentially by looking for the perspectives and concerns embedded and expressed in naturally occurring interaction” (Emerson, 28).

The implications that I made by using the technique of selective observation can be confirmed not only by my own experience, but also by modern Russian anthropological literature on Russian bath, as it is shown further in the theoretical chapters of my thesis.

I did not manage to extract some situations and events from the area of “self-evidence” by my own. For example, I was ignorant to “close body contact” that had place between the participants of the bath session. Professor Holtedahl helped me to do that only during the screening of rushes when my field work had been already finished for 4 months. But I think that this case just confirms the trueness of the strategy of moving toward the “self-evidence” as a field method and as an analytical tool.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of that strategy totally depends on the experience of a researcher and his ability “to increase his or her awareness, to raise the level of attention, to tune in things usually tuned out” (Spradley, 1980, 56). The screening of rushes and rereading a fieldwork journal within the research process as a position “beyond the camera's lens” helped me to make enough distance for such awareness and self-reflexivity.

3.4. Using film footage in discovering process

I used screening of rushes frequently during my fieldwork process. This strategy allowed me to narrow the focus of the observations within the research process in accordance with a *cyclical pattern* of ethnographic inquiry (Spradly 1980, 26).

Some scenes were screened 15 or 20 times before I started to understand their importance and relevance. This approach led me to take out of the area of “self-evidence” a very important scene with one bright funny dialogue of my informants. The four of them were sitting in the steam room, discussing their attempt to have a Russian bath in a small Austrian town and the bath traditions of other countries. This dialogue evoked the strongest emotional response of mine and somehow was linked with the issue of the construction of our shared Russian ethnic identity. This lengthy and lively filmed conversation was cut because of the length limits of exam film.

In this sense screening of rushes was a effective element of The Ethnographic Research Cycle described by Spradly. This strategy was useful because it led me to other analysis and other observations and additional ethnographic questions (Spradly 1980, 29-34).

The screening of rushes not only let me conduct some detailed studies and analyze some gained knowledge (on-the-research process) but often helped me to recall the information that in this way or another was missed during the field process.

Thus I immersed myself completely in shooting Mr. B, Mr. N and Mr. M at their works and left out of the account details like the rhythm or pace of my informants’ working activity. I noticed these things only during the screening of rushes. Later I set out to use that vivid distinction between the pace of bathing and working activities as one of the main visual metaphors in my film. To underline this contrast I tried to put together into the film the images of my informants at the work with the images of my informants at the bathing. This could illustrate clearly the oppositions of “structure” and “antistructure” in the daily lives of my informants.

The screening of rushes in front of the academic audience was also very fruitful. I received numerous fresh ideas on the possible potential problem areas of my research from teachers and my colleague-students.

For example, my supervisor Trond Waage noted the similarity of unusual states of “peace and serenity” mentioned by my informants with states of “peace and quiet” described by Marianne Gullestad. Professor Lisbet Holtedahl drew my attention to the situation of “close body contact” between my informants inside the hot steam room and recommended

that I investigate this as a possible manifestation of an aspect of the new status of my informants as members of *banya*-membership. My colleague-students Vida and Rashida made a good point about the connection between nakedness and the aspects of the “incognito” status that my informants could have during the bath session for an outsider.

The screening of rushes together with my informants usually inspired all of us and was always a pleasant occasion to discuss the progress of the project. It often raised a question that was a matter of general anxiety of the participants of my film. The question was whether the film would be able “not just to shock the European or Norwegian audience with an image of white naked Russian “barbarians” who just shout and beat each other with rods but if it could convey a poetry of Russian tradition and show the participants as a perceptive connoisseur of that poetry”. Such reaction and questions of my informants made me think more about the motives of their self-presentation and pushed me to look more carefully through their social statuses and roles.

Thus the screening of rushes played a great role not only in the correction of the research process but also in further analysis of my observations. At the same time the screening of rushes helped me to share my experience with my classmates and teachers. It was good example of how “different audiences acquire different understandings from what they see” (Arntsen and Holtedahl 2005, 81). Thus one of the main methodological implications achieved during the project is that all my findings must be considered as a new shared ethnographic knowledge constructed by me, my informants and the audience.

3.5. Ethics

In my opinion the strongest ethical challenge in my project was connected with the filming of naked people. That’s why in addition to receiving their explicit consent about participation in my project, it also required a sensitive approach to the process of filming and editing in order to prevent any undesirable consequences for the informants. It means that during filming and editing I tried to reduce full body shots of naked people as much as it was possible. During the postproduction editing I used special blur effect of Avid Media Composer in order to hide image of gentleman's parts. I informed my participants about screening my film within academic settings or through film festivals. Finally I made an agreement in writing with every informant of my project. Thus all my informants agreed on filming and discussing all the issues related to the *banya* tradition.

The subject of my film is not linked to political debates in Russia, or to the personal business and work of my informants. Therefore the characters could be sufficiently open in their thoughts and expressions in front of the camera. The issue of anonymity was not relevant in this project, although it was stated and clarified to informants at the beginning and I strongly followed the rule of the anonymisation of the data.

A number of issues were raised in accordance with the technical process of shooting. Thus shooting in wild conditions, near the river, in drastic temperature changes and in limits of duration of the bath session raised several ethical issues, such as possible allowance or strong prohibition of any repetitions, reenactments or simulations of situations, interactions or words. Under such circumstances I was not always able to follow unfailingly the principles of filmmakers of the famous BBC series (The Space Between Words) that “no one would be asked to do anything, or to repeat anything, for the benefit of the camera” (Vaughan 1999, 18). But of course I tried to do my best in that and I had very few reenactments because actually I did not need them very much due to the cyclic structure of a bath session. So most of those reenactments were connected with *recurrent activities*. That’s how I asked my informants to explain and show me more properly some details of cooking *banya* and making of bath besoms (rods).

Thus in my project I followed the basic ethical principles of social science such as duty of information, duty of care and duty of confidentiality. However, I clearly understand that filmmaking can evoke a lot of concrete ethic dilemmas and often code can't provide a researcher with all the answers (Barbash and Taylor 1997, 49).

3.6. Cross-connection of the film and the paper

I would prefer to consider the filmic part of my research project as a “*performativite*” manifestation of ethnographic knowledge (MacDougall 2006, 272) that contributed a lot to the text part of the project or to my thesis paper. To a great extent the cross-connection of these two parts of the project is linked to its subject content dedicated to the study of a rite.

There is some debate in visual anthropology about the possibility of using visual tools to capture the “secret” of a rite. Some of the anthropologists argued that it is impossible to convey the metaphorical significance of a rite with the images. They insisted that this significance “has to be told”. (Hastrup 1992, 9). However, according to MacDougall, “the visible is equally a pathway to the nonvisible”. Using visual and audio tools I was able to depict in my film what my informants didn't know how to express using the words. Thus to

show the fugitive states of mind and almost imperceptible emotions of my informants I used a lot of close-ups shots with images that MacDougall would refer to a sensorial or “corporeal knowledge” (MacDougall 2006, 137). Those shots included images of the smiling and calm faces of my informants, the relaxed postures of their bodies, their freezing eyes and slow gestures and speech. The most sophisticated text gave a display of its weakness to describe the meaning of these images in contrast to the visual expression of them by “free-floating of signifiers that escape from explanation or control” (MacDougall 1998, 72)

Thus visual tools exactly facilitated my approach “to the larger domain of the feelings, the intellect; and the remaining senses - what Edgar Morin called “the emotive fabric of human existence”(MacDougall 2006, 269).

Moreover in order to strengthen that inner or emotional element of the bath session and perform it more properly I chose for my film a poetic modality described by documentary filmmaker Toni de Bromhead as a way of emotional involving the audience “within the film-poem's own terms rather than upon one of the theses or story lines that are used in the other narrative forms” (Bromhead 1996, 121). So for example, if I wanted to convey the state of lightness of being that my informants might experience after the steaming I could use a shot of dancing tree-tops. At the same time the image of water mirror or an expanse of river was a symbol of “peace and quiet” states of mind of the bath participants.

Thus the text part of my project includes a thorough written description of the bany rite. I preferred to put into it the exact and detailed information about all data gathered during researching, the report of methods of data collection and important analytical generalizations and theories. But the advantage of a filmic part of my project I found in its unique epistemological way of construction of the ethnographic knowledge “not reducible to language, to the “sign” or to discourse” (Mitchell 1996, 82). This type of creation of ethnographic knowledge also implies the cooperative efforts of author-researcher, audience and actors. Moreover, the construction of this knowledge is not finished simply with the writing of this thesis, or with producing the documentary film “Light as Steam”. The construction of this knowledge has been ongoing since the collecting data and with the editing of the film. Furthermore, it is supposed to create new angles and facets of ethnographic knowledge each time the audience watches the film. The visual representation has “uncoded properties” (MacDougall 1998, 69) and “does not pin down meanings too precisely” (MacDougall 2006, 52). Because of that “dumbness” of visuality an author of a film can lose its privileged position and starts not to dictate but share the knowledge with an audience

(MacDougall 2006, 52). Thus this knowledge is not a final product of the research. It is still opened for new development and interpretations by audiences.

4. Banya in the context of social statuses of the contemporary practitioners

In the following pages, I will apply several anthropological theories that were helpful for my research.

First I will consider the Banya from the perspective of Viktor Turner's "liminoid" (Turner 1982). Turner used this term to describe a ritual interaction that is opposed to "work" and rather related to the leisure area of the contemporary society. Further I will analyze banya and work as two different settings where my informants have different kind of interactions. In first case they interact with their work colleagues or within their professional environment. In banya my informants interact with other banya participants, their close friends and their co-banya partners. To understand the meanings of these interactions and to find interconnection between them I will use dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman (Goffman 1971). According to Goffman, an interaction can be understood as a social drama where the actors use various strategies in order to present themselves in a favorable light and reach their goals (Goffman 1971). I will analyze social roles and livelihood (social) strategies of my informants in regard to their work activity. By this I will try to find the real social achievements of my informants and the social expectations or goals they pursue by playing their roles. Then I will compare the findings with the experience that my informants may get within the bath session. I will examine how this banya experience can be compatible or complemented or contradictive to what my informants may get by working (by doing their job). Thus the combination of Goffman's and Turner's theories will give me better understanding of the meaning of banya practice for my informants.

Applying the Bourdieu's theories of "social field" and "social capital" I will examine the microindividual strategies of the banya participants in connection to the social fields of work they belong to as agents (Bourdieu 1986). This will allow me to explore the possible meaning of banya practice on a high level within the context of global challenges of contemporary Russia.

Some Russian scientists try to explain the tradition of Russian *banya* in terms of the social practice of leisure and more accurately in terms of "liminoid" introduced by Viktor Turner (Turner 1982, 55) which seems to me plausible and fruitful. Thus according to

Russian anthropologist Dimitry Maslov who wrote mostly about urban and public banyas, *banya* is a liminal space in the midst of a working week that is able to harmonize accumulated stresses and to free up a conflict between “eyes to cool it” and duty to labour (Maslov 2011):

Turner coined the term "liminoid" in attempt to distinguish purely religious types of activity from all others. We believe that such passages can be allowed if the certain conditions are met. The successful functioning of the “rites of passage” in a traditional society is based on the opposition between the sacred/non-sacred. To overcome the crises of daily life one can invoke supernatural forces. Social “structure” is opposed to the ritual “antistructure”. In modern society basic and all-encompassing dichotomy was transformed into work/rest. On the analogy: people through a specific organization of their leisure time can take off the difficulties and conflicts of working time. The immersion into islands of “antistructural” “liminality” helps them to get rid of the accumulated contradictions. Using the institutions of leisure modern society not only satisfies its need for recreation, but also becomes integrated.

While interpreting the *Banya* as a liminal space is productive and fruitful, it seems, however, that the reducing of this tradition to a social practice of leisure or entertainment (even considering the fact that Maslov wrote particularly about public baths) is insufficient to understand the full complexity of this tradition. Especially it doesn't clarify the interest in reproducing of *banya* in the changing political, cultural and social landscape of Russian society. Such an explanation seems especially inadequate to me in comparison with other traditions (that could be also considered as practice of leisure), like block championships in dominos and chess, or the tradition of keeping of dovecotes, choir singing, all popular in Soviet times but quickly disappearing from the life of modern Russian society today.

It might be useful to examine such practices like *banya* by exploring the social statuses and careers of its practitioners. Probably such an approach would lead to better understanding of what the tradition is for my informants and what place it takes in a list of their livelihood strategies.

The social statuses and careers of my informants are inextricably connected with the historical context of modern Russia. As a reminder almost all of them (including me) are men of the same age (36-40 years old), married, have children and possess some personal property. Our youth was spent in Soviet Russia but at the age between 14-17 everything changed with the collapse of USSR. Economically my informants can be assumed to be equivalent to a middle class, or to a successful part of urban population that is slightly above the middle

class. Among my informants one can find a PR-manager (hereinafter referred to as Mr. B) who works for several big companies in Saint Petersburg, a master builder or a construction site supervisor (Mr. I), a musician and a businessman (Mr. N) who has own music recording studio and owns several small shops in Tikhvin and a freelance interpreter (Mr. M) who works also as a professional poker player. As married men they are under some obligations and have to work hard in order to provide enough money to support their families. Their lives are socially mobile and intense.

For example, the position of a PR-manager in Saint Petersburg requires being always in touch with great number of colleagues and journalists from different mass media. Three business phones of my informant Mr. B were constantly ringing during the whole workweek and his telephone address book had more than 5000 contacts. He was always strung-out from monitoring massive informational flows of the news and to organize and attend so many official parties, press conferences, briefings, forums and all kinds of relevant events.

Mr. N is a musician and a sound manager. In 2010 a jazz album recorded in his studio was rated “Best album of the year” by the Russian press Jazz.ru. His working day can last more than 10 hours. As a producer of his own jazz band he has to promote it, take part in concerts and negotiate with a lot of musicians, owners of clubs or concert-halls and other producers. Though his business is located in a small town (Tikhvin) near to Saint Petersburg he has similar difficulties and psychological stresses as Mr. B. As a businessman in modern Russia he faces plenty of competition, investment, marketing, tax and repayment risks. Moreover, he has to keep up client interest by continuously monitoring the quality of services that he provides. In addition he keeps several grocery stores and it means that he must control the quality of goods and collaborate with many different kinds of professionals like lawyers, police officers and officials that are capable to help him from time to time and support his business.

Such positions like a master builder (Mr. I) and a freelance interpreter or a poker player (Mr. M) also engage my informants into nonstop process of negotiations, contract designing, searching of new clients and participation in various projects, online and offline tournaments.

Almost all of the occupations of my informants did not exist during the Soviet period and appeared in Russia only at the beginning of the 1990s.

In addition all these careers have much in common in relation to the professional competence of the careerists. In order to constantly keep their job competence my informants

have to be well-educated, highly sociable, communicative and deeply integrated into their professional and social environments.

I think that the careers and statuses of my informants are largely an effect of usage of certain social strategies developed by them during the period of their earlier socialization that took place on 1990s, just then my actors were developing as separate social and economic entities. Almost all of them and their peers (including me) faced those changes without any opportunity to chose something else. We were born in USSR, were educated in Soviet schools, were Pioneers and some of us even had become the members of the All-Union Lenin Communist Youth League. So our youth and moving into adulthood occurred in the nineties of the last century. During that unstable decade my informants left the parental home, stopped being social dependents, graduated from universities, found their first jobs and some of them got married. Their student life took place in Moscow and St. Petersburg (the two biggest Russian cities) that became epicentres of all reforms and changes of Russian society at the time.

The decade of 1990's stuck in memories of Russians as a time of profound shock and extensive social and economic reforms. Many of reforms were later declared void or ineffective. On the one hand it was an era of great liberalization of Russian society, a sharp turnabout in policy and ideology; on the other hand it was a time of social nihilism and disintegration, unemployment and the criminalization of the society. The Moscow-born novelist and BBC broadcaster Zinovy Zinik captures this decade when he writes (Zinik 2005, 18):

During the last decade the entire Communist universe, like a Soviet Atlantis, disappeared from the map of the world and sank into oblivion. We are no longer sure what country under the name of Russia we are dealing with. It is still a fictitious entity, even its geographical borders are still questionable, its durability as a state in doubt... Even its language was switched to the foreign Volapuk, embracing its marketink, kholdink and body-bildink as part of the modern Russian vocabulary.

Here Zinik uses Russian versions of western words as markers of the transformation of Russia. All these changes became apparent in the runaway inflation and the fall of the Russian Rouble in 1992, in the appearance of Ponzi games, in the shooting in the Parliament in 1993, in bankruptcy and large-scale privatization of the state Soviet corporations, in an exhausting civil war in Chechnya, and in the economic crisis of the 1998. As the result there was a large-scale cultural crisis and “a state of permanent identity crisis” manifested through the loss of

cultural and spiritual values and the oblivion of many cultural Russians traditions (Zinik 2005, 18).

New unstable political and economic regime brought discredit upon itself. As a result of it people started to seek stability and certainty by any means and at whatever cost even by total independence from the State and distancing from any unreliable institutions (both old and new). Personal and family interests became more important than the interests of state or a corporation. And here is why the most effective key strategies then became such adaptive strategies. My informants demonstrate high social mobility, quick reaction rate to changes, critical reasoning, “high risk-high reward” strategies, acquirement of skills on demand and aiming always for economic self-sufficiency and independence from any employers and government agencies as something unreliable. The current political, religious and professional preferences of my informants reinforces this. All of them are anarchists by political beliefs. Mr. I and Mr. B have no religious commitments at all and consider any religion as kind of ideology designed to influence public opinion. The other two informants Mr. M and Mr. N (including me) are really close to agnostic theists and believe in the existence of God or Gods, but do not think ever to be able to prove it. Their professional skills and occupation let them achieve maximum independence from one employer, or to minimize this dependence.

In fact career goals and strategies may reveal a number of serious contradictions and internal psychological micro conflicts between the expectations and real achievements of my actors. On the one hand, they identify themselves as economically independent people who are their own masters, distrusting everything (religions, ideologies and policies) and everybody except for their close friends and families. On the other hand, in order to keep their economic independence and competitiveness they have to be as communicative, sociable and accessible as possible, while to a very great extent being socially dependent.

The working hours of my informants are irregular and working days are often extended. Actually they have really stressful lives. They are always involved into negotiation process with colleagues, partners or their clients and almost every day face many tough stressful situations, often running risks and sometimes losing. For instance, the average number of phone calls that Mr. B as PR-manager receives per day is between 75-90. The total duration of time spent on phone calls is more than 3-4 hours per day. As a sound manager and a record producer Mr. N has 15-20 contracts per month in average for his recording studio and has to devote half of his working time to such issues like musical rehearsal, tuning of sound equipment and digital mastering. Moreover, every day Mr. N as a businessman has to cover more than 150 kilometres (in the small town of 25 square kilometres) by car between

his own shops, his suppliers, the mayor's office, a commercial court, taxation service and the credit department of a bank.

An online poker tournament can take more than 15 hours per day and Mr. M as a professional player plays with 12 or 16 tables at once. Sometimes a translation of articles, books and handouts exacts of him as an interpreter several hours of negotiations with clients and editors. The part of Mr. I's job as a master builder is not only in-situ monitoring and work controls, but also negotiations with designers, conflict resolutions with clients, labour inspection, fire engineering service and suppliers of construction materials. According to a contract all fines for irregularities of a building process will be withheld by a client from Mr. I's salary and profit. As a result, his average working day often 10-12 hours. For last five years Mr. I has never taken a vacation. Under such pressure of work my informants have to intensify time and its "carrying capacity" (Bauman 2000, 9). In order to be successful they have to do as much as possible effective actions and operations per unit time. Every minute counts. It gives to my informants more money and the status of success but also it has ambivalent effect and produces a lack of timing budgets. As the result this intensification of time and success oriented fever lead to a severe shortage of leisure time or timeout (Ponukalina 2011, 213). In its turn it leads to an overfatigue, a psychological overloading and accumulating of mental stresses. Finally the unmet need of such timeout comes a point of time when each of my informants feels frustration and dissatisfaction with themselves and their situation. In such cases they really need and want "to take away" or "to clean" those stressful insufficient states.

In this connection *banya* can be considered as a *rite of passage* or a practice that produces not an economic profit but some special states. This allows them to make a transition from the state of overloading by various responsibilities and duties imposed by social routine and status of the participants to the state of timeless lightness of being or to the state of *timeout*. Thus this *timeout* as a "social space within which creativity can flourish" can be constituted by the influence of various "sources of indeterminacy" (Rosaldo 1993, 112). In my case these sources of indeterminacy, variability and optionality are directly related to the liminal states of social being that take place within the bath session. The *denotative* (metaphrastic) symbolism of those states can be understood in terms of binary oppositions "work-leisure", "accessibility-inaccessibility", "formal-informal", "distance-contact", "status-incognito", and then decoded or interpreted on *connotative or metalanguage* level (Barthes 1977) as general Turner's dichotomy "structure-antistructure" (Maslov 2011). My field work revealed manifestations and symbols of that "*antistructural liminality*". The next section expands on this.

5. Analysis of Banya tradition and its “antistructural” symbols

5.1. *Making yourself inaccessible*

In connection with rustic baths such actions like moving beyond and out of the city, switching off the phones, taking off watches, clothes, jewellery during the time of the bath session aside from purely physical aspects may have special symbolic meaning and represent symbol of “antistructure”. Of course, jewellery can burn in a hot steam room; high temperatures and humidity can damage clothes, phones and watches. Combined with prevention all those activities put a participant of the bath session beyond the reach of the external world, make him incommunicado and inaccessible for a while. Journeying out and beyond the city I felt content travelling by car in the company of my informants from Saint Petersburg to Tikhvin. All those trips gradually brought us to such state of distance or *inaccessibility* by the journey’s long duration and by moving through rural wild landscapes. It went without saying that my informants needed to leave their stressed lives behind in the city. They drove fast. This evoked a peace of mind with every new kilometer of the road and in several hours of the trip all conversations were gradually fading away.

5.2. *Banya and “structural” dirt*

During the bath session my informants tried to avoid any conversation about work, business and politics. Probably that unspoken ban on these topics was a strategy to distance themselves from routines of outside world. When I asked Mr. N (an owner of banya in Pagolda) about this he responded: “...the participants prefer not to take this *shit* into the *banya*”. This rude remark clearly shows that my informants strongly associate their work with *impurity* or *dirt*, especially against the background of *banya*. It doesn’t mean that they really consider their work as something useless or that they are not interested in politics. According to definition of *dirt* used by Mary Douglas as “matter out of place” it rather means that for my informants work topics as part of the “*structural*” world would be out of place in such “*antisructural*” space like *banya* (Douglas 2001, 36). As it was described by the informant B. in the film all structural “dirty” things must be left outside of banya:

... All your torturing thoughts, all your unpleasant memories, conversations you'd like to forget, disputes, problems, drifting in the back of your mind. You leave them in the dressing room...

The same is the case for sex and alcohol within the bath session. In the words of the informant I. “these things are not only dangerous during the bath session but they don’t allow the participants to feel the real taste of banya”. Thereby in the context of banya sex as well as the consumption of alcohol are also out of place or “dirty”.

However my informants consider banya not only as a space where “dirty” things are not supposed to be. The informant N in his interview said that “before every bath session a participant should tune himself to banya and then banya will probably set him, clean his tone and make him better”. This citation shows that for my informants the bath session has a function of purification and can be used as a space that can help the participants to put things where these things belong. At the beginning of the film my informant B. exactly noted this characteristic saying about “getting rid of all the dirt and dust, everything that has settled on you, the armour of routine that forms on you after working for days or weeks”. The point being made is that banya is used not for physical but rather for mental or social purification. In this sense my informants turn banya into a space for the social self-correction.

5.3. Nakedness as “stripping” off social statuses

The nakedness of all participants in the bath session is the first thing that catches the eye of an outsider. No one dresses in underwear or swim briefs during the bath session. Of course, the participants can use white sheets to cover themselves outside after cooling but usually everybody is totally naked. According to my informants nakedness within the heart of *banya* (inside the hot steam room) is one of the main conditions of the bath procedure. It lets the practitioners sweat in a proper way and be steamed well, but for the researcher nakedness can also have other connotations and meanings.

Simultaneously with the taking off of their clothing, the participants of the bath session are removing their “natural indexical signs” or the signal system that informs of their social background and surroundings (Goffman 1979, 7) and directly refers to their social statuses.

Naked participants of the bath session become equal to each other and inaccessible for social “reading” of their statuses. They stop regulating themselves and their actions by routine

schedules, according to which almost every situation can be associated with clothing and special dress codes.

Thus nakedness in *banya* can be interpreted as a condition that to some extent hides the statuses of the practitioners and at the same time imbues them with the status of incognito (especially for an outsider or a new member of the particular *banya*-membership).

Of course naked participants of *banya* cannot completely remove every aspect of social status. Their new status of incognito is a relative characteristic. To each other they still keep the statuses of friends, football fans, heterosexual men, or Russians. But such “*stripping off*” means removing particularly those social statuses that describe the work-related positions of my informants. To a large extent it concerns their economic as well as their power positions within the corporate hierarchies that they belong to. And old Russian saying that “There is only one chief in *Bayna* and that is the rod!” clearly illustrates the state of things during the bath session.

Hence the nakedness in *banya* is one of the most obvious “*antistructural*” symbols of bath session. At the same time it lets the practitioners increase the rate of their intimacy and deformalize as much as possible the process of communication between the participants.

In connection with that any attribute to routine daily life would be considered within the bath session as “antistructural” dirt. Such things like their social status, or their roles and position in their work hierarchy were not mentioned and even simply ignored. Even the inner hierarchy of *banya* that usually takes place in public baths didn’t work in my case. There was no discrimination or disrespectfulness between “hitters” and “average people” among my informants. Moreover, the most experienced informants of mine (N. and I.) never labelled their *co-banya* partners “average” persons. Just several times B. and M. suggested in the interviews about themselves that “probably they were not so much experienced as I. and N.”. The only distinction between them I noticed during the bath session was when B. and M. for example, sometimes left the steam room earlier than others, or missed a call or made long breaks between the calls, or probably they didn’t go very often to the river to cool themselves. Despite of this distinction in the stamina of my informants, the most experienced participants never showed their superiority or tried to push their *co-banya* partners to do something against their will. The informants were square with each other.

Finally it leads to a very close and relaxed companionship that I observed often during my research; such companionship is rather unusual for men within their day-to-day routine. Good examples of this intimacy can be found in the foul language used by informants, their close body contact, friendly jokes and their heart-to-heart conversations.

5.4. *Banya and foul language*

All the participants of my project often used cursing and foul language during almost every bath session. They didn't use it in order to insult each other or show any negative emotions. And they didn't use it to criticize the actions of each other. Probably being subject to drastic temperature changes my informants used it rather as "one of the important means in order to adapt well in extremely wild conditions" (Lotman 1995, 14). For example, very often as a reaction of the participants on the unbearable steam I could hear something like "Sod it!", "Holy shit!" or "Bloody hell!" On the other hand such specific types of language might symbolize a non-formal, unshackled by conventions and "antistructural" nature of the situation taking place in *banya*.

Consequently it could be considered as another stage of *nakedness* on verbal level. During the bath session the language of conversations was also gradually "getting naked" or exempted from formal vocabulary and official forms of compellation and became more laconic, bright and precise. So mainly for emphasis or to add some brightness to their speech the participants often used a cheery "Pizdec!" which in Russian is derivative of "Pizda" (literally, "cunt") but really means something like "Wow!". There are a lot of examples in my film when the informants use these words during the cooling down on the wooden platform near the river or during the steaming at the steam room.

Another interesting aspect is that Russian foul language often uses genital symbols and very often refers to a genital human nudity. For instance, to describe their positive feelings my informants often used such phrases as "Ohkuenno!" which in Russian is derivative of "Khui" (literally, "cock") but also means just "to be extremely satisfied".

5.5. *Laughter, humor and "bricolage" creativity in banya*

I noticed that my informants laughed a lot during the bath sessions. During the whole process of the bathing they were trying to make each other laugh using jokes and their audacious sense of humor. According to the Russian scientist Bakhtin "it is precisely laughter that destroys the epic, and in general destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance... Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (Bakhtin 1981, 23). In this sense together with cursing, laughter can be considered also

as a tool of destroying of the *valorized distance* between the participants of *banya*. These joking relationships established within *banya* membership are one more marker of the “antistructural” states when “individuals confront one another integrally and not as “segmentalized” into statuses and roles” (Turner 1991, 177).

During the bath session the informants often made fun of themselves, of the heaviness of their movements after cooling in cold river or of the “main *banya* dog Jack”. A lot of jokes referenced male anatomy. The penis therefore could be either baked in the steam room or fall off because of hypothermia and became food for fish. There were a lot of play situations as, for instance, naming a person a knight of the Order of the Bath. Many of them were included in my thesis film. The humor often had an evident masculine character. At the same it showed the high level of creativity of the participants.

Moreover, the humor, or the funny storytelling, or plays upon words as well as ad-libbing with rhymes and play activity that took place during the bathing were the markers of this spontaneous creativity. Generally it was humor based on special cultural meanings and connotations that can be readable only by a person who has grown up in Russian modern culture. The basis of my informants’ creativity were the personal history of their relationship, or their collective experience of the bathing, or some literary contamination from the books they had read or even dialogues from the films that they had seen.

This kind of *banya* creativity works similar to the principles of intellectual “bricolage”, described by Levi (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 17) It “works rather like a kaleidoscope” that tessellates “the formation of a new type of entity” based on the fragments of the previous observer's experience (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 36). From my point of view this kind of *bricolage* creativity can be understood as one more manifestation of *liminality* within the bath session, when the relevant rules of the society and other social fields stop being relevant for the participants and they begin to create their own relevant rules. This creativity does not grow out of being intentional or of economic motivation of the participants but just because they feel liberated.

The music written by my informant N. as soundtrack to my thesis film can be also an example of such creative energy evoked within the bath session. According to him he composed a lot of his songs and melodies right after the bathing while he was sitting near the calm river and trying to express his inner states.

5.6. *Banya and close body contact*

During almost every bath session one can notice close tactile interactions or some kind of skinship between the participants. It is presented in the very close distance between their bodies and in a variety of shake-hands, touches and taps on shoulders. That substantial shortening between *banya*-members is also revealed in some scenes and sequences of my film. Actually such types of behavior differ from the usual behavior of my informants in their everyday life or during the work (that I was able to observe). The main difference is related to the blurring of distinction of personal space in *banya* when the boundaries of personal spaces of practitioners are significantly reduced. In my opinion it can symbolize or perform a temporary obliquity of daily life where the boundaries of personal space are inviolable and determined by various routine rites within the accuracy of several centimeters.

By the close body contact the participants of the bath session proceed to a more intensive verbal-tactile kind of communication. Thereby the *banya*-members force a shell of routine communication (a side-effect of social self-isolation from the dissociative contacts) and consolidate their relations of friendship and trust. Thus in every bath session, they somehow review the access policy of their personal space and make the process of social interaction more flexible.

The participants of the bath session often show concern about the health of each other during the bathing. Sometimes they show extreme benevolence and tenderness in that tactile communication between each other. This type of behavior can be hardly considered as regular way of daily life for heterosexual men in modern Russia. But it is an aspect of how my informants behave in *banya*. The dominance of bodily experience gives to the participants of the bath session a unique relationships to each other based not on the sexuality of a naked body but rather on sensorial credibility or “trustfulness” of a body. This “trustfulness” can be transmitted during the contact of one’s body with the bodies of other *banya* participants by touches, dews of friends’ sweat and shared tactile feeling of hot steam. Exactly this means to be a *banya* co-member in relation to somebody when the participants start to feel each other on the entire body. According to Paul Stoller “expositions on odors, sounds and taste” might be a guide of ethnographic message (Stoller 1989, 31). In my case the capturing of the substance of life within the bath session was possible only by experiencing the reality of body.

Another explanation of the close body contact can also be related with Viktor Turner’s idea of “antistructure” and Edith Turner’s concept of “*communitas*”.

5.7. *The communitas of banya*

Hierarchy based on the experience of the practitioners is typical of the bath session. It means that to some extent “*structural*” type of relationships also takes place in *banya* but this type of “*structure*” must be perceived as shaping aspect of the rite. At the same time all other symbols of “*antistructure*” mentioned above refers rather to the substantive aspect of the *banya* tradition. These symbols coupled with the collective nature of tradition afford grounds to interpret *banya* as the kind of “*communitas*” described by Edith Turner.

During the period of my field observations I saw no one who was bathing alone. I heard nothing about that since I started to practice the tradition by myself. Thus as a “*communitas*” *banya* has an obvious collective shape where actions of all participants produce a strong cumulative effect that strengthens the feelings of each of them. Probably that is one of the reasons why rustic private Russian bathing always implies a company of participants (family members, friends, co-workers or neighbors) and almost never is taken alone.

In “*Communitas*” Edith Turner describes *communitas* as “a collective *satori* or *unio mystica*” (Turner 2012, 1) or a kind of collective experiencing of *liminality*. She gives an example of collective praying in an Iñupiat church when different voices of prayers “rose to the rafters” and created “a tower of the senses... with the songs, tears, and cries” (Turner 2012, xi). I suppose that the similar fusion of voices (yelling and screaming, jokes and foul language) as well as “body” voices often takes place in *banya*. As I mentioned in a previous chapter the body communication within *banya* can also be considered as a physical manifestation of the intense community spirit of *banya*-membership or a strong feeling of the *banya* togetherness. I repeatedly observed it as a very strong resonance effect that could be reached by intensification of the individual feelings within collective bathing. For instance, it often appeared at the phase of the apogee when the participants had to overcome almost unbearable conditions of steam and cold water. To do so the participants were crying or singing in unison and beating themselves or each other by the birch rods and then after all that they were sitting for a long time with straight calm faces keeping silent and being in almost ecstatic meditation.

Being a participant of the numerous bath sessions myself, I often felt such unusual states of mind. From my own experience and description of my informants these states have close nature to the “non-ordinary” states of consciousness, achieved under the influence of

psychedelics and described in modern transpersonal psychological studies. In my opinion these states are the brightest manifestations of “*antistructural liminality*” and the *communitas* created by spending time with friends in banya.

In connection with these non-ordinary states the phenomenon of “*communitas*” within *banya* may have two-sided effect. On the one hand the *communitas* can partially be a trigger of those states. On the other hand, it can play a role of the resonator that strengthens the individual states and turned them into common experience for all participants.

5.8. *Banya as a “psychotechnique”*

I assume that a better understanding of the bath tradition can be extended by taking into account “non-ordinary” states of consciousness achieved during the bath session.

Very useful is the idea of understanding *banya* in terms of “psychotechnique” used by Mircea Eliade and defined by Russian orientalist Evgeny Torchinov as “a set of tools and techniques developed within and shaped by the tradition used to achieve specific transpersonal states of consciousness” (Torchinov 2000, 253).

By “non-ordinary states of consciousness” or “transpersonal states of consciousness” Torchinov implied such states of the human mind, which were studied by the researchers of transpersonal psychology (especially Jung's psychology) such as Stanislav Grof, Kenneth Earl Wilber. Of course it doesn't mean the participants experience various visual and audial hallucinations during the bathing or after it.

However, based on the evidence of my informants one can conclude that states of consciousness achieved during the bath session are often characterized by transpersonal “experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos” (Walsh and Vaughan 1993, 203). Such states of deepest inner integrity, a state of utter tranquillity and serenity can be named and defined as non-ordinary states of consciousness. These states often evoke a steady effect of complete physical relaxation and can be interpreted by the participants as such. This could lead the researcher temptingly to reduce the Russian bath tradition to a concept of the social practice of leisure. However, in my opinion, this is only a secondary effect.

Thus I think that *banya* can be considered not only as a social practice of leisure or recreation that might be reduced to “communication with group” (of other participants) and to complex of “physical exercises for bodily relaxation”. Importantly, it can be interpreted as a

practice or a “psychotechnique” of self-regulation for the achievement of a psychotherapeutic or psycho-corrective effect and at the same time eliminating mental stress, purification of mentality and relaxation of its pathogenic affects.

The complex physical exertions within the bath session I therefore consider as one of the most probable causes of the non-ordinary states. Being subjects to drastic temperature changes *banya*-members experience on a rota basis pain and states of maximum relaxation.

6. Banya and happiness

The non-ordinary states achieved within a bath session were explicitly and implicitly interpreted by my informants as a kind of “peace and serenity” state of mind. I chose this emic concept because my informants used it more than others. It also seems to me that this definition has some useful perspectives for my further analysis. The “peace and serenity” state has fruitful connotation with the “peace and quiet” state, described earlier in the anthropological literature (Gullestad 1992, 137). So exploring the meanings of the “peace and quiet” cultural category “by examining whether it fits into a wider pattern” Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad “soon came across the other categories: the ideas of independence and of wholeness (*helhet*) are connected to protection of social boundaries by a reduction of the intensity of social relationships” (Gullestad 1992, 158). According to this logic I assume that in my case the “peace and serenity” or “peace and quiet” states are directly related to the concept of *happiness* of my informants. A monologue of my main informant N. that became the concluding chord for my documentary film illustrates this:

So this is how the things are in our life. A lot of things, all of them, probably... You just get tired of them. Sometimes I even think it's good that we're mortal. Well, how much life can you take, right? It's all the same after a while. The monotony gets under your skin. You are like: "Sod it!" But there are moments when everything is so calm and peaceful. You look at these trees, this nature... Suddenly you want to stop the clock, to frame this picture and remain inside it forever. You feel you'd never get tired of it! Not because it makes your life colourful or exciting... I don't know how to express it.

These words somehow convey ideas of the stopping the world, and the freezing of the *perpetuum mobile* of the routine monotony. Such poetic description of “*moments when everything is so calm and peaceful*” reveals the strongest internal and external tranquility of the speaker. It can be clearly seen from the film by the tone, facial expression and by the slow controlled movements of N. that at that moment he actually feels what he is talking about. A state of self-harmonization has been achieved.

Another informant of mine B. described this “peace and quiet” state as “a feeling when you do not have to be intent on any purposes”. According to B. “this is the very rare

moment in your life when it seems that you have already archived everything and there is nothing to wish anymore”. This is exactly what N. implies when he says in the film that a *banya* participant “falls into a certain state of mind a meditative kind, when one stops thinking one feels kind of light”. This state of light treatment to world unweighted by any goals and by goal-setting is the main meaning of a metaphor “light as steam” based on the title of my film.

In some sense all these ideas reveal a clear border between the state *before banya* and the state that are at the end of the bath session. The first state can be characterized by the ongoing social competition and stress, by the state of self-control and incessant monitoring of the situation, by the continuous intending and aiming any purposes dictated by the social roles of my informants. Their everyday life is characterized by the pressure and stress of the *structural* violence of newly emerging political and economic reality. The second state is really close to the state of super-satisfaction, of self-sufficiency and the stopping of target setting and finally to the state of “lightness” and *happiness* when life is so good that there is no need to wish for more. These *antistructural* states are resonated by the *communitas* experienced by the participants as feeling of solidarity and togetherness in the contrast to the competitiveness of everyday life.

Life before *banya* is time limited and tightly connected with working days, work and with social statuses and repertoire of the informants (Goffman 1971) who are constantly forced to continue the interactions with other agents of various social fields in order to keep their economical and social competitiveness (Bourdieu 1996). The main fact that life before *banya* always predispose my informants to this internal conflict I previously mentioned. This conflict takes place when the need to independence gained during the youth of my informants comes into strong collision with their social strategy of mobility and their livelihood strategy of extreme social engagement.

The state at the end of *banya* session can be explained by the short-term settlement to that internal conflict (If only for a moment but it seems solved). This space (*détente*) is evoked by the situation when the social fields of work, business, family and consuming with all their rules fade and cut out for a while like a signal of mobile telephone in a rural area. Among the naked friends the practitioners of *banya* don’t have to control anything anymore. They stop being the agents of social fields of work during the bath session (Bourdieu 1996, 11). This all shares idea that nobody controls anybody nor appropriates anything within the bath session. No one manipulates anyone nor sets any goals because there no longer any goals in *banya*. Time constrains are abandoned. Nobody hurries anybody nor is anybody in a hurry.

Even the duration of the bath session is uncertain and depends on the wishes and stamina of the participants. Thus in some sense life within banya is open ended and out of social time.

Thus *banya* actually becomes a scene or an arena of the passage from “stressful and strenuous” life to the “peace and quiet” state experienced by the practitioners accumulatively at the apogee of the bath session as a temporary state of *happiness*.

Probably this exact interpretation of *happiness* is not fully realized by my informants. Moreover, it rather stands in some contrast with their “post-Perestroika strategy of success” as “paddling one’s own canoe” and the pro-active livelihood strategies dictated by the new consumer society in Russia (Mostovaya 1995, 7). In particular this experience of complex state of *happiness* is really close to Gullestad’s idea of “*wholeness*” reinforced by the exclusivity of banya membership and “connected to protection of social boundaries by a reduction of the intensity of social relationships” (Gullestad 1992, 158). It exactly this complex experience of “wholeness” that attracts and motivates my informants to reproduce the tradition and to repeat the *banya* experience again and again. By achieving special non-ordinary states of mind, the creative renewal and “*wholeness*” within traditional practice people somehow try to cope with new social challenges. And this new tactical usage of tradition gives its practitioners space and *timeout* to cope with social changes dictated by the expansion of the consumer society and world globalization processes.

7. Rustic private Russian bath as a key club

7.1. Exclusion and inclusion at rustic private Russian bath

Another important feature of rustic bath is the very strong borders and very strong rules when it comes to exclusion and inclusion. This feature turns the users of the bath into an elite private club with exclusive/inclusive filters that keeps out the participation of randoms. Access is strictly regulated by all the participants and only possible via the personal acquaintance with the owner of *banya* and the mutual sympathy and friendship of other participants. The membership of this key club might remain constant for a very long time. In St. Petersburg I know personally several such *banya* groups. Replacement or adding of the members in these groups usually does not happen often. In my case it has not been changed for the last 8 years. Usually the membership depends on the owner of a *banya* and on the other members. To be invited to *banya* is a mark of great respect and trust. At the same time new members may be invited just for a time. The continuity of *banya* membership depends not only on initial trustship between new comers and old members but also on the evolution of these relationship. This implies a set of rules that are constantly negotiated within the bath session. These rules are unspoken and established by the old members for period of common practice. The new comers have to follow the rules. For examples, the participants have to be very friendly and polite to each other. The new comers have to be enough experienced in order to withstand drastic temperature changes and to be able to steam with old members. The participants don't have to drink alcohol during the session, to talk too much and to bore with talks about work, business, politics and family problems. I know several cases when some of the new comers were not invited again and were excluded. According to my informants, the main reason for these exclusions was "overtalkativeness" of the new comers. Thus the exclusive filter of *banya* protects *banya* co-members from the unpleasant invasion in their *banya* session. And this is probably one of the main characteristics that makes rustic private Russian bath more popular in Russia in comparison with public urban bath.

7.2. Banya in comparison with modern leisure practices of the consumer society

The privacy of rustic bath gives it one more unique character. It distinguishes rustic private baths from other practices of leisure dictated by the consumer society when

“consumed free time is in fact the time of a production” (Baudrillard 1998, 157). In contrast to a recreational center, water park, camping or even urban public baths a rustic private bath isolates its participants of the system of economic interactions. A participant of a traditional *banya* is not a customer. He is a guest who comes to his friends or relatives and does not pay for the visit. All costs associated with such *banya* are related mostly to travel expenses.

The intimacy of the process and extreme temperature conditions turn this type of leisure activity into an occasion that is not suitable for demonstrating or showing off. And this is another crucial difference and unique feature of *banya*. There is a common practice today to make “selfies” linking to social network (for ex. to FB, Instagram or Twitter) but nobody would consider doing this after a bath session. Otherwise it would be considered as a rare exception (as my research film is), or as an epatage or provocation. Moreover, there might be laws and ethic restrictions on the demonstrating of naked bodies in public. In modern consumer society the demonstrating of leisure activities is transformed from economically unproductive “waste of time” into “the time of a production of value - distinctive value, status value, prestige value” (Baudrillard 1998, 158). Thereby a demonstrative, ostentatious leisure attracts more potential consumers and becomes a key element of the production cycle of the modern consumer society. The ban on demonstrating the participation of the practitioners puts *banya* outside and beyond consumer society. *Banya* cannot therefore be turned into a demonstrative and saleable leisure activity. The practitioners of *banya* do not take part in the process of consumption and production. Doing so my informants consciously or unconsciously achieve their initial social attitude to be uncontrolled, free and independent. At the same time the inaccessibility for demonstrating strengthens the exclusivity of the social border of *banya* membership. This keeps strong the privacy and intimacy of *banya* co-membership.

7.3. Banya's membership as an access key to social capital

Sometimes the close relationships established in *banya* can become a ground for collaboration and common projects outside the *banya*. For example, two of my informants I. and B. took part into two collaborative business-projects related with building construction. N. and M. wrote some songs together and then organized a concert. B. and N. always help each other in search of business contacts. Once B. found funding for N.'s concert. Thus the relationships inside of a *banya* may give its members some advantages outside of it. But the real advantage here is not *banya* membership by itself but rather the level of credibility and

strong friendship that can be established within this membership. This credibility and trust can be brought with banya co-members outside the banya and can become relevant for other social situations. From this experience it can be stated that the relationships between *banya* co-partners has great potential outside the banya and can be seen as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” or as a “social capital” (Bourdieu 1986).

From my field work observations, the main spiritual bond of this key club is the intense feeling of togetherness that can't be controlled in any way by the outside. This togetherness is something completely uncontrollable that lets the *banya* members feel themselves independent on the high social turbulence and challenges. Moreover, the *banya* membership exists as if it is in the face of these challenges. Three years ago when B. lost his job it took more than six months for him to find a new one. During this period he didn't miss one bath session. During my field work my informant N. started a long legal battle with one of the Russian banks that illegally arrested his property. Two times in a week he had to travel from Tikhvin to St. Petersburg in order to visit exhausting court sessions. According to him, he was getting so tired of the unpleasant negotiations “*that every next banya weekend was expected by him with even more expectations than meeting with his wife after a long separation*”.

For a time the members of banya key club can be unobtainable for their work places, families or dissociative persons and achieved a period of exclusion.

8. Rustic private Russian bath and Russian identity

For my informants the tradition of banya is directly linked to Russian history and to Russian identity. Their various conversations and their stories about Banya, their pride of the tradition in relation to Russian history, their insisting on the uniqueness of Russian banya just emphasized the “Russianness” (Franklin and Widdis 2004) of the banya. The following dialogue between two of my informants clearly illustrates the role of the banya in constructing of new Russian identity:

N: Actually only Russians know how to take bath properly!

B: Yes, that’s true. You may find something similar to Russian banya in Finland, in Turkey or even in Japan, but it would be just a weak shadow of real bathing.

N: Exactly! Just a poor mimicry of the Russian banya.

B: ... (laughing)

N: Last year Sergei and I came to a small ski resort in Austria. There was a kind of sauna in the local hotel. You know, all foreign (non-Russian) guests of the hotel used it as a bench to sit for a while. Yes, they were sitting there, not steaming. So we had to teach them how to use it in a proper way.

B: Well, foreigners just don’t know that over the centuries Russians were born and died in banyas. So now we get banya in our blood.

N: Yes, but this time in Austria we showed them our secret. Although in two days foreigners stopped bathing with us. Probably they were scared to death with Russian style of bathing.

The further analysis of this conversation reveals that somehow the Russian rustic banya gives my informants much more than just a sense of connectedness, comradery and friendship. Actually for both B. and N. an original style of bathing is a way of defining “Russianness”. The meeting or encounter with foreign users of the bath in Austria makes this process of self-identification even more contrastive and thicker (Goffman, 1971). Taken as unique Russian tradition banya gives the banya members a vivid and strong idea of something that connects them with what it is to be Russian. Finally the banya creates both very close relationships among the participants and a sense of being Russian. By practicing this authentic Russian tradition my informants emphasize their Russian identity. The reason why they need to do this can be explained by taking into account the social statuses and careers of

my informants and situation in modern Russia. As I described before my informants are related to a successful part of Russian middle class and to a generation who has been grown up during the period of socio-political and economic transformation of Russia. This generation embraced neoliberalism and free market economy but also faced up all consequences of the falling of the Soviet Union. During the chaotic period of transformation the main priorities of my informants are the personal independence from both old and new any unreliable social institutions and structures. So by emphasizing their Russian identity my informants try to find a kind of social foundation within the unstable political and economical situation of modern Russia. Doing so they create a space of certainty within uncertain world. In some sense my informants take part in the ongoing process of constructing or searching for their identity in order “to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless” (Bauman 2000, 82). Moreover, in the context of the crisis of Russian identity (Berezkin 2012) the banya is endowed with very important cultural meaning. My analysis shows that this new meaning can be understood as a way to overcome the contemporary crisis of Russian identity by reconstructing this identity within the practice of authentic Russian traditions. In this case proliferation of Russian rustic baths supported today by statistics can be explained not only by the increasing economic wealth of Russian urban population. The increasing popularity of the banya can also be explained as an intention of new generation of Russians to develop new Russian identity.

9. Conclusion

The conducted research in conjunction with the documentary film created during the process of this research allow me to formulate a set of important findings.

A detailed analysis of the practice of *banya* confirmed the initial hypothesis of my research. My informants used *banya* as an *arena* where they experience a kind of *timeout* from various social responsibilities and duties imposed by their statuses. This stasis creates a temporary state of *happiness*. Moreover, I found that this occasional *timeout* allows my informants, who are all involved into processes of production and consumption, a space to reconstruct or renovate their own personalities and self-identities.

In general I observed that practicing the tradition of rustic private Russian bathing can take root into the ontological soil of the practitioners. The most important elements of this soil are values such as happiness, personal freedom and self-identity.

During the bath session the practitioners deconstruct their social status of work and become temporally free from *structural* behaviour patterns and strategies of their everyday life. The inaccessibility, nakedness, foul language, humor and close body contact are the most important guides of this deconstruction by destroying the *valorized distance* between the participants of *banya* (Bakhtin 1981). At the same time these key elements of the *banya* session are the markers of *liminality* or *passage* from the *structural* states of work to *antistructural* states of *communitas* collectively experienced by the participants as feeling of great togetherness and intimacy between each other.

Under the influence of specific *non-ordinary states of mind* occurring during the bath session the members of *banya communitas* engage in collective construction of a new insights about themselves. This is expressed in the experience of such feelings as happiness, lightness, carelessness, creativity, solidarity and brotherhood. This collective identity is reinforced by their nakedness and close body contact, foul language and humor. These factors start to play a role as the key elements in the identity negotiations of the participants (Goffman 1971; Swann 2008). The participants become aware that they feel happy and content.

In conclusion I found that the tradition of rustic private Russian bathing (*banya*) can be interpreted as a socially constructed space where the practitioners have a unique kind of experience. Firstly this experience is based on the skills of participants of the ritual bath process, on their sensorial experience (bodily experience, emotions, non-ordinary states of mind) achieved within the bath session, on their friendship as trust relationship developed

through the practice. Secondly the experience combined with historical background of the tradition link the participants to a key idea about being Russian. By this banya makes the practitioners emphasize their Russian identity. Thus banya experience has several levels of manifestations including physical, emotional, social and identification aspects that are fused within and constitute banya. Altogether these manifestations are experienced as a state of *happiness* and *wholeness* of a banya participant.

From this perspective *banya* can be also interpreted as an arena of inclusion and exclusion. Firstly it is not so hard to get an invitation to *banya* by being a friend or a relative. Secondly one can also be invited as kindred spirit of the *banya* co-members. But for my particular group, business partners or work associates have never been invited to banya for the last seven years. There is no place for political wrangling or for family problems within the bath session. Of course, my informants sometimes discussed these issues, for example after banya while having a supper, but they never did it during the bath session. This exclusionary practice is an example of distinction or differentiating of contemporary Russian society. By contrast its inclusive function within the bath session implies the constant process of the constructing of self-identity and the processes of exchanging and accumulation of social capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Finally my research reveals a transformation in the usage and perception of the *banya* tradition that has taken place in Russia in the last 30 years. The grandparents and parents of my informants used *banya* for hygienic purposes or as a leisure practice. My father noted that a banya session was rarely an intense experience. Now the children and grandchildren living in contemporary Russia ask something more from the banya experience. They come to it to renew their hectic lives and enrich their self-identities. This is how the tradition of banya carries on. The processes of globalization and development of a consumer society are markers of what is going on in contemporary Russia on the macro level. My informants are involved in these macro processes in different ways and to different extents. My film and thesis captures a specific group of informants who has reinvented the tradition of Russian bath in relation to modern Russian realities. With reinventing the tradition they are also reinventing the idea of “Russianness”. Therefore the naked men in the Russian bush in Pagolda give an important contribution to our understanding of contemporary developments in Russia.

10. References

Literature:

Arntsen, Bjorn, and Høltedahl Lisbet. 2005. Visualizing Situatedness – The Role of the Audience/Reader in Knowledge Production. In *Challenging Situatedness. Gender, Culture and the Production of Knowledge*. eds. Engelstad, Ericka, and Gerrard Siri, 67-83. Delft: Eburon.

Alexandrovsky, George. 1956. *Battle of Tsushima*. Rossiya Publishing Company

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981(1941). Epos i roman [Epic and novel]. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. M. Holquist, 3–40. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press.

Barthes, Roland. 1977. Rhetoric of the Image. From *Image, music, text*, sel. and trans. Stephen Heath, 32-51. New York: Hill and Wang.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1998. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. London: Sage.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Berezkin, Alexander. 2012. The crisis of national identity in Russia. *Scientific Journal for P.H.D and Doctor of science research* 10: 35-38

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *Physical space, social space and habitus*. Oslo: Institutt for sosiologi, Universitetet i Oslo.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. The forms of capital. From *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson, 241-58. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bromhead, Toni de. 1996. *Looking two ways: documentary's relationship with cinema and reality*. Højbjerg: Intervention Press.

Davies, Charlotte. 2008. *Reflexive Ethnography. A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London: Routledge.

Douglas, Mary. 2001. *Purity and Danger*. NY: Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Evplanov, Andrey. 2011. RG.RU

<http://www.rg.ru/2011/08/02/fitness.html>

Fedotova, Nadezhda. 2003. Krizis identichnosti v uslovijah globalizacii [The crisis of identity in a globalized world]. *Chelovek* 6: 50-58.

Franklin, Simon, and Emma Widdis. 2004. "All the Russias..."? In *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, ed. by Simon Franklin, Emma Widdis, 1-8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gennep, Arnold Van. 1960. *The rites of passage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Geertz, Clifford. 2006. Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture. In *Anthropology in Theory. Issues in Epistemology*, ed. H.L. Moore and T. Sanders, 236-243. London: Blackwell Publishing.

Geertz, Clifford. 1983. *Local knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York: Basic

Gullestad, Marianne. 1992. *The art of social relations: essays on culture, social action and everyday life in modern Norway*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1971. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Hastrup, Kirsten. 1992. Anthropological visions: some notes on visual and textual authority. In *Film as ethnography*, ed. by Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton, 8-25. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Juravleva, Svetlana. 2012. Yugopolis.ru

<http://www.yugopolis.ru/articles/social/2012/04/10/32652/krasnodar-prostituciya-biznes-sauny-bani>

(accessed October 30, 2013)

Ivchenko, Lidiya. 2002. *Borodino: Legend and reality*. Moscow: Exprint

Ledovskaya, Oxana. 2006. *The role of the traditions within modern culture*. Stavropol: The Stavropol State University.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1966. *The savage mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Lipinskaya, Victoriya. 2004. *Bath and stove in Russian ethnic tradition*. Moscow: Inranda.

Lotman, Yuri. 1995. Non-memoirs. In *Lotman Collection*, M., ed. E. V. Permyakov, 14. Moscow: Iz-Garant.

MacDougall, David. 2006. *The corporeal image: film, ethnography, and the senses*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

MacDougall, David. 1998. *Transcultural Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Maslov, Dmitry. 2011. Ethno Magazine — Ethnonet.ru.

<http://www.ethnonet.ru/etnografiya/obshhestvennaja-banja-kak-primer-instituta-dosuga/>

(accessed February 23, 2013).

Mitchell, W. J. T. 1996. What Do Pictures "Really" Want? *October*, Summer, Vol. 77.

Mihin, P. 2006. *Gunners, Stalin gave the order! We were dying to win*. Moscow: Jauza, Penguin Books

Mostovaya, I.V. 1995. *Russian society, social stratification, mobility*. Rostov on Don:

Pink, Sarah. 2001. *Doing visual ethnography: images, media and representation in research*. London: Sage.

Postma, Metje. 2006. Introduction. Visual Ethnography and Anthropology, In: *Reflecting Visual Ethnography using the camera in anthropological research*, ed. M. Postma and P.I. Crawford. Højbjerg: Intervention Press, pp. 1-7.

Ponukalina, O. 2011. Work and Leisure in Consumer Practices. *The journal of sociology and social anthropology*, XIV 5: 210-218.

Rakovskii, Leontii, 1989. Kutuzov. Moscow: DOSAAF USSR

Rosaldo, Renat. 1993. *Culture & truth: the remaking of social analysis*. London: Routledge.

Rouch, Jean. 2003. Our Totemic Ancestors and Crazy Masters. In: *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. P. Hockings. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 217-232.

Spradley, James. 1980. *Participant observation*. Thomson Learning, U.S.

Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The taste of ethnographic things: the senses in anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

Swann, William B. 2008. Identity negotiation: A theory of self and social interaction. In *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, 3rd ed. Oliver P. John, Richard W. Robins, Lawrence A. Pervin, 448-471. New York: Guilford Press

Torchinov, Evgeny. 2000. *Religions of the world. Experience of the Transcendence, Transpersonal States and Psychotechnique*. Saint Petersburg: Centre "Petersburg Oriental Studies".

Turner, Edith. 2012. *Communitas: the anthropology of collective joy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Turner, Viktor. 1982. *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. NY.

Turner, Viktor. 1991. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. NY: Ithaca.

Vaughan, Dai. 1999. *For documentary: twelve essays*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Walsh, Roger, and Vaughan Frances. 1993. On transpersonal definitions. In *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 25 (2): 199-207

Uryutova, Yulia. 2012. Russian national identity: ascent into the past for creating the future. *Society: politics, economics, law* 2: 11-17.

Zinik, Zinovy. 2005. Thy neighbour's fence. *Index on censorship*, 34 (1): 14-21.

Films:

Forest of Bliss. 1985. Robert Gardner. Film Study Center, Harvard University. USA. 91 min.

Alfred Melotu – the funeral of a paramount chief. 2003. Peter I. Crawford and Rolf Scott.

Steam of Life. 2010. Joonas Berghäll, Mika Hotakainen. Production Co: Oktober. Finland. 81 min.

Webpages:

Map of the North-West of Leningradskaya oblast region: source

<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/%D0%A2%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD,+%D0%9B%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD>

[B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F+%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8C,+%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D0%A1%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BA%D1%82-%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B3,+%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F/@59.9072644,31.9844004,9z/data=!4m6!4m5!1m5!1m1!1s0x46bca272179872fd:0xc925024d0b0ac69b!2m2!1d33.541032!2d59.6443858!1m5!1m1!1s0x4696378cc74a65ed:0x6dc7673fab848eff!2m2!1d30.3350986!2d59.9342802!2m1!1b1!3e0](https://maps.google.com/maps?m&ll=59.9072644,31.9844004&z=9&saddr=%D0%A2%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD,+%D0%9B%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F+%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8C,+%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D0%A1%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BA%D1%82-%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B3,+%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F/@59.9072644,31.9844004,9z/data=!4m6!4m5!1m5!1m1!1s0x46bca272179872fd:0xc925024d0b0ac69b!2m2!1d33.541032!2d59.6443858!1m5!1m1!1s0x4696378cc74a65ed:0x6dc7673fab848eff!2m2!1d30.3350986!2d59.9342802!2m1!1b1!3e0) (accessed 19.05.2014)

Map of Tikhvin and Pagolda: source

<https://maps.google.com/maps?m&ll=59.9072644,31.9844004&z=9&saddr=%D0%A2%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD,+%D0%9B%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F+%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8C,+%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F&daddr=%D0%A1%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BA%D1%82-%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B1%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B3,+%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F&output=classic&dg=ntvb>
(accessed 19.05.2014)