Searching for Authentic Living Through Native Fait
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The Maausk movement in Estonia

Jenni Rinne
Abstract
The broad aim of this thesis is twofold: firstly, I contextualise the Maausk movement and its practitioners’ understandings in relation to history and the surrounding society; secondly, I analyse the affective and embodied experiences of being a Maausk practitioner from a phenomenological perspective.

The thesis focuses on the formation and practice of Maausk, which is perceived to be deeply tied to the society and history where it exists. Relatedly, this study examines how Maausk identity formation and practices have been influenced by the Soviet legacy, romantic nationalism and Estonia’s current economic and political situation.

In order to analyse the Maausk experiences and narratives, this study draws from various phenomenologically oriented theories of affect, embodiment and emotion, as well as cultural theories of place, identity, tradition and authenticity. I have used economic anthropology and globalisation theories as well as historical studies of Estonia’s Soviet past to contextualise the Maausk movement. Further, to place Maausk in the European religious landscape, this study refers to native faith and Neopagan studies.

Through sensory ethnography, this study draws on the affective and emotional aspects of the research material to analyse how the complexity of emotional experiences of being a Maausk practitioner produces Maausk meanings and values. The study also examines the role and function of the body and emotions during the process of embodying the Maausk practices, both techniques and meanings of the practices.

Keywords: native faith, neo-paganism, affect, affective pattern, emotions, place, tradition, authenticity, neoliberalism, globalisation, identity, Estonia, lived religion, post-soviet.
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On a cold January day in 2013 I visited the town of Paide located in central Estonia. The visit was part of my fieldwork on the Estonian native faith
group *Maausk* (earth faith) that I was studying for my thesis. It’s a group that is registered as a religious organisation in Estonia. I went to Paide to interview Ainar one of the *Maausk* practitioners. Ainar was born in the mid-1960s, went to university but never finished his studies. He had travelled extensively in the 1990s and worked as a seasonal worker in different low-skilled jobs around southern Europe. However, he had decided to return to the town where he was born because he ‘missed his roots and the people who had always known him’, as he told me in the interview. He had been aware of *Maausk* gatherings while he was studying and had followed the group in the media and online. However it was only later that he had become more interested in the ideas of the group. At the time of our interview he defined himself as a practitioner, but did not take part in group activities.

After the interview, Ainar asked whether I would like to take a walk in the forest and see his personal sacred place, and I agreed with great interest. This was the first time I had been asked to visit somebody’s sacred place in the forest. I was aware that sacred places in nature are an important part of *Maausk* practice, where holidays are celebrated in groups or alone, and I had visited a historical sacred place which had evidence of past cultic use. However, I had never yet seen a personal sacred place. We walked through the town and turned onto a small dirt road. As we walked deeper into the woods Ainar explained that, for him, all the ground springs we saw were sacred. He said that he drank water mainly from them, and that he came to this particular spring at least once a week, both to spend some time in his sacred place and to take water.

We kept walking and the dirt road narrowed until it was only a path. We walked past a small area where the trees had been logged and Ainar expressed his sadness about this. He told me that he felt people were out of touch with nature even though they live right next to it. Then we arrived at the spring. It was a beautiful sight in the snowy forest, with clear water and a sandy bed, through which the water was slowly streaming towards a pool. Ainar told me that he usually carried out a small ritual before collecting water, but that he first wanted to show me a place among the trees close by.

We walked on from the spring to a spot with a small fireplace. Ainar told me that the local youth sometimes gathered there in the warmer season, and that he occasionally had to clean up after them. But he was not sorry about the public use of the place. In fact he viewed the popularity of the place as proof that it also appealed to others because of the force it held. He explained that he was sure our ancestors had visited this particular place long before him. Then Ainar walked a few steps away from the fireplace and
asked me to come and stand next to him. We were standing among very tall pine trees. He was looking up and did not speak or move for some time. I was also standing there looking up at the trees and thinking about how beautiful the place was. I remember feeling small among the tall, old pine trees. Then I lost track of time. It was only a moment, I think. I was watching the treetops and listening to the light wind blowing through the trees. The whooshing sound relaxed me. Suddenly I realized that Ainar was no longer there. I lowered my gaze from the treetops, and saw him over by the spring. He was walking slowly clockwise around the spring and looking down. After a little while he stopped and looked up for a moment, and then squatted and filled his water bottle. I joined him and we started to walk the same path back.

Only afterwards did I realise that the visit to the sacred place had actually been the most important moment of my meeting with Ainar. It helped me to recognise that if I wanted to understand what Maausk was all about, I needed to pay attention to small but significant moments relating to the practice. I could not rely only on interviews, even though they would still be important. I also had to do things with the Maausk practitioners and pay attention to the sensed and felt qualities of their practices. It was clear that Ainar returned to this particular place to feel something there. He was affected by the place, as was I as I stood amongst the trees. Already at the beginning of the research process I was interested in how Maausk came to be and how it was practiced. From that moment though, I became particularly curious about how the affective experiences and meanings of Maausk intertwined. I needed to be attentive to bodily experiences: small hints, like body postures, expressions of feeling, tears, moments of quietness and overall affective moments and atmospheres. Being attentive to feelings and emotions, both experienced and narrated, would yield research material that could offer me a valuable perspective on the complex processes that created and recreated the meanings and motivations in the everyday life of the practitioners.

But I also wanted to put the Maausk movement into a wider societal and historical context, in order to examine the development and current existence of the movement as well as the individuals’ motivations for practicing Maausk. According to Orvar Löfgren, using a historical approach in ethnological research is an analytical choice. History is then used as a tool to problematize the present. Löfgren claims that the historical knowledge can be used to elevate the analysis of the contemporary meanings of things. (Löfgren 2008: 128.) In other words, placing today’s Maausk organisation
and the individual practitioners’ understanding and concerns in a historical context, could provide me with valuable perspectives that would supplement the focus on the affective aspects.

Another early guiding principle in my thesis has been what Bruno Latour argued. He said that we should not simply deconstruct the ideas and understandings that people in a particular context share and then be content in our analysis. Rather, we should gather the components that produce the particular knowledge being studied, in order to generate more ideas about that which has been gathered. (Latour 2004: 245.) Inspired by Bruno Latour, I have thus strived to identify the Maausk practitioners’ concerns and ideas about Maausk and motivations for practicing it, as well as look at other factors - be they historical, societal, subjective or communal - that may have contributed to the formation of understandings and knowledge of the Maausk practitioners.

Objectives

This thesis is about a native faith group in Estonia, registered as a religious organisation, called Maausk (earth faith), and the focus of the study is twofold. Firstly, I aim to study how the Maausk practitioners produced and constructed their values, beliefs and practices, and how these became embodied in their lives. I have paid particular attention to the affective aspects of the Maausk practice, and how affective experiences are translated and used when meanings and worldviews are shaped by the practitioners. Secondly, I aim to take the existence of the Maausk movement and the understanding of the practitioners’ reflections and practices, and set these in a historical and societal context. For this reason, I have also analysed what kind of features of modern society the practice of Maausk could be seen as responding to. These two aims intertwine throughout the thesis as it looks at different questions and themes related to Maausk movement and practice.

The structure of the thesis is based on three main themes that have emerged during the analysis of the fieldwork material.

1. Identity construction among the Maausk practitioners. The questions that I aim to explore are: what are the components of the Maausk identity? How is the identity felt, framed and used in connection with history and society? In respect of Estonian history and society, I also
examine the practitioners’ views on *Maausk* as a religious movement, which is connected to the question of how religion, religiously engaged individuals and religious practice are viewed in the Estonian society.

2. Sacred places in nature. I explore how sacred places are experienced and understood by the practitioners of *Maausk*, as well as the connection between identity and place?

3. Meaning and constitution of folk traditions that are perceived to be the source of the *Maausk* practice. Folk traditions are closely related to the subject of authenticity, and especially the relationship between the personal sense of being an authentic person and the practitioners’ various views on *Maausk* practice. I examine: How is authenticity framed and felt? What is the connection between authenticity and traditions? What is the meaning of folk traditions in *Maausk* and how are they embodied?

**The early years of the *Maausk***

The formation of the *Maausk* movement in Estonia can be linked to the political and societal turmoil of the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, some of the ideas of the *Maausk* movement have a longer history dating back to the time of romanticism and connected with nineteenth century nationalism.

One of these older influences is apparent in how the *Maausk* identity is partly based on the idea of a shared ethnicity that is considered to be part of the Finno-Ugrian folk groups around Europe and in Russia. The perceived connections between these folk groups are primarily built on their linguistic ties. The Finno-Ugric identity has been present in the Estonian society since the times of national romanticism and national awakening. At that time it served as a foundation for a distinct identity that could justify claims for founding a national state. Since then the Finno-Ugric identity has been present in society, surfacing periodically (Kuutma 2005: 54–55). In Soviet times the idea of a community of Finno-Ugrians, which the Estonians were seen as belonging to, became an expression of the oppressed national identity and a counterforce against the Russification policies of the Soviet authorities. The Finno-Ugric identity also influenced young academics at the end of the 1980s in the university town of Tartu who started a heritage protection club called *Tõlet* (1987–1994). This organisation, established to study the folk heritage of Estonia, was the predecessor of the current
Maausk organisation (Kuutma 2005: 61.) During the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, heritage protection and the study of local history became popular as a form of protest against the officially sanctioned stories of Soviet history. One reason for this was that the Estonians were not part of interpreting or constructing the official Soviet historical narratives and so turned towards their local histories, which were untainted by official policy.

Many of the current practitioners turned to Maausk via the activities of Tõlet, which also organised events called ‘Thursday evenings’, where folk culture was discussed and practiced. Tõlet also published two newsletters: Hiis (sacred grove) and Videvik (twilight), to spread knowledge about the heritage and also their ideas about Maausk. According to the Estonian folklorist Kristin Kuutma the symbols that were introduced in these periodicals were sacrificial fire, amulets, sacred groves, stylized folk costumes and new rituals with Finno-Ugric design. Kuutma writes that: ‘Adherents developed idiomatic greetings, preferences in food and beverages, clothing and hair-style; they developed common entertainment and hobbies, promoted closeness of nature, advocated liberal rules and idiosyncratic deviances in social behaviour or gender relations’ (Kuutma 2005: 64–65). Many of these features still exist among Maausk practitioners. According to Kuutma, academic youth, who were searching for their religious roots, played an important role in the creation of the public image of the Maausk in the early years. For instance, they organised public events with incantation rites and voluntary conservation camps in the sacred groves in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Kuutma 2005: 65).

After the Soviet Union collapsed at the beginning of the 1990s, Estonia experienced an increased interest in religion, as did many other Eastern European countries. At this time Maausk had a positive image in the larger society since it was seen as something that belonged to the Estonians and that represented their ethnic identity (Västrik 2015: 146). Tõlet activists even performed a public incantation ritual in the parliament of the Estonian Republic in 1992 (Kuutma 2005: 67). The preoccupation with religion in general included folk beliefs and folk healing practices. According to the Estonian folklorist Mare Kõiva, these practices were more popular than ever already in the 1970s and 1980s. The pressure and psychological tension of living in a totalitarian society made people search for alternative therapies and new ways of thinking and living. This interest continued and in the 1980s and 1990s neo-shamanist healers like Vigala Sass (Aleksander Heintalu) were thought highly of in society at large (Kõiva 1995: 221–223). Heintalu also influenced the early days of Maausk with his/her book Eestide
(tsuudide) Hingestatud ilm published in 2001. The book was a combination of individual beliefs and academic studies about shamanistic practices of the Estonian, Baltic and Finno-Ugric peoples. The descriptions in the book of wedding rituals for example, still influence current Maausk practice.

By the mid-1990s the ideas and practices of Maausk had reached a certain consensus. The official organisation of Maausk, The House of Taara and Native Religions, was established in 1995. On May 5th and 6th of that year, the activists involved in the movement published two articles in the daily newspaper Postimees about the ideas of Maausk (Postimees, 1995, 1995). The following ideas were presented: Maausk does not have authoritarian religious leaders or sacred texts and rules to follow; the practitioners do not do active missionary work, but all interested people are welcome to the activities; the organisation is meant to be, first and foremost, a juridical unit which protects the rights of the practitioners. According to the articles, the old traditions of the agricultural and previous societies were respected in Maausk, but at the same time the modern information society would not be ruled out. However, what was also presented in the articles was that Maausk intended to remain free from the influence of the ‘Christian-European consumer culture’, which was described as homogenising societies. Deep ecological awareness borrowed from the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who influenced the environmental movements in the twentieth century, was cited in the articles as an inspiration for Maausk. Naess’ main idea was that the environmental crisis was happening due to a lack of deep understanding of nature where every living organism is connected. According to the articles, this ecological thinking meant that in the Maausk movement everything in nature – earth, trees, springs, lakes and forests – is perceived to be alive and conscious of its surroundings. The articles stated that the practitioners of Maausk believed that Estonians carry their spiritual heritage within them, in their practices and worldview, and that this needed simply to be realized (Postimees, 1995, 1995).

**Maausk (Earth faith)**

The Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions (Maavalla koda) was entered into the register of religious organisations of the Estonian state in 1995. ‘Taara’ referred to an earlier religious organisation established in the 1930s. The idea behind the Taara faith was to create a national religion as an alternative to Christianity. The Christian faith and the Lutheran church,
with their Germanic clergy, were depicted in opposition to “Estonianness.” Christianisation was portrayed as a story of ancient battle between the Estonian tribes and the Germanic Teutonic order, in which the Estonian tribes lost and were subsequently forcefully Christianised. The Taara faith was primarily a project of the intelligentsia who mixed old folk beliefs with newly created rituals to construct a new form of faith. (Altnurme 2006: 62; Kuutma 2005: 62 Västrik 2015: 134.) The followers of the Taara faith were heavily suppressed during the Soviet era and the faith therefore only existed in a few private households in Estonia and in exile (Altnurme 2006:62).

According to the official webpage of Maausk, the followers of the Taara faith that remained after the Soviet period were not interested in establishing their own religious organisation in the 1990s, but rather wanted to be part of the Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions. One important difference between the Taara faith and Maausk, according to the website of the Estonian house of Taara and Native Religions, is that Maausk was never established per se, it is perceived to have been part of a continuum of ancient pre-Christian folk beliefs and traditions. Taara faith, on the other hand, was a conscious reinvention where the past was used only as an inspiration (www.maavalde.ee).

The website also states that Maausk is a worldview which consists of a traditional lifestyle and a distinct culture and language that do not exist anywhere else. The webpage explains that the traditions are not the same all over Estonia, but that there is variation between the different local cultures around Estonia. That is why there are five different ‘kodas’ (sub-groups of practitioners) in different parts of Estonia. The shared characteristics of the Maausk sub-groups are however that the followers believe in an animated nature; appreciate the folk traditions specifically from that area; and follow the year cycles according to the traditional agricultural calendar. The shrines of Maausk are sacred places in nature, places of worship and communication with the ancestors and spirits of nature (www.maavalde.ee). These dimensions: recognizing historical sacred places in nature; practicing traditional folk beliefs; and connecting to nature which is perceived as alive, are central in the practices and faith of most Maausk practitioners. However, the practices, values and beliefs of Maausk are continuously negotiated and individual differences in emphasis exist.

Even though Maausk lacks any specific sacred texts, it is possible from my interviews to identify a certain inter-textual foundation to the movement. One of the important inspirations of Maausk ideals has been the nature-influenced poems of Jaan Kaplinski, a writer, Estonian philosopher,
cultural critic and poet. Texts by Uku Masing have also been influential. He is an Estonian theologian, folklorist, ethnologist and philosopher who wrote *Keelest ja Meelest* (About language and mind) and *Taevapödra lood* (The stories of heavenly reindeer) (1989). The main idea of these texts are that the language we speak influences the way we think which means that every culture is unique. This influenced the *Maausk* belief that the Estonian language and the kindred languages of Finno-Ugrians share a distinct way of understanding and creating a world, and that they have a shared core. Film materials were also mentioned as influential in my interviews, including nature documentaries by Rein Maran and other ethnographic films made in Estonia.¹

The *Maausk* practices have to a large extent been constructed with the help of folklore archives and popular folklore books that describe Estonian folk culture, and several of the participants in the study also mentioned having read a wide range of academic folklore studies. Older studies about sacrificial rituals of the ancestors and other folk beliefs at the beginning of the twentieth century made by Pastor Matthias Johan Eissen were also mentioned. Eissen’s books were published between 1919 and 1927, and reprinted in the mid-1990s. Further, the Estonian Folklorist Mare Kõiva has published studies on folk beliefs during the past 20 years, based on archived material, including *Eesti loitsud* (2011) (Estonian incantations). Mall Hiiemäe has also written about folk belief and based her studies on material from the ethnographic archives. Such studies were found on the bookshelves of several of the practitioners. Starting in the late 1980s, a number of young Estonian ethnologists made research trips to Siberia, returning with descriptions of the religious rituals carried out by the indigenous people of Siberia. These stories circulated among the group members in the early days of the movement. The Finno-Ugrian folk groups of *Mari* and *Udmurd* folk beliefs, which are published and read in Estonia – Lidia Toidubeks’ *Mari Usund* (The Religion of Mari) (1998) and Aado Lintrop’s *Udmurdi Usund* (2003) – were cited in several interviews.²

¹ Rein Maran has made documentaries about Estonian sacred places. In 2013 he made *Charms of sacred groves* and *Natural sacred sites in Estonia*, available on DVD. In 2015 Maran published *Suvited Tammealusel*, a TV documentary that depicted a gathering of *Maausk* practitioners on a particular holiday in a sacred place.

² The textual influences are wider than those depicted here, and there is personal variation in what is read. My purpose has been to give some idea of the kind of textual and film sources that are meaningful to the practitioners of *Maausk*.
The *Maausk* practitioners’ way of borrowing from folklore studies and archives can be seen as an example of what the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko has termed “a second life of folklore”:

It is in fact necessary to distinguish the ‘second life’ of folklore from the first, in which it is a natural part of a broader tradition system and not necessarily very easy to identify. This first life ends with the documentation of tradition. Texts and images are detached from their background and left to lie dormant, no longer having any influence on the further development of the tradition in question. Archive material is in this respect dead and ineffective: it joins the queue waiting for the beginning of the “second life” – getting taken into use again, published, performed, recycled. (Honko1990: 185)

To speak about a “second life” of folklore is appropriate in this context. The information and inspiration gathered from the archives and various academic studies have had a direct influence on the traditions and practice within *Maausk*. To a large extent *Maausk* is practiced individually or with family, but some of the active members also organise joint gatherings in sacred places. For the larger rituals everyone is invited, while the smaller rituals are usually practiced on a sub-group level. Two of the sub-groups located in the northern part of Estonia are more connected in their practice. The island of Saaremaa is not currently very active, neither are the two southern sub-groups, apart from the *Emujärvekoda*, which have some joint gatherings in friend-based groups.

The individual practice of *Maausk* involves a variety of customs, for instance blessing bread, or giving food offerings to nature, the fire or the house deity. The practice may also entail wearing a certain type of clothing or amulets, dancing and singing folksongs and having a particular attitude towards nature and life in general. The countryside and a past agricultural way of life with traditional handicraft skills are commonly idealized. Visiting personal or historical sacred places in nature (*Hiis*) is one of the most important practices, as illustrated at the beginning of the chapter.

The *Maausk* organisation also has its own way of measuring time, to avoid any Christian reference. Time starts from the melting of a glacier (Billingen catastrophe) in 8213 BC, but measure of time is more symbolic than it is an actual practice within *Maausk*. The names of the months also differ with ‘more Estonian’ versions, and the recognized calendar holidays and celebrations are based on practices from the old agricultural society. There are two main holidays that are usually celebrated together with other practitioners in the sacred places in nature: *Suvistepüha* in May and then
Hingedepäev in November. Both are days when ancestors are remembered. Some of the other holidays, like Leedopüha (midnight summer), are celebrated with family or unofficially among sub-group members. On bigger holidays somewhat official rituals take place, but with other holidays the rituals are more unofficial and improvised.

The practice of Maausk also varies between individuals, as it is drawn together from elements that are meaningful to each person. For example, an artist using folklore to express her worldview in her art may see this as part of her Maausk practice. Another practitioner may consider sitting by the fire and giving offerings to nature as the core of his practice. A third practitioner may regard visiting historical sacred places in nature and protecting them as the main part of their practice. While someone else may see the use of handicraft skills when constructing a sauna, sewing folk costumes, knitting traditional folk patterns or weaving traditional belts, as the most important part of practicing Maausk. Folk singing and folk dancing traditions are also important aspects of the practice for some Maausk practitioners, as well as certain small gestures that are present in everyday life. Here proverbs and folk beliefs are often put into practice; kissing bread if it drops to the ground, or placing bread in the right way on the table etc. Some practitioners also use protective signs when baking bread, for example, or in order to protect the house.

As previously described, practitioners in the early days of the movement were mostly enthusiastic university students, along with some parts of the Estonian intelligentsia with a similar interest in heritage and the protection of nature. Nowadays however, practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds, with different occupations and education and from a variety of age groups. What they all share is a common interest in folk traditions and a respectful attitude towards nature. Maausk does not require membership in order to take part in activities, and many people define themselves as practitioners of Maausk even though they are not officially members of the group. My interviews include both members and non-members, as long as they define themselves as practitioners. Not all practitioners feel the need to participate in group events and prefer to practice Maausk with their families or alone. Membership is often justified by the need for a legal organisation to protect the rights of the group and the sacred places. The whole group has one joint annual meeting. Local groups hold one meeting each year to elect the ‘elders’ of the group who take the lead in organising gatherings and take care of legal and administrative tasks. The northern local groups also meet for
common projects. Such projects include building traditional saunas, visiting sacred places, making folk costumes and visiting folklore archives.

There is no system of moral and ethical thought, or a systematic doctrine within Maausk. There is, nonetheless, a general core that centres on the idea of a polytheistic nature with forces and spirits as the main manifestation of the supernatural. Practitioners interviewed commonly referred to Maausk as a ‘worldview’ or ‘lifestyle’ rather than a religion. Practitioners of Maausk do not generally express supernatural experiences with large gestures or with testimonies of altered states of mind. Rather they make brief remarks about moments of connectedness to those forces and spirits which are thought to surround them constantly. The supernatural is thus quietly present in everyday life and not felt only on special occasions. The practitioner’s relationship to it is usually expressed as an idea that everything around us is alive and that relationships are equal with ‘those that live around us’. Each individual is responsible for his or her actions, and by giving gifts to the sacred entities in nature it is possible to communicate with these spirits or simply establish a connection to something on ‘the other side’.

The religious content of the practice was generally not emphasised by the study participants. Nonetheless, my material indicated a slight division between the practitioners with regard to the emphasis of the religious practice. For one group, the ‘inner feeling’ of the practitioner determined what and how they practiced. For the other group, heritage and practices of the past were seen as the most important guiding factor to how and what to practice. This division was not organised and not necessarily acknowledged by everyone, but it was evident in how the practitioners reasoned around their own and other people’s practice. It also illustrates the dynamic character of Maausk, where there are no fixed leaders or code of conduct at any level. Individual interpretations of the practice, founded in shared understandings as well as individual experiences, can thus be combined in different ways.

**Maausk and society**

Estonia is often depicted as a highly secularised country, particularly when it comes to membership of religious organisations, separation of the state and church, and when individuals are asked for their views on religion (Ringvee 2014). According to a housing and population census conducted by the
Estonian state in 2011, only 29 per cent of Estonians were affiliated with a particular religion and the most common religions were Christian Orthodoxy (16%) and Lutheranism (10%). 54 per cent of Estonians did not have any religious affiliation and 14 per cent did not want to answer the question about religious affiliation (Housing and population census 2011: http://www.stat.ee/65352?parent_id=39113). A religious scholar Ringo Ringvee (2014) has compared these Estonian results to surveys of religious life in other post-socialist countries. He concluded that in the countries where membership to the traditional majority church has remained high, there had previously been a historical connection between cultural and national identities and a particular church. In Estonia such connections are somewhat weak. However, it’s worth noting that religious affiliation does not necessarily reveal everything about people’s everyday religious or spiritual practices and beliefs outside the realm of the established religious institutions.

According to the sociologist Jose Casanova the term ‘secularisation’, in its broader sense, signifies a universal developmental process: a progressive decline of religious beliefs, practices and institutions (Casanova 2009: 1050). ‘Secularisation theories’ often refer to particular models explaining why this decline is happening. In these theories modernity and secularisation are seen to go hand in hand. Modernity is viewed as something that has caused a particular condition where worldviews and understandings have changed making disbelief possible, and religious institutions do not offer believable explanation models of the world. These prevailing secularisation theories have been heavily debated3 with a perspective that a decline in the membership of certain institutions does not necessarily mean that religious expression is disappearing from society. Recent studies show that Charismatic Christianity has experienced a strong revival in America (Luhrmann 2012) and Europe. Christianity in its traditional, Pentecostal and charismatic form is also spreading within the African and South-American continents (Jacobsen 2011) and the appearance of new forms of Islam also shows that religion is not disappearing from our world view. Further, New Age forms of religious expression and neo-paganism (which Maausk can be seen to be a part of since it draws from pre-Christian folk beliefs that are generally regarded as pagan) have also found their place among the many ways of manifesting religious sentiments. Looking at developments globally,
religious practices and worldviews or membership of religious organisations do not appear to be in significant decline. *Maausk* also challenges the secularisation paradigm in Estonia, since the number of people identifying themselves as *Maausk* rose by about 1000 people according to a 2011 population and housing census (Housing and population census 2011: http://www.stat.ee/65352?parent_id=39113).

But if religion is not disappearing and secularisation theories are not proving true, what has changed? If modernisation does not imply automatic secularisation, what does it actually do to the religious sphere? As individuals, we are far from settling down in unbelief according to philosopher Charles Taylor (Taylor 2007: 727). Taylor argues that what has happened generally is that the body has returned to religious practice while spiritual experiences are strongly sensed (Taylor 2007: 772). In recent years it has become more popular to study religious expression in connection with everyday life instead of concentrating on religious scriptures and professionals (Ammermann 2007, Bender 2003, McGuire 2008). In my thesis, I am also interested in looking at the lived, everyday experiences of *Maausk* practice especially focusing on felt and sensed qualities of the *Maausk* practice. However, religious expression based on the lived experiences of bodily sensations and experiences of individuals is not somehow free from the contexts within which those experiences are produced. Hence, studying the relevant history and circumstances within which different religious movements, expressions and practices develop becomes important.

Nancy Ammerman writes about *religiosities* in plural, rejecting the idea that religion is only one thing (Ammerman 2007: 6). Religious identity is not always singular, and even if it is in some cases, other religious ideas and practices may still be present, in the same way that folk beliefs and Christianity have always been entwined in practice. Some of the people in *Maausk* reject the idea of mixing religious ideas, but pluralism is still evidently present. In my study, the concept of plurality manifests in the different approaches and emphases that the *Maausk* practitioners have, and also individual preferences and lived experiences that influence the interpretation of *Maausk*. Religion as practiced is never a coherent unchanging thing, rather it is a shifting and changing web of threads and ideas about the supernatural, society and a world in general, intertwined in individual practice. This means that religious practice is not an entirely individual matter, especially when one belongs to a specific group. The shaping practice inside the group influence the individual, and also the history and society that people live in influence individual and group practices.
According to the religious scholar Sarah Pike, neo-paganism, a concept that can also be used to describe Maausk, highlights the relationship between humans and nature and reinvents religious practices and beliefs from the past. This is different from the New Age movements, which are focused more on transforming individual consciousness and shaping the future. (Pike 2004: 18.) Neo-paganism is a global phenomenon. Its branches reach every continent, each with their own peculiarities (Magliocco 2004: 3). Versions of neo-paganism exist in India, North and South America (both Native American and European descent) and Europe (in its northern, western and eastern versions), to name but a few. There are similarities among these groups as well as differences between them. According to Pike, in continental Europe these groups claim unbroken lineage, often tied to ethnicity and nationality. American, Australian and British groups build on social change movements and egalitarian and individualistic ideals (Pike 2004:19). The Eastern European variant of neo-paganism has distinctive origins as a post-socialist phenomenon and has, because of that, been termed as native faith groups. In contrast to neo-pagan groups in Britain and America for example, the Central and Eastern European native faith groups often emphasise distinctive ancestral continuity and pre-Christianity folk beliefs as a source of their practice and tend to connect these with ethnic pride (Aitamurto & Simpson 2013:1, Roundtree 2015:1). However, these distinctions are not absolute and each group should be defined based on their specific context and histories.

I thus define Maausk as a movement that is influenced by the specific social and historical circumstances of its establishment. It is a movement tied to the society where it exists, and to the history of that society, and which is closely connected with people’s everyday lives. Sensed, felt and embodied aspects of the practices are part of the meaning-making processes of the group, and those qualities create a specific Maausk experience that directs the practitioners’ lives and motivations.

Previous research

This study can be seen as being at the intersection of several research fields. One is the study of religion within ethnology, which is related to the more recently established research field of lived religion within the sociology of religion, which focuses on the everyday aspects of religion. The thesis is, furthermore, a contribution to research on native faith groups, and in extension also to the
wider research field concerned with the global phenomenon of neo-paganism. Finally, this study relates to research within the anthropology of globalisation. I briefly address each of these research fields here.

Folk belief research that entails studies of rituals and belief systems as well as healing practices, has historically been an established part of ethnological and folkloristic studies. It is thus not new that ethnologists write about religious groups and their practices and understandings. I briefly outline a few of the most current studies done within Swedish, Estonian and Finnish ethnology here. A number of these have been based on archive material, such as: Mare Kõiva’s studies of old folk incantation rituals in Estonia; Laura Stark’s studies of the interconnectedness of magic and Christianity in old folk religion in Finland; and the borders of what is sacred through Karelian folk poetry (Kõiva 2011, Stark 2002, 2005). Another long-standing Finnish ethnologist, Anna-Leena Siikala, used material from folklore archives in her research on Finno-Ugric mythology and shamanism, and published a book about Finno-Ugric mythology based on folk poetry in 2012.

Siikala also studied more recent forms of folk religion by doing fieldwork among Finno-Ugric people in Europe and in Siberia including the Khanty, Komi and Udmurd. In one of her studies from 2011, she analysed tradition and belonging through public and private rituals together with Oleg Ulyshev (2011). The Estonian scholar Ergo-Hart Västrik has published studies on the creation of belief narratives and the vernacular religion of the Votians, drawing from ethnographic material (2014, 2014). Another Estonian ethnologist Laur Vallikivi has studied the conversion to Pentecostal movements and Charismatic Christianity in the Komi Republic and among the Tundra Nenets, a folk group that live as reindeer herders in Siberia (2014). Swedish ethnologists who have contributed to this field include Barbro Blehr who has studied the sacred quality of mundane rituals in Norway and elsewhere (2009, 2009, 1999), as well as changes within the thinking and responsibility of clergymen in the Lutheran church (2008). Another Swedish ethnologist Maria Zackariasson has studied young people’s involvement, habituation and emotions in Christian youth organisations (2012, 2014, 2015). Finally Pia Karlsson Minganti has studied Islamic revival and young Muslim Women in Sweden (2007).

This is by no means an exhaustive list of all research done within ethnology concerning religion. I have however included these examples partly to emphasise that religion has been studied from a variety of perspectives within ethnology – with a focus on religion as a phenomenon or
on more specific practices, expressions, beliefs and narratives. What is common across the ethnological studies is that they generally start from an everyday perspective – what religion might mean in the everyday life of individuals. This perspective connects the ethnological studies to the research field in sociology of religion called *lived religion*.

In recent study of religion some researchers have started to conceptualise so-called *lived religion* or *everyday religion*. Their objective is to address individuality and the religious experience from a phenomenological point of view in order to try to answer the question of how to approach religiosity in our present day society. Nancy Ammerman, in her book: *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (2007) described modern religiosities from the experience of non-experts. The focus was on what happens outside religious organisations in everyday life. This was not to exclude the role of experts and official ideologies, but to look at how religious experiences were interwoven with the everyday lives of individuals (Ammerman, 2007: 3). Courtney Bender in her study *Heaven’s Kitchen: Living Religion at God’s Love We Deliver* (2003), took a radical starting approach for her study of religious expression and morals in everyday life. She observed religious expression in the non-religious setting of a volunteer organisation that had a multi-religious participant network. Her aim was to study how religious conversation happened in the course of daily lives in non-religious environments. She concluded that when people expressed their religious values they were often context dependant and they changed accordingly (Bender 2003: 136).

Meredith McGuire has also written about complex religious lives from the point of view of non-expert individuals in her book *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (2008). She wrote that we should think of religion ‘at the individual level, as an ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy - even contradictory - amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those that religious institutions consider important’ (McGuire 2008: 4). What McGuire means by ‘lived religion’ is a focus on religion as it is lived and experienced within a certain time and cultural setting. That is, how the actual experiences of religious people differ from institutional beliefs and practices. However, the construction of the religious world does not occur in a vacuum, but in relation to other people. (McGuire 2008: 12.) I agree with McGuire with respect to the importance of observing individual practices, nevertheless I think it has to be done not only in relation to other people, but also in relation to the wider society, and the cultural and historical context. More specifically, it is important to look at the shared
understandings of the religious organisation within society, since its practices and their meanings are built from the shared experiences, meanings and practices of the individuals involved. The formation of religious organisations always happens in relation to society and the history of that society. In my study, it has been crucially important that I have not studied individual experiences in isolation from the society within which Maausk exists. I would argue that it is vital to examine how different levels of society intertwine when studying religious expression. The social context of the group’s formation and values are important when interpreting individual practices. Finally we should not forget the impact of personal and societal history that influence religious forms, interpretations and practices.

As stated above, native faith is a nascent concept that refers to paganism in Central and Eastern Europe. Studies of native faith tend to take the societal and historical developments of the society into consideration when studying paganism in these areas, as advocated above. A number of articles about these movements have been published in different journals in addition to two anthologies that address the native faith concept and groups. One of them is Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe (2013) edited by Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson. The book is a collection of articles specifically focused on the post-socialistic countries and the pagan movements in that area. According to Aitamurto and Simpson the common features in all countries in Central and Eastern Europe are the emphasis on ethnicity and local ethnic tradition with common ancestors. Another shared feature is the idea that it is possible to find traces of pre-Christian folk beliefs from the past in the present. A concern for and connection to nature is also common, which can also manifest itself as environmental or political activism (Aitamurto and Simpson, 2013: 4–5). The second anthology is called Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe (2015) edited by Kathryn Roundtree. The anthology addresses paganism in Europe in general, not only focusing on Central and Eastern Europe. According to the introductory chapter, the shared goals of these pagan groups include the ‘construction of authentic, indigenous, personal and group identities’ in the face of globalising forces in current Europe. The author of the introduction identifies two broad tendencies present in the articles of the anthology that the contemporary Pagan and Native faith movements might project; namely colonial or nationalistic tendencies, or sometimes both (Roundtree 2015: 2).

Some research has thus been carried out on native faith groups that is relevant for my study. In terms of Maausk more specifically, two scientific
articles and one conference paper have been published. The paper was written by Ergo-Hart Västrik in 1995, when the movement had just been registered as an official organisation, and it focused on depicting the early years of the movement. Västrik has also written a second article about the movement in the earlier mentioned anthology edited by Roundtree (2015). In this he depicts the formation of the movement, particularly describing the influence of nationalistic discourses during the establishment of *Maausk*. The third article was written by Kristin Kuutma (2005), who also traces the construction of the *Maausk* movement from the early days and frames the movement as a ‘vernacular religious movement’ developed as a counter identity to oppose the Soviet hegemonies.

Finally, this thesis can also be loosely placed in the field of the anthropology of globalisation, since neo-paganism is a global phenomenon (Magliocco 2004, Pike 2004, Roundtree 2015). While groups like *Maausk* do not advocate transnational connection as inspiration to religious practice, connection over group borders exists for other purposes, and the world *Maausk* exists in is influenced by globalisation. Globalisation refers to an intensely interconnected world where people, cultural expression, ideas, ideologies, consumer goods and capital flow rapidly over nation state borders (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 4). This intensification of global interconnectedness is not an entirely new phenomenon – the world has long been interconnected (Abu Lugholt 1989, Appadurai 2002). What is characteristic for current globalisation is economic and political interdependence, which have altered space and time, as suggested by David Harvey (2001) and Anthony Giddens (1991). The anthropology of globalisation is concerned with human agency, people’s practices and everyday life as well as how subjects mediate in the conditions created by globalisation (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 5).

This is a wide and dynamic research field, but what is relevant in relation to this study is the relationship between the local and the global. In other words, how globalising processes are received locally, and how the local environment then has to come to terms with the realities that globalisation presents. More specifically I am interested in how global neoliberal economic policies at a state level may influence people’s positions in society. This is something that has been studied in the field of economic anthropology by Jonathan Freidman, Kaisa Ekholm Friedman (1994, 2013) and Don Kalb (2011) for example. I have two reasons for wanting to set this study in relation to this particular field. Firstly, because neo-paganism is a global phenomenon as described earlier (Magliocco 2004, Pike 2004,
Roundtree 2015) and a regional phenomenon (Roundtree 2015, Aitamurto, Simpson 2013) and at the same time concerned with local identities and origins, and these different levels are clearly interconnected. Secondly, because Estonia is a post-socialist country that experienced a radical transition influenced by neoliberal ideology in their political and economic systems in the beginning of the 1990s. In addition, Estonia introduced heavy austerity policies after the 2008 economic crisis. In this context the Maausk movement thus exists in a society clearly influenced by neoliberal economic ideology.

Theoretical framework

The phenomenological approach

My overall research approach is influenced by phenomenology, or more accurately existential phenomenology, an approach that is concerned with everyday experiences of human life. This branch of phenomenology is influenced by the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger developed between the years of 1927–1962 and was further developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty during the years between 1945–1962. Phenomenological philosophy explores lived experience in the arena of everyday life. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach involves an understanding of the body as a personally experienced ‘lived body’ rather than solely a physical object; the lived body is at the centre of the human experience. Phenomenology understands that through our bodies we navigate the world and experience the physical world. According to Jenssen and Moran people also experience others primarily through encountering their living bodies, expressive gestures and movements (Jenssen and Moran, 2014: vii). Embodied experiences are also a matter of routines, habits, practices and skills, with a lot of our actions in the world requiring pre-reflective navigations (Jenssen and Moran, 2014: x).

Phenomenology emphasises that experience is always intentional, which means that it is directed towards something. According to Pollio et al. intentionality implies that experiences and the world co-constitute one another for each individual person. Intentionality ‘emphasises that human experience is continuously directed toward a world’ and is a ‘basic structure of the human experience that captures the fact that humans are fundamentally related to the context in which they live’ (Pollio et al., 1997: 7). This
means that we are always ‘in-the-world’, not outside of it projecting meaning onto it as intelligent subjects. However, what we experience is always connected to the culture and language we live in and through (Pollio et al., 1997: 8). I understand this to mean that we live in a particular language, which has a particular conceptual network that helps us describe and understand our experiences. More significantly for this thesis, I believe that this contextual ‘living-in-the-world’ can also mean that we describe our experiences from the particular position that we inhabit, which is influenced by communal and personal contexts and histories. Meanings of experiences are always described from the point of view of situated perspectives. I would add that they are also described in relation to the socio-historical-economic context that has created the possibilities for particular positions.

As discussed above, the subjects studied are necessarily embodied subjects who are also embedded in the social and historical life-worlds. The embeddedness of social and historical context in our experiences opens up the possibility of inter-subjectivity (Jensen and Moran, 2014: vii). Inter-subjectivity is Husserl’s concept and it describes the human ability to understand others through one’s own subjective experience, since cognitive patterns operate according to shared patterns (Cox, 2010: 53). It is of course impossible to enter someone’s personal experience. However, studying experiences becomes possible by looking at them as reflected. Then what is looked at is how the world of everyday human experience is described. This can be done in dialogues between people where the meanings of the experiences are clarified (Pollio et al., 1997: 28).

In my thesis this phenomenological approach to experience, serves as an epistemological backdrop to the other concepts and theories that I use in my analysis of the everyday experiences of Maausk practitioners. I will particularly focus on a specific aspect of experience, namely the affective experience of practicing Maausk. Affect is a concept that refers to the emotional level of human existence. From this point of view, the individual is thought to not only think and believe in the reality of her religious life, but also experience it with the body through senses and feelings as affects.

The phenomenological approach to affect

According to the Oxford English dictionary, ‘affect’ is generally used as a verb meaning something that influences, impresses or moves something, it also means something that ‘moves emotionally’. In relation to objects affect might also mean ‘to feel (something)’. Affect can be also used as noun,
when it means ‘emotion influencing the behaviour’. In my thesis I am using the concept of affect in all of these meanings. (www.oxforddictionaries.com) Simply put, I use the concept of affect when referring to the emotional or affective state or narrative of that state, that people are in, which is a combination of perceptions, cognitions and performances, as well as corporeal sensations. Furthermore, I understand affect happening in relation to something that affect us, whether that be materiality or ideas and thought origination from society and our private lives. This does not however need to be a causal relationship.

There is no single definition of affect, but it is often understood and defined differently depending on the discipline and context. Affect has been studied by a wide range of disciplines, from neuroscience and psychology to cultural and societal studies. Cultural studies and the social sciences have been extensively preoccupied by the study of affect in recent years. So much so, that the interest in emotions, feelings and affects, and their connection to the social and cultural, is now being termed ‘the affective turn’ (see for example Clough, 2007; Gregg, and Seighworth 2010; Wetherell, 2012). The interest in affect has arisen from the need to address aspects of people’s experiences that are not easily described merely through representations that have dominated the research material of cultural studies, such as language, symbols and signs. The methodological barriers to accessing the knowledge hidden in the affective sphere are not easily overcome. In my opinion, such barriers have hindered the exploration of the emotional qualities of fieldwork material for analytical purposes. Emotional and affective qualities have always been present in ‘thick descriptions’ written by ethnologists, but they have been there to illustrate the fieldwork context rather than used as elements of the production of the social and cultural world. However, nowadays there are a number of studies focused on affect and its connection to how people create identities and meanings.

Focusing on affect brings into the body to the fore: a body understood not as a constructed object but as a sentient subject. Affect would be nothing without the sensing, feeling and moving body. Affect has been defined as ‘physical disturbance’ over the body, for instance blushing, shivering, sobbing or giggling. It has been understood as ‘a sense of push in the world’, or ‘a set of flows moving through the bodies of human and other beings’ (Thrift, 2009: 88). Feelings and emotions on the other hand are understood in scholarly work as verbal and mental interpretations of affect. So, blushing for instance has been understood as affect, but when the blushing is interpreted as embarrassment, it is regarded then as a feeling, a
cognitive representation or interpretation of affect. Similarly, when someone giggles the feeling can be named as nervousness or happiness, or shivers can be seen to signify an ominous feeling. Feelings are then understood as subjective experiences that can be described, as opposed to unconscious bodily reactions of affect (Wetherell, 2012: 2). The separation of affect and feelings has meant that affect has been understood as pre-social and pre-cognitive, whereas feelings and emotions have been understood as cognitive representations of bodily sensed affects.

One of the influential definitions of affect as pre-social comes from the Canadian political philosopher Brian Massumi. To Massumi affect does not denote a personal feeling, it is a pre-personal intensity of the body relating to the body’s transitions. Each transition is accompanied by variation in the capacity of the body (Massumi, 2002: 15). According to Massumi a variation in intensity is then felt, which is separate from affect. Emotion to Massumi is not a feeling nor an affect but a projection of feeling. Emotion has social shared qualities, and as such is different from feelings, which are personal (Massumi, 1987).

The separation of cognition and bodily felt affect suggested by Massumi for example, has recently been criticised by other scholars, for instance social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (2012) as well as cultural geographer Tim Edensor (2012). Edensor questions the positing of a rigid difference between affect as pre-social and emotion as social. According to him if affect is understood as pre-social this would mean ‘a mute attunement’, or that people would always experience affect as if it were the first time without any pre-conceptions about it, that might influence the affect. He claims in his analysis of illuminated atmospheres in a festival taking place in England that attunement and anticipation can bring about affective experiences (Edensor, 2011: 1105). Edensor shows that anticipating particular experiences attunes people to experience particular affective moments in a particular way. Thus attunement and anticipation questions the pre-sociality of affect.

I concur with the critique formulated by Edensor, aligning with Rose et al. (2010). They claim that theories of affect have tended to miss the social and cultural context of affective formation, thereby omitting that people often become affected because they have histories that have been constituted in interaction with people and things, or places. This differs from the previous understanding of affect as a reaction of the body made meaningful only later through a conscious interpretation of the affective experience, which translated affect to emotions (Massumi 1987). However, it has been claimed that prior experiences and anticipations that people have,
attune them in a particular way, which then would challenge the ‘mute attunement’ that a separation of affect and emotion would suggest (Edensor, 2011: 1105). People thus do not necessarily meet places and things with blank orientation. I therefore understand affects, already when experienced, as influenced by people’s orientations, habits, expectations and experiences to name a few.

This is why I do not make a strong distinction between affect and emotion in my work. I do however recognise that separating these two might sometimes serve an analytical purpose when studying the social construction of one or a few particular emotions and their cultural history (see for instance Sara Ahmed in 2004 or William Reddy in 2001). Furthermore, I use the concept of affect rather than the concept of emotion, since affect tends to have more relational than expressive connotations; one is affected or affects people and things, whereas one has emotions (Flatley, 2008: 12). The notion of both being affected by something and having the capability to affect something or somebody else, suggests a relationship that gives access to the emotional world outside of one’s own self.

However, when separating affect and emotion, it’s also important to note that doing so could tend towards Cartesian dualism, where mind and body are seen as separate. Such dualism would not help me to understand the cultural and social aspects of affect, since it would mean positioning affect as involuntary reactions of the body, which are then interpreted as fixed packages of emotions and feelings. Retaining the idea of dualism may limit my ability to see the complex interwoven composition of affect; the back and forth, in and out flows of meanings and body states. From such a perspective, the relationship between body and meanings would always be interpreted as a causal flow from stimulus to interpretation, and as separate packages.

The most productive definition of affect I have found, for my particular purposes, comes from Margaret Wetherell (2012). She also argues that affect is not pre-social, meaning that talking about and interpreting affects would be a different phenomenon than feeling them. Furthermore, she claims that ‘human affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic and the discursive and it is not productive to treat them separately’ (Wetherell, 2012: 19–20). Wetherell defines affect as a practice in order to highlight the relational and repetitive nature that affects have in her view. She does not see them only as bodily reaction, but as complex knots of different features starting from a personal psychological and historical context and connected to discursive and narrative textures of society. According to Wetherell, affective practice as interrelated patterning can be
shared inter-subjectively between many participants. This is an important consideration with respect to the communal and shared aspects of affective practices, and highly relevant for my analysis (Wetherell, 2012: 14). In addition, she describes how affective practices can stretch across a scene or a site and thus be spatial. At the same time she points out that affective practices can also be specific to a particular place (Wetherell, 2012: 14).

Wetherell’s definition of affect and the affective experience helps me conceptualise the role of the felt bodily aspects of affects and combine them with discourses, contexts and histories. Some of the affective experiences fade away quickly after an initial burst. However, some practices are solidified through repetition, and may become habits. Wetherell’s approach to affect allows me to focus on the more habitual patterns of affect that occur amongst the *Maausk* practitioners revealed through individual experiences and narratives.

I understand the relation between discourses and affect in the following way. My understanding of the concept of discourse is founded in Wetherell, who defines it loosely as ‘the practical realm of language in action – talk and texts, words, utterances, conversations, stories, speeches, lectures, television programs, web pages, messages on message boards, books etc., patterned with the everyday activities of social life’ (Wetherell, 2012: 52). I see the realm of discourse as a separable part of the more habitual affects, but my aim is not to study discourses as such, rather to see how they are intertwined with affective patterns.

**Place, authenticity, tradition and embodiment**

In addition to affect I use a number of other theories and concepts within my thesis to analyse the examples and empirical material. Firstly there’s the concept of *authenticity*. In his book *Culture and Authenticity* (2008), the anthropologist Charles Lindholm traces the emergence of the idea of authenticity to the early days of modernity. At that time, different transformations in society led to a greater mobility of individuals, and labour or social class did not necessarily define the role a person would follow for the rest of his or her life. According to Lindholm this created a shift ‘from being as one appears, to discovering what one truly is’ (Lindholm, 2008: 3–4). Lindholm also links the increased interest in personal authenticity to the times of enlightenment where discussions of fundamental human equality ‘require belief in a sacred and universal moral self; existing beneath the social framework’ (Lindholm, 2008: 6). Further, Lindholm connects the rise
of scientific reason to a rise in the importance of the idea of authenticity. Scientists of the time believed it was possible to get to an underlying reality (an authentic core) through careful examination. At the same time expeditions to unknown territories brought Europeans into contact with other civilizations, which raised the question of cultural and personal authenticity. Pristine and coherent cultures were believed to be represented by tribes living in isolation. They were seen to be authentic in the sense of being original, but also pure, representing a closeness to nature and close relationships with mysterious spiritual forces (Lindholm, 2008: 5). In this thesis, I explore the sense of authenticity, again from the point of view of affective experience, and in how it is framed and felt in the body. In this context, I am interested in the phenomenology of sensed authenticity.

The concept of authenticity is closely related to the concept of tradition. Simon Bronner describes tradition as people’s structured practice, which is repeated and framed culturally. It is performed from the present for present purposes, even though the origins are seen as coming from the past, and it has meanings outside the immediate realm of denotation (Bronner, 2010: 10). Traditions can be interpreted in different ways, and can thus be a source of social conflict, but they can also be a building block of identity; they may have powerful meanings in individual lives. In the Maausk practice, what is perceived as ancient traditions plays an important role and is closely connected to the idea of authenticity.

In my analysis I particularly aim to look at the embodiment of traditions, that is, how the various traditions that the Maausk practice is related to are embodied. My view on the concept ‘embodiment’ has been partly influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the concept, as discussed previously, who argues that we perceive the world through our living and sensing body (Merleau-Ponty, 2003 [1945]: 3). Thomas J. Csordas, also influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s ideas, has argued that embodiment is a valuable starting point from which to rethink culture (Csordas, 1997[1994]: 6). Csordas defines embodiment as a field perceptual experience and as a mode of presence and engagement of the body in the world (Csordas, 1997[1994]: 12). The concept of embodiment thus deconstructs the duality between mind and body in a similar manner to the concept of affect.

The sociologist Nick Crossley, has examined the role of embodiment in rituals. His approach has also been influenced by Merleau-Ponty as well as by Marcel Mauss’s concept of body technique. This concept views the body as culturally specific. In other words – that there are cultural variations in how people walk, talk, sleep, eat or do other tasks in their everyday life.
Crossley argues that this shows that groups learn to use their bodies in a specific way, and uses this approach to examine the embodiment of rituals (Crossley, 2004: 33.) I use Crossley’s approach on embodiment as a culturally specific way of using the body in order to examine the particular embodiment of Maausk practices that can be framed as ritualistic. I thus understand the practice of Maausk as a profoundly embodied practice where understandings of cultural habits are also sensed within the body. I examine these embodied practices as affective and as intertwined with meaning-making, which in turn orients the Maausk practitioners in a particular way.

The final concept I consider here is place, or more precisely the sense of place. I understand the idea of place as constructed and imaginary in line with Tim Ingold (2000) and Doreen Massey (1994). However, I see Edward S. Casey’s view on places as equally important. In his view the ‘local knowledge’ and lived experience of the place comes before the abstract space, which used to be the starting point in many studies of place (Casey, 1996: 18). His stance can then be framed as a phenomenological approach to place. Even though his formulation is more of an approach to place than an analytical category, Casey has framed some specific features of the notion of place that I use in my analysis. I also extend the discussion of the sensed place to encompass the political meaning of place for the practitioners of Maausk. Moreover, I look at the societal context with respect to a particular formation of place identities in connection with a collective Maausk identity. Identity in this study is understood as cultural identity framed by Stuart Hall (1996) who sees it as communally framed in relation to society as well as intertwined with personal identity.

Method

Since all researchers are a part of the research they do, researchers’ reflexivity should be taken into account to reveal various aspects that might influence the research process. Reflexive thinking is necessary at all the levels of the research process. The ethnologist Outi Fingeroos writes about four different levels of reflexivity: self-reflection, methodological reflection, epistemological reflection, and, finally, political reflection, on the purpose and outside influence of the research. These reflections on the subject position of the researchers and their influence on the research project should be visible in the text, Fingeroos argues (Fingeroos, 2003). I agree with Fin-
geroos about the different levels of reflexivity, but I would add that these levels are often interwoven. For example research methods and analysing techniques are connected to the epistemological choices made by the researcher and vice versa.

Consequently, the aim of this section of the chapter is to reflect on how my ethnographic fieldwork practice has evolved, instead of describing my methods as stable practices throughout the research. I have chosen to use this approach in order to show the process nature of fieldwork and how methods tend to change and shift throughout the dynamic process of fieldwork. For example fieldwork locations and the interview situation influence the knowledge gained, sometimes in unexpected ways, which I describe later in more detail. This approach is inspired by Liisa Malkki’s description of ethnography as ‘a critical theoretical practice, quotidian ethical practice and improvisational practice’ (Malkki, 2007: 164), with an emphasis on the latter, the improvisational quality of ethnographic practice. In my experience methods keep reforming and changing during the ‘reflexive ethnographic process’ as also stated above (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 18–19).

One of the consequences of seeing the ethnographic process as a fundamentally reflexive one, is that the analysing process should be seen as starting from the very first encounter with the research participants. My experience is that everything (what I heard, saw, felt and sensed) in the field caused me to reflect and to draw on theories I had read, studies that had been made, and my own experiences in order to interpret what was happening. The fieldwork experiences also directed my search for theoretical inspirations and helped me to frame research questions, themes and topics. Malkki writes about the ‘puzzlement and sudden realization’ that researchers encounter in the field: These moments make researchers frame their questions again, and cause them to move back and forth between the new understanding and the old theoretical readings and research questions. At the same time, new methodological ideas arise and older ones are reframed. The cyclical character of knowledge gained in the field and the reflexive on-going analysing process affect the methods. These are parallel processes, since a growing understanding influences the method, but changes in the method also influence the knowledge gained. (Malkki, 2007: 175)

My main methods throughout the fieldwork were interviews and participant observation during specific events, and in the following, I describe them more in detail. I carried out 23 interviews with 21 people altogether, ten with women and 13 with men. Two of the interviews were
with married couples. I also interviewed two of the people twice. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, with a few exceptions when they lasted longer. I have transcribed all the interviews, because in my experience this is an important part of the analytical process. According to the Swedish ethnologist Barbro Klein, transcribing becomes useful, because it helps to identify specific features of the interview (Klein, 1990: 66). The transcription allowed me to really concentrate on what was being said and in what kind of tone it was expressed. Klein concludes that close systematic transcribing can help us to understand people’s values and to interpret their existence (Klein, 1990: 66). When listening to and transcribing the tapes, I was able to pay attention to both sides, to what was being said and in what way (the tone of the voice and the emphasis in speech), and also to hear the sounds of the interview situations. This gave me information about the context and surroundings of the interview. I have tried to be as true as possible to what was said when transcribing the recordings. I have not explicitly marked the pauses and silences in the transcriptions, but I have written additional descriptions of some parts of the interviews that contain shifts of moods and tones of voice for instance.

I conducted all the interviews in Estonian. Even though Estonian is not my native language I am fluent in speaking and understanding it. I lived in Estonia for five years to study the language, and completed a Bachelor’s degree in Ethnology at Tartu University. Also my mother tongue, which is Finnish, is linguistically close to Estonian and has helped me bridge the language barrier that non-native speakers might have. However, translating the quotes from Estonian to English has not been easy, because of the different structure and grammar of the language. I recognise that some sense might be lost in translation, and in the text I explain the Estonian context of some of the words, and analyse some in detail.

**Interviews and sensory ethnography**

The interviews were initially planned to circulate around a few questions, and the idea was to keep them as open as possible and let people talk freely around these questions and also choose their own topics. In the beginning I had some difficulties in gaining access to the field, and I reflected on the reason for this. After processing the first encounters I realised that I was using the wrong words in my questions; for example, ‘religious’ and ‘religion’ were words that could deter people from participating, since they tend to have negative connotations in the Estonian society. I come back to
this later on. This was the first time I had to revise my interview technique, and I decided to formulate a few themes or topics for the conversation instead of posing specific questions. Since that moment my themes have stayed the same. The first theme related to how and why an interest in Maausk had appeared in the individual lives of the practitioners. The second theme focused on the practice of Maausk, and the third was about the connection to nature and the role of sacred places in nature.

Even though these themes remained, the interviews varied depending on what emphasis the research participants put on the different themes. Some participants talked more about sacred places and others talked more about their practice or the ideological level of Maausk, depending on their personal preferences. I also had to constantly revise my role as an interviewer during the fieldwork, because of the different personalities and backgrounds of the research participants and what the connection between them and me looked like. Sometimes participants adopted the role of a teacher or used academic language, thus emphasising my position as a researcher and that the interview was part of a research project. Some preferred to keep the interview informal and friendly over a cup of coffee, or wanted to take me for a walk. I intentionally did not steer the situation in any direction if the participant appeared to have a strong view on our respective roles or the tone of the interview. At the same time, I also encountered situations where I had to steer the conversation more actively, for instance when the participant did not appear very interested in talking to me. My overall aim was to make the interview situation as comfortable as possible, for the interviewee and for me.

In my first attempt to analyse my research material I realised that my approach did not take into account the ‘lived’ experiences of people. I then started to be more attentive to the described ‘lived’ experiences, since the social context and discursive level, my starting point, did not really fully describe the actual lived experience of Maausk. When I started listening to and transcribing my interviews with a conscious focus on such aspects, I began to spot all kinds of ‘extra-linguistic signals’ that hinted at affects and emotions. The ethnologist Eva Fägerborg noted that spoken language differs from written language because of all the little words, unfinished meanings, things included in the moment, and unplanned reflections which characterise the spontaneity of spoken language. These things, and other signals like the tone of voice, mimicking, gestures and signs of hesitation, provide knowledge of the topic under study (Fägerborg, 1999: 69). Paying
attention to these things made me view my material in a different way, something that proved essential for my analysis.

I then turned to what had been written about emotions, senses and affect in social and cultural studies, which lead me to sensory ethnography, as described by Sarah Pink in her book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009). I realised that affective and emotional moments could be observable with the help of sensorial information. I decided to pay attention to the ‘sensoriality’ interview, and to also consider this when I was doing participant observation in order to spot affective moments and situations.

Paula Saukko’s book, *Doing Research in Cultural Studies* (2003), addresses a similar kind of problem whereby she tries to analyse the discourse around anorexia while also taking into account the actual experiences of having anorexia. She writes that lived realities and the discourse that mediates those realities are not easily combined, because they do not always meet. She continues that different methodologies address different realities, or different sides of reality (Saukko, 2003: 34). In other words, when studying discourse, there is a tendency to pay little attention to the phenomenological level of everyday experiences as they are lived; and vice versa, when studying actual lived realities, discourses tend not to be addressed so much. I argue though, as does Paula Saukko, that there is a potential for establishing a dialogue between different methodological approaches. Consequently, I shift between two different approaches in my methods during my analytical chapters, combining sensory ethnography defined by Sarah Pink with a perspective that focuses on affective experiences, to try to see how affects are entangled with the discourses and values of *Maausk*. Then I also contextualise *Maausk* through a wider cultural and historical analysis.

Pink suggests that we need to think of the process of ethnography as ‘multisensory’, or residing both in the lives of the researcher and in those of the research participants. She urges us to reflect on the sensorial experience of ethnographic practice, suggesting that multisensory experiences can provide us with useful knowledge about people’s values and worldview (Pink, 2009: 1). In my fieldwork, engaging in multisensory experiences provided me with knowledge of things that are not or cannot be spoken in words. It also made me more attentive to my own sensorial and affective experiences while interviewing as well as when participating in *Maausk* practices. According to Pink, in ethnographic practice knowledge is created within the inter-subjective connection, where loyalty to the context and negotiations are very important. The process of ethnography is thus creat-
ing and representing knowledge based on the ethnographer’s own experiences (Pink, 2009: 8). Pink further suggests the existence of an ‘emplaced ethnography’, where experience is a relationship between bodies, minds and the materiality and ‘sensoriality’ of the environment (Pink, 2009: 25). What Pink suggests is then not to separate body and mind, but to embrace the interconnectedness of the two, as well as how they are connected to other bodies, the material world and sensory experience.

According to Sara Pink, an interview situation can be seen as a multisensory event, and from that it is possible to reach emplaced knowing, and to understand how participants represent and categorise their experiences. Access to their values, ethics and ways of seeing the world become possible when paying attention to their senses, and reflecting the researcher’s own senses (Pink, 2009: 81). As Pink notes, ‘[a]n interview is a social, sensorial and emotive encounter’ (Pink, 2009: 83). My encounters with the people in my study were multiple, and the experiences varied, but what I profoundly agree with is that interviews are not just situations where one person asks questions for the answers to be recorded. I remember countless situations where I saw the research participants being moved by something and I was moved by that too. In these situations, I was reading their body signs to interpret the meaning of what was just said. By doing that I learned about the worldview, about the attitudes towards certain things, as well as about the values and emotions of the participants.

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson note a close connection between interview situations and participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 108). In my experience, interview locations or situations tend to influence the knowledge gained. Being in a specific location or doing something particular, influences what is said and how it is said. Certain places or situations might evoke something in us that is connected to memories of similar places or situations, or to our preconceptions about them. The influence of the locations is observable in bodily reactions, affects, and oral descriptions. I usually encouraged the interview participants to choose the interview place, and consequently they varied a great deal. I conducted interviews in my friend’s apartment in downtown Tallinn, in a quiet cafeteria in the Estonian academy of science, in a hotel, in a countryside homestead, a tourist house, in the car, in the forest and in a sacred place, to name a few. During interviews I have consumed much tea, coffee or pastries to create an atmosphere of ‘just another visit’.

Interviews were distinct in many ways: Those done while on the move (by car or by foot) and those carried out while sitting at a table provided
different kinds of information. The physical surroundings often evoked past experiences, and interview participants connected the knowledge they were imparting to the immediate surroundings. This understanding led me to seek a more active role in planning interview situations, asking people to visit their sacred places with me for instance. If I visited someone’s home I was often taken somewhere else afterwards, to a sacred place for example. But these things cannot always be planned, they rather depend upon the spontaneity of the participants, and on other conditions, sometimes quite practical ones – such as there being too many mosquitoes to go to the forest, or that heavy rain made it less attractive to go outside.

Participant observation and the researcher role

At the beginning of my research I had a lot of plans about observing and participating in all kinds of joint gatherings. I would take part in meetings organised by the sub-groups, record joint discussions, participate in the rituals and everyday life of the practitioners of Maausk. But I realised quite quickly that gaining access to the field would not be easy. The practitioners’ fear of being presented in a negative fashion to wider society inhibited my access to different events. Even after the first successful interviews were made I was still not invited to participate in the rituals and was definitely not allowed to participate in group meetings. But little by little, through different people, I gained access to the rituals. By the time the fieldwork was complete I had participated in nine different rituals or gatherings in the historical sacred places, had been invited to preparations of a ritual in a private home, and had participated in a Maausk name-giving ritual for a baby. Towards the end of the fieldwork I had reached a point where I felt comfortable in the gatherings, since I knew how to behave and what to do. I had stayed in people’s homes and with time I got to know some of the participants quite well. This meant I was able to observe how Maausk was apparent in some of the practitioners’ everyday lives, and I had many informal conversations with the practitioners that contributed valuable supplementary knowledge about Maausk practice, beyond the formal interviews.

I treated the participant observation experiences largely as described in the earlier section of this chapter on sensory ethnography in interviews: through paying attention to my own sensory and emotional experiences and also trying to note signs of the others’ bodily reactions in order to interpret what was happening. Being in the forest in sunny late spring weather is a totally different experience from being in the forest when it is minus twenty degrees
Celsius. Here is where the improvisational character of fieldwork becomes most tangible, in the sense that the researcher must always be open to situations that happen and, if needed, adjust the methods to suit the situation. Recording a walk in the forest when it is raining does not produce a good quality recording, for instance, which makes detailed field notes invaluable. Throughout the fieldwork, I wrote a lot about my sensations and feelings without knowing if I would need this information. It turned out to be absolutely necessary for understanding the participant’s experiences. I also sometimes recorded my impressions (emotions, descriptions, thoughts) onto the tape immediately after leaving a fieldwork situation, and these recordings have given me great insight into my immediate reactions to the events, which I was then able to use to analyse the experience in more detail. I also made recordings in the sacred places, since I wanted to capture the sound of the joint events and ceremonies.

But one significant difference between the interview and the participant observation situation is that in the latter I was not able to plan or structure the situation in the same way as in the interviews. I strived to pay attention to ‘serendipitous’, unanticipated sensory embodied or emplaced experiences (Pink, 2009: 69), which lead me to new understandings. For example the sudden shudder of a research participant in a certain situation lead me to understand his experience on a much deeper level than the oral description sometimes could. At the same time I paid attention to practices, conversation topics and ritual patterns, and to all kinds of events that happened in the rituals, in order to analyse and put the experience into its wider societal and historical context. However, whatever material I gather from the field will always be a partial and selective view on things produced by me as a researcher in connection with the participants, as noted by the Swedish ethnologist Billy Ehn (Ehn, 2009: 57). Ethnographic fieldwork does not aim for universalised general information, but a specific, relational and context-dependent partial view of the culture and practices of people.

One very important point to emphasise here is my approach to the participatory aspect of doing the fieldwork. I generally not only observed but also participated in the rituals because I did not want to just ‘interpret

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4 During my fieldwork I wrote a 36-page fieldwork diary that contains memories, descriptions of interviews and joint gatherings of Maausk, perceptions and initial thoughts on the analysis. In addition to that I have a 47-page handwritten notebook that consists of immediate impressions and notes of my experiences and thoughts, written while participating in various Maausk events.
the experience, but also share the experience’ (Rantala, 2010: 280). I wanted to experience the practice of Maausk in the sacred places as well as to comment on it. I focused not only on others’ actions and discussion, but also tried to observe my own experiences, affects, emotions, bodily reactions and sensations with the help of Pink’s sensory ethnography described above. I used my own embodied knowledge and experiences of practicing Maausk in analysing the fieldwork material. According to James Cox, when studying religion from a phenomenological perspective, the researcher must cultivate a feeling for practices and beliefs that are often not their own. This is of course not easy, as it means that one needs to become familiar with something that was previously unfamiliar. However, culturally shared patterns of cognitive processes make it possible to come close to what others might feel (Cox, 2010: 52–53). This then needs to be portrayed by describing the feelings, tones, attitudes and convictions of believers (Cox, 2010: 56).

This approach has been termed auto- or self-reflexive ethnography, or anthropology in ethnographic literature. It means that one has ‘to go native’ and use oneself as a subject, see the world through the eyes of the research subject and become immersed in the cultural context of those studied. However, this approach does not mean that I needed to become a Maausk practitioner in order to understand what Maausk is about. Even though I share a lot of their concerns and feelings towards nature and the world, I never felt it would be possible to become one of them, since I was there to write a PhD thesis. My identity as a researcher was, however, impacted by my multiple identities and so it became possible to experience fieldwork through different positions. At the same time these multiple perspectives were always intertwined with the researcher position I was there to occupy. For example, the practice of being in the forest is something I enjoy in my private life, and this helped me to perceive being in the forest from the viewpoint of the practitioners. I was able to tune myself in to the moments of practicing when some of my other concerns faded away into the background. I was able to find new ways of ‘seeing’ the world, especially when it came to my relation with nature for example, or to understanding the relationships between practitioners and the materiality of Maausk.

When studying activists, carers of nature and spiritual practitioners, Sylvia Shawn describes how, in her research process, she learned to occupy a particular position through particular perception and she learned to reflect upon the processes of creating a relationship with nature and embracing the interconnectedness of subject and object through participa-
tion (Shawn, 2004: 135). I had similar experiences to those described by Shawn in the sense that I was able to tune myself in a particular way when entering a sacred place with the practitioners. This did not mean that I became one of them; rather I occupied a kind of in-between position. This third position has something to do with the changes that happened in me as a result of the participant observation I was doing. Graham Harvey argues that ‘observers change that which they observe and are changed themselves’, in writing about his position while studying paganism in England (Harvey, 2004: 251). I have been changed through my participation in Maausk events, and I will never be the same person I was before participating in the practices of Maausk. For example, I realised at one point in my research that I had become much more attentive to trees. I had come to see them as individuals instead of a homogenous mass of trees. I had also become much more attentive to the breaking of tree branches. This change meant that I was attentive during the fieldwork, and it spilled over to my own private everyday life.

In spite of the changes in me, my interests have remained scholarly during the fieldwork periods. I also think there might be a gap between the scholar’s participation and the full experience of the practitioners as Harvey also notes (Harvey, 2004: 251). What I mean is that I have access to all the academic theories and ideas and critical positions to contextualise my experience, and the practitioners often have a totally different starting point. It was not relevant for the practitioners to talk about, or even think about, their meaning-making processes, whereas for me it was the most important aspect to think about. This stopped me from being a full insider and made me different from the others.

Some ethical considerations

Research ethics is an important part of reflexivity with respect to the research process. The Swedish ethnologist Oscar Pripp identified a number of ethical questions as follows: How much should I talk about my research and aims? What are the limits of the personal relationships in the field? To what extent do I need to ask permission of the people in the field? What will I do with the information after I finish the research? In addition to these

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5 This does not mean that practitioners could not be reflexive about their practice or write a scholarly text about it. However, our perspectives on the events and situations might differ in various ways, as a result of our different roles and positions.
questions, the question of anonymity should also be dealt with (Pripp, 1999: 51). So, how have I handled these questions? To begin with I always started each interview with a short description of my aims and the themes I was interested in, emphasising my interest in focusing on individuals rather than the group. The focus on individual meanings justified my research in the eyes of many practitioners of *Maausk*, since they described their practice as a dogma-free individual practice. But I still faced some suspicions and worries that I would not genuinely try to understand the practice of *Maausk*. I also answered questions about my personal beliefs openly when asked. But the need to justify my research to the practitioners was not always easy, and I did at times question my right to interpret their practice. This led me to reflect upon my methods and theories in considering the extent to which I could really portray the multiple ‘voices’ of the practitioners in my writing.

When it comes to personal relationships, it is a well-documented problem with ethnographers that if one becomes friends with some of the participants in a study, it might feel like a betrayal to write about them in an analytical way. I had these feelings as well, since I formed some good personal relationships in the field. But, in my opinion, becoming closer to some of the participants gives the opportunity to discuss, test, and also to disagree openly in some matters, as you would in any normal encounter between people. I also think that it is more ethical to let the research participants know your point of view and to discuss it with them, instead of privately thinking about it. But of course this has to be done in a polite and constructive way without pushing your own point of view. Sometimes the participants were not at all interested in taking up such discussion points when raised and then I did not press the issue.

The anonymity question is dealt with through the use of pseudonyms in my thesis. I have chosen new names for the people appearing in my text from the most common names of the generation in Estonia. I have not given detailed personal information when describing people, but they are anonymised only to a point where outsiders cannot recognise them. I am not able to guarantee that they will not be recognised within the group through some of the things they say, but at least recognition is only at the level of speculation. The pictures I took during some of the rituals or interviews never depict people or reveal their faces, they are focused on the practice or object. The interview tapes, transcriptions, and fieldwork diary are kept only on my private computer in a password-protected file. I will treat these materials with utmost confidentiality.
Because access to the field was sometimes problematic I carefully considered how to respect the participants’ worries about being represented negatively or in a way with which they may not agree. The different levels of analysis do not always match the understandings of the Maausk practitioners, as I have also mentioned in the earlier methods section, and this matter needs to be treated with respect. I am more than willing to recognise that my analysis is a subjective interpretation, where the tradetions and abstractions coming from my discipline and theories guide my attention and understandings. By choosing the phenomenological approach in addition to a cultural constructionist approach, I try to cover different levels of fieldwork material in my text. I also recognise that offending someone with my analysis is a possibility, even though my aim is not to cause any harm to participants. However, no ethical research strategy applies absolutely and universally in every situation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 219).

Some remarks on the analysis

As noted earlier, Sarah Pink argues that theoretical thought and critique and interpretative understandings cannot be separated from the ethnographic material (Pink 2009:142). At least part of the analysis process takes place already while doing the fieldwork, and theoretical insights emerge from the ethnographic encounters that are often serendipitous. The analysis is, in other words, situated within the fieldwork process, in the sense that the researcher is continuously forming reflexive and analytical thoughts about what she or he is experiencing (Pink 2009:143).

However, when put on paper the analysis is also situated spatially and temporally away from the fieldwork site. According to Pink, the analysis itself should still be done in relation to the phenomenological context of the production of the research material. This means, according to her, that the research material itself can be used as prompts that help to evoke memories that enable us to re-encounter the sensorial and emotional reality of the research situations (Pink 2009: 143). However, such an approach does not mean that the researcher should exclude a more systematic analysis of the content and themes, like for instance, looking for patterns and mapping out the representations of the world (Pink 2009: 144).

I have organised my research material in different ways. The interviews were first categorised according to the themes covered within the interviews. In the next stage I also organized material in relation to various sub-
categories, based on the topics and emic-concepts that were used by the interviewees themselves. Some examples include ‘motivations to practice’, ‘the sacred place’, ‘local place’, ‘Finno-Ugric identity’, ‘indigenous’, ‘practices’, and ‘traditions and heritage’.

I primarily organised my fieldwork diary and the notes made during the fieldwork in a number of phenomenological categories (Cox, 2010: 59). These categories included aspects such as ‘practices’ (with sub-categories of experiences of dancing, singing, cooking, offering and so on) and ‘sacred place’. I then focused on the descriptions of ‘affective moments’ sometimes accessible through senses that were present in my field notes. The way I handled the material was thus influenced by my phenomenological research approach and the method of sensory ethnography.

With these categories established I then gradually started to make more abstract interpretations using the theories previously described. However, I didn’t only use theories in the analysis, I also used the method of historical ethnography described by Orvar Löfgren (2008), which was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. By applying this analytical approach, history can be used to discover current meanings of things. In this particular case this means that Estonian history, particularly during the time it was part of the Soviet republic, greatly helped me to contextualise some of my themes. Additionally, in my analysis of meanings, ideas and experiences within Maausk, it has been valuable to take into account the earlier national romanticism period, and the current context of the Estonian economic and political situation, with its transition to capitalism and independence.

Outline of the study
The thesis is structured such that I examine particular contextual issues related to the Maausk movement and its relation to society in the second chapter. First, this chapter looks at the emic definitions of ‘usk’ or ‘religioon’, two words that can both be translated as “religion”. Specific meanings of those concepts and how these influenced the practitioners’ descriptions of Maausk are investigated. Secondly these are contextualised with the help of Estonian history and society.

The third chapter focuses on Maausk identity constructions. It explores the meaning and use of the particular position that is constructed and reflected in the interviews, but also in relation to official documents and texts of the organisation. In the fourth chapter a more phenomenological
approach is employed when focusing on sacred places. The chapter looks at how particular moods and affective atmospheres are experienced in these places. Further, the moods and atmospheres, as well as other affective experiences in the sacred places, are framed as affective patterns. In addition, their possible social consequences are examined. The fifth chapter looks at how a personal sense of authenticity was negotiated in relation to *Maausk* practice, particularly in relation to folk traditions. The sixth chapter focuses on embodiment and the constitution of the meaning of traditions in the *Maausk* context. And finally, chapter seven aims at tying different threads together and contemplating the relationship of the movement and the Estonian society with its particular history.
CHAPTER 2

‘Maausk is not really a religion’:
meanings of the folk concept of religion
and its reflection on how Maausk is talked about

You know Jenni, I don’t really understand that it would be “usk” (religion, faith) what I do; that Maausk would be “religioon” (religion). That sounds strange to me! (Ester)

These kinds of statements were very common when I talked about Maausk with the practitioners. Many people did not like to describe themselves as ‘religious’ or describe Maausk as a religion. A number of them also rejected the idea that their practice should be described with words like ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ (the latter they connected sometimes to new age movements or Satanism). This was rather surprising, since the organisation many of them belonged to was in fact registered as a religious organisation. To become a member one needs to go through an interview, which aims at investigating whether the applicant is suitable in his or her ideas about Maausk. It does not cost anything to be a member, but yearly collection of funds is run by the organisation. Members are expected to take part in organising joint projects together, albeit on a voluntary basis and, not demanded by the members. The aim of this chapter is to analyse why practitioners of Maausk felt it important to emphasise that Maausk is not a religion. To answer this question, I focus on the popular understanding of the concept of religion in Estonia, and how such an understanding might have influenced the kind of descriptions of Maausk that the practitioners chose to use during the interviews. I will also look at some of the other ways the practitioners defined Maausk.

The concept of religion in relation to my study needs to be understood as something dynamic, in the sense that it is constantly shifting and changing in relation to society and individual experience. It can, furthermore, have
different meanings in different cultures, and these meanings can change over time (Frisk and Åkerbäck, 2013: 13). For instance, in the Estonian language two words are used for religion. The word *usk*, means faith or belief, and also encompasses a religious worldview (like Lutheranism, Buddhism, Judaism). The other word is *religioon* which is a foreign import that is primarily associated within institutionalised religions ([EKSS] Estonian Dictionary). However, in everyday use these distinctions are not usually made, and both words are used when talking about institutionalised religion as well as worldview, faith or belief. What is most relevant for my analysis is, then, not to separate the two concepts, but to look closer at how they are understood in Estonia and how this in its turn may influence how the people in the study talked about their relation to *Maausk*.

Another aspect I wish to emphasise is that religious expressions should be studied in relation to local histories. This is advocated by the religious studies scholar Courtney Bender in her book *The New Metaphysical: Spirituality and American Religious Imagination* (2010). According to Bender, the recent sociology of religion understands the current religious condition as an individual project of unaffiliated religious seekers, which is seen as a consequence of how modern society values individualism. This hinders the analysis of the production and reproduction of spirituality in relation to local history (Bender, 2010: 3). What Bender is saying, is that to analyse and search for possible explanations for the existence of particular religious and spiritual expressions and practices, we should not regard the current religious condition as a totally new kind of individual project, rather we should see it as something that is produced in relation to history. In other words, the production and reproduction of particular kinds of spirituality and religious expressions should, from this perspective, be viewed in relation to local history. I would add that regional or even global histories also matter when searching for context and meaning of religious and spiritual expressions. This becomes evident in the course of the analysis in this chapter and beyond.

Such a perspective is, then, the foundation for my analysis of the empirical material used in this chapter. I pay particular attention to the societal and historical context in which *Maausk* exists, in order to examine the meaning of the concept of religion and its relation to how this group was described in the interviews.
Dislike of the word *usk* (religion, faith)

I met Viive in the downtown area of Tallinn in the summer of 2013. Viive was born in the late 1960s and worked as an expert on environmental issues. She had taken part in leading the group since the establishment of the official organisation. Viive’s route into *Maausk* was through her father, who had been interested in ‘nature religions’ already during Soviet times. Viive told me that she had become accustomed to a respectful and caring attitude towards nature since she was quite young, and that this had made her develop a certain kind of lifestyle. During her student days at Tartu University she had come across the people who had started to plan the establishment of an official organisation for *Maausk* practitioners. She found the project interesting and decided that she wanted to take part in establishing the organisation. In the interview she pointed out that it was important to have an official channel for communicating with the state, but that the official organisation was not really important to her personal practice:

Honesty speaking, I don’t feel that it is important to identify myself as part of *Maausk*. As a matter of fact, it is not important to belong to the organisation. What is important is to take nature and the surrounding environment into account. It means that I try to consume and pollute as little as possible. I don’t like the word *Maausk*. The word ‘usk’ (religion, faith) does not suit me. In Estonian that word means... (laughs shortly). I can’t really say that I am religious. The word relates to Christianity or something that is forced upon people. It does not fit somehow.

In the interview material, it was not uncommon that the official organisation of *Maausk* was described as something rather unimportant for the individual practice. Viive told me for example that she did not like to go to the joint rituals and events of *Maausk*, but rather preferred to spend the important calendar days with her family ‘and not with strangers’, as she described the members of the official organisation. Not everyone shared this view, however. Many of the practitioners still liked going to joint events organised by local *Maausk* groups, especially since not everyone had families who practiced *Maausk*. But even in these cases the official organisation was not mentioned as necessarily important in order to practice *Maausk*. Instead, what the informants emphasised was the importance of meeting up with likeminded people occasionally, even though the practices were not always shared.
What I particularly want to highlight here is Viive’s reflections on the word *usk* (religion, faith). Even though she tried to describe what *usk* means in Estonia, she was somehow unable to do so. Instead I heard her briefly laugh in the recording. According to Glenn and Holt, laughter is not only a response to something humorous, but something that happens in a number of different contexts and thus has multiple meanings, depending on the circumstances (Glenn and Holt 2013: 3). Glenn and Holt write that laughter usually refers to something in the immediate situation and that it reflects and constitutes environments and identities. (Glenn and Holt 2013: 18). From this perspective, Viive’s laughter could be interpreted as operating in relation to the word *usk*, in the sense that her laughter could be seen as an indication of her dislike for the word. In other words, the laughter served as an emphasis of her statement that she did not like the word *usk*, since it did not somehow ‘fit’ how she perceived *Maausk*.

Laughter can also indicate that some kind of identity construction is happening in the interaction between the people present in the situation (Liebscher and Dailey – O’Cain 2013: 252), which in this case would mean the immediate interaction we were having in the interview. From this perspective, her laughter would indicate that she wanted me to know that she was not comfortable with being identified as a religious person. But the laughter also somehow acknowledged the ambivalence present in that. On the one hand, Viive was part of the leadership of a religious organisation, but on the other she did not see it as important for her practice and identity to belong to that organisation.

To set Viive’s unwillingness to identify as religious person in a wider perspective, I want to relate it to what the Estonian sociologists Liina Kilemit and Urmas Nõmmik have written about the word ‘religious’ in Estonia. According to them the word has negative connotations and is almost a taboo word in the Estonian cultural sphere. Even people who are part of religious groups or have an interest in religion do not want to call themselves religious (Kilemit and Nõmmik, 2004: 33). According to Maria Zackariasson, people might sometimes be reluctant to be open about their religious affiliation, because of the possibility of being categorised in particular way that might not feel comfortable. In other words, this might mean being labelled as ‘religious’ in a way that might not correspond to the individual identity. (Zackariasson 2014: 154) I suggest then that Viive’s account of her own affiliation can be understood in relation to the negative connotations of the concept of religion in Estonian society. She did not want to be labelled by society, or by me, as a
religious person, since being religious in general and the word usk in particular conveyed something negative.

When discussing matters of faith with Viive I asked whether she believed in something specific, or if Maausk could be described only as a certain way of life that her father had taught her, and she replied:

I believe in people themselves and forces of nature. That is Maausk for me. If I want to turn to someone, it is still the moon, earth, forest and nature. Those gods are in nature, but they are not concrete. I believe I can ask and thank them for things, but in the end the responsibility for my actions stays with me. Every time I go to the countryside to our family place, I go and meet the oak trees. I stand and face them and thank them and ask them things. This is what I have been doing from early childhood. I learned this from my father.

Even though Viive did not consider the Estonian word usk as appropriate for defining or describing her practice, her beliefs and practice nevertheless involved ‘gods of nature’ and communicating with the supernatural. Later on in the interview, when I talked with Viive about better ways of naming the practice, she still justified the need for a name with the word usk in it, since this was necessary to be able to register the group as a religious organisation. She explained that this kind of registration enabled them to be under the law of religious matters assembled by the state. Throughout the interviews, this was a common and recurring argument for the need to have an official organisation. Several of the practitioners told me that the organisation was only established for bureaucratic needs to communicate with the state and to represent the rights of the practitioners of Maausk. This need for an official channel to be able to communicate with the state as a collective, is an interesting motivation for establishing a religious organisation, and could be understood as a way to have a voice in society. Fragmented identities and new kinds of political identities, based on ethnicity and exclusive religious positioning, have been interpreted as a reaction to neoliberal state policies that offer little protection to citizens lives (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, Friedman 2014, Ekhholm Friedman and Friedman 2013, Kalb 2004). I explore this possibility in the next chapter of the thesis.

In the following I identify some of the possible reasons for why a negative, or at least ambivalent, attitude towards religion prevails in Estonian society and, furthermore, how that is illustrated when talking about Maausk. The meaning of the concept of religion should be defined in relation to society. Ann af Burén, in her thesis Living Simultaneity: On religion among semi-secular Swedes, shows how different sets of associations
and fluid meanings in society can be used when the meaning of the concept of religion is described. According to af Burén, the understanding of the concept of religion is always context specific, which in turn is dependent on the discursive possibilities of the society (af Burén, 2015: 108–111).¹

Christianity as a synonym to *Religioon* and *usk*

In the quote above, Viive connected the concept of *usk* to Christianity. She was not the only *Maausk* practitioner who made this connection. Tõnis, whom I met in the winter of 2011, expressed a similar view. He was born in the late 1960s and was interested in the folk healing practices of different cultures. He was also an expert in the traditional folk healing customs of Estonia, which he described as part of his *Maausk* practice, and about which he had been giving lectures. During the interview, I asked him about the content of his teaching. When answering, he started by giving me a lengthy narrative of the history of Estonians as suppressed peasants under the Teutonic knights of German origin. He talked about Christian power over peasants and gave me vivid examples of the violent oppression of folk healers and peasant rituals under church rule. He told me that because of this violent past, many of the folk healing practices that would have been treasured by the *Maausk* practitioners were lost. He then continued by telling me that because of that history, the word ‘pagan’ started to mean something negative in Estonian society. Still, some of the practitioners upheld their old ways, which were archived as folklore or alternatively still existed among the people. He felt that it was still a bit dangerous to talk about *Maausk*, and that he therefore avoided words like *pagan* and *usk* (religion, faith). I asked why, and he answered:

Well because... it creates like a bad feeling. It is connected with words like Christianity, if it is not connected to Satanism or something similar. It creates some kind of feeling of uneasiness. The person becomes quiet and does not know what to say or how to take a stance.

What was most noteworthy in Tõnis’ interview was the perceived nature of the Christianisation process as forced, violent and harmful to folk beliefs. It was also relevant that the word *usk* was described here in negative terms.

¹ See also Courtney Bender (2003) and David Thurfjell (2015).
similar to Viive’s description. Tõnis told me that usk creates a bad feeling in people, which in turn is connected to Christianity, so it is regarded almost as a synonym.

Raivo, one of the older practitioners of Maausk, also gave me a very animated and angry description of the violent Christianisation process:

The Christianisation of Estonia was very cruel! They try to say that Christianity came first, and then the men with swords, but it was the opposite! One people wanted to oppress the other. Christianity and baptism were how they motivated their ‘sword-work’! Well we were subjugated. We had our own troubles here. We had not developed a state at the time. We did not know how to fight back. The freedom fight started in 1208 and after 20 years it was over!! The country was baptised. In came the foreign men, and so it went through the grey Middle Ages, and all kinds of cruel things were done. It became very cruel under the Swedish rule when Lutheranism came in. Then came the burning of the wise people. That was done a lot here among our people!

Raivo was yet another person who told me in the interview that he did not like the word usk in Maausk, because it was connected with Christianity. He said that because there was no better word, Maausk practitioners had accepted it. But if he had to define what Maausk was, he would not use the work usk, instead he would describe it as ‘an old, close to nature, lifestyle’.

The fact that Christianity was understood and described in such a negative light in interviews can be connected to the fact that it is also seen in unfavourably in general in Estonia. One reason for this can be found in the construction of Estonian national identity. Namely, Christianity is not generally treated as a building block of Estonian national identity, instead it has been portrayed as a foreign belief which was forced upon the Estonians. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Estonian national identity was evolving, the Lutheran church was perceived as being of German origin and therefore oppositional to Estonian native culture (Viirets, 2001: 21–22). Predominant interpretations of history constructed the idea that the Christianisation of Estonians happened in the hands of the Teutonic order, which was of Germanic origin. This interpretation was put forward as a mythical story of Estonia’s violent past in a forceful period of Christianisation. This influenced the break between identity building and the Lutheran church in Estonia. However, this mythical story of the ancient freedom fight from the past has been questioned in more recent interpretations of the Middle Ages in the book Eesti ajalugu II (Estonian History II). In this book, the whole idea of the ‘freedom fight’ happening in the
thirteenth century was erased, based on the proposition that such a community with a consistent identity, which would have fought against the joint enemy, simply could not have existed at the time. The new interpretation was not praised in online communication shared through the e-mail list of the Maausk practitioners and was seen as offensive and inconsiderate of the struggles that people at the time had suffered under the Christianisation process. (toimub@maavalde)

Another aspect that contributed to a negative attitude towards the Christian church was the fact that most of the priests and monks were not of Estonian origin (Plaat, 2001: 31). Further, the Christian priests were not supportive of Estonia’s first independence efforts between the World Wars. At the time, some steps were taken towards ‘estoniaising’ the Lutheran church. This was also the time period in which the Taara faith was created by the Estonian intelligentsia. Taara faith was intended as the national religion of Estonians. It was a combination of old symbols drawn from folk beliefs and modern ideas, and was eventually banned by the Soviet powers (Altnurme, 2006: 62). In my material people’s interpretation of history emphasising violent Christianisation was a recurring theme. More specifically the interviews underlined that the Christianisation process in Estonia was brutal towards folk beliefs and “old wise people” which contributed to the diminishing of the important folk knowledge that Maausk was seen to be based on. The concept of usk was repeatedly connected to this interpretation of Christianity.

A religious person is portrayed as someone who has psychological problems

Interpretations of history and the national identity of Estonia are not the only reasons for the generally negative view of religion in Estonia. Interviewees

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2 The public Taara faith reached its end when the Soviet Union came to power in Estonia and religious activities were forbidden. Many of the members fled the country and some were deported to Siberia. Activities continued in some private households during Soviet times, but it was only small-scale individual activity. According to Altnurme Christianity was still part of the cultural sphere of people between the World Wars, because the children had religious education in schools. People also followed the customs and rituals of the Lutheran church and had basic knowledge of the religious content (Altnurme, 2006: 63.) But the number of active and devoted members of the Christian congregation was still quite small (Plaat, 2001: 155). The Lutheran church also suffered under Soviet rule.
expressed other reasons connected to the supposed mental state of people practicing religion. The interview with Hannes was one example of this.

I met Hannes in early spring 2011 in Tartu. He was born in the late 1960s and had an academic background in cultural studies. He was part of the official Maausk organisation, and was one of the young students who had come into contact with the ideas of Maausk in the organisation’s early days during his time as a student at Tartu University. We were talking about the highest Maausk organisation, the Estonian House of Taara and Native religion (Maavalla koda). Just like Viive, Hannes justified his membership in the organisation with the need to have a means of communicating with the state. He did not, however, see it as necessary to be part of the organisation to be a practitioner of Maausk:

There are a lot of people in the Estonian society who are sympathetic towards the ideas and practices of Maausk, but who would never be part of the organisation. It is because every kind of institutionalised action is frightening to people, right? Any kind of institutional-based believing is seen as ludicrous, and I agree with that (laughs). I am telling you, the word usk creates, in the Estonian cultural space, connotations of a person that has psychological problems. [...] It is linked to the idea of destructive sects, tied to something that a sane person would never do. Really, this is very Estonian. It might be that somewhere else that person would be seen as normal; someone who believes and represents his beliefs, but in the Estonian culture there are no good words to talk about it. At an academic level though, it is possible and acceptable to talk about everything.

Hannes’ description, where he connected the word usk to mental illness and extremist forms of faith, was one of the most negative within the material. His reasoning shows just how negative the ideas and conceptions regarding openly practicing religious people might be, and how these ideas surfaced when talking about the word usk (religion, faith). I want to focus on two specific aspects of the quote above: firstly, Hannes’ laughter in relation to what he was saying, and, secondly, the description of religiously active persons as mentally ill.

As I wrote previously, laughter can be understood as part of an interaction where for example identity construction is performed in relation to other people (Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain 2013: 252). When Hannes told me that religious people are seen as ludicrous, and that he agrees with this view, the laughter could be interpreted as his way of telling me that he is not one of them. In other words, he distanced himself from the image he had of religious people. Liebscher and Dailley-O’Cain write that the identity constructed through laughter in interaction does not have to be directed at
the people present in the immediate situation (Liebscher and Dailley-O’Cain 2013: 252). The interaction can also involve people outside that situation, such as people in society in general. The laughter in the examples from Viive and Hannes was then, not only happening in interaction with me, but in the wider relation they have with the society they live in. It can thus be related to the ideas that are common there about religious people. According to Liebscher and Dailley-O’Cain laughter can also construct categorisations of others (2013: 251). I am suggesting here that Hannes was recreating and re-enforcing society’s negative stereotype of religious people as something laughable and unstable.

Raivo also talked about the danger of being perceived as religious in Estonian society. He had had a career in a public post and he told me that it would have been risky to be identified as religious while working there. He also told me that he had had what he called ‘Maausk values in his heart’ already during the Soviet time. But during that period it would have been absolutely unthinkable to be identified as religious, as it was seen as completely inappropriate. He explained that it was not until he retired that he was actually able be open about his interest in Maausk, and he then became active in the organisation. We also discussed the number of members in the official organisation and he related the relatively low membership numbers to people’s unwillingness to be associated with a religious organisation:

The number of members is not so high, but I think there are more people who practice Maausk. Maybe in the next population and housing census more people will dare to register as Maausk practitioners. People are ashamed, but at the same time there are a lot of people who share the Maausk worldview and lifestyle. But they are embarrassed about it.

Both the distancing laughter and comments from Hannes and Viive and the reflections from Raivo, illustrate how being religious was regularly associated with something that was ‘embarrassing’ or ‘shameful’. David Thurfjell (2015) highlights a similar tendency in Swedish society, where being a Christian was often seen as something embarrassing to admit in his study. He writes about this embarrassment using theories of social-psychology and connects these feelings to social relations. He argues that the feeling of embarrassment is connected to the individual’s fear of being ridiculed for not living up to the norms and understanding of the majority where religious affiliations are not that common (Thurfjell 2015: 189, see also
Zackariasson 2014). Even though Thurfjell’s examples come from Swedish society, his ideas are also relevant to Estonia, in the sense that a religious identity in Estonia, just like the Christian identity in Sweden, does not fit with the mainstream societal norms.

Thurfjell identifies three possible social rules that prompt the feeling of embarrassment. One is that being religious is not seen as ‘cool’ in society. The second reason is that openly religious individuals are seen as stupid and irrational. And the final reason he proposes is that in modern society where ironic distancing is the prevailing way of relating to the world, the sincere and non-ironic way that Christianity expresses engagement with the world does not fit in (Thurfjell 2015: 199). These aspects may be relevant in Estonia. I argue that there is another force that explains why religious people are seen as unstable, stupid and ‘having psychological problems’ in Estonia, as Hannes described it. It stems from the atheistic policies that existed in the Soviet Union, which Estonia was a part of for nearly 60 years.

Within the Soviet Union, there were official secularisation politics, and a number of policies that aimed at separating state and church and also encouraged individual secularisation. The predominant politics related to religion were based on the ideas of Karl Marx, who, according to religious scholar Atko Remmel, perceived religion as an obstacle to seeing social realities and hierarchies clearly. Religion was regarded as something that suppressed class knowledge and the will for revolutionary consciousness. According to Remmel, Marx argued that in a society where people are free, religion should not exist. (Remmel, 2010: 45.)

On the other hand, Soviet atheism could be seen as a kind of religious ritual in itself, as argued by several scholars, since the creation of new proletariat traditions and celebrations was supposed to replace church holidays and rituals (Remmel, 2008: 248; Altnurme, 2009: 69; Luhermann, 2011: 6–7). For example, Christian confirmation camps were replaced by camps for young people called ‘The Summer Days’. These camps became a place to meet Estonian youth from all over the country, build friendship networks and meet a future spouse. The camps offered all kinds of activities, such as sport competitions, dancing and excursions. They were also intended to provide knowledge about how to be a Soviet citizen through ideological lectures, and to promote the ‘scientific worldview’ that all Soviet citizens were meant to adhere to. (Remmel, 2008: 258).

During this period anti-religious campaigns were initiated, directed at teaching people about the ‘scientific worldview’ (Remmel, 2008: 247–248). Other methods were also used in the fight against religious institutions in
Estonia including the prohibition of Lutheran confirmation camps, and, more radically, the deportation of priests and openly religious people to Siberia in 1951 (Remmel, 2008: 254) Lectures that were critical towards religious practices and worldviews were an important part of these campaigns. Such lectures were held in workplaces, schools, universities, at youth gatherings such as pioneer camps, the previously mentioned ‘The Summer Days’ camps and Komsomolsk youth organisations, as well as in cultural centres, for example before theatre performances or movie screenings (Remmel, 2008: 276–277, Altnurme, 2009: 153). School teachers were seen as particularly important actors in this work, and their education was occasionally updated, enabling them to promote atheism in schools. Lea Altnurme (2009) describes, in her dissertation, the difficulties for believers in the Soviet school environment. They were ridiculed by teachers and classmates, and many times denied access to higher education.

Atheistic campaigns were also upheld in newspapers, where religiously active people were frequently depicted as immoral, treacherous and disloyal and described as rationally challenged and mentally unstable. Religion was tied to feelings of dread and two negative stereotypes were created. One was linked to violence and the other to stupidity (Altnurme, 2009: 68–69). Even though atheistic propaganda was not necessarily taken very seriously, negative stereotypes of religious people became widespread. At that time in Estonia, it was not easy to live openly as a religious person (Altnurme, 2009: 155–156).

Film art produced in Soviet times also reinforced these negative stereotypes, supplementing the official propaganda. One example is the popular Soviet-Estonian film *The Last Relic* (Reliikvia, 1969), a medieval love story in which the monks were described as deceitful, selfish, greedy and treacherous. Among the Estonian intelligentsia the monastery was linked to the repression of the Soviet system, but the movie also connects religion and the church to violence and stupidity. Another popular movie, filmed in 1970 and based on the Oscar Luts story, *Spring* (Kevade), was a semi-autobiographical text about friendship, love and life in a small Estonian country boarding school at the end of the nineteenth century. The film depicted a teacher of religion as a mean character who treated the pupils harshly. These films were aired on public TV several times a year on public holidays, and are still aired occasionally today. They can also be seen as contributing to the negative image of religious institutions and practitioners in Estonian society.
The atheistic campaigns were made more persuasive through certain rhetoric and tricks. Sonia Luehrmann writes about the ‘didactic public’, formed from performers of atheistic lecturers as well as the public (Luehrmann, 2011: 8). Through continuous propaganda campaigns people became used to certain images and attitudes depicted in the campaigns and were affected by them. Even though people’s relationship to the official ideology was cynical, they were nevertheless shaped by it, at least among the last Soviet generation (cf Yurchak 2005). I suggest that these ideas are still present in Estonian society to some extent and influence how religious people are viewed in society. This consequently influences how Maausk practitioners talk about Maausk and their practice; trying to avoid identifying or being labelled as religious as well as downplaying the fact that the Maausk organisation is registered as a religious organisation and emphasizing the legal role of it.

‘We have grown up without religion’

The ideas, conceptions and images surrounding religion and religiously active people, founded in the atheistic policies and practices of the Soviet Union, can thus be seen as a contributing reason for several of the practitioners distancing themselves from the words usk and religioon. There are other reasons, which are more connected to present-day Estonian society.

I met Peeter for the first time during a joint ritual in a sacred place. He was very eager to talk to me and we met for an interview in a quiet Soviet-style hotel on the seashore not far from Tallinn. He did not belong to the official organisation, but nevertheless defined himself as a ‘follower’ of Maausk. He told me that he sometimes attended organised events and practiced Maausk in his everyday life. Early on in the interview I asked how he became interested in Maausk, and he answered my question with a long reflective narrative:

People have a need to feel connected to something bigger and start to look for that. And since we have the Soviet period behind us, we are not so to say... Well, what is essential is that we have not grown up with one religion, because everything was forbidden. We have grown up without religion. The first Christmas without Soviet power, we went straight to church. We could then. It was not forbidden anymore. I went but I had to leave half way through. It felt really awful. It felt like some kind of brainwash. It felt really unfamiliar and awful and I felt physically ill.
When I was a child I read books about old wars. It felt like a freedom fight: you fight on behalf of your fatherland and mother tongue, on behalf of your sister and your brother and so forth... Then there is some supernatural power or god or something, whatever you call it, it might be in heaven or inside a moon or under a rock, it does not matter, what matters is that it is our own. Why should somebody else’s god be better than ours, especially when it was forced upon us? I started to think that if we have our own ways, then we have our own ways.

Then I started to do research [and realised] the extent of different people of nature that existed, Native Americans, Finno-Ugric and... That perhaps Finno-Ugric tribes have their own spirit, just as Native Americans have. People try to coexist with nature as equals. That nature is God feels so much more logical than the idea that somewhere there is some kind of supernatural dude, who you must pay to have a relationship with, and then between you and that supernatural [entity] there is a priest who is the connector. Well, for me it felt like the communist worldview... that shit that was run over us. There you had the head of the ‘politbüro’ who was also like a God, and then there was the officer of the local organisation who was the man in between, who was like a priest, who one needs to pay all the time. There are so many parallels! These systems all rule others out.

For me, Maausk felt like my own and was the best for me. It felt very democratic. It does not cause any anguish. I pay the membership only if I want to. I can go to Hiis (sacred place in the forest) whenever I want and I can talk to God. I can also not go there. I can practice Maausk everywhere: in the meadow, by the seashore, everywhere. God, in that sense, is not something that can be visualised. It is not something concrete, but it is everywhere and in everything. I am part of it. I am respectful towards nature and then it gives back to me. It is like a partnership. [...]

There are several themes in Peeter’s story that I want to highlight. Firstly his religious education; that he, through being part of the “Soviet society” grew up “without religion”, and how his first, and only, visit to a Church sermon ended with him having to leave, since he was overwhelmed with nausea and bad feelings. At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonia, like many other former socialistic republics, experienced an increased interest in matters of religion. This period has been described as a ‘religious boom’, which was characterised by a rise in a multitude of religious organisations and movements that swept across the Central and Eastern parts of Europe (see for example Chris Hann 2009). Individual, societal and media interest in religion were very high at the time, which was understood as a counter-reaction to the atheistic campaigns of the Soviet Union and socialist orders. In Estonia this ‘boom’ did not last long. Negative stereotypes surrounding
religion remained, even though repression in the public sphere had stopped (Kilemit and Nõmmik 2004: 34; Altnurme, 2009: 218). This can be seen as being in part related to that fact there is still no religious education in school. After independence was regained only a few schools started to offer religious education. Not only are people unused to religious rituals in their everyday life, they are also uneducated about the different expressions and forms of religious practice. This could also be seen as one of the differences between Sweden and Estonia in terms of reasons for negative attitude towards religion (cf. Thurfjell 2015).

The debate about whether religious studies should be a compulsory subject in Estonia has been a source of controversy since the early 1990s. The opponents of compulsory religious education argued that this might “lure school children to join the churches,” while the representatives of non-Christian religions complained that the treatment of these religions was too shallow (Vakker and Rohtmets, 2008: 50). While some concerns could be seen as legitimate, others also illustrated that fear of, and negative attitudes towards, religious institutions and practices still prevailed. This can be understood as a legacy of the Soviet atheistic policies I described previously in this chapter. My analysis can be connected to the findings of the religious scholar Pille Valk (2008) who categorised some of the attitudes toward religious education. She analysed the commentaries to news articles on the popular internet page www.delfi.ee, with a particular focus on posts by people who were opposed to religious education in school. She found that religion in Estonia tended to be seen as the opposite of science, as something that contravenes human rights, as hypocritical and nothing to do with morals. Religion was also seen as a way to escape the world, especially for weak people, and was all in all understood as preventing the free development of the human being. According to Valk all of these aspects were used as arguments for why education about religions should not exist in schools (Valk, 2008: 107).

There is another aspect from Peeter’s narrative that I want to look more closely at, namely his description of how he had discovered religious practices, beliefs and ‘gods’ that are from Estonia. According to the Estonian Folklorist Ergo-Hart Västrik, the development of *Maausk* was connected to the turbulent years of the mid-1980s and 1990s when the search for cultural roots was at its height in Estonia (Västrik, 2015: 131). It was a time when Soviet state ideology had lost some of its power and alternative identities based on ethnicities could be developed and expressed to a greater extent. In the interview, when Peeter connected the religious worldview of *Maausk* to
his country of origin, the religious beliefs and customs came to be presented as something that was rightfully owned by him and other Estonians. This is in contrast to other worldviews or practices that were assumed to imitate the Soviet system or belong to a foreign power.

This was especially highlighted in how Peeter finished his story with a distinct focus on heritage, continuity and ancestors. He said that *Maausk* is all about a connection to nature and the soil, and that this heritage had been developed and maintained ‘with straight backs’, without ‘brainwashing’ through foreign ideas. I relate this to Eiki Berg’s analysis of how Estonian identity appears to contain a strong linkage to a particular territory and the settlement of a certain group of people in that territory over at least 5000 years. Berg argues that these conceptions give Estonians a sense of a primordial right to that space. As a metaphor of Estonian soil and indigenous culture, it also emphasises a genealogical rootedness to the place and subsequently produces the meaning of being Estonian as also being connected to a rural way of life (Berg, 2002: 111). Deep connections to place and claims of rights to territory was one of the main themes of the dominating *Maausk* discourses.

**Home space as sacred**

So far in this chapter I have described the negative attitudes the practitioners expressed concerning both the concepts *usk* and *religion*, and the possibility of associating *Maausk* with religion and religiosity. I have identified several reasons that could be considered as contributing to the prevalence of this attitude, such as how religion tended to be seen as synonymous with Christianity, the Soviet atheistic policies that created a negative image of believers and, finally, the lack of religious education in school, both in Soviet times and today. In the following I delve deeper into the ways in which Soviet atheistic policies have influenced religious expression over the long term, in particular when it comes to the actual practices among the *Maausk* practitioners.

After saying that they did not think *usk* was good word to describe *Maausk*, the practitioners often continued to tell me that the practice was more about a particular lifestyle. It was based on folk traditions and mostly took place in the home or in particular forests that they had a certain connection to, sometimes described as ‘home-forests’. To a large extent, the practice of the *Maausk* practitioners seemed to consist of a number of
everyday customs perceived as folk traditions, taking place in the domestic sphere. For example, Ester, one of the practitioners, told me that *Maausk* was visible in her life the following way:

In everyday life tradition is important. I can see that some of it is disappearing. But at the same time I can see that it (tradition) carries me in my everyday life. *Maausk* is about doing things like… how we peel potatoes and how we make a tasty soup. We know that we have to break the potatoes and not cut them with a knife. You make a small cut and then you break the potato. That makes a tasty soup. (...) *Maausk* in everyday life is knowing how to do things with your hands. Tradition is that you know the right way to wash woollen socks with your hands. The technique is important when it comes to drying the sock and keeping it soft.

Ester also told me that *Maausk* to her was about the traditional handicraft skills of making mittens and socks with patterns found in old folk clothing in the folk-life museum. She found it important to teach these kinds of traditions to her daughter in order to transmit the *Maausk* ideas about how to live your everyday life. Another practitioner called Terje, told me that *Maausk* was visible in her life through her skills of baking her own bread and cooking traditional dishes. Similarly, Tõnis told me that:

If I think about *Maausk*, it is really about what I do in my ordinary life. For example, when I make bread and I am in a good mood. I then think that I will make some kind of mark on the surface of the bread. What does that mean? Well, through that, I somehow communicate with the spirits that are all around us in nature all the time. I don’t always think this through. *Maausk* is actually here and now: that I do certain things in my life in a particular way.

Almost all of the practitioners gave me similar examples of how their everyday domestic chores, or rather a particular way of doing these, were part of what they considered their *Maausk* practice. Also, the home was described as playing an important part in the *Maausk* practice itself. Hannes told me in the interview that in his view, *Maausk* did not have to be more complicated than making a fire in the backyard and sharing it with some good friends, which he really liked doing. He explained that his *Maausk* thinking and lifestyle to a large extent came from experiences he had in his grandparents’ home during his childhood:

The grandparents of my generation lived in the countryside where I spent a lot of time in my childhood. That connection to the countryside and a countryside home is very important to my *Maausk* practice. It is not that they would talk about *Maausk* at that time, far from it! If I think about what was done there.
How they lived their life. If I can see the world and life through their eyes, then the starting point is in how they lived their everyday life in their home. That is the centre and starting point of my Maausk practice.

Hannes also told me that he still had access to his grandparents’ place, which was also the childhood home of his parents, and that he would never give the place up, since it was so important to him:

The spirit of the location of our countryside home is important. I have travelled quite a lot, but I really value the fact that I have the countryside home. That, I think, might be characteristic in Maausk thinking, that the centre point of the world is home, not in some great cities of the world.

Maie, another practitioner born in the late 1970s, also talked about the importance of the countryside home. She had lived and worked in Finland most of her adult life, but at the time of the interview had decided to move back to Estonia, to the countryside home of her mother, which she was gradually renovating. She told me that one reason for doing this was that she felt the place had started to ‘call her back’. The place was a countryside home that had originally been built by her great grandfather. She had a strong connection to the house, and had plans to improve it, so that it would be suitable for year-round living. In connection with her daughter’s name giving ceremony, she had built a sauna there and planted a fruit garden at the back of the house. When she described the role of Maausk in her life, it was almost exclusively connected to activities related to the garden, or the house itself. The most important Maausk related activity in her life at that moment, was, she said, to keep the ‘home of her ancestors alive’.

In addition to activities at home, the practitioners also described Maausk practices related to sacred places located in the ‘home-forest’ or close to the home. As mentioned in the introduction, sacred places were to a large extent the main venue for the practitioners to communicate with the supernatural, either alone or with others at the larger events that were regularly organised. The practices connected to these sacred places varied. They could include leaving food offerings or woollen threads as gifts to the spirits of the sacred place, or coming to the sacred place to think and reflect over life. Several of the practitioners told me that the most meaningful sacred places were situated in the local surroundings of the practitioners’ homes. Viive provided one example in her earlier quote, where she ex-
explained that every time she went to her countryside home she would go and greet the oak trees close to it. Ester gave a similar example:

Close to my summer-home, I found an old house that had burned down. There is a circle of old oak trees there. I go there quite often. I like that place. I pick berries and mushrooms there, and always leave something behind. It is my home Hiiis (sacred place in nature).

Raivo also emphasised this aspect:

I have a Hiiis, about half a kilometre away, where we always go. I go with my wife, my friend or alone. We tie a thread to the tree and that is it. Then we think our own thoughts. It is already a ritual to spend time in the Hiiis. About 25 kilometres away there is a Paluküla sacred place. That is a sacred place of our local county. In that sense it is also my home Hiiis.

Paluküla is a famous historical sacred place that is well known in Estonia, but to Raivo it was also his personal home Hiiis. Raivo’s, Ester’s, Viive’s and several other descriptions in my material about home Hiiis illustrate that even though there are a lot of sacred places in Estonia, the ones that are regarded as personally important are located near the home or labelled as home Hiiis.

There might be several reasons why the Maausk practices centre around and take place in the home to such an extent. One of them is directly connected to my previous discussion about the influence of past Soviet atheistic policies.

According to Sonja Luehrmann, the Soviet secularisation project was about establishing a link with previous cultural forms, rather than just replacing the old practices, even though the distance from earlier forms was important to keep. This distance was partly created through the communication of a ‘scientific worldview’, which depicted religious institutions and religious persons in an extremely negative way, as shown above. According to Luehrmann, this substitution process produced new kinds of ‘affective regimes’ and ‘communicative possibilities’ where socially constructed religious expressions and sentiments were altered in comparison to those possible in a religious society. Change in ‘communicative possibilities’ refers to a shift in how religious experiences and beliefs were spoken about, while change in ‘affective regimes’ refers to how it was possible to interpret and name the feelings related to religion and religious experiences. She adds that the Soviet secularisation project influenced society in such a way that
people got used to social relations in which there were no significant ‘nonhuman agents’ involved (Luehrmann, 2011: 7). Luehrmann connects this to the Western idea that forms the basis of secularist traditions, described as ‘exclusive humanism’, where the supernatural had no space (see Taylor, 2007).

Returning to Luhermann’s point about different ‘communicative possibilities’ and ‘affective regimes’, I have already shown how the vocabulary the practitioners used when they talked about Maausk could be seen as affected by the secularisation project. Further, in some cases the difference between secular and religious is a matter of vocabulary. This is illustrated for example in how some churches have started to use more secular concepts to legitimate their claims, by using the vocabulary of human rights for instance. This shows how the very ideas of the secular and religious are shifting and changing in society (Wilson, 2012: 39), and this could also be the case in Estonia. I argue then that the vocabulary for talking about religious expression is either lacking in the case of Estonia, or that it has shifted to another realm of life, while religion in popular use has come to mean something negative.

It is well-documented that when religious expression in Soviet society was removed from the public realm by the secularisation project, in many cases, it ended up moving to the private sphere. According to Anu Kannikke, in Estonia this led to sacralisation of private homes and everyday life. In her article Creating cultural continuity in the domestic realm: The case of Soviet Estonia (2006), Kannikke describes that everyday life served as a refuge for the sacred, where counter-cultural messages could also be hidden. Even though the official ideology aimed at transforming the everyday life towards the profane, ‘the sacred’ did not disappear, but could instead be found in the domestic sphere. For instance, according to Kannikke, in Soviet memories the space of the home was described with religious terminology, as ‘paradise, place of peace, redemption, glory, heaven, true life’. Furthermore, building the home space involved almost ritualistic behaviour, according to Kannikke, where memories were full of descriptions of ‘making things with their own hands’ and ‘with one’s own sweat and blood’ (Kannikke, 2006: 219).

Kannikke’s analysis of home space as ‘sacred’, may thus be applied to the descriptions of Maausk, which was dominated by the practices that happened in home sphere. From this perspective, the importance of the home in the descriptions of Maausk can be partly interpreted as a result of shifting ‘communicative possibilities’ and ‘affective regimes’ that replaced
old locations of sacred and ways of talking about religious practices and experiences in Soviet societies as described by Luehrman. I would also argue, in relation to different ‘communicative possibilities’ and ‘affective regimes’ that not only was the home sacralised in this process, but also other things like heritage, the forest and nature, which were the main markers of Maausk in my interview material, were moved to the sphere of the sacred.

Doubt and possibility for belief

The shift in ‘affective regimes’ and ‘communicative possibilities’ of religious experiences caused by Soviet religious policies can also be seen from another perspective that cannot be contextualised through the influence of Soviet history of Estonia. Talking about sacred and religion, and the kind of feelings attached to religious experiences, can be set in a more current context. According to Tanya Luhrmann we presently live in societies where rational worldview makes doubt in the supernatural possible, and where this is actually seen as socially more acceptable than faith in something (Luhrmann 2012: 139 see also Giddens 1999). Today’s western society’s rational worldview can thus be seen as similar to the Soviet ‘scientific worldview’ paradigm, tied with the Soviet secularisation project. However, Luhrman argues that certain religious practices such as Neo-paganism, which Maausk may also be defined as, are open to making a supernatural world real even though they fear it might not be, and this happens because Neopaganism treats magic as present in the mundane life (Luhrman 2012: 139). This balancing between doubt and belief is visible in the following quote from Ester, an arts and crafts teacher born in the mid-1960s:

I didn’t grow up with knowledge about spirits. I heard about them later. Like Vigala Sass⁴ says, when you have a teacher who teaches that, ‘What is happening now, is done by a spirit’, then one starts to believe that it is a spirit. If you have been told the stories about spirits you see them everywhere. For me it might be a house mouse, something just ran by really fast, but certainly not a spirit. But I have agreed to delude myself. I agree that if they are framed as spirits, then they are. But I do believe in mother earth, father forest and who else..? When I go to

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⁴ Aleksander Heintalu (1941–2015), better known as Vigala Sass, was a well-known public figure in Estonia often referred to as a folk healer and shaman. Heintalu published books about medical herbs and ancient magic.
pick berries I always give the first one back, and then I believe I will get a good amount of berries. That is certainly something I believe in. If I give them something they give it back. I believe in exchange.

Ester can be understood to express doubt in the above quote; sometimes she is not sure if she is experiencing the presence of spirits or if she simply sees house mice. She said she sees house mice, but her comment also suggests that she has accepted the possibility that they might be something else as well. Luhrmann suggests that ‘what these religions, (like for instance Neo-paganism) share, is an attempt to make real what these practitioners fear might not be real, and that both spring from the same impulse: to allow people to experience the supernatural as real, despite the awareness that other, sensible people presume that it is not’. She argues that this style of religiosity emerges in secular societies and characterises Neo-paganism as well as other kinds of new religious movements in society (Luhrmann, 2012: 138).

According to Luhrmann stories of the supernatural are told playfully and with humour which suspends the stories between real and unreal (Luhrmann 2012: 139). The humorous tone of the stories of the supernatural was vividly present in one of my interviews with Veiko and his life partner Sirje. The interview took place in a fishing village in a coastal town by the Baltic Sea in the summer of 2012. Veiko was an excellent storyteller and usually answered my questions with a story. At one point during our meeting he told me that he and Sirje had a home spirit that they fed through a vessel where they placed part of their food. They told me that it was hidden from view but nevertheless well used. We were talking about what was put there and Veiko told me the following:

One cannot put all things in there. It is a matter of an inner feeling. Even if we drank Coca-Cola sometimes, we never put that in the vessel. And when we ordered kebab at home we would never have offered that to the home spirit.

We laughed about this for a while after he told me. His giving me this example could be interpreted as Veiko wanting to convey that he and Sirje were just ordinary people ordering kebab and drinking Coca-Cola. However, Veiko felt that the home spirit would not have liked to eat such food, presumably it was foreign and factory processed. Sirje urged Veiko to tell me about the ‘ice cream incident’, and Veiko told me the following story:

That was a funny story. At one point I ate a lot of ice cream. Every evening I ate one litre of ice cream but my weight went down five kilos. This has nothing to do
with *Maausk*, well actually it does. My entire life is so entangled with it that one cannot separate things. When I first started to put the ice cream into the vessel, I opened the package and put ice cream in. I did it twice. I don’t know if I placed it badly, but it fell down. Well, anyway the ice cream fell on the floor from the vessel. I picked it up and placed it back in, but it fell down again.

Sirje: Do you think it is a good thing to give that to the home spirit?

Veiko: That is the thing. If the spirit doesn’t want it, I will no longer try to give it any. (laughter)

Luhrmann describes the experiences of everydayness full of magical qualities as ‘magical realism’. She borrows the term from the literary style in which magic blends seamlessly into the mundane (Luhrmann, 2012: 139). As Veiko also told me, his life was so entangled with *Maausk* that one could not separate them. This story can thus be understood as if the everyday life of Veiko was a site of magical qualities, possibilities and signs of the supernatural, like ice cream falling from a spirit’s vessel. Luhrmann claims that people involved with Neo-paganism create a kind of ‘third epistemic space’ that allows the possibility that the world is actually more alive than it is thought to be (Luhrmann 2012: 127). According to her, in this ‘third epistemic space the way the divine is imagined insists that someone pays constant attention to his or her mind and world, seeking the divine presence, listening for something it might say. This divinity can comfort, like a friend, and respond directly, like a friend’ (Luhrmann, 2012: 148). This is another aspect that is visible in Veiko’s playful story about the home spirit and the ice cream. It could be interpreted that he and Sirje regarded the supernatural as something friendly and interacted with it informally.

Referring back to the earlier discussion about communicative possibilities, on the basis of Veiko’s and Ester’s quotes it can be claimed that the experiences of the supernatural and the sacred shifted into the mundane everyday life of the home sphere, as previously suggested. But a playful and humorous way of talking about them is now present, a kind of a new way of communicating these experiences as well as new emotional way of relating to the supernatural on a friend-like basis.

**A note on secularisation**

This analysis can be applied more generally by considering different ‘communicative possibilities’ in relation to secularisation theories. As I
wrote in the introduction, Estonia is often described as one of the most secularised countries in Europe particularly in respect to the decrease in membership of religious institutions. However, there are two ways of understanding the concept of secularisation. Firstly as an ideological project put in place to change society, like it was in the Soviet Union. Secondly, it can be understood as a scientific theory that relates to a process that has resulted in a changing role of religion in society. I will discuss the latter concept first – secularisation as a process.

The idea of secularisation as a process was developed alongside theories of modernity to explain the changes as a decline in interest in religion which eventually leads to the disappearance of religion altogether (Delanty, 2000: i.) According to early secularisation theories, a transformed situation in modern society would lead to the disappearance of particular religious traditions, while other social institutions would take over the task of generating the values and meanings of the society (Ammerman, 2007: 4). Nowadays there is no single secularisation theory, but many. They emphasise different characteristics of modernity and their influence on the religious landscape and practice. There is debate about whether individuals are becoming less religious, or whether the influence of religious institutions on society is also diminishing (Wilson, 2012: 37).

Secularisation theories have been challenged by the fact that religion has not disappeared from society. In other words, secularisation has not happened as expected; not even if we look only at western societies and leave out other parts of the world. People still belong to religious institutions and these, as well as religious practices and values, still influence individual lives. As Nancy Ammerman puts it, ‘[s]cience, capitalism and politics are pervasive and powerful in everyday lives, but so is religion’ (Ammerman, 2007: 4). This means that even if in the late modern age popular science has become a part of the everyday knowledge production, democratisation has increased the individual agency, and the neoliberal capitalist labour market is creating a situation where transnational mobility is ever increasing, religion still has a role to play in it. Understanding that society is populated by groups of autonomous individuals in a neoliberal globalised world has not led to the disappearance of expressions described as religious or spiritual. Secularisation is thus no longer understood as describing the

4 See for example: Stan and Turcescu, Church, State and Democracy in Expanding Europe (2011) or The Social Significance of Religion in the Enlarged Europe: Secularisation, Individualization and Pluralism (Pollack, Muller and Pickel, 2012).
actual situation, and the concept itself has consequently come under analysis, as illustrated in the ‘after secularism’ discussions that are currently ongoing in the field of religious studies.5

Modern secularisation theory has also been challenged by the argument that ‘the religious boom’ in post-Soviet and post-socialist countries at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s proved that religious interest, practice and institutions are not in decline in modern Europe. This was seen to illustrate that secularisation did not follow a linear phase of development; from participation and practice of institutionalised religion to decline in membership and interest in religious organisations. (Plaat, 2003: 128). After the Soviet collapse people became intrigued by religious organisations and practices that had nonetheless survived not disappeared during socialism. However, in the case of Estonia, while the popularity of church rituals blossomed during the 1980s and 1990s, it was mostly temporary. Since then, membership in religious organisations has decreased extensively (Plaat, 2003: 128). In post-communist East Germany the situation is similar to that in Estonia, where low membership rates of the formerly dominant Lutheran church have been reported (Froese and Pfaff, 2009: 137). It has been suggested that Estonia is actually following the post-modern shift towards low interest in participation in religious organisations. This shift was evidenced in statistics measuring the decline in membership of religious institutions (Plaat, 2003: 133). However, even though surveys can measure participation rates in institutions, they do not depict the actual convictions or different forms of religious practices outside the institutional realm. This is important especially in the Estonian context since Estonians are particularly suspicious of institutionalised religious belonging, as previously described.

When it comes to twentieth century secularisation projects, rather than secularisation theories, Sonja Luehrmann argues that they were actually about building new communities. One of her examples is a Soviet community-building project, which had no room for religious institutions. She also refers to Kemalist Turkey and post-independence India where ‘non-human agents’ were seen as a threat to the idea of equal citizens. There was an idealised view of building particular communities free from religious influence within these projects. This questions the idea that secularism and

liberal individualism are somehow inherently linked, as claimed in many secularisation theories (Luehrmann, 2011: 5).

I would argue, then, that even though involvement in religious organisations in Estonia is very low, it does not mean that different forms of religious expression have lost their significance altogether in the everyday life of Estonians. They may appear in different forms and expression, such as the existence of Maausk, which are in turn intertwined with the history and developments of the society and culture.

Here I would like refer back to Courtney Bender’s (2012) advice to consider history when explaining the emergence of different religious forms. Even though Estonia is perceived to be a highly secular country, some kind of religious landscape still exists in the country. This must be studied and defined in relation to specific practices by placing them in a historical and socio-political context and analysing the practices as they are ‘lived’. Furthermore, understanding the sacred and profane as deeply intertwined in people’s everyday lives can help in understanding religious expression in Estonia. Secularisation theories per se do not provide answers regarding how religious practices, beliefs and institutions have changed in society. However, it is possible to examine the religious landscape to some extent by identifying the influences of the Soviet secularisation project, for instance the shift in the ‘communicative possibilities’ of religious expressions and forms as I have shown in relation to Maausk in this chapter. It is important nonetheless to note that it is not only the past that matters when analysing the form and existence of the Maausk movement in society. The present societal context should obviously be considered as well, since the current possibility to doubt the supernatural has influenced how the supernatural is experienced and expressed.
Boiled eggs used for an ‘egg rolling’ competition at a Maausk gathering that took place in Tammealuse Hiis (Sacred place in nature) in summer 2015. The world was born from the egg of a water bird according to the mythology of the Baltic Finns (groups of people living around Baltic sea and speaking Finno-Ugric languages)

In this chapter I look more closely at the collective identity that the Maausk practitioners tended to identify with. My aim is to first describe the processes involved in identity formation and then present some possible reasons why it was constructed in this particular way. Even though the
concept of identity is used here, my primary goal is not to discuss various definitions of the concept as such. Instead, I focus on certain aspects of identity formation, based on Stuart Hall’s discussions of what he labels as a particular ‘cultural identity’ (1996). According to Hall cultural identity is something constructed in interaction between the self and society, and which, because of that, combines the personal and public levels of identity into one. Hall claims that this means that personal selves are projected into these cultural identities, while at the same time internalising the meanings of them. In this process, subjective feelings align with positions we occupy in the social and cultural world (Hall 1996: 597–598). Therefore we become invested in identities through emotions. What needs to be noted here is that subjects do not occupy these cultural identities as something unified, or as the only identities they might have, since in reality we occupy multiple identities at the same time. This has been characterised as a late-modern identity formation (Hall 1996: 601). In addition to multiple identities, the late-modern world also offers many more possible identity positions than in the past, which can be seen as a result of structural changes in society and increasing globalisation (Giddens 1990, Laclau 1990, Harvey 1989). However, while acknowledging this, Maausk identity is framed here as a cultural identity that refers to the particular community. This does not, however, have to be a fixed and stable construction, rather it shifts and changes depending on the practitioner as well as space and time. Furthermore, cultural identity is seen here as an active positioning act drawing from different discourses available, while at the same time felt in the emotional life of the practitioners.

A Finno-Ugrian identity

The Maausk identity was constructed from different elements. The first is a felt connection to an the idea of a Finno-Ugric family. Finno-Ugrian refers to an established relationship between particular language groups spoken around the Baltic Sea, in middle Russia, West Siberia and Hungary (Laakso 1991). Estonian is generally regarded as one of these languages. However, the idea of a cultural and ethnic unity that connects the speakers of these languages is a subject of debate. It used to be a popular idea at the time of Romantic nationalism in nineteenth and twentieth century Estonia and Finland. According to the Estonian folklorist Kristin Kuutma, the Finno-Ugric identity in Estonia was built on this concept of a shared past with a
common heritage, which was founded on the idea of linguistic similarities. This idea was actively used at the beginning of the twentieth century as one of the factors for legitimising Estonia as a sovereign nation. According to Kuutma, Estonia needed a grand narrative of a historical continuum, something that was also desired and formed elsewhere in Europe at the time. To establish this kind of continuity and connection of the language community, the past was studied and traced through folklore and folk research, and multiple research trips were made, for example to Siberia. At a political level, the Finno-Ugric identity was framed against a perceived Indo-European hegemony. Various cultural organisations were established in the 1920s and 1930s to promote co-operation among various groups of Finno-Ugric people but were eventually banned by the Soviet authorities in the 1940s. During the Soviet period of the 1960s, interest in the Finno-Ugrians became more acceptable again in Estonia. The political thaw of the Soviet Union made it possible to establish cultural ties between Finland and Hungary. Interest was again also directed at the Finno-Ugric people living in the Russian territory, in Karelia, and also on other side of the Ural Mountains. (Kuutma. 2005: 55.)

The idea of a Finno-Ugric identity thus has a particular historical context, and it is also prevalent in Estonia in general today. The annual event, the Finno-Ugrian Days, brings together Finno-Ugric people to perform folk traditions and discuss their rights within the context of the states they live in. Events related to issues of ‘kindred peoples’ are also organised throughout the year by the non-profit organisation Fenno-Ugria. The organisation was established in 1927 to promote the connection between Estonia and other Finno-Ugric people. It was stopped during the Soviet years, but was re-established in 1991 with the same purpose. Some of the Maausk practitioners were active in this organisation and many of them visited events regularly. Andrus, for instance, told me that he often attended the evenings organized by Fenno-Ugria. He explained that one reason he was interested in the Udmurd, Mari, Mordva and other Finno-Ugric groups was that he, through learning about these groups, was able to gain knowledge about traditions that he perceived had disappeared from Estonia:

When being with them it helps us to hear about things that have been lost. There is this feeling of belonging with Siberian and Finnish people. I don’t know if this feeling the same with Hungarians, but naturally they belong to us.
Andrus’ description was one example of the practitioners expressing a sense of belonging to the Finno-Ugric community, and the view that there was a connection between what they saw as traditions developed in the Estonian territory and the traditions of other Finno-Ugric groups. They generally tended to presume a historical connection among the Finno-Ugric peoples on the grounds that customs and traditions might have been shared in the past. Kuutma identifies two processes that she argues influenced the rise of the Finno-Ugric identity in Estonia and among early Maausk practitioners. According to her, one of the reasons for the development of the Finno-Ugric identity was that Soviet cultural practices strictly regulated cultural expression. As a result, Estonians felt marginalised within the framework of the Soviet Union. In the realm of arts and culture, the Finno-Ugric identity became outspoken and turned into a political instrument for opposing hegemonic Soviet cultural policies. Consequently, the Finno-Ugric identity became an oppositional identity against the hegemonic order, already a component in the turn of twentieth century nationalist ideas. According to Kuutma, the opposition to hegemony at that time could also be linked to counter-culture movements in the West in the 1960s and 1970s (the so called hippie movement), which also opposed hegemonies of the West. Kuutma’s claims challenge the general understanding that the Eastern European countries did not experience the cultural counter movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the same way as the West, since the opposition movements did not have any place in the official society. (Kuutma, 2005: 56.)

A closer look at the folklore movement in the Baltic countries in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, does suggest that something similar to the counterculture movement in the West was actually happening in at least some parts of Eastern Europe. In Estonia the 1960s and 1970s folklore movement involved a search for genuine folk culture, which, among other things, led to folklore students and artists studying folklore in the rural countryside, where it was perceived to still exist in its authentic form at least in some remote parts. The official Soviet culture, on the other hand, was understood to be inauthentic. Folklorists travelled far to visit various groups of Finno-Ugric people from the Baltic Sea to the Volga River, and to the Siberian Tundra, just as they had done at the time of nation building at the

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1 In addition, the non-existence of the ‘hippy movement’ in the Soviet Union has also been questioned in an exhibition curated by KIWA & Terje Toomistu about the underground movement that existed in 1970s Estonia, where countercultural activities were similar to the western hippy movements.
end of the 1800s and the beginning of 1900s. It was generally assumed that Estonians could find their archaic heritage through studying Finno-Ugrians. (Kuutma 1998: 2) For example, Lennart Meri, a former Estonian president, (1992–2001), a writer and filmmaker, made several documentaries in the 1960s and 1970s where he filmed Finno-Ugric people around Siberia and the Baltic Sea, traced the language, relationships and history between people who spoke Finno-Ugric languages.

However, one potential difference between the described folklore movement and the so-called ‘hippie’ movement in Western Europe at the same time is that the counterculture of the 1960s had a different historical starting point to similar movements in Eastern Europe. The Western left-wing counterculture had its roots in the nineteenth century ‘individualistic-Byronic Romantic model’, according to which the individual is in its desired ‘natural state’ only when it is free. Living under state structures and power was seen as an unnatural condition for individuals. Its right-wing counterpart would have its roots in the ‘nationalistic romantic model’, where the tribe or the descent group, was seen as natural, and breaking their unity was seen as unnatural. This idea was developed in the nationalism of the 1930s, and also in the environments created by communist suppression, and it peaked in the chaotic years of the communist transformation of Eastern European societies (Aitamurto and Simpson, 2013: 3). Thus it seems that the idea of the existence of ‘natural’ communities with shared lines of descent, language and mentality is still present and influences people’s lives in Eastern Europe and beyond. The idea of such “natural” communities could, in turn, potentially result in contributing to defining others as “outsiders”, something that has sometimes led to the development of extreme racist communities and ideologies.

The strongly felt connection to the Finno-Ugric minorities was also well illustrated in my interview with Raivo. We were talking about the Finno-Ugric evenings organised in Tallinn and I asked what Finno-Ugric means to him. He answered as follows:

It means very much. My soul is somehow [...] I dream about visiting the Mariland, Udmurdiland, Komiland and to get to know their customs. If it is at all possible, I go to the performances they have here during the Finno-Ugrian days. It is somehow something [...] It develops some kind of home feeling. Develops some kind of feeling of connectedness. I visited some a few summers ago. I arranged a bicycle trip to the Vadja country. From Leningrad Oblast to the direction of the Lauka River, there are Vadjas: do you know that group? I went to their village party and it was a warm feeling. Only the old people could speak
the Vadja language, but the whole village was together. They talk in Russian but everybody wears folk clothes. They are very “russified,” but somehow there is a good feeling. In the Mariland the situation is different. Hiied, sacred places, are protected. There, life goes on according to native religion, but “russification” is still doing its work. This Ugri thing is very close to my heart. [...] Sometimes I think about how I should behave on certain holy days. I feel that when I go to a Hiis alone or with my family or with my wife or with acquaintances, something is missing. I don’t know, like I don’t remember, that memory has been cut off, and myself I don’t want to invent something. But where can we get the knowledge? Maybe we can get it from Mari or somewhere. I have this need to visit them, but the transportation possibilities are limited. But it might be that I will go there in few years.

Raivo’s way of expressing himself can be seen as an affective pattern of attachment to perceived kin folks. My impression during the interview was that he tried to convey warm and strong feelings to me as a listener, by using expressions like ‘soul’ and ‘heart’. In that way he emphasised a sense of connectedness to Finno-Ugric people, which was also evident in how he talked about how he had experienced “a warm feeling” when visiting these groups, and in how he described such visits as a way of gaining access to particular knowledge, traditions and also a kind of mentality. That he felt there was a need for such knowledge was reflected in how he talked about a sense of loss, ‘a cut memory’, in relation to how to practice Maausk.

I would argue that the emotional attachment to Finno-Ugric groups on the grounds of a shared past, which was evident in the quote from Raivo, as well as in the interview with Andrus, could be seen as being connected to cultural identity formation in the way that Hall suggested. According to Hall cultural identities become one with personal identities, and subjective feelings in turn enforce the identities we take on in society (Hall 1996: 597–598). Furthermore, this intertwining of emotional attachments and identities can be set in the context of the broader cultural resources that Maausk practitioners might draw upon. I suggest, therefore, that the history of Finno-Ugric identity formation, as previously described, influenced the Maausk identity formation such that the personal and the public connect in intimate ways as Hall also suggested (ibid.). This aligns with what Wetherell argues; that it is possible to combine the influences of the broader argumentative textures and discursive threads with longer histories to particular affective patterns. Considering wider frameworks of reference allows us to see how affective patterns are sometimes tied with narratives from society (Wetherell, 2012: 100). It could be claimed that this is evident in the history of the meaning of Finno-Ugrism in the Estonian society, combined with the
feeling of being connected to Finno-Ugric community expressed in the interview quotes.

Local and indigenous identity

I suggest that the concept of a particular Finno-Ugric identity evident in the interviews of Maausk practitioners, could serve as a counter identity resisting particular hegemonies still today. This was the case at the time of the first independence of Estonia in the 1920s and 1930s, when it was used as an opposition to German hegemonies in the Baltic, and under the Soviet Union in resisting Soviet hegemonies. This becomes clear in the following analysis when adding other factors to Maausk identity construction.

The locally based Maausk groups are formed on the basis of a perceived idea of local people with local customs. The traditions of the groups are thereby perceived as slightly different from each other, just like in the traditional folk museum classification systems where each county has its own folk clothes, and different nuances in language and customs collected in the archives. In my material it became quite clear that the ideas and structures of Maausk contributed to particular kinds of local identities with separate traditions being emphasised over national identity. In the interview with Raivo this emphasis on small, local communities was quite evident:

I consider myself as Mõhulane (name of ancient county in the middle of Estonia). When there was a population and housing census, I put myself in the books as Mõhulane. I am such a stubborn and stiff person. I have principles. I like it when people say that they are a Virulane, that is a person from the Viru County or from the Saaremaa, or a Võruke from the Võru county, a Sakala from the Viljandi County, a Läänlane from the Haapsalu (ancient county names and nouns) This is our ancient county division and people used to name themselves according to these. For example, my grandfather was one of them. He was born in 1871.

Raivo did not identify himself as Estonian, which is a state ethnicity, but instead labelled himself in relation to the county he was from. That he also stated this officially, in the housing and population census, indicates that he saw it as an important distinction to make. This could be understood as Raivo not aligning with the national identity but instead constructing an identity that turns towards a more marginal local position. That the involvement with Maausk could engender such a stance was also reflected in the interview with
Ester. First she told me that she did not value her local identity when she was young, and she was, as a matter of fact, the first one in her family to leave the area and marry ‘a long-faced Estonian’. According to her, when she moved to Tallinn she had even tried to hide the fact that she spoke in a particular way, a trait that easily connected her to a particular area. However, it was when she became involved with Maausk that she started appreciating her roots and her local identity. She told me that over the last ten years she had been increasingly preoccupied with finding out more about her origins and the traditions of the county she was from. Like Raivo, Ester described her identity as based on a connection with a particular local area while denouncing the idea of a more general Estonian identity:

I don’t consider myself to be Estonian. I am Virulane, well more precisely I am Vadjalane. What does it mean to be Estonian? To be “a proud and good Estonian” (ironic tone). I think every place has its own people; Võrulased, Saarlased, Hiiglased (nouns depicting people coming from particular areas in Estonia). In the market place in the train station, the egg seller asked me in Russian: ‘You are from Kohtla-järve?’ I have always been ashamed that I am from Kohtla-järve. I am not exactly from there but I am from Jõhvi! Apparently she was from Kohtla-järvi and she could see from my face that I am from there.

The local area that Ester identified with was historically the area of a small Finno-Ugric group called Vadja. In the 1970s the area saw heavy workforce immigration from the Soviet Union. The Russian speaking population came to work in the mining industry and the demographics of the area quickly changed. This could be one of the reasons why Ester did not want to identify with the area when she was younger. Over time though, she had started to feel proud of being one of the few Vadjas remaining in Estonia. The well used saying she quoted to distance herself from the idea of an Estonian identity, ‘to be a proud and good Estonian’, comes from a popular song called Eestlane olen ja eestlaseks jään (I am Estonian and will stay Estonian). The song was commonly sung at the time of the Singing revolution in Estonia.

It could be suggested that the ‘proudness’ expressed by Raivo and Ester in relation to local identities and the irony expressed by Ester when contemplating the idea of Estonianness, can be seen as a form of affective positioning as Wetherell discusses, where active presentations of emotions are crucial (Wetherell 2012: 90). Such affective identity construction relating to local level ‘ethnicities’ inside the Estonian state that Raivo and Ester both described, could have its roots in Soviet national policies. The Soviet
approach to national and local identity concentrated on ethnicity or
descent, equating it with nationality, culture and language (Kuutma,
Seljamaa and Västrik, 2012: 50). Within the frameworks of these ‘ethnic
nations’, governing units were constructed and used as basic frameworks
for state organisation inside the Soviet Union. The Estonian Soviet
Socialistic republic could be perceived as one of these. When the Soviet
Union collapsed, a number of ‘nationalities’ and ‘national territories’ came
into existence. These new states developed sometimes in pre-existing
foundation of nation states in place before the Soviet Union. These were
based on territories occupied by perceived unified ethnic groups, like all the
Baltic countries did. While many other states did not have pre-Soviet
existence. The Soviet nominal nationalities continued to influence com-
munal cultural identities even after the 1991 state formation, in the sense
that many of the post-Socialist states were based on the idea of ‘ethnic-
nations’ rather than citizenship (Hirsch, 2000: 226; see also Slezking 1994;

That the Estonian state consisted of distinct ethnic groups as it did in the
Soviet Union could thus be seen as influential for how some of the Maausk
practitioners emphasised their connection to local groups and areas. The
current cultural policies of Estonia also support similar identification efforts
by encouraging organisation around ethnicities based on language and
cultural heritage, for example Ingrian Finns, Russian speakers and Seto folk
in southern Estonia. It can be claimed that there is, however, a risk that this
approach can prevent these groups from identifying as the ‘state-bearing
ethnicities’, while at the same time declaring the ethnic majority, in this case
‘ethnic Estonians’ as in the ‘rightful’ power position when leading the
country (Kuutma, Seljamaa and Västrik, 2012: 51).

It is noteworthy that the Maausk practitioners in general did not appear
to be very interested in this ‘majority ethnicity’ as Estonian, even though
there were no obstacles for them to take that position in society. Instead
they tended to frame the various local identities, which they identified with,
as indigenous. The official status of ‘indigenous’ in Europe has only been
granted to the Sámi people living in northern Scandinavia. Still, the idea of
representing an indigenous identity was illustrated for instance on the web

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2 The Maausk practitioners, however, emphasised the importance of that which was
traditionally Estonian, as I describe in later chapters. However, it was a local variation of
traditions inside Estonia that practitioners emphasised rather than those of Estonia in
general.
The Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions; hereafter Maavalla Koda, embodies in itself four Houses of believers in indigenous religions. Two religions are represented in Maavalla Koda: The Taara religion, created in 1930s and Estonian indigenous religion (Maauks) – nature worship. The aim of Maavalla Koda is to provide prerequisites for the maintenance and development of the indigenous religion and culture, following its creed and customs.

One of the most important tasks of Maavalla Koda is the introduction and evaluation of the indigenous tradition. Every Estonian, be he an infidel, a Christian, a Muslim, an adherent of the indigenous religion or an upholder of some other world view, should be proud of the religion and culture of his ancestors. For example, Koda compiles and publishes the Estonian runic calendar that reflects indigenous chronology and festivals. (For the adherents of the Estonian indigenous religion the year 10216 corresponds to the year 2003.) Also, public lectures are held and articles published in the media to introduce the Estonian traditional religion.

Maavalla Koda organizes the research, introduction and evaluation of the traditional culture. We have in Estonia a strong tradition of folklore research but it is based on the Western-Christian worldview. Thus Koda has to organize the research and interpretation of the indigenous tradition based on the indigenous worldview. For example, Koda is currently making preparations for a general and complex survey of ancient indigenous shrines (sacred groves, holy springs, sacred trees, stones, etc.). (www.maavald.ee/eng)

The way the tasks of the official organisation are described as evaluating, promoting and protecting the indigenous practice, faith, tradition and worldview, which were explicitly defined as indigenous, can be seen as examples of indigenous positioning. According to Ronald Niezen indigenous identity can be defined as a travelling discourse and global phenomenon, a new kind of political entity through which rights and a better position in the world can be claimed (Niezen, 2003: 3). I want to underline that I do not see indigenousness here as some kind of essence of a culturally unified and locally based group, but as a process; a process in which the local is interrelated with the global in many ways. Identification at a local level on the basis of dialectic differences and distinct cultural heritage is also happening in the southern part of Estonia, where, for example the ‘Seto’ identity is strong and they have even applied for indigenous group status. Also the previously described association with the Finno-Ugric groups illustrates that the ideas of indigenousness as a building
block of Maausk identity is not that far-fetched. Many of these groups have indigenous status as reindeer herders of Siberia.

One way to understand the positioning of Maausk as indigenous, is thus as a kind of claim-making, just as any kind of cultural politics can really be seen as claim-making directed towards the public sphere, as Niezen argues. In particular, the last section of the website quote can be seen as an effort to claim a particular position to protect the indigenous tradition and rights that are not taken care of by the state. According to Niezen, this new kind of political identity actually has influence over how the state manages its affairs (Niezen, 2003: 23). Niezen, however, refers to people who actually have indigenous status, which Maausk practitioners do not. Nonetheless the claimed distinct ethnicity, which is understood and described as indigenous on the website, still offers a framework from which to protect the rights of the practitioners of Maausk and place claims on the state. By doing this, the organisation relates itself to the global arena where indigenousness is tied to discourses of cultural minority rights and cultural heritage as part of the human rights discourse. If rights for ethnic and indigenous minorities were granted at the global level, the demands of the Maausk at the state level would become more difficult to contest.

One example of how Maausk relates to the global arena is through its involvement in the struggle of Finno-Ugric indigenous groups in the current Russian territory, through the organisation Fenno-Ugria. This involvement, and the kinship the Maausk practitioners feel with indigenous Finno-Ugrian groups, could stem from the perception of Finno-Ugrian identity as counter identity, as described earlier. I suggest thus that the Finno-Ugrian indigenous identity of Maausk practitioners can be seen as a kind of counter identity still used in the present day to claim position and rights in society.

The organisation and the practitioners also felt connected to Native American indigenous people. Terje described this connection in the following way:

We have been growing from this base where we are born. The bond we have with the local place, with the geography, with the nature that we have here, is important. We cannot be Buddhist here for instance. They have developed in a totally different climate. We have developed in this environment, like every nature religion in its own environment. [...] I find it natural to have relations with Native Americans who still live as nature worshippers. They are simply so similar to us, right? Not that we have to take their customs. They have their own
customs and rituals. We have our own Sauna culture. Their way to sweat feels foreign to me and different to our way.

In Terje’s view, each local place and its environment naturally had a different connection with nature, and thereby different traditions and a different ‘nature worship’ culture. Nevertheless she felt connected to Native Americans, who she saw as still living in a way that is based on traditions and tied to a local way of life.

I would thus argue that when describing and defining themselves as 1) indigenous 2) as those who study and protect the indigenous culture of Estonia, and 3) as connecting with struggles of other indigenous groups in the world, the Maausk organisation places itself in a particular position in society. It is a political position that helps them to acquire ways to influence their lives inside a state structure. This resonates with what Niezen writes about indigenous positioning:

Renewal or adoption of indigenous identity is manifested in cultural and political reforms at a variety of levels: in strengthening community loyalties; challenging state notions of citizenship, national culture, and individual rights; and, internationally, striving not only for equality within state [...] but also for a greater measure of self determination, recognition of indigenous peoples’ status as distinct societies with rights of self-governance and control of land resources (Niezen, 2003: xv).

According to Niezen indigenous people seek recognition and rights for self-determination from international forums, thereby giving rise to a new kind of global identity (Niezen, 2003: xv). Niezen writes that what is interesting in this identity is that even though it is relatively new it ‘refers to primordial identity, to people with primary attachment to land and culture, “traditional” people with lasting connection to ways of life that have survived “from time immemorial” (Niezen, 2003: 3). This connects well to how some of the Maausk practitioners liked to position themselves as local instead of Estonian, and how this local identity was framed as having a deeper roots and a particular connection to the land with distinctive cultural features. That the Maausk organisation and its practitioners define themselves as ‘indigenous people’ can thus be understood to have two purposes. First it aims to associate with particular local places, customs and traditions, and second to connect to a legal status through which these features of ‘traditional’ people can be protected.
A reason for the identity construction

I have described the Maausk identity as constructed from elements such as Finno-Ugrism, locality and indigenousness. I have also established that this can be seen as a new kind of political identity through which claims can be placed on the state by drawing on global human-rights discourses and indigenous struggles elsewhere. An important question now needs to be asked. Namely, why is it that the practitioners position themselves as a minority instead of belonging to the majority ‘state’ ethnicity in Estonia, which they could also choose to do? As I have shown, many of the sources that the practitioners drew from in their identity building (folk traditions and ideas of long roots, descent lines tied with unified cultural features) were actually the same sources used for national identity building in Estonia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the twentieth century.

It has been argued that the reason for the rise of ethnic, local, religious or ethno-nationalist identities in Europe currently is connected to the inability of neoliberal states to culturally and socially integrate and homogenize citizens (see for example Friedman in 2013, Woolfson in 2013). These neoliberal states are no longer able to offer social security, jobs and a platform for civic activities, which in turn fragmentises identities. However, according to Jonathan Friedman and Kaisa Ekholm Friedman (2013) it is important to make a distinction between globalisation discourse and the global systemic approach, with the former being seen by them as a flawed discourse (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, 2013: 244). In this discourse, globalisation is framed as a ‘new world, a global world, post-modern, post-national and hybrid’ (Friedman, 2004: 63), presuming that where before we were local we are now global. The globalisation discourse presents globalisation as something akin to an evolutionary process, where a new world emerges. For Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, however, globalisation is nothing new. Changes similar to high-speed financialisation, the information revolution, and new kinds of migration can be identified happening in the past as well, for example, between 1880 and 1920 (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, 2013: 248).

What Ekholm Friedman and Friedman suggest is a ‘global systemic approach’, which is ‘concerned with the historical dynamics of expansion and contradiction of imperial-hegemonic centres, the shift of such centres, and the articulation between such processes and social, cultural and political orders in both centres and peripheries’ (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman,
In this process it is possible to see the different phases of de-globalisation as well; it is not a unidirectional process but can be reversed.

According to Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, what is happening in this current phase of globalisation is: First, ‘massive capital export’ which creates new competitive centres, and, importantly, means capital accumulation moves from being a vertical process to financial hubs and enables flexible subcontracting and outsourcing units that affect the social order, and also the state. Secondly, the current phase of globalisation has increased both ‘horizontal and vertical polarization’. ‘Ethnification’ and new cultural-political movements are occurring at the same time as polarisation. Finally, migration from unsecure areas to countries which themselves are in decline leads to marginalisation of immigrants. (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, 2013: 248).

What is interesting in Ekholm Friedman and Friedman’s formulation is that ethnification occurs at the same time as polarisation in societies increases, because of the global processes at play. The process of ethnification leads to the development of identities based on exclusive membership relating to language and cultural traits, customs and traditions distinct from others. It could be argued then that the *Maausk* identity is an example of this kind of ‘ethnified’ identity, since the *Maausk*, as I have shown in this chapter, have constructed the identity of a community based on distinct cultural traits seen as inherited from the ancient past. However, according to Friedman ethnification does not necessarily need to be seen as a reaction to globalisation as such, but instead it should be understood as being situated within the articulation of global processes and local social orders (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, 2013: 249). This means that ethnification is not a direct reaction to globalisation, but, more specifically, a reaction to the decline of the homogenisation of citizens inside a nation-state, as I understand it. This decline happens through the decentralisation of capital accumulation due to neoliberalism, which increases polarisation through structural changes of society. Identification with the state becomes less desirable when it offers little in return; when social security and means of livelihood are not enhanced, the state is no longer representative of the people.

I suggest that the affective positioning (Wetherell 2012) of *Maausk* practitioners as indigenous local people is tied to such a polarisation of society and a decline in the unifying power of the state. Don Kalb has also identified the downward pressure of social rights, solidarity and social welfare, which in turn creates downward pressure on the legitimacy of state elites and the political classes. This process originates from the transforma-
tion of ‘national welfares, socialist and developmentalist states’ into capitalist competitive states in the neoliberal marketplace (Kalb, 2011: 4). Even though there is a difference between state capitalism, states and processes (when comparing for instance Scandinavian social welfare countries to post-Soviet, strongly neoliberal Baltic countries), the general rule, according to Kalb, is a decline in the legitimacy of the state and political classes (Kalb, 2011: 4). Kalb thereby explains the rise of working-class neo-nationalism as a result of the failure of the state power to maintain homogenising power. I would argue that in Estonia, downward pressure and dispossessions created by the neoliberal state generate identities also constructed around ethnicity, indigenousness and local places as shown by my empirical examples here. Identities develop which are more fragmented than those at the state level.

According to Ekholm Friedman and Friedman the ‘decline of the state-based public sector and the assimilation machine’ opens up opportunities for alternative identities to emerge (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, 2013: 249). However, this does not mean that cultural differences disappear when state-based homogenising works well. According to Ekholm Friedman and Friedman the cultural differences are then a part of the private lives of individuals and not used for political purposes. Pluralism would exist, but within a public sphere with shared values and institutions (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, 2013: 250).

Ekholm Friedman and Friedman (2013) and Kalb (2011) claim that neoliberal globalisation should not be seen as directly resisted by different kinds of movements and identities, like indigenous positioning. Instead, the impacts of global economics tend to reveal themselves in ‘nation-state arenas’. According to Kalb, the global power should always be treated as an abstraction that nonetheless impacts how the state uses its power, which in turn directly influences people’s lives (Kalb, 2011: 12). This is why these movements are visible within the frameworks of states, as is the case with the indigenous identity of *Maausk*. The practitioners of *Maausk* do not often identify with the state. In addition, they sometimes express criticism towards how the state manages its affairs and relates to *Maausk* practitioners. The feeling of discontent towards the state is illustrated in the following quotation from the website of the *Estonian House of Taara and Native Religions* (Maavalla koda):

> We can freely develop as the indigenous people only when the Estonian legislation recognizes indigenous values and customs. Thus one of the tasks of
Maavalla Koda is to represent the religious interests of the indigenous people in the relations with the state. Unfortunately, the Estonian legislation still follows the examples culturally alien or even hostile to us. For example, the Estonian Republic does not recognize our indigenous shrines as sacred places, forbids the following of the indigenous funeral rites, does not warrant the peace of grave of our ancestors, etc.

Special attention in Maavalla Koda is paid to the educational life in Estonia. Koda, together with other non-Christian religious organisations has opposed actively the introduction of the compulsory religious instruction in comprehensive schools. Koda has also emphasized that the present curriculum of the Estonian schools does not pay sufficient attention to the traditional culture and religion and treats it inadequately. (www.maavad.ee/eng)

This is a criticism of the state’s lack of interest towards those demands that the organisation has been established to protect. In other words, the Maausk understanding is that the state does not protect the shrines and heritage, and traditional culture is not valued. As we saw in chapter two, a recurring opinion among the practitioners was that there was no actual need for an official organisation, in order for them to follow the traditions and practice Maausk. They did, however see it as an important establishment when it came to protecting and fighting for the rights of the practitioners. This can be seen as a result of the Maausk practitioners not feeling completely secure in society and therefore seeing a need for an organisation that could serve as their voice in contacts with the authorities. The widespread feeling that the claims of the practitioners were not taken seriously is illustrated in this quote from the interview with Raivo:

The state is not equal to all. They should be consistent towards everybody [...] I personally think that I am not content with the stands that the state is taking. Our prime minister is not as conscious as he should be. I think he is skewed to the side of the Christians and does not care about the issues of Maausk and indigenous people. This is why the development scheme of protecting sacred places in Estonia has been only partly fulfilled.

The Estonian state had, in fact, funded a programme directed towards collecting information and protecting the historical sacred places in nature. In the Maausk view these places are important heritage that needs to be protected and studied as indigenous history. Some of the practitioners actually had been, and still were, involved with this project. However, the state’s interest in protecting the sacred places was not seen to be adequate and problems with funding was recurring; the practitioners often com-
explained to me about the state’s lack of interest. There was a view that *Maausk* was not given adequate attention or taken seriously by the authorities and politicians, as illustrated in the interview with Andrus:

*Maausk* is somehow seen as a disturbance. When there is a President’s reception for the Independence Day, there is a representative of the Muslims, there is a representative of the orthodox Christianity but a representative of *Maausk* is not invited. It does not really matter if there are many of us or only a few, since today we have not been invited. It is a matter of choices. It is about how the state is relating to us and they are not interested in our rights as practitioners.

Raivo and Andrus’ perspective that the state’s treatment of its citizens was biased, can be understood as criticism towards it. Framing *Maausk* as a kind of religious minority which was not taken seriously can be seen in relation to the general claim of the practitioners that the official organisation was established only for the purpose of fighting for rights. Alongside the claims of being an indigenous group, the positioning of *Maausk* as a religious group can thus be seen as another way to try to influence the state, and make claims on it. It is interesting that reluctance to define *Maausk* as religion, discussed in the last chapter, was not present where rights and recognition were demanded of the state. Consequently, this reinforces my argument that the specific position that *Maausk* had created in society can be viewed as a type of political identity.

As previously mentioned, the global level of economic policies play out in nation state arenas, which can be seen as causing downward pressure and thereby fragmentation of identities (Kalb 2011, Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman 2013). These have a rather specific pattern and history in Estonia. When the Soviet Union collapsed and Estonia gained its independence in 1991, the country experienced a collapse of its macro structures of the party state and the administered economy. At that time the rescue of the post-socialist state was understood to be ‘a shock therapy’ – a neoliberal package of price liberalisation, stabilisation and privatisation of previously state-owned businesses, housing and land resources (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999: 5). The shock therapy advocated total collapse before building a new neoliberal economic policy with political, economic and land reforms. Burawoy and Verdery argue that this collapse produced, in all post-Soviet states, a series of micro-economic responses where grassroots level initiatives were started for the purpose of survival (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999: 2). It also created a refashioning of communities with particular identities, not always in a way intended by the state (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999: 7).
This led to fragmented identities and the development of groups with closed memberships. In Estonia neoliberal policies were embraced and the general public was supportive of the reforms and determined to build an independent state.

After the ‘transition’ years the Baltic countries can all be ‘classified as belonging to a neoliberal type of Central and Eastern European countries’ (Kallaste and Woolfson, 2013: 253; Sommers, Woolfson and Juska, 2014: 405). Estonia did quite well, with a steady growth in GDP and other markers showing improvements in living standards. The three countries were even named ‘The Baltic Tigers’ because of the massive economic boom of 2000–2007 (Sommers, Woolfson and Juska, 2014: 405).

However, after the impacts of the 2008 global economic crisis, Estonia’s ‘austerity policy’ put in motion another wave of heavy neoliberal reforms. Sommers et al. (2014) studied the outcome of the new reforms and policies in the Baltic States. They concluded that even though these policies were heavily praised by the global neoliberal elite, the everyday lives of people have become less secure. Sommers et al. depict a gloomy picture of austerity policies in all three Baltic countries, where unemployment rates have risen. New employment laws have resulted in lower salaries and a rise in short term employment without benefits. Social welfare reforms have been aimed at cutting government spending and increasing taxes, poverty has risen in all three countries, and demographic sustainability has worsened, with the rapid decline in average income impacting levels of consumption. Demographic sustainability is further threatened by heavy migration. A so-called *austeriat* was created, which means ‘a dislocated workforce driven by poverty, unemployment and economic duress’ (Sommers, Woolfson and Juska, 2014: 406–408). The free movement of labour inside the European Union in this case was an economic survival strategy rather than a choice.

Based on this, one can describe Estonia as a country where the state does not necessarily offer social security, a means of livelihood or solidarity to all its citizens. This paves the way for fragmented identities based on exclusive membership of groups that have a particular language and cultural traits, in the way that Ekholm Friedman and Friedman have suggested. Sommers, Woolfson and Juska describe muted protests against the austerity measures in all three countries, and suggest that the lack of popular resistance is ‘profoundly damaging to the cohesion and sustainability of society in the longer run where its population chooses “exit” rather than “voice”’ (Sommers, Woolfson and Juska 2014: 411). I would however argue that in spite of the lack of popular protest, the formation of minority identities can
lead to meaningful social dialogue and be affective way to file claims with the state and resist these policies. What I am suggesting is that Maausk identity as local and indigenous could be seen as a form of resistance, or at least as a reaction other than ‘exit’, in order to gain a ‘voice’ in society.

Affective pattern of identity construction

In this chapter I have argued that an expressed emotional belonging to Finno-Ugric and other indigenous people has contributed to constructing a particular Maausk identity. Maausk identity can be understood as a cultural identity in the sense that Hall suggests; that in these identities the self and society interact. Consequently, personal feelings align with communal identities so contributing to the affective identification process. I have suggested that this identity could be framed as political, in the sense that it was regarded as a tool for achieving a better position in society. I have also discussed how it relates to the idea of fragmented identities that evolve inside neoliberal states. In such conditions homogenising powers are weakened due to the downward pressure of the state, which diminishes livelihood possibilities and social security. When the state no longer is thought to represent all of its citizens’ interests, allies are looked for elsewhere. This was the case for the Maausk organisation and practitioners who sought global allies based on a perception of shared indigenous struggles and human rights discourses.

These kinds of large-scale structural processes and very personal affective positioning acts and attachments may seem to be far removed from one another. However, to understand affective experiences as patterns comprising a wide range of possible ingredients, it can be valuable to investigate the wider processes and narratives of society. Wetherell also advocates tying affective patterns to the wider structures of society. S/he argues that sometimes this weaving of societal structures and affective patterns is noticeable to participants, and sometimes it is only noticeable to a researcher (Wetherell, 2012: 100). Wetherell claims that sometimes the researcher and the research participants’ descriptions of things are not epistemologically equivalent, since they are products of different knowledge practices and production (Wetherell, 2012: 101). Subsequently, the explanations the researchers offer might not match the research participants’ orientations and sense-making. This can be illustrated in my case where I see the affective lives and discourses and structures of society intertwined in
identity construction as Stuart Hall (1990) and Margareth Wertherell (2012) have suggested. The *Maausk* practitioners, on the other hand, probably do not consider the relation between global neoliberal processes and affective patterns when they sense a connection to Finno-Ugric groups, when they emotionally support the claims of indigenous struggles, or express proudness of their local roots. I do not claim that the researcher’s view is better or more accurate; it simply adds another perspective informed and influenced by chosen theories.

Finally, I wish to be cautious of claiming very strong and fixed causal parallels between affects and social structures. What I have suggested is that different factors contributing to identity construction are interlinked in complex ways that are then part of an affective pattern. Affects are not merely a pre-personal and pre-cultural bodily reaction to things, but are complex patterns where social, historical, personal, psychological and economical factors come together. Affective patterns can have endless ingredients entwined, or only a few. They can be of short duration and never repeated, or they can get stuck and through repetition formulate quite solidified patterns of affect. It is the more solidified and repeated affective patterns related to identity construction that I have investigated in this chapter. These are linked with processes in both the society under consideration and the world at large.
CHAPTER 4

Affective sacred places in nature

Hingedė pėv (Day of the ancestors) at Kunda Hiimągi, a sacred hill in Viru county on November 2013. "The ancestors like to appear with a bang": said one of the practitioners to me while we were both struck by the impressive sunrise and migrating birds in the dark sky. (Field notes November 2013)

According to the Estonian semiotician Auli Kütt, a sacred place in nature in Estonia can be a single object such as a tree, a stone or a spring, or a wider land area such as a sacred grove or a hill, which contains all or some of these objects. Sacred groves and, sometimes, single sacred objects are generally
called *hiis* (Kütt, 2007: 185), a word which is also common among other Baltic Finns. Such places in nature, which with time have come to be regarded as sacred, can either have a historical connection, or be primarily personal. Historical sacred places contain archaeological and historical evidence of past cultic use. Personal sacred places do not have the historical context, are located in a forest or garden near to the homes of individual practitioners, are often only used by those individuals and are visited alone or with small groups. In contrast, historical sacred places are generally used for larger gatherings with many participants taking part in common rituals and ceremonies. Historical sacred places are also visited outside these joint events. Gatherings in the historical sacred places could be seen as the very backbone of the joint practice of *Maausk*. These places are for connecting with the supernatural, as well as for being in contact with one’s roots and heritage. In addition, historical sacred places are also venues where individual practitioners can meet likeminded people.

In this chapter I take a closer look at how the practitioners described their relationship to both the historical and personal sacred places, and how they are used as sites for practising *Maausk*. Visiting the sacred places and taking part in rituals and gatherings there, can evoke all kinds of feelings, emotions, sensations, thoughts, memories, and corporeal reactions. I therefore analyse more specifically emotional experiences related to the sacred places and the role affective patterns may play in making them meaningful (cf Casey 1996, Wetherell 2014). In the first part of the chapter I focus on the relationship between attunement and affective atmospheres experienced in historical sacred places. In the latter part I look at how emotional attachment to sacred places can be constituted verbally and how affective patterns in relation to sacred places may have particular social consequences.

Wetherell (2014) argues that in the ‘mesh’ of different elements working within the affect, one can find patterns and order, though not in a fixed way. Affect is always dynamic, in that it can flow in every possible direction. According to Wetherell, affective textures flow in everyday life and are shaped by a complicated patterned mix of ‘somatic, discursive, situated, historical, social, psychological and cultural’ features (Wetherell, 2014: 4). This means that affective experiences are connected with cultural and social processes, memories, thoughts and imagination, and personal histories, which all contribute to affective patterns.

1 See Veikko Anttonen’s 2010 analysis of the *hiis* in the Finnish context.
Using Wetherell’s approach to affect as my starting point, and as discussed in chapter one, I do not see affect as pre-cultural, pre-social or pre-personal, in contrast to some scholars (cf. Massumi 2002, Thrift 2007). Neither do I see affects as mere bodily reactions that only later reach cognitive processes when bodily sensations are interpreted. Still, affects are not always produced consciously; they can also be sub-conscious. People are not always be aware of all the preconceptions, memories, thoughts and other background factors that influence their affective lives. Affective moments do not appear from empty space. This view of affect pre-supposes that both corporeal and cognitive processes are at play, thus blurring the boundaries often constructed between mind and body. It is also possible to tune in and orient oneself so that the experience resembles previous affective experiences. According to Wetherell this ‘ongoingness’ of affects is better expressed as patterns (Wetherell, 2014: 23). In this chapter I build my analysis of sacred places primarily on this understanding of affective patterns. However, in the analysis of the various empirical examples, I focus on distinct features of different affective patterns, sometimes concentrating more on the corporeal experiences and sometimes more on the discursive and societal elements.

Behavioural rules and characteristics of the sacred place

With the help of folklore collected from archives, people involved with Maausk have established rules and regulations concerning sacred places in nature, which are posted on the organisation’s official website (www.mavallakoda.ee). They are also printed in a multidisciplinary book about sacred places in Estonia containing articles contributed by academics offering different perspectives about these places in Estonia (Valk & Kaasik 2007). I start this chapter by describing the characteristics of sacred places and behavioural rules related to visiting the places, in order to discuss the influence of these on the affective patterns experienced in sacred places. More specifically I look into the affective pattern of affective ‘atmosphere,’ which can be also understood as ‘mood’ using Tim Edensor’s, Ben Higmore’s and Jonathan Flatley’s conceptions about different aspects of moods. The way I understand mood in the context of this chapter, is that affects and spaces are interrelated in mood and thus experienced in relation to each other. In this way they form an affective pattern with specific components. For instance, if positive feelings are experienced in a particular
place, the experience of the place may become positive. This can be extended to shared feelings; places can have a positive atmosphere that relates to the individual moods of the people present in that place and vice versa, the perceived atmosphere of a place itself may influence the mood of the individuals.

The behavioural guide on the organisation’s website addresses both the individual’s state of mind, and aspects related to the body and physical behaviour. To start with, all visitors are expected to be physically and mentally clean, while also being respectful when entering a sacred place. One should always greet the spirits and say goodbye to them when leaving the place. The peace of the place should be maintained and making loud noises should be avoided. Trees and branches must not be cut down, but it is permitted to use fallen branches for making a fire in the place. Plants are considered to be alive and have spirits, so picking them should also be avoided. It is not permitted to drink alcohol in the sacred place nor have bad thoughts or act violently against any fellow human being in the area. Nothing but trash should be taken from from the area. Springs, offering stones and trees are to be treated with particular respect – you should not put your feet in the spring, for example. In addition, if you take healing water from the spring, you should offer something back, preferably something silver. (www.maavallakoda.ee). This was done in different ways; sometimes practitioners left coins in the place and sometimes silver was carved from an amulet on a necklace.

The first time my family and I were to take part in a joint ritual of the Maausk group in one of the historical sacred places, I was sent some instructions in advance. I was to wear white clothes and go to the sauna or clean myself the night before. I was informed that in the sacred place it was not permitted to pick flowers, break any tree branches, or harm nature in any way. I was also told that if I wanted to make offerings they had to be homemade products. We followed the rules as best we could, but I was somewhat concerned that my young daughter would not be able to follow the flower picking rules. My fear came true when she did indeed want to pick flowers and one of the participants reminded us kindly that it was not allowed since “sacredness comes from the earth, and everything is alive”. However, the remark was not made with absolute seriousness but spoken quite casually. This was my first experience of how the rules surrounding the rituals and the sacred places tended to be interpreted in different ways by different people.
The behavioural rules were, in fact, negotiated all the time among the practitioners, as well as in contacts with any outsiders who wanted to visit the places. One example was the perspective on offerings and gifts that were left in the sacred places. Usually these offerings consisted of food, coins or woollen threads and braided belts that were tied to the tree branches. The purpose of the gifts was to honour the ancestors and spirits, or to express a wish or a prayer to them. Food offerings were generally eaten after they had been offered, but the threads tied to the trees were left in place. This practice was sometimes questioned. For example Nina, one of the practitioners, expressed concern that the ribbons tied to the trees might violate the growth of the tree, and wanted people to consider using biodegradable material. She appeared to be annoyed by people’s apparent inability to appreciate the tree as the most important part of giving the offerings, and remarked on how their behaviour went against the rule of not harming any plants and trees in the sacred places. Her views on how the offerings should be made were thus not necessarily shared by all of the other Maausk practitioners.
A sacred tree and a stone in *Tammealuse Hiis* in June 2014 with gifts of food and coins placed on a stone, and threads tied around tree branches

Another topic of discussion among the practitioners of *Maausk* was the maintenance of the scared place – should sacred places in nature be taken care of, or not? At the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s there were some efforts to repair and re-establish historical sacred places. However, over time perspectives shifted somewhat, so that sacred places were no longer seen as something that could be created or recreated. Instead, even when the intention was good, human interference with the sacred places came to be seen as an interruption of the ideal state of the sacred place – that of
untouched nature. As an example, a walking path in the sacred places could be altered because a tree had fallen across it, which was not supposed to be moved. Letting nature remain completely untouched in the sacred places is a challenge since they are also used in Maausk practices. So this ideal of the sacred place as untouched was continuously negotiated among the practitioners. This is illustrated in my interview with Mart, who had resigned from the official organisation but still defined himself as a practitioner of Maausk:

Mart: I believe that the Hiis were founded once. I read in a book once, maybe it was about Vadjans or someone else, relatives of Estonians anyway, that they took a sacred stone with them to a new place. It was done in a similar way in the Samma Hiis as well. They cleaned the springs and planted trees and so on. And at the same time there is the idea that one can’t touch anything in the sacred places, and one needs to offer silver. One can’t even clean the place a little! It is a nice story but it doesn’t fit with reality. The idea that Hiis should be on higher ground, for example. There aren’t many high spots in Estonia. And the story with the Paluvillage Hiis: There has been a machine there already and it has been digging. The other side of the hill is more untouched. But it is very difficult to leave it untouched. New traditions have evolved. It could be possible to leave a small place untouched, but otherwise this issue should be in tune with the current reality. The truth can’t be found in some old books. For me it seems as if things change all the time. Some kind of change is happening all the time

Jenni: So do you personally have some rules concerning these places?

Mart: Of course I do, and in the Maavalla koda they try to present the idea that the general rules should be followed very closely. But that might mean closing down the Hiis-sites. It would affect everything and everybody. One would not dare to carry out anything in the Hiis. If you act the wrong way you will get in trouble. That would have an effect on people.

What is being negotiated here in other words is the authority and the ownership of the rules. Who is defines the rules of the sacred places and on what grounds? Should the basis for the rules be traditional behavioural norms taken from folklore archives, or should they be adjusted to ensure the usability of and accessibility to the place? Later on Mart said to me: ‘Their idea was that absolutely nothing should be touched, but as you just saw, with Estonian nature if nothing gets touched it becomes one impenetrable bush! If you wait long enough a place like that (sacred place untouched nature) just develops. It takes hundreds of years’. Even if Mart did not see a problem in altering the physical state of the sacred places, other aspects of how to treat these places were important in his view. In the
interview he stated that: ‘One should not scream in the Hiis, or in the forest in general. Being loud is undesirable. And one should certainly not think bad thoughts, while being in the Hiis.’ According to Mart such behaviour could disturb the peace of the place and have a negative impact on the visitor. The ideal norm of a sacred place for him appeared to be a place that should be visited and used, and that could be altered to gain access, but there were still distinct limits for how one was supposed to behave there.

A different, more protectionist view of the sacred places was provided by Vello in an interview in a newspaper focused on nature protection efforts. He was a Maausk representative as well as one of the people I interviewed for my study.

In that time (the early 1990s) we thought it possible to restore (sacred places), that if they had been destroyed it was possible to restore them. The first big effort was to plant sacred oak groves, the TV and a couple of hundred people were there. Later I started to do research to find answers to questions I had. I found out that hiis does not mean oak grove as a rule, that it is not possible to restore a hiis place, that it has to be restored by itself. Hiis is a natural thing. When we try to restore hiis, then it is a violent intervention, it is not natural anymore, and in that kind of place, the forces do not come out. About the aggressive behaviour in the hiis - most of the hiis places are injured and crazily exploited. As long as there is fertile surface, where it is possible to grow grass, bushes and trees, a hiis is capable of restoring itself. Since these places have been hurt, perhaps that is why people start to behave in an aggressive way there. When the place has a force and is in a good condition, it can calm you down and it makes you clean. (Looduse Sõber 4/2008, author’s translation) http://www.loodusjakiri.ee/loodus/artikkel1275_1269.html

This opinion returns us to the idea that the nature in sacred places should remain completely untouched, that it should be left to grow and develop without interruption, following its own course. And, as the newspaper article suggests, the Maausk emphasis on attaching rules to the places can be understood as a way of trying to keep them sacred. Veikko Anttonen, has written about the folk beliefs of Baltic Finns from a historical perspective. According to Anttonen, the concept of “sacred” historically meant something that has been set aside from others, and which was regulated by the behavioural norms of the society at the time (Anttonen 2010: 121). The behavioural rules attached to sacred places in Maausk evidence a similar
way of thinking. For instance, the sacred places in Maausk were regarded as separate from the ordinary forest where people constantly left traces by picking berries or mushrooms or, on a larger scale, treated it as an economic asset by cutting down trees. The sacred places in nature separated from the rest of the natural landscape can be interpreted in relation to what this landscape contains. Namely, when travelling through the Estonian countryside, the Soviet past becomes quickly apparent through abandoned kolkhoze buildings and the Soviet-style houses in village centres. There are also more recent impacts from forestry, timber industry through heavy logging for instance. Nature can also be used for tourism which often leads to altering the nature through landscape development to make it more accessible and usable. This is something that many of the practitioners fought against. Thus, sacred places can be viewed as attempts to construct separate spheres with a different meaning and different symbolic nature than the rest of the nature, away from the polluted Soviet landscape or nature for profit.

The notion of separation, that you should leave your ordinary, everyday self behind when entering the sacred places, was also present in the requirement to clean your body and clear your mind. Homemade offerings can also be seen as a symbol of a space set aside from the everyday life, in the sense that these were different from “unclean” industrially manufactured everyday food.

I also want to underline that the practitioners in the above examples related the behavioural rules to the idea that the sacred places could have an effect on people’s moods. What Vello seems to suggest in the newspaper interview is that when certain rules are respected in relation to sacred places, they had the power to influence the affective mood in a positive way. For example, rules emphasising cleanliness, calmness and a respectful attitude, that you should sauna before the visit and ensure you enter the sacred place with a positive state of mind, could be seen to encourage a calm and clean experience.

If these rules were not followed and the sacred places were harmed, they could negatively influence people’s emotional state, as Vello states in the newspaper article. Mart, on the other hand, had a different opinion. In his view having too strict rules for how the sacred places should be treated

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2 This can be due the fact that the behavioural rules have been constructed with the help of similar historical material about folk beliefs in Estonia.

3 I address this later in the chapter.
would be problematic for accessibility, both physically and mentally. However, he nonetheless described it as important to follow some rules to create a positive affective experience. Still, rules that were unfamiliar or seen as exaggerated and too restricting could, according to Mart, negatively influence the experience of the visit and even in the long-term prevent people from visiting the sacred places.

Anticipated attunement

According to Tim Edensor the affective engagement with place can provide texture and motivations to particular feelings that attune visitors to particular affective experiences. (Edensor 2012: 1108.) He uses as an example the illuminated atmospheres in annual light festivals in Birmingham, and describes visitors who repeatedly return to the festival and who consequently expect and anticipate a particular affective experience through the festival. Edensor calls this ‘anticipated attunement’ and argues that it can be produced through repeated visits to particular locations or situations (Edensor 2012). Following Edensor’s line of reasoning, the behavioural rules attached to the sacred places could be seen to contribute to such an anticipated attunement among the Maasusk practitioners, together with the regular visits and repetitive practices during them. The interview with Mart and the newspaper interview with Vello could be understood as describing the significance of such attunement. For instance, they spoke about the importance of following behavioural rules to be properly prepared and in a particular state of mind, so as to be able to experience sacred places in the best possible way. This is also illustrated in the interview I carried out with Vello. We talked about visiting sacred places, and he told me that in addition to going to the personally important sacred places he visited many others, primarily to study them:

Vello: One cannot forget what kind of places you are dealing with when going to sacred place. These are places that the ancestors have put special forces and all of their prayers and wishes into. One should prepare for sacred places by unwinding and calming down. Then it is possible to feel good in them. I always address places personally before going in. Otherwise these places can tire you out tremendously.

Jenni: Interesting. What does it mean to address them personally?

Vello: One should treat these places like living beings. So, it means say hello. One should greet the place – spirits, ancestors and goods. Let them know that you are coming with good intentions and with friendship. It ensures the visit will be good.
One of the general ways to greet the spirits was to knock on the knocking board hung between trees at the entrance of the sacred place. But I observed that Vello usually addressed the sacred place with words when entering them. Greeting the spirits when entering and leaving the sacred place was also one of the behavioural rules. According to Ben Highmore we are able to ‘tune in’ to or ‘tune out’ of a particular mood by focusing our attention and orienting ourselves (Highmore 2013: 435). With this perspective, the practice of greeting could be seen as a way to consciously attune one’s affective state to the visit and mark the difference between the state of mind outside and inside the place, which in turn could be seen to influence the mood while one is in the sacred place. As Vello also suggested, preparing for the visit by calming oneself down, as well as the practice of greeting could also help to ensure that the visit was a good one.

This idea that the behavioural rules attached to sacred places attuned the practitioners was also illustrated by how some of them talked about the custom of wearing white clothes at the joint gatherings and rituals. Not everyone thought this rule was very important, while others emphasised it strongly, but for different reasons. Peeter told me for instance, that it was important for him to wear white linen clothes in the sacred places, since this was how it was traditionally done in past gatherings, which made him feel more ‘authentic’4. Ester told me that wearing particular clothes made her feel like she was following the traditions tied to the sacred places. Maie, on the other hand, explained that wearing white linen clothes in the sacred places made her feel more festive: ‘It shows that I have made an effort to look pretty and it makes me feel that something special is happening. There is a party going on’. All of these motivations were thus related to how certain preparations and practices could influence the practitioners’ moods when visiting the sacred places. In particular the example from Maie illustrates how such aspects could contribute to an anticipated attunement. By putting on white clothes she started to get into the festive mood already before going to the gathering. This relates to the earlier discussion regarding the polluted landscape and today’s commercial use of the forest, the practice of wearing white or festive clothes could also create a space outside of these non desirable symbolic spheres.

4 The feeling of authenticity is analysed more closely in a later chapter
Mood as affective patterns

Another way to understand the role different moods can play in how the sacred places and the rituals that took place there were experienced by the participants, would be to see them in relation to Wetherell’s conception of affective patterns. According to Wetherell, the patterning and logic of affects can be unravelled through an analysis combining the body’s physical reactions, emotions, thoughts, personal histories, social relations and interpretative patterns (Wetherell, 2012: 14). To do this, I use my own affective experience from my very first visit to a sacred place as an example.

At the time I had just commenced my fieldwork and I was somewhat anxious about how my research participants would receive me, since it would be the first time I met most of them. Consequently, I was determined to follow the behavioural rules tied to the sacred places as well as I could. However, I had spent the night before the ritual on the ferry from Sweden to Estonia, which had been an uncomfortable journey. I hadn’t sleep well due to the rocking boat, and in the morning my daughter had awoken early, waking me just as I had finally managed to go to sleep. We hurried from the boat to the car rental office, stopped briefly in the supermarket to buy something to eat and some eggs to offer to the spirits, and drove two hours to the place in North-Eastern Estonia where the sacred place was located. When we arrived I tried to focus on the event and the new fieldwork site, but I could not help feeling tired, hungry, sweaty and dirty both mentally and physically. Considering what I knew of the behavioural rules, this made me feel fake and disrespectful. I felt that I was not in an appropriate mood to enter the sacred place and I had not prepared myself for it in the way they had asked. Even though I was wearing white clothes, this just felt superficial. I had not had time to shower in the morning and I felt unclean. In my taped fieldwork diary from that event I repeated several times that I needed to shower and I should be clean in order to be in the sacred place. It felt disrespectful arriving like that, not properly prepared.

One way to understand the specific emotional experience of my first visit, would be in relation to what I learned as a child. Sacred places such as churches and mosques should be entered with respect and certain behavioural codes should be followed. I felt in that first visit that I was not fulfilling the code of conduct, in particular the rules concerning physical cleanliness when entering a sacred place. I had wanted to respect the rules of sacred places but felt I failed to do so. This combined with my desire to make a good impression and fully understand the experiences of the practi-
tioners, contributed to putting me in a particular mood. In other words, the anticipated attunement created by the purity aspect of the behavioural code and my eagerness to respect the sacred place together gave me a more negative experience than a positive one. My experience is an example of the complexity of affective patterns (Wetherell 2012), in the sense that expectations, rules and previous interpretation scenarios became intertwined with my feeling of uncleanliness during that particular day.

Since then I have entered sacred places several times, and my physical state has not affected my mood in quite the same way as during that first visit. In subsequent visits I have never felt dirty in a mental way due to not following the rules exactly. This is partly because my perception has changed during recurring visits. I am no longer concerned about following the rules strictly because I know that they are somewhat flexible. After many visits, I now experience the sacred places as positive and calming. Nonetheless, my fieldwork diaries illustrate that my experience of each visit was still often related to the way and the extent to which the behavioural rules were followed. Certain preparations for being in the sacred place still influenced my experience. For example, a sauna visit the night before one of the gatherings made me realise how the physical experience of the sauna could serve as a factor that tuned me in to a particular affective experience in the sacred place. What I described in my fieldwork diary was that visiting the sauna left my body and mind in a relaxed state. This state lingered so that it affected my experience of the sacred place the following day (Field diary, June 2014).

This example illustrates how behavioural rules related to sacred places can attune the visitor and influence the affective experience. However, the experience or the type of affect of course varies depending on the attunement of the visitor. Interviewees explained that they expected calmness, relaxation and happiness from a visit to a sacred place. However affective patterns can combine in a number of ways and consequently vary for each the visitor.

Moving bodies and atmosphere

A particular mood can be framed as a kind of affective atmosphere, and such atmospheres in sacred places can be tightly linked to bodily experiences of the individuals during the rituals and gatherings. An example of this was the way collective dancing and singing during the joint gatherings
impacted the affective atmosphere. Traditional folk dancing, where everyone sang and danced together in a group, was generally a part of the gatherings organised in the sacred places. The dancing experiences were often enjoyable, but occasionally something went wrong, and what was meant to be a positive experience was affected by a disharmonious feeling and a sense of awkwardness or embarrassment. At least this was my experience on an ice cold winter day on a sacred hill in Northern Estonia, as is shown in my fieldwork diary:

January 2013

The dancing-singing today was just awful. I think it was Urmas who suggested some dancing and singing to warm up. My toes were freezing so I was happy at first. But the singing was somehow hesitant and somewhat out of tune. Still, it was easy to follow. I tried to sing louder to support the singing, and it seemed as if all the others were trying to do the same. But it just made things worse, because it emphasised the weak performance of the leader singer. Dancing, or more accurately, moving along the circle, was quite difficult because of the huge amount of snow there and the small space we were all crammed into. I felt really awkward. The singing and dancing faded away quite quickly.

This is an example of how the collective singing and dancing in the sacred places could be a more negative experience. However, when everything went well, it created a sense of connection and joy, based on the experience of being part of a collective of bodies moving in the same direction. The following extract from my fieldwork diary illustrates this:

Early November 2013

Vello suggested singing the songs that are usually sang on the day of honouring and commemorating the ancestors. He said that the dancing circle that usually goes clockwise needed to be turned in the opposite direction when singing to the ancestors. The day is a part of a longer time period in late autumn when the ancestors are remembered. I decided that I wanted to feel connected to the event and chose to focus on some of my deceased relatives. When we started the singing and dancing the melody was unknown to me. The tone of it was melancholic. I quickly captured the melody, and focused on answering the leader singer’s singing. We moved in a slow rhythm and there were no dissonances or disturbances to interrupt the rhythm. I started to enjoy the shared movement of dancing and voices joined together in harmony. I was comfortable focusing on my relatives and started to feel the melancholic tone of the song. The singing and dancing started to feel heavier. It was almost as a site of mourning. I think the leader singer was transmitting his sad mood to the event. Maybe he was mourning somebody in particular. The song ended, we all stood there for a while in silence, and then somebody else started singing again. The next song was
about welcoming ancestors to the occasion. The singing and dancing did not feel so heavy anymore, but the enjoyment of rhythmic coordinated movement and singing remained.

The two extracts from my field notes illustrate the relational quality that affective experiences may have. According to Wetherell, the interrelated affect’s patterning can be held inter-subjectively across a few or more participants (Wetherell, 2012: 14). Wetherell’s argument is based on neuropsychological work that claims that our nervous system seems to be able to capture the nervous system of others. It does this for example by observing gestures and facial expressions that help us to ‘re-run’ the psychological states of others. According to Wetherell, in these situations it is possible that subjectivities become entangled, making it possible for affect to be distributed among individuals and for affective episodes to be co-created. This also suggests that affects can be contagious and transmitted inside groups. (Wetherell 2012: 88). The dance situations in the examples above can be interpreted as instances where at least some part of the affective states were co-created and distributed inside the dancing group. As was obvious from my field notes, I interpreted the situation in the first example as if something was uneasy; maybe the singing was not good and the dancing was difficult on the snowy, lumpy ground. When trying to influence the situation we all acted in relation to one another. When someone sang louder all the others followed, trying to help change the situation. And when it did not seem to get any better, the singing and dancing just faded away. In the second example, the whole group created more harmonious collective dancing and singing. The movement was somehow effortless and smooth, no one stumbled and the voices were in tune and fitted together well. All of these aspects, and thereby all of the participating individuals, can be seen as contributing to co-creating a particular affective state.

Another quite different way to understand the atmosphere of these two dancing occasions would be to look at the role of the moving bodies. As I have mentioned, Wetherell argues that affective patterns have multiple components and one of them is the role of embodiment and the body. However, she does not elaborate on, for example, how the movement of the body can contribute to affective patterns. Derek P. McCormack (2013) argues that moving bodies should be understood as a generative participant in engineering the affective atmosphere of spaces. According to him dancing is one example that can be employed to ‘producing affective spaces and modulating their intensity (McCormack, 2013: 3–4). McCormack
continues that studying rhythmic moving bodies is important when seeking to understand affective atmospheres (McCormack 2013:7). I suggest that the rhythm of the dancing in the sacred place becomes an important element in trying to understand what happens when affective Maausk practice is successful or unsuccessful. According to McCormack studying the connectedness of rhythmic bodies and spaces in formation of atmosphere should be done in restrained moments that have repetitive qualities, but at the same time can still potentially generate new aspects to those moments (McCormack 2013: 8). These ‘restrained’ moments can be the recurring moments of folk dancing in sacred places that the practitioners take part in, and which I have also become accustomed to during my fieldwork. Looking at the dancing from the point of view of McCormak, repetitively and rhythmically moving bodies can be seen as invoking a particular affective experience. Through dancing it can be possible to embody the rhythmic flow of affective experience of the moment.

Further, according to McCormack, affective spaces are not necessarily representational through cognitive processes. Nevertheless, they generate a rather ‘vague multi-layered sensibility’ from which thinking takes place in the form of ‘fleeting combinations of perceptions, affects and concepts’ (McCormack 2013:4). This resembles Wetherell’s conception of affective practice as a complicated pattern of similar elements, which McCormack also mentions. Thus the successful dancing and singing can be interpreted such that the uninterrupted rhythm of bodies moving and singing together helped me and the other participants to focus on our ancestors. Through the rhythm I also experienced tones in the atmosphere that I interpreted as ‘heavy mourning’ feelings. The rhythm thus helped me to focus in a particular way and this intertwined with the context of the ancestral honouring of that day. What is significant in my second example, with the successful dancing, is that the context of the dancing was known to all. It was a moment of remembering deceased ancestors, who were sometimes more of an abstract idea of forefathers, but were also described as relatives that one can still remember. For instance, many of the participants that day told me stories about their grandmothers and grandfathers. That the song and the ritual were directed to their ancestors was also emphasised by how the movement of the dancing circle was supposed to go in the opposite direction to the usual practice. I suggest therefore, that communal feelings may have been present not only shaped by observing the affective states of others, and the uninterrupted flow of rhythm generated by multiple bodies moving, but also shaped by the particular context of remembering ancestors.
Looking at the unsuccessful dancing and singing experience from the point of view of McCormack, one could thus argue that the problem was that the rhythm of the collective dancing was off, and because of that the embodied practice did not achieve what it had achieved before. The expectations somehow did not meet the affective experience we had and the activity was halted before it had even really started. It can be argued that this illustrates how much the body is involved as an active participator when atmospheres, meanings and places are being created. Bodies have the potential to contribute to the affective meaning-making with their movement. Further, they often do this in relation to one another. People learn what to do and how to act in relation to each other in these situations; they know how to be initiators and how to respond to situations.

Finally, what is important to note about McCormack’s ‘moving bodies’, is that they always exist in relation to space. Space for McCormack is never a backdrop, but bodies and spaces produce each other through practices, gestures, movements and events (McCormack, 2013: 2). Since the dancing happened in the sacred places, the movement of the dancing contributed to creating the particular location through that movement. I suggest therefore that the affective qualities of sacred places were felt in the bodies while at the same time the body’s activity created the atmosphere of the sacred places. In other words, when the dancing was successful, the sacred place was experienced as anticipated, its qualities were strongly felt and contributed to the meaning of the place. I interpret the unsuccessful dancing moment as not allowing the participants to experience or feel the qualities of the sacred place in the anticipated way. Thus, the movement and space still created each other, but the anticipation was not fulfilled. By extension, the dancing and the sacred place failed to produce the affects that would have been expected for that moment, sacred place and reason for the visit.

Corporeal and sensorial experiences of sacred places
So far we have seen how sacred places can be experienced through certain atmospheres and moods. These are to some extent anticipated through attunement as I analysed in the previous sections on behavioural rules. I have also argued that atmospheres in sacred places can be created by moving bodies dancing in the sacred place. I now illustrate how these places can be corporeally felt influenced by the imagined power of these places, as shown in the next example. Mart and his wife Anne were both born in the late 1960s
and had academic backgrounds. They both defined themselves as *Maauusk* practitioners, but only Anne belonged to the organisation, even though she was no longer active in it, as they had both been in the past. They told me that they saw the visits to sacred places as an opportunity to communicate with nature – trees or stones, and more exactly with the spirits in them. Anne described the relationship she had with her personal sacred place.

I have for some reason ended up in some places and they have worked to my benefit, and then I have started to visit these places. As a matter a fact they have touched me. These places resonate in me. I need to go and touch them regularly. There is this need to touch them. They are like ringing or jingling for me, for my benefit.

Anne describes the actual bodily sensations that these places gave her. When she described the need to go to these places regularly, she put her arms around herself like she was hugging or touching a tree and smiled. In so doing, and through her smile, she showed me the positive emotion that the memory of being in the place and touching the trees aroused in her.

But Mart and Anne also expressed that these places are so powerful that it is not good to go there all the time. In fact, it could, in their opinion, even be harmful to spend too much time there, as was illustrated in the following story from Mart:

It was a time when I was researching the *hiis*-sites. We went to two *hiis*-sites that had been preserved quite well. There are not so many of them left. In two of them there were people living inside the place. Those people were drunks. That place had made them alcoholics. Many people say that you are not meant to stay put in those places, that one can only visit them. (...) It means that these places are places that people come to give offerings and then leave.

Later on Mart also told me about another *hiis*-site he visited. ‘When I went to Paluküla, I did not go to the sacred hill. I just went to the foot of the hill. Simple people, like me can feel another kind of force.’ When Mart told me this he shivered. He continued to tell me a story of a boy who had taken a mushroom from the sacred hill and because of that had become very ill. According to Mart the boy had gotten better only after a woman from the village had heard his story and then found a piece of the mushroom from the compost heap and had taken it back to the sacred hill. His shiver when telling me about his visit to the sacred hill as well as the ‘mushroom-story’ can be understood in relation to the force that the sacred hill had in his
mind. He perceived it as so powerful that he even had a corporeal reaction while telling me about it. Similarly, Anne’s description of her sensorial affective experience of the ringing of the scared tree as well as the positive feeling generated by sacred places demonstrated by her hugging herself can be connected with her ideas that sacred trees could have a force that would work for her benefit.

According to Wetherell, affective activity is not only about particular histories and psychologies of a specific human being, it is also about the material world. Further, she claims that our material world is not a passive backdrop but actively enters into the experienced affect (Wetherell 2012: 88.) That objects and materiality can have an agency has also been suggested by several other scholars (see Latour 2005, Ingold 2000, Bennet 2010). The descriptions from Anne and Mart can be analysed from this perspective; that their affective activity was linked with the material world of the sacred places. They both also described the material world as an active participant in the affective experience. Anne when describing how a tree could make a noise that resonated in her and Mart when describing how the sacred hill had affected him when he visited it.

Wetherell argues that affective patterns can be described as ‘multimodal’, which, according to her, suggests that the affective activity is not made up from separate elements that are put together. Instead they are assembled as ‘integrated and organic unfolding and weaving’ of diverse modes of ‘the semiotic, the material and natural, which might dominate in different moments of the affective patterns’ (Wetherell 2012: 89). Mart’s and Anne’s corporeal and sensorial actions of the body in the context of sacred places can be understood as such multimodal affective patterns where ideas, materiality and ‘personal histories and psychologies’ all have mutual agency when they were weaved together.

Blurring the boundaries of subject and object

The formulation of affective pattern as ‘multimodal’ raises questions of subject-object relations, which is interesting when thinking about the intentionality of affects. For example: Do practitioners expect to be affected in a particular way when they visit the sacred place or are the affects of dancing and singing an unintentional, pre-cultural reaction to the situation? Where does the affect happen? Does the subject/object distinction hold when we are affected? There seems to be a profound interrelationship between subject and object in the moment of affect. It is not always easy to
know whether the affect originates from the object or produces it. Flatley would argue that affect blurs the boundaries between subject and object since ‘powerful emotional experiences connect us with, even transport us into, the materiality of the world around us’. Flatley claims, that affective moments are actually the moments we care about the most – those moments when we feel the value of something outside of ourselves (Flatley, 2008: 18). This way of understanding affects would suggest for instance that when practitioners sense their ancestors or a force in a sacred place, this can have been invoked by the materiality of an actual place.

Jane Bennet has written about ‘vital materiality’, something she understands as flows that go through and around us. She sees this materiality as a potentially forceful agential power. She argues that as soon as certain material objects appear to us they affect our being and are quickly incorporated into human moods, actions, meanings, agendas or ideologies. This, she argues, reveals a fantasy that we are in charge of all of those situations (Bennett, 2010: x). Because of this ontology she also defines affect as impersonal, not ‘specific’ to human bodies. She is interested in the power of affect when it appears in non-human bodies. Affect for her points in two directions: ‘the first towards the human who feels enchanted and whose agentic capacities may be thereby strengthened, and the second toward the agency of the things that produce effects in human and other bodies’ (Bennett, 2010: xii). I find this definition of affect important because it can suggest that human beings should reflect on their sense of being in charge of nature for instance. Materialism helps us to see nature as a non-human agent. However Bennet’s way of thinking about affect would mean that material things that affect us ‘appear to us’, that is to say we have no previous relationship to them. The ‘we’ as the subject would encounter the materiality with ‘mute attunement’, which Tim Edensor (2012) argued against when writing about illuminated festivals in England.

I acknowledge that it is valuable to question ideas that put the subject at the centre of experience. It is quite easy to see how people get subjectified through the discourses or practices. The subjectified also takes up already existing subject positions and so actors become already formed with routines and repetitive practices. However I argue that when examining affects and their influence on people’s actions and ways of understanding the world it is difficult to do so without invoking the subject. It is also difficult to study the content of ‘subjectless’ affects. Wetherell argues that when studying affect, personal affective histories and context have an influence on affective patterns. If affect is understood as ‘subjectless’ it loses the repetitions and
continuities of a particular subject. What is also lost is the way subjects represent and practice affects and how they mix past practices with new ones (Wetherell, 2012: 125). What Wetherell also argues is that this kind of philosophy flattens out the distinctiveness of particular continuities and creativity, which vary according to different life forms, like trees or farm animals for instance (Wetherell, 2012: 126). People develop persisting affective repertoires over time. Personal history is more than an additional, personal ingredient to affect, but is a site for patterning and configuring of affect in a particular way. Affective patterning can become habitual over time, and this is influenced by our gender, age, class and ethnicity.

What Wetherell is proposing then is a kind of ‘light’ relational subject when study the human and personal specificity in relation to affective patterns. She suggests a subject that is not pre-packaged with essential, innate psychological processes and large numbers of pre-organised routes through which affect can travel, but a relational capacity. (Wetherell, 2012: 139). I would also suggest that if relational capacity is one of the key points then it should also entail materiality on some level, but not to the extent that the subject is lost, just that it is part of the patterning of affect. The flow of our affective life encompasses the materiality around us that contributes to our affects.

Wetherell argues that ‘we also need to locate affect in actual bodies and social actors, negotiating, making decisions, evaluating, communicating, inferring and relating’ (Wetherell, 2012: 159). According to Wetherell, the content or value of the affect is created by the direction and history of affective practice over time, and the history of its entanglements with other constituting practices and social formations (ibid.). This is a way to keep the study of affect connected to the agency of the subject and see affective experiences as complex patterns that entail both materiality and the subject. This approach also let’s us construct a subject that is totally at the mercy of materiality without any agency, but at the same time does not forget the agency that materiality sometimes has.

**Affective attachment to sacred places and a sense of time**

The affective attachment to sacred places in *Maausk* can thus be seen as being formed through the affective experiences in the sacred places. These are intertwined with ideas and conceptions of such places as described previously. Affective patterns can also be seen to be tied to a sense of time,
since the patterns, according to Wetherell, are made up of discursive, situated, historical, social aspects (Wetherell 2012: 4). In the following I discuss how this is illustrated in the practitioners’ descriptions of the sacred places. In the interviews I carried out, it was evident how different temporalities were seen as coming together in the sacred places. In particular, how a sense of the past was interlaced with the present, which was most often expressed, since the sacred places were seen as connected to ancestral activities of the past.

Andrus was one of the practitioners who expressed this sense of connectedness to the past through the historical sacred places. I first met him during a small, unstructured ritual in a sacred place on a cold day in January. I travelled in his car back to Tallinn, returning from a ritual that had taken place in one of the historical sacred places. During the journey he told me about his involvement in the work for the protection of sacred places. We decided to meet up later in the week to talk more about this as well as his involvement with Maausk. In the interview he talked at length about the need to protect the historical sacred places. He also had a strong personal connection to these places and framed his visits to them as a particular type of experience.

There is a sense of being; that in that moment I am there in the Hiis and behind me there is my father and my father’s father and rows of others. That it is something that by law (figuratively) has been given to us. I have a good feeling and I have sense of pride. I take care of something that is ancient. I keep that alive.

In those places I sense something different. Well I don’t know [...] That place is not like an ordinary place in the forest. There is something there that can be sensed. Something is different and I can feel that. I have a good feeling when I am there. It is a feeling that cannot be felt anywhere else. They have been used for hundreds of years.

These Hiis-sites have existed for 8000 years. I don’t know exactly. In one place people have been visiting from generation to generation. These people know this place, those people who found it. They felt the force of the place. It is not just a place. Those places are not random places. They have a solid and definite force.

I want to highlight two things here. One is the imagined row ‘of fathers and fathers’ fathers’ that, according to Andrus, had been coming to that particular place for years. This can be interpreted as if Andrus saw himself as a kind of continuation of this row of ancestors, and as someone who was supposed to keep this continuation alive. The second important point is
that Andrus described a particular affective mood that he felt in the sacred places. For example, that the atmosphere of the place made him feel ‘good’ and ‘proud’. He also described an extraordinary feeling, something that ‘cannot be felt anywhere else’. According to him this extraordinariness was about the history of the place, and also about the ‘force’ that these places were supposed to have.

Andrus expressed how he felt the sacred places and their past on several occasions during the interview. He spoke in detail about this when he told me why and how he got involved with Maausk:

What is most important, most easy to receive, is the reason why I went there (joined the Maausk) in the first place. In the past we Estonians did not need temples or churches, nothing like that was needed. Those Hiis-sites (sacred places) that are in nature, which are some kind of energy gathering points or something, people knew about them even before the knights of the crusades appeared in Estonia. These places were visited. And the ones who knew how it was possible to get some energy from these places, they did that […] or something […] But the significant thing is that these places have evolved through a long period of time and these places still exist in nature, and it is possible to feel them. When I am in this kind of place I feel good. If I am somewhere close to an offering stone, I feel good. Inside me there is this kind of calm feeling. That is something that is very much within us. There have been many different beliefs in Estonia, but what happens to us there is that we meet our ancestors’ beliefs. It is something that is only ours, which is tied to this place, to this soil. It directs my attention towards it and makes me act in that direction.

Andrus’ description suggests that visiting the sacred places had a real effect on him, similar to Mart and Anne’s descriptions of their experiences. It is clear that Andrus connected the experience of a ‘good’ and ‘calm’ feeling in the sacred place to the idea of its connection to the ancestors. It can then be suggested that through these places Andrus was able to experience a sense of shared roots with his perceived ancestors. This also allowed him to feel connected to a particular local place and the ‘soil’ in it.

Like Andrus Vello was an active protector of the sacred places. He had been involved with Maausk since the early days of the organisation and had dedicated his life to the practice and protection of Maausk. He told me about the historical sacred places in the following way:

Let’s say that the essential places in the landscape are sacred. In a way the whole life is sacred here. This land is sacred, and specific places in this land are historically sacred places. They have a certain spirit that exists nowhere else. It is a historical connection with the ancestors. Not only that, but they are places that
my ancestors have lived in. Ancestors have visited these places for a long time. So, with these places I associate a special honour and strength. There is a burning and a special force that has been given to these places. But these places are also beautiful in a natural way.

Later on in the interview Vello emphasised the connection to the ancestral past through the historical sacred places. He brought up the difference between the personal and historical sacred places:

Through these historical sacred places in nature I have a connection with my ancestors. In my home I also have places that are important to me. Places that I have later returned to. For example one old oak, one tree, one view. I have these places, but then there are historical sacred places. Those and other places in nature are different only in the way that through the sacred places I have a connection with my ancestors. It is a sacred place of my ancestors.

Vello’s way of describing the sacred places and his relation to them, was in many ways quite similar to Andrus’. They both emphasised how the places were extraordinary and had a force or a spirit that could only be felt there, and that this was related to the connection to the ancestors. Based on these descriptions, the affective experiences in these places were related to a sensed connection to the past of the sacred place and the presumed ancestral activity there.

According to Wetherell, when people talk about their feelings they routinely show their comprehensions of what is happening in the social world they are engaged with. They draw from the resources and understandings that are available, and this orients their interpretations when they constitute their experiences (Wetherell, 2012: 90). Wetherell also argues that affective moments are sometimes constituted through talk; talking is a discursive action and affective performance. She claims that talk about affect can become routines, as it accounts for and narrates the affects and puts them in socially recognisable forms (Wetherell, 2012: 93). When looking at my material, it becomes clear that talk about affective experiences as a felt connection to the past was part of the routine expression of the Maausk practitioners, where they tried to put their experiences into a socially recognisable form.

This does not mean that the narrated experiences of the sacred places were not really felt, it simply shows that they were linked to cultural conceptions and ideas about the place. This aligns with Wetherell, who claims that affects are linked in ‘intimate ways’ to conventions and normative
practices and that it is possible to see how affect, discourse and social life are connected. The bursts of affect narrated and re-worked can be seen as building a consensus around the meaning of the affect (Wetherell, 2012: 93). Wetherell also suggests that representing affect through talk is sometimes an act of positioning (Wetherell, 2012: 92). Andrus, Vello and Hannes could be understood to be positioning themselves as part of a long line of people active in the particular place. I argue that this is a particular narrative construction and claim of identity. The identity construction is linked to the affects felt in the sacred places and they feed into each other. Positioning oneself as a representative and protector of a long line of continued activity in the sacred place can thus be thought to ‘assemble, compose or figure’ (Wetherell, 2012: 99) the affective patterns that a practitioner of Maausk feels in the historical sacred places.

In addition to interpreting the sensed past described in the sacred places as a positioning act, one of the functions of referring to the past of a place, according to Doreen Massey, is the creation of a fixed identity of the place. Ideas of the continuity and authenticity of the place are attempts to stabilise and fix the place identity in a particular way (Massey 1994: 8). I suggest that the Maausk framing of sacred places as a continuum fixes the place identity, as Massey argues. I would also add that this practice not only fixes the place identities but also the shared identities of those doing the ‘fixing’. In this case, it would mean that the Maausk practitioners’ identities are being defined at the same time as the sacred place identity. Further, Massey claims that despite the attempts to fix the place identity, a place is actually dynamic and multiple, as well as anti-essentialist (Massey 1994: 4). She suggests that place identities are always constructed in connection to the present, which is tied to current structures of society and social relations. I propose that this is also the case here, based on at what I wrote previously about Maausk identity as a political identity related to the political and economic situation of Estonian past and present.

Places reflect their occupants

One other perspective here in relation to Andrus’ and Vello’s descriptions of the sensed past, is that, according to the philosopher Edward Casey one of the characteristics of a place as ‘lived’ is as a ‘gathering’ of things. He writes that, ‘[p]laces gather experiences and histories, even language and thought. Think only of what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the
familiar and the strange, and much more besides’ (Casey 1996: 24). To Casey, a place is ultimately dynamic in its character, because it is never quite the same when we return to it. He also writes that the place ‘gathers’, because it has the capacity to ‘co-locate’ in different spaces and times. Deconstructing space and time allows us to construct it again (Casey 1996: 38). If we look at the Maausk practitioners’ descriptions of sensed sacred places from this perspective, it could be understood that when they go to the sacred places, they connect to past experiences of those places and may, consequently, experience the sacred places in similar ways at different times. To add one more dimension to the time aspect of the sacred place, I would argue that while in the sacred places the practitioners also experienced or sensed an imagined past which they had never lived. It is not only the past they have actually lived, but also the past that has never been lived that is experienced in the places and then ‘gathered by the place’ (Casey 1996: 24). Ethnologist Florence Fröhlig (2013) has analysed traumatic memories, which are sometimes hard to put into words and which have been kept from younger generations. She has shown how these kinds of memories can be emplaced to a particular place organised to commemorate the events that caused these memories. Through the emplacement of memories even younger generations can take part in them at some level. This could be seen as one example how places can gather things.

According to Casey the dimensions of ‘gathering’ are experienced and expressed because the place is not a thing, but an event. It is not one clearly defined phenomenon, instead the ‘place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description, and expressing them in an occurrence as an event’ (Casey 1996: 27). Using Casey’s ideas one could argue that this is the case with the Maausk practitioners and their connection to sacred places. Even though the felt connection to the past is experienced as a personal feeling, it is not free from the shared framing of sacred places within Maausk. Traditions, histories of past customs, and ancestors are all important elements within the Maausk practice. The sacred places as historical cultic places for their ancestors are especially important. This aspect of Maausk was evident in the narratives about personal experiences in the sacred places.
Claiming ownership of the sacred place

In the previous section I suggested that the felt connection to the past through the historical sacred places can be seen as an affective meaning-making process and part of an identity construction that draws from the imagined past. I will now present another view on the felt historicity of the sacred places. This view is tied to perceived ownership of the sacred places as well as to conceptions of Maausk identity, in the sense that sacred places are sometimes fiercely claimed as under the ownership of particular locals.

One example of this was evident in the interview with Nina, who I mentioned previously in relation to behavioural rules. She contacted me in the summer of 2012 after I had sent a general description of my project to the e-mail list of the official organisation. Nina was originally from the Swedish speaking countryside in southern Finland and had ended up in Estonia at the beginning of the 1990s, where she had met her husband and started a family. She did not belong to the official Maausk organisation and did not participate regularly in the joint rituals. She did, however, know many practitioners and had contact with them in her private life, and defined herself as practitioner of Maausk. Her connection to sacred places existed on different levels. She told me that she and her family had their own sacred stone in the garden of her countryside home, but she also had a connection to a well-known historical sacred hill in the village, which she had initially heard about from her mother-in-law.

Nina appeared to be a very active person and had been involved in a local history project. Her knowledge of the history of the area had grown to the extent that even the locals would seek historical information from her. She was also an active member of the local agricultural society that organised various village events and history projects. Nina legitimised her interest in the historical sacred place through the interest of her mother-in-law. She said that she felt the history of the hill was the history of her children and that it was important to maintain the place for their sake. She was also involved in the protection of the place, and this is what she said about her protection efforts:

This hill here has become a contested place, like the Paluküla sacred hill. Ski tracks have been made there and some lights have been put up. They want to make an artificial lake there and artificial snow and what else do they want to do? But this is a ‘Natura 2000’ area and a landscape protection area, so I try to take initiatives and be involved so that not everything is built there in the Hiis.
In the interview it became clear that Nina was very focused on maintaining the place as it was, in its natural state. She talked about the activities of some other groups, which she described as ‘shamanist’. They had built a stone circle on the hill and she appeared to be very angry about it, but she described a feeling of relief that the stone circle was not built in the actual sacred place, but in a less sacred spot. It was quite evident that in Nina’s opinion the place belonged to the locals, and it was they who should decide what should be done there:

They are from somewhere else: From Tallinn or something. They speak strangely. Well, of course if we go a long way back in time, we can find these drummers from here as well. It depends on how far we go back in time. We can construct the Stone Age camp here as well, but [...] I do not know if I have the right to say who has the right to be there, but the agricultural society did not like them.

One way to understand Nina’s statements is that they illustrate how strong the local identity was tied to the local land. She went on to explain the history of the hill to me in detail. Later on she came back to the topic of the historical sacred hill that she saw as belonging only to the locals. She used a very angry tone of voice, with a touch of comedy, but nevertheless she appeared to be quite offended by the acts of “others”, the ones who did not belong to the village, on the hill:

*The House of Taara and Native Religions of Estonia* cannot come to the hill and put a knocking board between trees. It is up to the locals. We will decide for ourselves. Here is the development of the tourist centre; they wanted to put benches on the hill and energy trees. We set them straight! We said directly to them that it is none of their business! ‘Take it easy! The locals will do that if they want to, but don’t you start organising this kind of thing!’

She then more calmly said that people from outside the village could of course visit the hill, but that it was strange if somebody from the outside interfered with the business of the hill. She then related this to her own experiences:

I also wouldn’t go to the sacred places of other villages. I once visited a sacred place of another village quite far away from here. It was this kind of a strange feeling that you are stepping on ground that belongs to someone else. That it is their sacred place, that they have strong feelings in them and towards them. I am like a guest. I come here for the first time. I don’t have any commitments to the place. There is nothing that ties me to the place. The connectedness comes when
you have been in the place many times. It is the same thing that you have with a
school, or with the local congregation, or with the clubhouse or organisation that
you have been to many times, or since you were small. Every year you have been
there, and you have memories from the place. You see so many people in there,
even though some of them are dead, you see these people, because you have
these images in your mind. It has not been researched why some people feel at
home in certain places, it could be that 300 years ago this person lived in this
place, that they have some kind of image in their brains that has been inherited.

Nina’s reflections illustrate well how an intimate relationship can be de-
veloped with places, a relationship that makes them mean a lot to people. One can relate Nina’s connection to the sacred place to what Casey writes
about the ‘gathering’ aspect of places. Her emphasis on how places come to
mean something because you have been there many times, can be seen as an
example of Casey’s ideas on how places gather histories, experiences and
thoughts, and how when going back to a particular place one finds it full of
memories and expectations (Casey, 1996: 24).

Nina’s narrative also indicates the felt ownership of the sacred place. The
idea of losing control of the sacred place appeared to be upsetting to her.
She had a playful tone in her voice when she talked about this, but it was
clear that she resented outsiders meddling with the local sacred place.
Judging by Nina’s choice of words, the sacred place belonged to locals and
no-one else, even though the place is a famous heritage site known through-
out Estonia.

Ester was another practitioner who affectively claimed ownership of a
sacred place, telling me that she had tried to look for the sacred places of her
people, the Vadja people. She explained that there was an old monastery on
the sacred hill of Vadja and that she visited it regularly:

Well, I am like a dog that goes and pees there [...] maybe [...] I think I want to
somehow [...] I put really cool and impressive braided woollen offerings there in
the trees. So they would notice and would think ‘oh, somebody has marked these
places, but why?’ I want blood! (laughs) Well I just wanted to put a sign of myself
there and I wanted to tie some offerings there. I went around the hill and tied the
offerings to trees there.

Ester’s quote can be understood to mean that she wanted to leave a mark of
herself in the place that used to be a sacred hill of her people. She was
actually marking the ownership of the land by leaving ‘impressive woollen’
offerings all around the trees. Her offering practice thus became a way of
claiming the place for herself as a representative of the Vadja.
One can interpret both Ester and Nina’s description of their relation to the historical sacred places as a legitimizing of their claims on these places by constructing a past for them, a past that they felt strongly and described themselves to be a part of. Ester based this claim on the fact that she was a direct descendant of the Vadja people and Nina based it on her position as a mother of sons that were direct descendants of the rightful owners of the sacred hill. Based on Wetherell’s formulations of affective patterns as positioning acts, their narratives and statements during the interviews could thus be seen as a way of constructing themselves as the rightful owners and as bearers of a descendant line tied to the sacred places, like Andrus and Vello earlier (cf Wetherell, 2012: 92). This construction was closely linked to the affects and feelings lived and narrated while being in the sacred place and when talking about it. I argue that these identities only become personally meaningful through the affective level. Without this affective level such identities would not orient and motivate people’s actions and claims; for instance, claiming the sacred places would not be important without affective attachment to these places.

There is a nuance to my argument however as I do not mean to suggest that the relationship between affective patterns and the Maausk identity is so clearly fixed. Wetherell has also argued that the connection between the affective practices and identities of social groupings are not neat and tidy, because affective practices always travel and change (Wetherell, 2012: 117). This is illustrated, for example, by the different affective experiences in the sacred places that the practitioners described. Andrus and Vello talked mainly about the positive affects when being in the sacred places, while the narratives from Ester and Nina to a large extent were centred on negative affects. Their tones of voice and affective performances displayed angry and sad feelings over the lost sacred hills that they were trying to claim back, but which were always under threat from unknowing outsiders. It is therefore relevant that Wetherell advocates sensitivity when researching different ways that people position themselves and the social relations influencing identification, which in turn meet and wind together. She argues that people are able to mobilise, and be mobilised by ‘complicated mixes of affective repertoires available to any one individual or any one social group in any one moment’ (Wetherell, 2012: 118). The Maausk practitioners can also be understood to occupy multiple other positions as well as being part of different social networks that in turn influence the affective patterns that are recruited in particular moments. Consequently, the affective positioning practices may not be fixed or always present themselves in the same way.
An example of how the affective patterns assembled in the sacred places could be quite varied, came from the interview with Peeter.

The places are just the kind that I have liked for some reason. Not that they have evolved through history. Some of the places have become significant and important through my own life. Every time I go back to the place I live through the thing again, and I feel pleased that I have made a circle and come back to that place again. They don’t have a connection to tradition, but more with my consciousness. Well I don’t know how far the consciousness reaches. It can be that it reaches back 20 generations or 40 in sub-consciousness. I don’t know. For some reason some places are more important to me than others. I don’t know why they have developed. There has been some kind of positive emotion, or something nice has happened there. Maybe I have been there with somebody important. I can’t exactly describe why these places have evolved. They simply have.

I asked him what he usually did in these places, and he replied:

I am there, and I think there. I do not go there necessarily for a special reason. In my own roaming I have come back to the same places and then they have developed, then I have started to go there more often, because I have been there many times. I feel good in these places, and then I have started to strengthen the relationship with these places.

Peeter’s description of affects experienced in the sacred places was thus more connected to his personal connection to these places than to their historical past. Unlike many of the other practitioners he did not at all tie his positive affective experiences to the idea of a long line of ancestors, for example. He did however make a connection to the past on another level when he spoke about a possible connection to ‘past consciousness’.

The practitioners’ connection to and affective experiences in the sacred places were so frequently described in relation to their past. This can be related to how Wetherell notes that even though affective patterns move and change they sometimes get stuck and are stabilised for a moment in relation to the shifting and plural subjectivities engaging with the shifting and plural social world (Wetherell, 2012: 118–119). I would argue that the particular kind of affective positioning of many of the Maausk practitioners that I have described here are patterns that have become somewhat stabilised, although they are never as solidified and fixed as they might seem.
Endangered sacred places

A commonality across most of the narratives regarding affective patterns and identity formation used in the last section, is that many of the practitioners who expressed strong views on this, were also active protectors of sacred places. It was quite common among the Maausk practitioners to view the sacred places as heritage sites that were in danger of disappearing if they were not protected. What I examine in the following is how such protection efforts can be linked to a strong affective attachment to sacred places, which in turn might have social consequences. I do not argue a causal relationship; rather my aim is to show how affective patterns are entangled with the social world in complex ways.

One aspect of this is the research carried out on the historical sacred places in nature in Estonia. The practitioners partly based their knowledge of the sacred places on this research, which for instance has claimed that the first discussion of sacred places in nature was found in the Livonian Chronicle of Henry written at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The first actual research attempts concerning sacred places in Estonia were made at the time of the first national awakening in the second half of the nineteenth century. In these attempts, peasant folklore and customs were collected by the Estonian intelligentsia to find out about the Estonian past that only resided in people’s memories. In Soviet times sacred places in nature were seen as archaeological objects, but actual research projects were small scale due to the atheistic policies of the Soviet authorities. Old folk beliefs were not seen to be a suitable topic for research. Interest rose during the second national awakening, which started a few years before the second independence of Estonia in 1991. Since then a number of studies have been made of the materials in the folklore archives (see Remmel, 1998). A lot of popular literature has been written about sacred trees and stones in the past few years and the University of Tartu has been offering a course about sacred places for five years.

Another aspect to note is that the historical sacred places in nature are generally known to the wider public, and some of them are protected by

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5 The well-known and still read books of Matthias Johan Eissen (pastor) about the sacrificial rituals of the ancestors, and other books related to folk beliefs, were published between 1919 and 1927. One of Eissen’s students, Richar Viidalepp, organised a number of large trips just before the Second World War to collect memories of the home place and living area. These collections include a lot of materials related to sacred places (Hiiemäe, 2007: 221).
different institutions. Today 447 sites have been declared as official heritage protection sites and 50 are designated nature conservation objects (Köivupuu, 2009: 224). Some places were protected in the 1970s, under Soviet rule, as archaeological objects, with some existing under the nature protection programme and some under the heritage protection programme. Common policies relating to the protection of the sacred places in nature do not exist, even though there was a government funded programme for developing a juridical regulation of these places, involving researching and mapping out the sacred places in nature from 2008 to 2012. A guidebook for the protection of sacred places published by UNESCO (Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for the protected Area Managers, 2008) has been translated into Estonian but does not have any juridical power. Awareness of these places is propagated widely in the media by the active members of Maausk, and also by outsiders. For example, some folklorists have openly spoken for the protection of these places as Estonian heritage.

The organisation that is most active in the protection efforts of the sacred places is The Hiite Maja Foundation, a non-profit organisation set up by the official organisation of Maausk. The Hiite Maja was created for the research and protection of the ‘indigenous culture of Estonia’, and mainly focuses on the historical sacred places in Estonia. The practitioners’ common view that these places were in danger and needed to be protected can be seen in the earlier quotes of Andrus, Nina and Ester. However, some of them had also taken on more official and public roles as protectors of the heritage of the historical sacred places. Andrus was for instance involved with the organisation the Hiite Maja Foundation. I asked him in the interview why he thought these places needed to be protected, and he answered that ‘the sacred places in nature are very unique. In other parts of Europe, they have disappeared and they have not been mapped out’. He continued that the knowledge of these places was too precious to be forgotten, so they needed to be protected and researched, especially since there are still places that have not been acknowledged as neede to be protected. Similarly, Hannes, another active protector of sacred places, said that:

There are many kind of traditions and many organisations that deal with protecting the heritage. Maausk practitioners would like to protect the tradition... the cultural tradition that is linked with the Hiis-sites. Naturally it needs to be protected. Estonia is a small country in Europe and the traditions are different here. Something unique is left here that needs to be protected. Nobody else in Europe has similar to the kind of scared places that we still have. We don’t need to look at how things (heritage protection) are done in Germany or Finland.
One way to understand the stances expressed by Hannes and Andrus, is that for them, the sacred places represent a unique tradition of a minority group inside Europe. This is illustrated for example in how they frame Estonia as a small country. From this perspective the tradition of sacred places is something that does not exist anywhere else and needs to be protected, but on Maausk terms, not those of other countries.

Andrus also told me that the goal of the protection and research efforts was not to make these places public, but rather to secure the privacy of the places. In his opinion knowledge of the sacred places should be researched and made public, but not the actual places in themselves. Andrus believed that those places already in the maps and guidebooks of Estonia could be made public and be part of the general information about the culture and behavioural rules about these places. However, not all sacred placed should be made public according to Andrus, since not everyone knows how to behave there. In a sense Andrus was claiming ownership of these places for Maausk practitioners and the small circle of locals, just as Nina and Ester were doing in the previous example. Hannes expressed a similar attitude when saying that suggestions had been made that Maausk practitioners should be consulted and take part in the juridical process related to Estonian forests, such as logging permissions, for example. The practitioners’ protection efforts can also be interpreted as an effort to gain control over certain pieces of local land that have a strong symbolic meaning as a site of the everyday practice of the Maausk worship of nature. This may then be seen as another example of how the protection efforts are tied to claims or struggles regarding gaining control of the land where sacred places are located, as described in the last section.

The practitioners’ concern over the protection of the sacred places was founded on actual threats and situations where their action had been needed. One example was in Maardu, a sacred forest close to Tallinn, which was protected by a nature protection institution. However, since the boundaries had not been marked accurately on the map logging had occurred. The forest logging had started on a Saturday night when it had been impossible to contact any public officers to discuss the boundaries of the sacred forest. The ‘protectors’ took the issue to court but it transpired that the logging had been carried out according to the maps available. The Maausk practitioners had also been involved in previous court cases, for example when landscape developers had shown interest in using the places commercially. That would have meant altering the landscape surrounding the sacred places for leisure purposes, with roads and infrastructure to gain
access to the places, for example. This goes against the *Maausk* image of rural locations, affected by romantic ideals of an old peasant lifestyle that can be traced back to the folklore in the archives. As one of the *Maausk* practitioners once said to me, ‘Ski tracks and electric illumination’, do not belong in places like that.

The fact that other institutions, including heritage and environmental protection institutions, were also involved in the protection of the sacred places had made it more and more difficult for the *Maausk* practitioners to defend their ideas about how to use and protect these places. In their view the ideal sacred place consisted of untouched nature where branches, flowers or even mushrooms cannot be picked as described earlier. The state and other heritage protection institutions have provided funding for research and protection, and this has naturally introduced other stakeholder perspectives. The government aims to secure access to sacred places for all, as the places are part of the cultural heritage of Estonia. Maintaining the sacredness of the places is not, perhaps understandably, the primary focus of the government. Heritage protection institutions are interested in the archaeological evidence of the places that would define whether they should be protected as heritage. However, archaeological excavations do not align with the perspective that the sacred place should be left untouched in order to remain a sacred place.

As a result of this conflict of interests, allies for the protection efforts have been sought in other places. One example was when *Maausk* practitioners, who were active protectors of sacred places, placed historical sacred places in nature in the context of international discussion about cultural heritage protection, influenced by the UNESCO cultural heritage definition efforts. These efforts have developed globally partly because cultural heritage sites can have transnational commercial value through tourism efforts for instance. The destruction of heritage sites and international trading of heritage objects require international regulation to protect heritage. The destruction of heritage sites often takes place in the cultural sphere of indigenous people. Heritage protection therefore has a strong political context that can be used for protecting the indigenous groups’ rights to decide over the use and function of their intangible and tangible heritage. In my earlier analysis of the *Maausk* identity as a political identity, I have already described how the *Maausk* efforts to protect heritage was connected to human rights discourses on indigenous heritage protection. The protection of the historical sacred places in nature as heritage sites was one of the main issues taken up by the official organisation. In these
struggles indigenous and local positioning was used to legitimise their claims. This was illustrated when Andrus expressed the need to protect the sacred places in his interview: ‘The UN declaration, or the declaration of the indigenous rights, gives rights to every individual to follow religious beliefs according to what he feels is right’. In particular, during the interviews associations were made with the efforts of Native Americans to protect their sacred places, as the next example from Andrus shows:

The sacred places must remain and people would have benefits from them like all the people of nature. Native Americans have these places as well. There are of course choices; nobody is being forced to protect these places. But we think it is important to save these places for the next generation, it is unique in Europe, but indigenous people elsewhere still have natural sacred places.

Ester reasoned in a similar way, when comparing the Maausk efforts to protect sacred places as cultural heritage with the Native American struggle.

The Native Americans had troubles with their sacred places. Dams were made in some of the sacred places. Trees were logged from the forest. They (Native Americans) started to fight for their rights and tried to stop the logging somehow, I am not sure what they did. But people really did not like the logging. Then white people also started to talk about ‘do not make any trouble. It is still a sacred place for these people. You should not dare to take any tree from it. Build somewhere else, and the sun can be used for energy as well’. At one point they asked for help on Facebook from other people who were also suffering from the destruction of sacred places in their own country. I thought it is just like our problems.

Taking up a position as indigenous and relating to indigenous struggles can be a very powerful and useful positioning when placing demands on the state, as discussed in chapter three. But it also does something else. It builds people’s sense of ties to particular local lands, which are founded on both a symbolic and sensed connection to the sacred places. In his book, *Indigenous People, Ethnic Groups and the State* (1997), David Maybury-Lewis defined the concept’s use in the discussion of indigenous rights. According to him,

The very term *indigenous people* is confusing because most people in the world are ‘indigenous’ to their countries in the sense of having been born in them and being descended from people who were born in them. Indigenous peoples are clearly native to their countries in this sense too, but they also make another
claim, namely that they were there first and are still there and so have rights of prior occupancy to their lands (Maybury-Lewis 1997: 7).

Wetherell states that ‘affective assemblages’ operate in important context of everyday life, and can have social consequences (Wetherell, 2012: 52). They are also meaning-making processes which are entangled with bodies as sense and affective experiences (Wetherell 2012: 56). Using these ideas from Wetherell, I suggest that the affective attachment to sacred places is a meaning-making process that has consequences for the social world the practitioners live in and, further, how they want to live in it. These are actualised for example in the official protection efforts tied to the Maausk ideals drawing from the past as a source of meaningful lives and identities.

My analysis of affective patterns related to atmospheres, moods and spaces has shown how the sacred places are intimately linked with the practitioners’ affective lives, and at the same time affective patterns play an active part in constituting the meaning of the scared places. This occurs through affective patterns where different elements interlace. For example the context and cultural conceptions of the ideas of the sacred places interlace with previous experiences in the places that attune practitioners to expected and unexpected affective experiences. The affective patterns related to the sacred places are sometimes intertwined with identity formation and social activism where they also have a role to play as shown in the last section of the chapter.
Maie said to me that it is not that her practice of Maausk has to follow traditions exactly. Traditions are important, but more important is how the practice feels. While she was saying this to me she lifted her hands from her lap and placed them on her chest where the heart is located. (Field notes, spring 2015)

According to the website of the official organisation Maavalla koda, the practice of Maausk was thought to be based on local folk traditions. This was what Maie referred to when she told me that traditions are important for her Maausk practice. These traditions were described on the website either as transmitted from past generations and still existing as fragments in, for example, family practices of Christmas and midnight summer celebrations, or as preserved in the folk life archives during the past 150 years. However, traditions as such were not the only criteria that Maie and the other practitioners told me they based Maausk practice on. The individual choices relating to practice were often motivated and described in the interviews as a ‘feeling’ or sometimes as a sort of intuition, an ‘inner consciousness’ (tunnetus, sisetunne). Maie tried to convey this feeling to me by placing her hands on her heart when she told me that what was most important was how the practice felt. In popular knowledge, the heart is the place where feelings and emotions reside. Already in children’s literature youngsters are taught that the heart is where feelings are located. Emotions, the heart and the self, have been linked in popular consciousness for a long time (see Fay Bound Alberti in 2011).

In this chapter I analyse the ‘feeling’ that influences how Maausk is practiced on a personal level and how it connects with official ideas.

1 See, for example, In My Heart: A Book of Feelings (Growing Hearts) by Jo Witek and Christine Roussey.
regarding tradition. I argue, however, that this ‘feeling’ is also connected to something deeply fundamental in people’s lives, namely a sense of authenticity. Furthermore, I suggest that this personal sense of authenticity ties to the decision-making processes of the practitioners regarding which practices to follow and how to follow them.

According to Vannini and Williams, authenticity is an affective, cognitive, narrative and self-reflecting experience (Vannini and Williams, 2009). In my view, authenticity defined in this way can be studied from the perspective of Wetherell’s (2012) affective patterns, which are also composed from the various elements mentioned by Vannini and Williams. In this chapter I will examine how the affective patterns of authenticity related to Maausk can be formed within the everyday lives of different practitioners. I start the chapter by framing the official and sometimes shared understanding of tradition. This is crucial to understand to be able to unpack the affective patterns of sensed authenticity.

**Tradition understood as an authentic continuum**

Not everything from tradition is acceptable for us. Quite a big part of it has been borrowed from different cultures at different times and is in opposition with the native religion. Thus the studying of tradition based on the native religion is like gold washing – only the important and valuable part must remain. (www.maavalde.ee)

The above quote from the website of the official organisation shows how the organisation depicts tradition as something that can be contaminated by other cultures. Tradition is viewed as needing to be purified or separated from other cultural influences that are considered foreign and unoriginal. The gold washing metaphor can be understood to mean that what is left after the rinsing is the ‘gold’; the most essential and pure content, completely cleansed from other elements. It suggests that the official organisation wants to convey that there is such a thing as an original tradition underneath the loans from other cultures.

Notions like, ‘pure’, ‘original’, ‘essential’, ‘natural’ and ‘real’ are qualities often associated with the concept of authenticity (Lindholm, 2008: 1). Authenticity has also been defined as an ‘inherent’ quality of a particular object (Vannini and Williams, 2009: 2). From this perspective, the official Maausk organisation seems to connect the concept of tradition to the
concept of authenticity, given that it suggests that pureness and originality are ‘inherent’ qualities of traditions. A tradition can also be associated with the opposite of authenticity, namely inauthenticity, or something that is fake or not true in its substance. Hence, the quote ‘not everything from tradition is acceptable’, can be interpreted to mean that tradition can also be inauthentic according to Maausk understanding. They perceive that tradition has perhaps been spoiled and polluted by past foreign influences or even the current state of Estonia, moulded by global neoliberal economic policies or influenced by the European Union, for instance.

It is not only within Maausk that tradition and authenticity are associated with each other. These two aspects have historically been linked in relation to folklore scholarship and nationalism (Bendix 1997 and Anttonen 2005). According to a number of scholars, tradition is often popularly regarded as something that represents continuity and authenticity of a national or ethnic culture (Alsayyad, 2005: 22; Bronner, 2008: 1). The idea of tradition as an authentic continuum with a past was academically challenged by Erik Hobsbawn (1983) in the 1980s. Hobsbawn argued that tradition is invented in the process of nation building. According to him nation states are built on the idea of shared heritages from the past in order to unify the people in the territory. These traditions are often claimed as ancient, even though they are usually of quite recent origin. Benedict Andersson’s (1983) argument about communities being imagined and socially constructed rather than being based on continuous ethnic ties has also challenged the idea of tradition as unbreakable static and stable continuity.

Traditions, then, are not stable frames of reference, as numerous cultural researchers have illustrated in studies of how cultural customs change over time and space depending on the context and the individuals involved. Instead, they can be understood as multiple, since the identities of the people who practice a particular tradition can be multiple and dynamic. From this perspective, interpretation of a particular tradition might differ depending on the person taking part in it. Further, traditions, as well as identities, are a matter of taste and individual decisions instead of part of a culture which people are born into. In the introductory chapter of the anthology The End of Tradition? (2005), Nezar Alsayyad similarly argues that tradition cannot be understood as having an authentic value as such. Alsayyad writes:

So it would seem that what has ended, in the end, is not tradition itself, but the idea of tradition as a harbinger of authenticity, and as a container of specific
cultural meaning. What has ended is not tradition, but tradition as a place-based, temporarily situated concept; as a static authoritative legacy; and as heritage owned by certain groups of people (Alsayyad, 2005: 23).

I agree with Alsayyad that defining tradition in an essentialist way does not make sense in light of current academic understandings of tradition as dynamic, contested, plural and invented. Traditions seem to always be a dynamic reinterpretation from the point of view of the present. However, this is not how traditions are perceived within Maausk. In the official Maausk understanding, traditions can be seen as tainted with too much creativity when it comes to the individual practice, as shown by the following quote from their website:

The Estonian native religion is the only native nature worship in Estonia. It was never created; it has arisen and changed in this country together with maarahvas (Estonians) over innumerable generations. Estonia has been inhabited for about 10 000 years. Maarahvas\(^2\) and their religion are considered just as old.

Being an inseparable entity together with our land, traditional culture and native languages, it is something more than a religion. It is a consistent worldview, tradition and way of life, which in this form exists only here, in Estonia. (www.maavald.ee/eng)

This quote very explicitly states that traditions in Maausk are regarded as continuous, as having always existed. Even though the text notes that traditional native nature worship has changed with time this clearly refers to the group level. It omits that individual identities and practices may have influenced how traditions are interpreted. The above quote can be understood such that the official Maausk view is that identity and tradition are a unified uncreated entity, and an ownership and birth right of a particular group. The quote constructs the idea that traditions contain a blueprint for a particular way of living and a worldview that represents continuity tied to a particular place and a particular language, which in turn has been developed among a distinctive ethnic group as a birth right. Finally this continuity can be understood to suggest the authenticity of a group and individual as part of that group.

\(^2\) Maarahvas is considered an ancient way of referring to the people of Estonia before the national identity was constructed and everybody was referred to as Estonian.
According to Lindholm there are two ways in which authenticity can be understood and experienced: shared and personal. He clarifies his point by claiming that collectives are understood to be authentic when their origin can be traced and if the members of that collective follow the traditions developed within that particular group. Similarly, individuals are understood to be authentic when they are true to their roots or if their lives are direct expressions of their essence (Lindholm 2008:2). This is an important point for my analysis. Namely, that there can be several formulations of a sense of authenticity and these can intertwine. The individual sense of Maausk practitioners’ authenticity can be understood as being intertwined with the authenticity of the Maausk group and vice versa. The Maausk group identity can be perceived as authentic if the group members stay true to their roots and follow the expected traditions. This positions the practitioners as bearers of original and continuous traditions from past generations. Furthermore it can be suggested that by staying true to the roots and traditions, individual authenticity can be experienced. Thus these two levels can mix but they can also be in conflict with each other. This relationship is discussed in more detail throughout this chapter.

It is also noteworthy that the website of the official organisation claims an ‘inseparable’ connection between people, land, tradition, culture and native language. This can be interpreted as an illustration of how authenticity is constructed at a communal level as part of the discourses of Maausk. Vannini and Williams define authenticity as ‘some sort of ideal, highly valued and sought by individuals and groups as part of a process of becoming’. According to them, authenticity is a socially constructed phenomenon and it is also an ‘ultimately evaluative concept’. This means that the concept refers to a set of qualities that people in a particular time and place have come to agree on as an ideal (Vannini and Williams, 2009: 3). In the Maausk context, the formation of such an ideal at a communal level could be said to happen when the practitioners engage in a collaborative evaluative process of various traditions as authentic and suitable for Maausk practice. In my fieldwork I experienced how this happens through discussions during the gatherings of the practitioners, where the right form of singing, dancing, cooking or collecting medical herbs were discussed and agreed upon.

One quite common Maausk authentication practice was the attempt to remove foreign imports into the language, such as ‘okej’ or ‘tsau’. This can be seen as forming a sense of self-authenticity through evaluating whether traditional practices were authentic. Many of the practitioners also deli-
berately used local dialects and traditional proverbs in their everyday speech, because these were understood to depict the mentality and wisdom of certain local folk groups. This suggests that practitioners viewed language as an authentic tradition containing a genuine essence, which had been corrupted by foreign influences. This attitude was quite similar to the one expressed in the quote from the official website. Discussions concerning the ‘correct’ and ‘original’ traditions that I witnessed were a further indication of this. For instance, practitioners discussed the aspects of Christianity in folk belief, so that they could identify and avoid Christian influences in their traditions. The recurring nature of the discussions indicates the near impossibility of separating folk beliefs and Christian ideas as they have been intertwined for such a long time. Additionally, the ‘authentic traditions’ the practitioners strove to uncover may never have existed, considering the dynamic, unstable character of tradition.

Another illustration of situations where the authenticity of particular traditions was negotiated and evaluated on group level was the actual learning locations of folk practices. Many of the interviewees were interested in learning and eventually carrying out what they saw as continuous folk tradition in different venues. Some of the practitioners organised folk museum visits to learn the traditions in a setting where they were already validated as authentic, in this case by the museum institution. They also organised summer camps where practitioners could learn how to make a traditional knife, braid a belt or build a sauna for example. These activities were popular among the practitioners, since they gave them a chance to learn the correct form of various practices and skills, which could then be incorporated in their personal Maausk practice, as several of the practitioners told me. Ester told me that they had invited a person skilled at traditional ‘puukko’ knife (nuga) making to a camp to teach practitioners how to make a knife³ (interview June 2013). Communal sauna building camps were venues where traditions were spoken and evaluated (interview with Raivo in January 2012, Ester in June 2013, Andrus in February 2014). A discussion I witnessed about the correct form of poetic ancient folk singing versus the current choir singing can also be seen as another example of evaluating the authenticity of traditions (Field diary January 2013, November 2014, May 2015). In line with Vannini and Williams, I suggest

³ Nuga, a particular kind of small knife, was sometimes worn by Maausk practitioners since it was perceived to be a part of traditional clothing.
that these activities and recurring discussions about the construction of traditions became a part of an evaluative process that contributed to a shared understanding of what should be counted as authentic tradition. It also contributed to the understanding of tradition as something that can be either authentic or fake.

‘Feeling’ as a personal sense of authenticity

It’s important to emphasise that defining the idea of authentic tradition and related identity as constructed, does not diminish the fact that they can be deeply felt and give meaning and a sense of authenticity to people’s lives. I discuss this throughout the rest of the chapter. I argue that understanding the authenticity of traditions only as a construction does not explain how the ideas of tradition are negotiated and constituted as meaningful in personal lives. The affective investment in traditions makes the experience of authenticity feel like true essence, which makes it difficult to empirically experience authenticity as constructed.

Overlapping modes of authenticity

At the beginning of the chapter I described how Maie told me that when practicing Maausk, the most important thing to her was how the practice ‘felt’. She was less concerned with the precision of the form of the particular tradition that the practice was based on. She returned to this line of thought various times throughout the interview, as in the following example:

Maie: *Maausk* is about being connected to one’s roots, and that you know about your traditions. It is a way of seeing the world. Some, like for instance Vello, know everything about traditions. He has a lot of knowledge about the traditions that are described in books. But it does not have to be like that. If you live your everyday life in the countryside (...) Ultimately you need to do things according to your heart, according how it feels. For example, that you will not do any damage to your environment, that you create and not destroy things. It is exciting to do research on tradition from books, and I often take things from books. I think, ‘aah, what a great idea! This fits really well for me. It feels right!’

Jenni: So, you need to feel that it fits you and the place somehow?

Maie: Yes! What is written in books about traditions is very important! But in order to be a practitioner of *Maausk* you do not need to know everything word for word. You do not need to memorise everything about a tradition. It is rather about being connected with the place, respecting your ancestors and having a
lifestyle that is about living a true life. Traditions and customs are important but when you live your everyday life, you do not check everything in the books to learn how things should be done. Some days I have customs that I follow that I know already, sometimes I need to make creative solutions. Living your everyday life is a question of feeling how to live it.

A similar example comes from the interview I carried out with Veiko and his partner, Sirje in which they talked a lot about the relationship between tradition and their practice of *Maausk*. Veiko told me about his *Maausk* practice of greeting tools every time he used them:

Veiko: Here in the countryside if I take a tool in my hand, I have specific words. When I mow with a scythe, I have certain words for saying hello. [...] When I use a scythe I have specific words for saying hello. I take the tool in my hand, and I have these words for the tool. It was the same in Finland. I worked in a big hall. Every time I went to work, I checked that my workmates were not too close, then I put my hand in this string in my neck, and said my own word for greetings the tools I was about to use. And as you can see from my hands, they are intact even though I am a carpenter.

Jenni: Where did you get these words?

Veiko: Look, some things need to be invented, since you can’t find them in the archives. There are absolutely a lot of these words in the archives, but time goes on. In the old days there were not these ultramodern things and words that exist nowadays.

Sirje: Maybe those old words would not work today.

Veiko: Yes. There is a possibility to modernise and one can take the existing words and supplement them. Because at least I need to supplement them according to my preferences, for example there is a tool that has an Estonian name ‘frees’, but I prefer the Finnish variant ‘jyrsin’. So I say the words of greeting in Estonian, but also the Finnish word ‘jyrsin’ is there. Let’s say that because it was...Well okay, it was made in Italy, ‘Grioko’ or some other firm, but it is a Finnish tool anyway, I used a Finnish name for the tool. It was in my own head this thing.

Jenni: So it comes from you, not from tradition?

Veiko: Well, I didn’t really get any words for greeting the electric saw from my grandmother. Everything changes. If tradition were a stable thing, it would be inflexible. Then it would be like the glasses and other valuable objects in the top of that drawer. You pull the glasses out and say, “You can’t touch them”, there must not be any finger marks on them. Then it is not alive. It is like museum stuff and so on. But it is a matter of inner feeling of how to use the archived materials. One has to have a base, a stable foundation must be in place so you don’t start to invent whatever, then it starts to be new age and neo-paganism:
The mixed porridge that comes out from there. One has to have a certain background, so that you already know things.

Certain similarities are evident in how Maie and Veiko described tradition in relation to their Maausk practice. I underline that they both said that knowing and reading about the folk traditions was important. Veiko motivated this by stating that one needs to have a proper foundation on which to base the practice, which could be found in the traditions. Maie said that Maausk practice is about knowing one’s traditions, which could be interpreted to mean that traditions were the foundation or base of her practice. They both connected the traditions with ‘roots’ and ‘ancestors’, thus constructing an idea of continuity of the traditions, similar to what I described at the beginning of this chapter.

Though Veiko also talked about how there was a potential danger in inventing ‘too much’ or the ‘wrong things’, he seemed to be fairly comfortable regarding traditions as invented and dynamic. Maie also told me that practices must be adjusted according to everyday life, and that traditions should not be followed literally. Nonetheless, they expressed the need to know that the practice was based on folk traditions and ancestors’ knowledge to establish a sense of continuity that could be understood as contributing to the sense of authenticity of a particular practice. For instance, ‘New age’ was described as inauthentic by Veiko, because he thought that it was a mix of things from different traditions, and Maie emphasised the need to be aware of one’s roots and traditions when being a Maausk practitioner. Traditions were thus understood to be the proper base for authentic practice of Maausk, so that the necessary sense of continuity could be achieved.

Veiko told me a story about him and his grandmother that was another example of how he was comfortable with inventing traditions his Maausk practice, albeit within a particular framework:

I remember a time long ago when I found a stone in the forest. It was a border stone of two houses, where the dividing line of two forests belonging to different houses went. I took the stone and cleaned it, and put a mushroom on top. When my grandmother and her friends found it, they started to put other things on the stone. It was funny, because it is usually the opposite way around: the older teach the young. But grandmother was that kind of a person, it fitted her very well. Apparently she had also done something similar in her childhood, so it was somehow natural to her. Everybody in the village started to put mushrooms and berries onto the stone. Grandmother has been dead for years now, but I have been back to the sacred stone a few times. It is not significant whether it had
been used as a sacred stone in the past or not. It can also just be a border stone. It is simply a place to which people have started to bring offerings. What does it matter that it has happened in more recent times? Maausk is a dynamic thing. It moves along with time.

In this story Veiko initiated and transmitted the tradition. He told me that it was a practice without very deep roots, but at the same time his narrative suggested that it was somehow familiar to the people in the village and to his grandmother. He argued that it was natural for them to start to follow the practice, since it reminded them of the cultural traditions from the past. It appears that the practice needed be connected to familiarity with imagined past traditions that took place in the local area, in order for his grandmother to continue the practice. I suggest then, based on Veiko’s story that here, as well as in the previous example, the authenticity of the practice, and also Veiko’s personal authenticity, were confirmed by staying true to continuous local traditions and roots.

Veiko’s and Maie’s descriptions of their Maausk practice did not only discuss the traditions as such. They also connected the traditions to the special ‘feeling’ that guided or determined their Maausk practice and how such a feeling was a central aspect in their views on how one should live one’s life in the best possible way. Their practice in their view was connected not only to following the right traditions but also to having the right kind of feeling.

According to Vannini and Burgess, for something to feel authentic there has to be ‘congruence’ between one’s actions and one’s core self-conception. If there is ‘congruence’ between actions and ideas about the self, one’s self is then affirmed and authenticity is experienced (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 104). From such a perspective, Veiko’s and Maie’s reasoning can be interpreted to mean that they found it necessary to practice Maausk both through the “right” traditions and with the “right” feeling, to experience authenticity on a personal level. By so doing, their actions would be in line with their ideals of being Maausk practitioners who practice the traditions of their ancestors. However, the practice did not necessarily have to be strictly fixed and firmly based in the books about the folk tradition. Both interviews instead indicated that the mere mentioning of a tradition in a text or document was not enough for it to be taken up in practice. In other words – each potential Maausk practice had to be evaluated on the level of how it felt in the practitioners’ personal lives before the practice was followed. This would then indicate that the communal framing of con-
tinuous traditions as a source of authenticity was not valid here in the strictest sense. At the same time, both Maie and Veiko based their *Maausk* practice on folk traditions. This indicates that some of the communal framing of tradition contributed to their formation of a personal sense of authenticity.

It is not a new idea to describe authenticity as a feeling or as an affective experience and not only as an inherent property of tradition. Lindholm describes authenticity as a feeling (Lindholm, 2008: 1). Charles Taylor (1983) has also connected the personal sense of authenticity with a feeling that corresponds to living a particular life that reflects how one understands oneself. I would argue that such a feeling of authenticity could be interpreted as an affective pattern in Wetherell’s (2012) sense. The affective patterns in this case can be understood as a ‘feeling’ interpreted as a personal sense of authenticity, which was tied to both communal and personal understandings of how *Maausk* should be practiced based on traditions. According to Wetherell, affective patterns are open to normative as well as moral assessments for judging and accounting for actions (Wetherell, 2012: 1169). I suggest then that part of the practitioners’ personal sense of authenticity came from normative judging of the particular practice when communal perceptions were mixed with personal senses. What was judged in the affective pattern of authenticity in both cases was the authenticity of the *Maausk* practice on a personal level.

Further according to Wetherell, affective practices can be enriching, guide motivations and orient life choices (Wetherell, 2012: 118). Based on the previous quotes I suggest that a feeling of personal authenticity through practicing traditions motivated the *Maausk* practitioners. Vannini and Burgess argue that ‘finding one’s self and one’s conduct meaningful may be an experience positive enough to warrant similar future conduct’ (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 105). However, motivation does not mean that it overwhelmingly determines the conduct in a fixed manner. Vannini and Burges argue that motivation can be seen more as something that orients people and provides frameworks within which people interpret themselves. They see motivation as a ‘socialised willpower that is emergent on people’s transactions with the world’, that is interpersonal and personal, and subject to interpretations and negotiations (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 106). For example, we have multiple identities and staying true to one of them might cause contradicting forms of authenticity (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 113–114). I want to underline once more here that Veiko’s and Maie’s stories can thus indicate that a sense of authenticity was connected with staying true to
traditional roots authenticated by continuity. However the form of traditions and continuity could be negotiated to fit in with their personal lives. Veiko and Maie were thereby able to successfully navigate between a shared understanding of authenticity and their personal sense of authenticity. This navigation was not always unproblematic though, sometimes these different levels collided with and contradicted each other. I address this more thoroughly in the following section.

I would like to highlight two main points concerning the practitioners’ views on and attitudes towards traditions, continuity and authenticity. Firstly, I suggest that making one’s actions, presence and environment meaningful in the world through practicing *Maausk* provided a feeling of personal authenticity. Secondly, this motivated people’s actions and their participation in *Maausk*.

**Conflicting modes of authenticity**

An example of how the two levels could at times come into conflict with each other, relates to how the practitioners tended to refer to two separate understandings of *Maausk*. One was called ‘the line of heritage’ (*pärimuslikku liin*) which emphasised the importance of cultural heritage as a base for the practice of *Maausk*. The other was called *tunnetuslik liin*, which referred to the more individual and personal practice of *Maausk* that emphasised the affective aspect of the practice. Mart and his wife Anne could be seen as representatives of the latter. They both identified themselves as practitioners of *Maausk*, but the way they described their practice gave the impression that they had a more “creative” approach to it than many of the other practitioners.

When we met for the interview, Mart met me in the Estonian countryside and we drove along small country roads while he described and explained different historical sacred places along the road. We stopped and visited one particular sacred place in the pouring rain, and eventually we ended up at his wife’s parents’ self-sustained farm near Elva. During the car ride Mart told me a story about wooden statues:

I was supposed to tell you about the wooden statues. It is a small image of what *Maausk* is for us, or for me. We, me and my spouse, wanted a kind of *hiiekoht* (sacred place). It can really be that it is not right to call it a *Hiis* (historical sacred place). There are several names and in the old days people used to have some kind of sacred spots, somewhere in the corner of the garden: a kind of sacred place. We wanted to make a ‘Vigala Sass style’ sacred place, where the old gods
would be placed according to their living areas on the map. In the koda (subgroup) there was a lot of talk about those. My wife and I made a project. We asked a sculptor to make the sculptures. I asked for them to be as high as possible. I am not sure how high they are, around half a meter. They are quite big. They are placed almost in a circle. They are very interesting to look at. They are placed in the park in Tartu. They get attention in there. [...] These statues are still there. Last year during a sport event, 12 000 people arrived at the finish line between the earth gods.

That is one of the things that would not please the members of the Estonian House of Taara and native religions (the official organisation of Maausk). To have that in that kind of place: full of advertisements and with a basketball field in the middle of the earth gods. They did not come to the place. We had an event there. People from the literary museum were there, but the members of the Estonian House of Taara and native religions did not come. [...] They were not offended by it, but it is simply not their worldview. After a while, one of them said that it was totally ok.

Later on, it became a tradition: the making of the wooden statues. More statues were added to the place. There are wooden statues about Estonian legends. There are about 30 wooden statues there. They are not necessarily Maausk, but kindergarten teachers go there with their children in days of solstice. Is that Maausk or not? But at the same time people like to go there. It is a popular activity. I think we should be content with that. Not in the sense that it has to be very official. People simply put some money on the earth gods and that’s it!

One way to understand Mart’s story about the wooden statues, would be that he saw tradition as something that needed to be interpreted in relation to the present, and thus as something dynamic. In that sense, his understanding of tradition, as something flexible and dynamic, mirrored the attitude that Maie and Veiko conveyed in the previous section. However, what was different to Veiko’s and Maie’s understanding of tradition, was that Mart did not at all seem to use the idea of unbreakable continuity connected to past folk life traditions, as a justification for his practice. Still, he referred to it as a tradition. To Mart, traditions could be created, moved with time, were under constant construction and did not have to be based on continuity. In this particular example, the idea of continuity of tradition as source of authenticity did not play a very important role in justifying a certain practice. Instead, creativity and innovation could lead to new traditions and new practices that were seen as just as valuable, especially if they made people get involved with Maausk practices, knowingly or unknowingly.

In the quote Mart also expressed that his practice did not fit into the framework of the discourse of traditions advocated by the official Maausk organization. In other words, Mart’s understanding did not fit the idea of
tradition as a continuum that cannot be changed without jeopardising its authenticity. Even though Veiko and Maie also talked about the dynamic and unstable character of traditions, their practice could be understood as an authentic tradition according the criteria of the official group of *Maausk*, since it corresponded with the shared idea of tradition as an unchanged base for *Maausk* practice, as I explained earlier.

Mart was aware that the official *Maausk* organisation had a different idea of tradition, as evidenced when he mentioned that the organisation did not attend the event he had organised. Like Mart, Tõnis also told me that he sometimes had a different view of traditions than that of the official organisation. He expressed that it was not enough for him that traditions had been evaluated on the official level, and considered to be authentic and thus suitable for *Maausk* practice, in order for him to follow them in his personal life.

When we go together to the sacred place to do some kind of prayer, I feel a bit like a stranger there. I’m not used to doing those things there. I do not feel uncomfortable, but [...] it does not feel like my own. Because of that I do not start to do those things myself. Well there was a time, something was wrong in my life and I went into the *Hiis*. I tied a woollen thread to the tree branch. I gave a small offering to the forest. But I could feel that it was not part of my understanding. That it is not really part of my everyday life. [...] I did not know why I should do those things. To go somewhere to tie an offering; that we go somewhere to pray with a group to bow down to something, it did not feel like my own somehow. I felt fake, unauthentic. I don’t have anything against that, but I think it is not for me.

Even though Tõnis was rather uncomfortable in communal offering situations, he did have a personal sacred place that he liked to visit, particularly to reflect upon his life. This special place had been important to him long before he became interested in *Maausk*, and he told me that going to this personal sacred place alone, without other members, felt much more comfortable to him. One way to interpret Tõnis’ view would be that participating in the communal *Maausk* practices did not correspond with what Franzeze defines as “a personal sense of authenticity”. In other words the individual subjective sense that his/her behaviour, appearance and self, reflects his/her sense of core being (Franzeze, 2009: 87). Alternatively, to use Vannini and Burgess reasoning, that when participating in the joint rituals, Tõnis’ actions were not in line with his values and beliefs, which meant that he did not feel like an authentic person – he felt “fake” as he expressed it in the interview (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 104).
Wetherell argues that it is not always easy to associate affective practices with social groupings because affective practices travel and change continuously. Additionally, she argues that affective tenets community will vary in content (Wetherell, 2012: 116). This means that affective patterns are not stable in the form, but instead they arise in particular moments when different configurations of aspects that contribute to the affective pattern are thrown together. This in turn can be understood to create a situation where the affective pattern of authenticity is formed from different components at different moments, which is also influenced by the particular practitioner. Even though the Maausk community was pre-occupied with evaluating the authenticity of traditions which they in turn started to practice as Maausk, they, also emphasised the individual choice of practice on their official website for instance. They emphasised the lack of scripture and religious leaders as I have said before, and that everyone was free to determine their own practice according to their preferences and feelings. This is a paradox that influences the formation of Maausk practices at the individual level and thus the sense of authenticity when practicing it.

I suggest that Tõnis did not describe that his practice was in direct conflict with the communal understandings because of the freedom to choose one’s own practice. Furthermore, I suggest, that the affective pattern of authenticity is then influenced by the feature of Maausk that emphasises individual differences, even though the shared understanding was acknowledged by Tõnis.

Mart’s and Anne’s ideas about their practice corresponded to those of Tõnis. However, Mart and Anne were very critical of the official way of determining Maausk practice, while Tõnis was not, even though his practice did not always align with the predominant understandings. Mart and Anne said repeatedly that the stable, fixed framing of tradition by the official organisation did not coincide with their understanding of tradition and Maausk practice. Based on this, I suggest that also in Mart’s and Anne’s’ case, the Maausk practice as advocated by the official organisation would not allow them to be true to themselves and so to feel authentic. This also suggests that the affective pattern of authenticity is formed by elements that can be in conflict with authenticity negotiated by the some of the other members of Maausk organisation, as the following shows.

Both Anne and Mart expressed their appreciation that the official organisation was doing a good job of protecting Estonia’s heritage of historical sacred places. They told me that they would always help if there was a signature needed or if there was a need to organise a demonstration.
on behalf of a sacred place. Nonetheless, Anne commented on her unwillingness to participate in *Maausk* events:

> For me they have too little creativity. Because they are run so strictly according to the literary museum archives of what one can and cannot do: ‘This is the way it has been written and this has not been written, therefore it is not valid’. They have so little creativity! For me it is a shame really. That is why I don’t bother to have a very close relationship with them. Naturally I respect their efforts but sometimes they tend to be a bunch of men who want to rule.

We continued to talk about the roles of men and women in the group, but after a short while we came back to the theme of traditions and differences in interpreting them. Mart commented as follows:

> Let’s say that what they follow is a good thing, but they forget how, what they follow, has developed in the first place. It has happened in the way that in hundreds of years some kind of creation evolved. One cannot take a certain canon from that: ‘this is the way it is’. In reality it is possible that it still developed through the years. [...] On top of that it is some kind of interpretation of heritage that they use, not the heritage itself. [...] There is this system where the Estonian counties have been renamed. It is all a kind of interpretation. It is not really scientific and certain. Then this runic calendar that was made, which is really honoured, those runes where put together 30 years ago. They are not inherited from some ancient runes. *Maausk* is supposed to be something continuous, that it has come from ancient times. It can be that it has come, but it can also be that it has not come from the past. Who knows exactly? They don’t want to talk about this. There was a time when it was a very forbidden topic: if it is a continuum or not. They say it is, but it is simply that nobody knows that really. We have come to the conclusion that if we feel like doing something, we don’t leave it undone just because nothing has been preserved in the archives regarding that practice.

An additional important difference from how Tõnis regarded *Maausk* was that Mart and Anne strongly questioned continuity. I thus suggest that it was this particular aspect that separated them from the group. It is a question of acting and doing that which corresponds to their personal sense of being authentic people, as Vannini and Burgess (2009) have suggested. Acting according to a shared understanding of tradition as continuity would have felt wrong to them, because it did not correspond with their values and ideas about tradition.

As I wrote previously, Charles Taylor has suggested that authenticity is related to a personal understanding of self-fulfilment (Taylor, 1983: 28). To
put it another way, if we are not free to determine our selfhood, which is the source of authentic living, we no longer live meaningful lives. This sense of lack of meaning as part of the experience of authenticity or more accurately, inauthenticity and ‘fakeness’ is something that is particularly emphasised by Taylor, but not by Vannini and Burgess. According to Taylor the idea that living a specific life produces a sense of personal authenticity has roots in the ‘massive subjective turn of modern culture’. According to Taylor, in the eighteenth century the idea developed that people have an inherent sense of right and wrong, which is anchored in our moral feelings. Self-determined freedom has shaped the idea of authentic living (influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ideas), which means that people are free to decide for themselves rather than being influenced by outside forces (Taylor, 1983: 27). We feel we lead meaningful lives when we are free to determine our own selfhood. Taylor also describes Herder’s influence on the ideal of authenticity. Herder introduced the idea that each person has an original way of being a human. According to Taylor this idea has a deep moral significance in relation to respecting the individual differences between people. According to this idea there is a certain way of being for each individual, and if it is not followed then their life becomes untrue. Taylor writes:

Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing the potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background of understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization in which it is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized form. It is what gives sense to the idea of ‘doing your own thing’ or ‘finding your own fulfillment’. (Taylor, 1983: 29)

Taylor’s formulation of authenticity helps us to understand how deeply the concept of authenticity is intertwined with people’s sense of a good and meaningful life and originality of selfhood. I apply Taylor’s reasoning to the example from Anne and Mart. They talked at length about individual freedom of practice that was seen to be in jeopardy if the frameworks provided by the official Maausk organisation were too strict. One should, according to them, practice Maausk according to one’s feelings, not because someone approves that the practice is traditional and therefore proper to Maausk. Anne seemed to think that each individual has a certain way of being that is authentic only to that person, and which would be in danger if someone else’s ideas were followed rather than the individual creatively
producing ideas of *Maausk* practice. As Charles Taylor claims in the quote above, a sense of authenticity is about finding your own way in life and this seemed to be exactly what Anne wanted to emphasise when she talked about the need for individual creativity. For Mart and Anne, traditions changed over time, and did not have to remain within the frameworks authenticated by others, because then they would be too stiff and lacking in creativity. This was illustrated when Mart said that ‘if we feel like doing something, we don’t leave it undone just because nothing has been preserved in the archives.’

The ‘feeling’ mentioned by Anne in the quote can again be seen in relation to determining the *Maausk* practice. I would argue that this shows once again how authenticity is related to the affective sphere; it is something that can be felt, as Vannini and Williams (2009) Lindholm (2009) and Taylor (1983) have suggested. According to the interviews, this feeling of authenticity was combined with various elements, depending on the person, whilst having some contextual, historical and communal influences. To Anne ‘the feeling’ of authenticity was about being true to one’s creativity when practicing *Maausk*. However, to Anne, being creative in her way went against some other ideals of *Maausk*, thus stopping her from participating in communal *Maausk* events for example. In contrast, for Veiko, Maie and many other *Maausk* practitioners, this ‘feeling of being true to myself’, meant being true to tradition as a continuity that represents belongingness to roots and origins that have continuity throughout time.

**Aesthetics and authenticity**

I have now described how the personal sense of authenticity related to personal *Maausk* practice was constantly negotiated. At times the sensed authenticity of the *Maausk* practice aligned with the communal framing of *Maausk* practice as an authentic continuity of folk traditions. At other times the communal understanding of authentic *Maausk* practice directly opposed a personal sense of authentic practice, since it limited the form of the practice too much. However, what was clear in all the examples was that in order for the folk traditions to feel like authentic *Maausk* practice, they sometimes needed some modification. The complex relationships between the different modes of authenticity in experiencing authenticity in *Maausk* practice were also connected to aesthetic factors. I examine this more closely in this section.
Ester, who was skilled in traditional handicrafts and transmitted this knowledge to others, told me that Maausk had influenced her life choices a great deal. Her eating habits, for instance, were important, and she described herself not only as ‘green’ but ‘dark green’, when it came to food choices. She preferred organic food grown in Estonia:

Ester: Food has to be grown without fertilizers, well I mean artificial fertilizers. As a matter of fact, there are also other things that need to be considered, like what is our own and what is foreign: Onion, when it is ours, then it is good, when it is foreign it has a bad taste. Then I make a difference between things like chicken, we don’t eat chicken any more, we eat broiler. Then there is the fish ‘Sirel’, that is a foreign species, don’t bring it home. Keep your home clean.

Jenni: What do you mean by your own? Does it mean that it is Estonian or who’s own?

Ester: I mean that it belongs to Maausk

She told me that she also made a distinction between what was seen as ‘our own’ and what was seen as ‘foreign’ in relation to her handicraft. She talked about how she used a knife instead of scissors, and how she had started to understand how much German influence there was in folk costumes, so she tried to avoid these. She made a remark about different ‘do it yourself’ crafts, like glass painting as unnecessary and then she continued to talk about Seto folk clothes.

So, what does ‘our own’ mean? The reason why Seto people still have and use their folk clothes is that they have always valued their own traditions. They have never had money to be concerned about different ways of painting glass for example. That is why they have such interesting culture and their deep folk art still exists. They have taken care of it. They have held on to it. They have been so smart. They are not like the glass painters! Well, what can you do about it? I have also painted glass. I love to learn new handicraft techniques. I learned yesterday, and then today I teach them. But, what should I do with that knowledge? Where is the content of it? Where is the story behind that skill? I don’t buy handicraft books anymore if there is no history behind it. For example, the history of woollen gloves. If there is no story behind it what is it for?

Ester also told me that lately she had removed a number of things from her stock of handicraft materials to purchase more authentic ones. Throughout

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4 Seto is a group in the northeastern part of Estonia whose folk singing (leelo) practices were added to the UNESCO world heritage list in 2009.
the interview she tended to interpret and define tradition in a very purist way, discerning between her ‘own’ and ‘foreign’ traditions, and appeared to view the handicraft that she saw as authentic as the most personally meaningful. In that sense, her attitude can be seen as an example of how an idea of something as original and as part of a continuous tradition could be quite influential in the practitioners’ relation to Maausk and Maausk practice. In certain respects, the views she expressed relate to Vannini and Burgess’ ideas regarding how authenticity refers to a quality of realness. It is not an imitation but a real thing, which is genuine and not false or an imitation (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 104).

This corresponds again clearly with the official ideas of Maausk where tradition was seen as something that was authenticated through an evaluative process. In this process the continuity and originality of the traditions were sought, as I have written earlier. In Ester’s case, this process of evaluation involved dividing things into either ‘our own’ or ‘foreign’. Lindholm points out that communal authentication processes often essentialise traditions as something that is “owned” by a particular, for instance ethnic, group (Lindholm 2009). The traditions that are determined to be authentic are then linked with an ideal of an authentic collective character of that group, that generally includes essentialized ethnic and racial identities. Ester’s description of how she gave up some handicraft techniques can be interpreted as a purification process of handicraft traditions, where ‘German traces’ or anything that did not have the right ‘content’ or ‘story’ was removed. And this process can be understood as an essentializing manner of understanding the authenticity of tradition. Furthermore, one can interpret Ester’s shared essentialist understanding of authentic tradition with the official level of Maausk as being intertwined with her sense of being an authentic person, similar to Veiko and Maie. However, Ester was even more concerned about purity and originality, and did not talk about the need to have flexibility and creativity when adjusting the traditions to the modern day. Instead she clearly expressed the opinion that modern influences and handicraft techniques were without meaning and harmful for the perceived correct forms of traditions.

However, I suggest that in Ester’s quote it is also possible to detect yet another element in her sensed authenticity, namely the aesthetics of folk handicrafts. Authenticity can be interpreted as a meaningful aesthetic experience when for example creating something (Vannini and Burgess 2009). Having spent an extensive amount of time with Ester, I know that she appreciated visual symbols of folk art. She liked to choose food products
such as cheese and bread that had folk art motifs in their package design. Once after contemplating a long time over the wine that we were supposed to buy for dinner, Ester finally settled on a bottle with folk handicraft motifs on the label. She reflected on her choice by stating that she chose the wine that looked the most beautiful. Similarly, she repeatedly told me that she appreciated how the folk clothes she made for herself and others looked, that the style and colours were aesthetically pleasing to her.

Another example of aesthetic appreciation of the clothes used in Maausk practice was evident in the interview with Peeter. He was also concerned about issues regarding the authenticity of the traditions that he based his practice of Maausk on. The importance of such aspects were clear from the fact that he had officially registered another more ‘traditional’ Estonian name because his birth name had too Christian connotations in his view. In the interview he told me that in some cases he was very ‘concrete’ about how to follow traditions. I asked what kinds of things he had in mind, and he replied:

For example, when I made the linen shirt, it was essential that the linen was grown in Estonia, but I don’t know where the seeds came from. The thread I used to stitch the shirt, it was essential that it was Estonian breed lamb wool, which had been farmed in Estonia. But where did the dye come from? Did it come from Estonia? I don’t know that. When you see me wearing a man’s suit it is not significant for you where the fabric comes from, Sweden, Siberia, Belorussia. It is not really significant. When you see me wearing folk clothes or let’s say clothing from ancient times, it is significant for you and for the whole picture that they look like folk clothes. For me it is important that I also know exactly where the components come from. [...] It might be that I am running after the truth with too much detail, but I feel that doing it any other way is wrong. For me it is significant, when I already know something about the tradition, that I do it in the right way. Maybe that is why I go to the joint rituals in the sacred place in nature, because I know that it is right. It might not be significant, but I feel that it is right; that may be why why I go to them.

The shirt that Peeter mentioned was one that he had worn during our first meeting in the sacred grove. It was an uncoloured simple linen shirt, without sleeves, buttons or a collar, with red stitches for decoration. It was not made according to the current official folk customs, carefully constructed with the features of a certain county. The shirt was made in a simple and rough way, without carefully stitched linings for example. As the quote above indicates, it appeared to be very important to Peeter to follow what he felt was the correct practice of tradition; he was trying to reach the
‘truth’. One way of doing this was to wear something that, as far as possible, was made in the same way as it was in the past, using the same material and techniques that were used then.

One way to understand what Peeter told me in the interview could be that he, like Ester, was concerned about the aesthetics of his practice. The quote illustrated that the shirt had to have a particular look or style in addition to authentic materials being used in the making of it, in order for it to ‘feel’ right. This can be interpreted in relation to Vannini and Burgess’ claim that aesthetic appreciation constitutes an experience of meaningfulness, and that aesthetic pleasure is a motivator that can orient people to seek similar experiences. Furthermore, they claim that feelings of authentic selfdom sometimes arise together with these aesthetic experiences (Vannini and Burgess, 2009: 110–111). Based on the interviews with Ester and Peeter, I agree with Vannini and Burgess that a sense of authentic selfdom can be experienced together with aesthetic experience. The sense of beauty that Ester and Peeter experienced in connection with their authenticated folk handicrafts, could definitely be understood as something that gave them a ‘feeling’ of being authentic in their practice. In another words, I suggest that authenticity rising from specific aesthetics can be seen as a source of motivation for the self. I do not suggest that the mechanism would be a causal, deterministic relationship, but that a feeling of personal authenticity, through staying true to particular aesthetics, can be seen to be about an individual’s self-appraisal of their value and worth as a congruent person. However, the aesthetic preferences are not constructed entirely alone, rather they are guided by the community of Maausk’s understandings that appreciated the folklore aesthetics as part of traditional folk culture.

Yet another example that illustrated the relationship between aesthetic appreciation and sensed authenticity was given in the interview with Maie. We were talking about the Maausk custom of wearing white clothes in the gatherings in the sacred places in the forest. I asked her:

Jenni: It seems to be important to you what you wear in the Hiis (sacred place in nature)?

Maie: Well there are two things: I am a women and a bit vain (laughs) so I like to look good, and I genuinely like linen clothes also.

However, on the day of the interview we were to attend a joint evening event in a sacred place organised by the practitioners of Maausk. She told me that she would actually be wearing a colourful skirt that was quite ordinary in style.
and not made from linen. It did not even have any ‘folk features’, which she was otherwise inspired by. Maie told me that she did not wear white every time she went to Maausk gathering, even though according to her she appreciated the ‘style’ of the clothes worn by Maausk practitioners. She told me that she had also changed her style as she got older:

It is funny how in my life a dress with glitter sequins has been changed to folk costumes. We were laughing about it one time with my sisters, saying that when we were younger the one who had the most glittery shirt was admired and it was put on for any party. But now when we have grown older, we ask each other: What are you going to wear for the party? Did you finish making the new folk skirt already? (laughing) Things change. (…)

Later on in the interview, we talked about the Maausk practice of going to museums to research how clothes were made in the old days. In relation to that, Maie told me that:

I think that my clothes do not have to look like a sample from the museum. It is not significant for me. What is enough for me is that the clothing has a certain style. I, for example, would like to make clothes for everyday use that have an ethnic spirit. It kind of fits, they would not be directly like folk costumes from the national museum, but they have a particular nuance. How do you change the old so that it fits the current? Like for instance my dress has a zipper, some clothes do not have that, because in the old days zippers didn’t exist. There are differences, but it is a matter of inner feeling what feels right to the individual. In the end we need to be who we are and aim for that. The most important thing in life is to become yourself and realise who you are.

In the interview Maie also told me how her taste in clothes had become more connected to the ‘shared taste of Maausk’. She seemed to think that there were particular aesthetic preferences in the Maausk group that were related to folk clothing and folk costumes from the national museum. However, as is clear in the quote, Maie did not think it was important to maintain the actual form of the museum clothing, in all ways. Having a zipper in her dress was acceptable, even though these had not been used in the original clothes that it was inspired by. So, while Maie’s taste or sense of aesthetics regarding clothes was also influenced by what she saw as traditional types of clothing and folk costumes, she was not at all as strict as Ester and Peeter in her views on the importance of following the old traditions and techniques as far as possible, in order for them to feel authentic.
The important point here is that in one way or another all of the examples presented in this section can be said to reflect a sense of personal authenticity in relation to aesthetics. Ester and Peeter had slightly different ideas of the *Maausk* aesthetics. Nonetheless all of the quotes can be interpreted such that the aesthetic appreciation corresponded to the sense of being an ‘authentic self.’ This aligns with Vannini and Burgess’ (2009) claims of a connection between aesthetic experience and authenticity.

On the basis of Maie, Ester and Peeter’s explanations of their aesthetic and clothing preferences, I further suggest that this is yet another example of how a sense of authenticity may be experienced when one’s actions are in line with one’s ideas and values, which scholars like Taylor (1983), Vannini and Burges (2009) have argued. Ester and Peeter expressed that it was important to stay true to the old way of making clothes and using the correct materials, which could be seen as an example of ideals aligning with actions. While Maie was not so concerned with the manufacturing, it was however important to her to have the particular look or the style that she described as ‘Maausk style’ as well as ‘ethnic’.

Modernity and authenticity of tradition

As the analysis of the different interviews has shown, the conception and experience of authenticity appeared to be important to the practitioners. The idea of authenticity included a feeling of being true to one self, this was also, in its turn, connected to the constant evaluation of what was authentic and inauthentic, by the practitioners of *Maausk*. This was part of their practice geared towards experiencing tradition in a ‘real’ way. It was also part of the process that authenticated the collective as well as the personal self. But why did this idea of authenticity play such an essential role in their relationship with *Maausk*? How can it be understood not only in relation to the individual level, or the rather narrow sphere surrounding *Maausk*, but also to more general tendencies and structures in society?

One way to put authenticity in a larger context is by using Charles Lindholm’s reasoning regarding authenticity and modernity. He claims that the search for authenticity is a result of modernity, in that people in modern society feel the pressure having such a vast amount individual freedom in creating an identity. The foundation of identity is felt to be insecure, and people feel nostalgia towards the fundaments of culture. According to
Lindholm the current concern for authenticity is thus connected to a sense of anxiety and longing for an essential source of identity (Lindholm, 2008: 5).

Lindholm notes that, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the first philosopher to argue that ‘simpler cultures’ carry some of the original authenticity that has been lost or is in danger of being lost. Later theories about tribal purity, nationalism and ethnic pride have their origins in Rousseau’s ideas (Lindholm, 2008: 9). Rousseau has also influenced J. G. Herder’s (1744–1803) ideas about a nation as group of people who all share the same biological ancestry and therefore the same primordial experience (Lindholm, 2008: 100). Herder believed that nations have lost their collective soul through modernisation, but that it could be found among the isolated rural folk, whose dances, songs and stories carried the original folk consciousness (Lindholm 2008: 100). Echoes of this kind of thinking were easy to detect in the understandings of practitioners of Maausk as shown in the interviews. Also on the website of the official Maausk organisation, a view of tradition was presented which described it as something that needed to be protected and preserved, so that it could be passed on to the generations to come. Furthermore, the website states that Maausk, tradition can be found in its most authentic form in the countryside or more remote places rather than in urban areas. If a search for particular roots and a sense of authenticity is a criticism of modernity, it can also be understood as a criticism of the current state of Estonia influenced by regulations from the European Union or Neoliberal global economic policies. This also helps us understand that authenticity is a specific kind of cultural construction tied with society, but at the same time strongly felt in the emotional lives of the practitioners of Maausk.

As mentioned, some of the practitioners had an academic background in folklore studies, and in certain cases, this background contributed to their understanding of tradition and authenticity. Folklore studies are after all founded on a search for pristine, original authentic folk culture, also influenced by Herders ideas of a lost collective soul (Bendix 1997). Nonetheless, the idea of authentic folk culture is understood nowadays by folklore scholars as being problematic. Hannes, was a practitioner who had such a background, and he talked extensively about the need to protect Maausk through the official organisation. This was a common justification for the existence and foundation of the official organisation in the first place. During the interview, I asked Hannes what he saw as actual threats to Maausk, and received the following answer:
Well, certainly a changing society could be said to be threatening, but very different discourses come together here. One discourse is about the past, which says that it is about something that has been given to Estonians. Estonians are a modern people from the 19th century, or let’s say modern Estonian culture was developed in the 19th century. It changed very slowly and there is still something from the past that can be found in the present, right. If there still was to be something left from the past in Estonian culture, it has a value in itself – it has that also if you ask people from the streets. Naturally there are a lot of people who would with pleasure have an identity constructed from the present, then some kind of ethno-cultural nationality would have only a confusing role. It might be that to people in Maausk the ethno-cultural past has some kind of self-evident value. At the same time, it is a discourse very tied to the past. [...] 

Okay, and then the other discourse is tied to the modern worldview: a fear of distancing from tradition. It is a threat to the values of Maausk. There is a need to show that we are the native people in this land. Well that does not mean any kind of fascism or racism. At least for now it has not meant that, right, but maybe Estonians do not have that problem, that we should start chasing immigrants, or something. Maybe if there would be problems something would change. But at the moment one cannot say that of us. I think there might be some Christian nationalists that would pursue that route. Well, we don’t know about that, but what threatens the worldview of Maausk? Starting from these discourses would be that, in the end it disappears totally, the cultural identity disappears, the one that is owned by Estonians. [...] We could say that the practitioners of Maausk would like to protect the heritage of folk belief, cultural heritage tied with sacred sites among other things. Of course to protect the small Estonian country, which is different from Europe. The same kind of natural sacred places, like we have, others don’t have. Estonia is an independent nation. We should be able to decide what to protect without looking to Finland or Germany for how it is done. That is something that the official organisation of Maavalla koda is doing. It is very difficult to live in a country that is run by copy-paste leaders. Routines could be developed here in the home country as well.

Hannes ended his long reflection with an ironic laugh about his remark on the copy-paste leadership of Estonia. It was easy to detect his frustration in this closing remark. One way to interpret his reaction is to see it as frustration over the bureaucracy of administration, when trying to protect the cultural heritage. Since the cultural heritage can be both intangible and

5 The heavy influx of the migrations and refugees from the Middle-Eastern countries to Europe in 2015 have raised the question of the extent to which the Baltic countries should receive immigrants. Negative and racist voices were raised in the Estonian media and society and such opinions were reflected among some of the practitioners as well. More research would need to be done on this matter to determine to what extent such opinions are tied to Maausk values and how much they reflect other contexts in society.
tangible, it is not only made of archaeological evidence, confirming it heritage and therefore protecting is not an easy task. But what is more noteworthy is the idea of tradition evident in this quote. Traditions are described as traces from the past in the present, which are about to disappear. They need to be protected before they are gone, according to Hannes, because they are a source of authentic ethnicity-based identity. This disappearing tradition is not sufficiently protected by the government in his view. This can be understood as criticism of the state – that is not perceived to be interested in preserving the traditions of Estonia.

This example relates to how heritage protection efforts have their roots in the folklore discipline in Europe. The first ethnographers travelled to the countryside to collect what was understood to be authentic folklore, material culture and customs for preservation. They searched for an authentic essence that was lost. It was modernity that had created the loss of essential customs and made the quest meaningful. The countryside was seen as a pristine place where folk culture had been kept alive longer than in urban areas, and this perceived folk culture was seen to constitute the roots of the nation itself, as folklorist Regina Bendix (1997) showed us. This idea is still present in the general public, even though folklore scholars have reflected that the paradigm concerning ideas about tradition has become more nuanced, where tradition is not seen as something given, but instead constructed. The idea that authentic traditions can disappear is still, nonetheless, something that can have an influence on people’s ideas and conceptions about the world. In Estonia, the idea of genuine folk cultures disappearing was raised again in the 1970s as an opposition to Soviet cultural policies. This produced the culture of ‘professional folk performers’, who were supposed to be Socialist in the content they presented and ‘folk’ in their appearance. Folk culture collecting trips were organised at the same time to the countryside and to Siberia to study Finno-Ugric cultures (Kuutma, 1998: 1).

Looking at the quote from such a perspective, it is evident that for Hannes, traditions could still be seen in the present and gave value to life, but at the same time they needed to be protected because they were in danger of disappearing. In his book *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship* (2005), the Finnish folklorist Pertti Anttonen discusses the folklore paradigm of a feeling of cultural loss: ‘mourning is done of what is lost when culture becomes modern’ (Anttonen, 2005: 80). The traditional and the modern are positioned as opposites, and loss of tradition is seen as a result of mo-
dernisation. Within this sense of loss people construct an idea of home and of a space and time that existed before the change, and this becomes a representative of tradition (Anttonen, 2005: 80). Hannes’ understanding of tradition, as something that was under threat and needed protection, could thus be understood as reflecting such a folklore paradigm of loss, as described by Anttonen.

The efforts to preserve tradition in its authentic form, that in some cases contributes to the personal sense of authenticity in Maausk, could thus be translated as a search for a fixed stable identity based on the ethnic and genealogical roots and continuity to which the traditions belong. These kinds of fragmented identities have sometimes been seen as a reaction against global neoliberal policies, weakening the homogenisation phenomenon of shared identities founded in belongingness to a state. When the states do not offer a stable platform for people’s lives, with benefits and obligations, fragmented identities that provide meanings, affective attachments and allies are established inside a state structure based on other identification markers. These have been more closely looked at in chapter 3.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have analysed the sense of authenticity and its connection to the understanding of traditions within Maausk. Authenticity in this chapter has been looked at from the perspective of affective feeling or a sense of being an authentic person. I have been inspired by the perspective of Vannini and Williams. They see authenticity from a phenomenological perspective, in that it is seen as an affective, cognitive, narrative and self-reflexive experience, but at the same time can be seen as a normative ideal (Vannini and Williams, 2009: 6). I have written about how these levels interact together as an affective practice per Wetherell, and are narrated as the ‘feeling’.

This affective pattern of authenticity was revealed in the interviews as self-reflexive narratives whereby practitioners expressed ‘feeling’ connected in the process of motivating and determining the Maausk practices they had chosen to take up in their lives. These ‘feelings’ interpreted here as authenticity, were nuanced, multi-faceted and dependent on context. The context for the ‘feeling’ as an authentic person was provided sometimes by the Maausk understanding of authentic traditions, which provided the ‘normative ideal’ of traditions, and sometimes by personal preferences that collided with these ‘normative ideals.’

In some cases, practicing these traditions as authentic provided a personal sense of authenticity for Maausk practitioners, although not always. Sometimes the affective pattern of authenticity felt in relation to the
personal life was composed of elements that corresponded with other values, which in turn clashed with official Maausk understandings. In addition, the experience of a personal sense of authenticity could orient people’s actions so that they might seek similar experiences in the future. By doing this they either reproduced the values of shared understanding of the authentic tradition or they rejected these values and as a result had an experience of authenticity.

According to the official understanding of the Maausk organisation, traditions were understood as authentic when they were seen to have continuity and roots and when they were seen to be free of foreign influences. They were also perceived as owned by a particular group that the Maausk practitioners represented. In addition, the modernity’s quest for authentic and original roots may have been a contributing factor to the idea of continuum of tradition developed within Maausk in the first place. But the quest for roots may be also tied with current Estonian society that is influenced by globalisation as well the regulations coming from the European Union, for example.
CHAPTER 6

_Maausk_ practice as an embodiment of tradition

A sacred tree in _Tammealuse Hiis_ in June 2015
In this chapter I continue my discussion of the significance of traditions in Maausk. However instead of focusing on the relationship between the feeling of authenticity and traditions as I did in the previous chapter, I focus my analysis on framing the concept of tradition so that it reflects the actual and lived quality of it as part of Maausk practice. I will take a closer look at the embodiment of the traditions and their symbolic meanings.

In the Estonian language the meanings of heritage and tradition are not separate as they are in English. According to the Estonian dictionary of synonyms, the words tradition (traditsioon) and heritage (pärimus) have the same connotations. The dictionary states that the Estonian words pärimus and traditsioon mean a ‘creation of the people transmitted from generation to generation that can be a custom, a practice, a belief, an object, knowledge or other kind of traditions’ (Eesti keele seletav sõnaraamat).\(^1\) These two words are entangled in everyday Estonian use (Kuutma and Kästik 2014: 284) and also among the practitioners of Maausk. In English there is a distinct difference between the two concepts. According to dictionary definitions: ‘tradition’ is defined as the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, and ‘heritage’ is defined as a property that is inherited (Oxford English dictionary). In this chapter I use the English term ‘tradition’ when writing about the meaning of traditsioon and pärimus in Maausk, since it better reflects the focus of the chapter. That is, the significance of ‘transmission’ of tradition, which is lacking in the definition of the concept of ‘heritage’ in English. It is the embodiment of tradition that is of particular interest in terms of this ‘transmission’, but I start by explaining how I understand the ‘transmission’ of tradition and why it is significant.

Transmission of traditions

As became clear in the previous chapter, Maausk practice is based on the perceived folk traditions. These traditions are learned and discussed in the joint gatherings of the practitioners such as summer camps, museum visit and rituals in the sacred places. In addition, traditions are learned in clubs organised in Estonia in general. All of these moments can be seen as part of the transmission process, where techniques and ideas of traditions can be

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\(^1\) Translated by the author.
learned, repeated, imitated and so embodied and then put into circulation. I examine this claim further in this section with the help of empirical material.

The idea of tradition as something that is transmitted can be found in Edward Shils’ book *Tradition* (1981). In this book Shils describes tradition to be in its purest form, as something that is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. According to Shils it does not matter what is transmitted or in what form, or whether it is a tangible or an intangible object. In addition, it does not matter in what way it is transmitted or why this occurs (Shils, 1983: 12). This understanding can be problematic if the tradition, which is thought to be handed down from the past to the present, is understood to be fixed and unchangeable in character. As Hobsbawn and Ranger argue, traditions are tied to time and therefore plural, invented and dynamic related to present needs (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). However, Shils is not concerned about a validation of the tradition that could fix the meaning and form of it as something unchangeable. He writes that the ‘true value’ of tradition is irrelevant, since in the process of transmission traditions always change. According to Shils, it is thus always a new interpretation of a particular tradition that is made in the transmission process (Shils, 1983: 13).

The understanding of tradition as something that is ‘handed down in time’ is not where I would primarily locate transmission in the context of *Maausk*. Rather, I would like to emphasise how it tended to be communicated, ‘handed to’ and circulated inside the group, in other words transmitted in a horizontal direction rather than vertically. This is something folklorist Simon J. Bronner underlines in his description of the roles adopted in the transmission processes inside a group. He sees people as both ‘givers’ and ‘recipients’, as opposed to some individuals being ‘originators’, as the idea of tradition being ‘handed down in time’ would suggest (Bronner, 2008: 30). An example of how the transmission process within the *Maausk* community tended to be characterised by such a horizontal direction, where the participants tended to have equal roles, is exemplified in the following quote from Maie:

At present we don’t really have direct contact with the ancestors who would all the time teach you traditions incorporated in to the everyday life. In a way we are all teaching each other. How should I put it (…)? Well, in quotation marks, we are all ancestors to each other. The community exists to support the heritage. It is very substantial. The ideal would of course be that this kind of community like *Maausk* would not be necessary. That the traditions would just be natural – naturally occurring in everyday life.
Maie’s reasoning reflects the idea that many traditions have disappeared from everyday life, and that the community of Maausk is trying to bring them back to life. This understanding of Maausk practices and beliefs founded in folk traditions circulating within the community in a horizontal direction, was also illustrated in the interviews with Tõnis. He told me that what attracted him to the Maausk community was that they liked to do ‘traditional’ things (like building a sauna) as well as talk about traditions, and, that they in other words, shared his interest in the old ways of doing things. When we were talking about the practices he took part in, which he defined as Maausk, I asked him where these practices came from and he replied:

They come from the family or books, but on the other hand they are actually coming from... well, that somebody learns something from somewhere... It is unbelievable how fast that works. If, for example, I learn some interesting aspect of how our ancestors were doing a particular thing, it spreads around really fast. Everybody wants to know about it, and then somebody else in the group is the one who says: ‘do you know that our ancestors did it this way’. Some start to follow that and some don’t. This is very significant. But anyway that is how traditions move around.

According to Bronner the idea of ‘handing the tradition over’ suggests a social connection: ‘Giver and recipient come together at that moment and become familiar as a consequence’. This also suggests a kind of social continuity (Bronner, 2008: 32). The quotes from Tõnis and Maie illustrate the importance of the community in the transmission process as well as highlight the social ties that are formed in that same process. What the quotes could also be seen to suggest is that in this transmission process values and beliefs related to traditions were shared and negotiated. For example, the view that traditions were in danger of disappearing altogether and thus needed to be protected, which the Maausk community was trying to do for instance by practicing them.

The Maausk practitioners often talked about traditions in the moment of transmission, but what is important is that they also carried out the actual practice of tradition at the same time, like braiding or dancing or building a sauna for instance. It could be a newly learned skill, or a practice they had repeated many times. What is significant for my analysis is that these moments involved doing in addition to talking, and this doing required an active engagement of the body. This may be interpreted such that the embodiment of traditions was, in addition to other aspects, a part of the process of transmitting and learning them. According to Merleau-Ponty
(1945) the world is primarily perceived through the body, which makes the body the foundation for all experiences. This also implies, according to him, that the body is the existential base for experiencing culture. Based on Merleau-Ponty, Thomas J. Csordas understands embodiment as the existential basis of culture. The body is then not seen as an object that is rendered meaningful through representations but is understood as a ‘subject’ of culture (Csordas 1990: 5). Csordas sees culture as foremost founded in the human body, which in turn implies that embodiment should be the starting point for studying people as cultural beings (Csordas 1994: 6).

I find the process of transmission of traditions interesting because it is in this process that they are embodied and lived. Even though traditions may be described in books for instance, the full knowledge of them becomes embedded in the body through practicing them. As an example, one of the traditions learned in group-gatherings of Maausk is a technique for braiding woollen belts, which are then sometimes given as gifts to spirits in the sacred places. Considering my own experiences in, what I call, the transmission moment of a particular tradition, I would say that I attained embodied knowledge about the process of braiding in that moment. It gave me a sense of how the wool felt in my hands, and what the best technique for braiding it was. Patterns were taught in the process of making, but personal creativity could be used when choosing the colours for the work. The best technique varied from person to person, but figuring out which one was most suitable happened only by actual braiding. The hands learned how to hold on to the threads so that they would not get entangled, and what the best tension was for the threads to make a durable belt. According to my field notes and diary, when I made my own woollen offerings in the gatherings, usually instructed by some of the practitioners, the offering felt much more meaningful because I had made it myself according to my colour preferences, and the technique I had used had been according to ‘traditions’ (Field diary: May 2014 and May 2015).
An example of braiding done by me in Tammealuse Hiis in Viru county in May 2015 that was left as a gift to a sacred tree.

I would assume that something similar happens to the practitioners when they practice the traditions. However, one has to be careful when making this kind of assumptions since people experience the world from individual positions and it is impossible to fully access other people’s actual experiences. To overcome this barrier Sarah Pink suggests a specific method of sensory ethnography, which I introduced in the introductory chapter. In this method researchers participate in the field with their entire experienc-
ing body, paying attention to sensorial, emotional and bodily experiences (Pink 2009: 27) in addition to basing analysis on representations gathered by interviews. Pink also suggests that embodied knowledge can be learned, like any other kinds of knowledge. This learning in turn entails both the experience of understanding the meaning and the feeling of bodily competence over the knowledge. So, in order to begin to understand this kind of knowledge and experience, the researcher needs to participate in the actual practices. According to Pink, the knowing in practice can be understood as an embodied and multisensory way of knowing. Knowing is again individually situated and constantly changing. Yet knowledge must not be understood only as specific to practice, but it is also attached to broader discourses. Consequently, in order know the embodiment of others, according to Pink, one needs to be attentive to the discourses and the context that frames the practices while at the same time being attentive to one’s sensorial and bodily experiences whilst engaging in practices (Pink 2009: 39–41).

What Pink is suggesting then, is that through a process of learning that entails both embodiment and other representations, it is possible to understand the embodiment of others. My previous description of braiding illustrates that while I embodied the technique of braiding I also embodied some of the values of Maausk, such as the importance of traditions and the particular forms of giving purposeful gifts to the spirits. These had been passed on to me in multiple conversations in the transmission processes of traditions, which had made me perceive things through Maausk values. However, in order to comprehend the Maausk practitioners’ experience of the traditions the conversations had not been enough. I also needed to participate in the practices to get to the embodied level of traditions that had contributed to my understanding of Maausk practice, and understand how the values and ideas about the practice of folk traditions are embodied and shared.

In addition, my participation as a researcher, with a specific academic background as well as a particular goal with my participation, influenced the embodiment I experienced and placed the experience in the sphere of personal instead of communal. However, all practitioners have individual backgrounds. According to Pink, ethnographic studies have shown us learning a skill is not simply about mimicking, but creating a personalised skill that is still acceptable to others (Pink 2009:41). So, what needs to be acknowledged here is that embodiment always takes many different forms (Turner 2015: 66), even if the individuals are all part of a particular community. However, the Maausk practitioners were engaged, like I was, in
learning processes of traditions that happen in the moment of transmission of the tradition. In these processes, discourses, ideals, values and interpretation scenarios are incorporated into the moment of doing. This creates a certain possibility to ‘know other’s embodiment’ through a learning process where perceptions can be altered.

Finally, what I argue here is that it is in the moment of transmission, where actual doing is involved, that tradition comes into being and is constituted. According to Paul Oliver, tradition is not in what is being transmitted, it is not in the materiality, in some kind of physical object or some idea or belief, even though they might be the symbols of tradition. Oliver claims, in the case of transmission of traditional architecture, that tradition does not come to be in the materiality of the buildings, even though they might symbolise the tradition. It is in the transmission, where, for example traditional ideas are tested through trial and error in the building process where tradition emanates (Oliver, 2006). When practitioners meet for sauna building gatherings for example, they test the circulating vernacular or textual knowledge about the traditional building techniques by actually building a sauna. At the same time they create and reproduce the meanings tied to particular traditions.

Consequently, I argue that it is only in the moment of transmission that involves doing, that traditions start to mean more than abstract cognitive knowledge. Knowledge is embodied while doing during the transmission process. What is important with respect to this is Merleau-Ponty’s idea that we perceive the world through sensing bodies. According to him our bodies are always directed towards experiencing, perceiving and sensing the world. We are not able to understand the world without ‘sense-experience’ of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2003 [1945]: 3). To Merleau-Ponty the mind and body are intertwined in human experience, and not divided as the dualistic view of human beings has suggested. This is important here as I agree that the intertwining of the body and mind is at the centre of people’s experiences, constructions, meaning-making and engagement with their culture and the world in general. As I have explained with the help of my own experience, learning a tradition requires both embodied knowledge and acquired representation of the ideas and meanings of the tradition. In this way, traditions are constituted in the transmission process through embodied learning as well as through learning about the symbolic meanings of traditions. This happened to me while learning the belt braiding technique. I embodied the traditional technique and at the same time the tradition became something personally meaningful, which in turn was
partly tied to Maausk values. It’s important to note that in the embodied experience of braiding, I also incorporated my own individual preferences, for instance which colours to choose and the tension of the thread.

Learning traditional braiding patterns in Tammealuse Hiis June 2014 (note to self: frame the picture so that the faces are not showing)
Dancing and singing

Traditional folk singing and dancing was a common practice within Maausk, and was performed at the joint events and sometimes also outside of these events. Estonians in general are very familiar with folk singing and dancing. Ever since since Soviet times, children have been going to folk singing and dancing clubs after school from a young age. This was a pastime supported by the Soviet policies. However these clubs were not allowed to portray any kind of national identity, since symbolic value was supposed to be reserved, at least officially, for Communist ideology (Gorsuch 2011: 53). ‘Ethnic in form, but socialist in content’ was the slogan of the project where the aesthetics of ethnic culture were put on display to demonstrate the variety of the different Soviet nations (Brubaker 2006: 84, 2013: 13).

Folk dancing and singing clubs are not as popular anymore as they were in Soviet times, but they are still quite a well-known and appreciated hobby of children and adults. It would be difficult to find an Estonian who has never sung a poetic form regi laul folk song or danced folk dances on some occasion in their lives. Some of the practitioners had done so when attending folk dance or folk singing clubs, which are still organised in various places throughout Estonia. These clubs still exist in part because folk culture arose as an anti-Soviet identity symbol that drew from perceived ancient traditions, at around the time when the Soviet cultural system started to crumble, even though it was originally the Soviet regime that created the conditions where this kind of activity was possible (cf Kuutma and Kästik 2014: 281, Gorsuch 2011: 53). The folklore movement in Estonia at this time revived folk music and connected back to what was perceived as traditions from an idealised pre-industrial peasant culture. They used improvisation and individual interpretation to replace the Soviet-style unified folk culture expression (Kuutma and Kästik 2014: 282, 306). This in turn enforced the symbolic meaning of folk singing and dancing as folk traditions, and thus as symbols of Estonian identity.

Ester and embodied connection to Finno-Ugric descent

This historically conditioned background of the meaning of folk singing and dancing can be seen as influencing the discourses of such traditions in Maausk as well, I would argue. This was evident in how the practitioners described their experiences of these traditions. Ester, who was one of the
most skilled practitioners of folk dancing practice, expressed her experiences in the following way:

I tend to go to all the Finno-Ugric evenings they organise here in Tallinn. They interest me a lot and one can learn a lot from them. I especially like those where they sing or dance because I can relate to them. I know what it is like to dance in a group with other couples. Sometimes it works like a charm, sometimes it is more difficult. I can see them as relatives of ours. There are also dance clubs organised here in Tallinn. I go whenever I have the time. I like to learn the patterns of group dancing for example. I am sometimes the one who teaches others in the joint events of Maausk.

According to Merleau-Ponty, in order to learn movements, the body has to understand the movement so that it is incorporated into the body’s world (Merleau-Ponty (2013 [1945]): 140). Furthermore, he writes that to acquire a habit that reworks the body schema one must ‘habituate’ oneself to the gestures of the habit and make them participate in one’s body (Merleau-Ponty 2013 [1945]): 145). In this process the body learns to sense the possible movements so that the movements become smooth. I consider dancing in Ester’s case as a habit, which has been incorporated into her ‘body’s world’, that is, has become embodied. Her ability to not only learn the patterns of the folk dancing, but also teach them to others, can be seen as an illustration of how she had become familiar with the movements to the extent that they were in fact incorporated in to her body. My first experience of folk dancing in a group during the fieldwork was that my movements were somewhat awkward, since my body did not really know how to adjust itself to the positions of the dance movements. I collided with the others since I needed to reflect upon the movements before actually making them. Ester, on the other hand, danced quite effortlessly, as noted during the fieldwork.

There is also another significant aspect in Ester’s story, namely the habit of going to see Finno-Ugric groups perform folk dancing. As I discussed in chapter three, perceived Finno-Ugric unity is part of the Maausk identity construction. Their traditions and practices are read, spoken about and practiced within Maausk, because of the perceived ancient connection between all of the Finno-Ugric people. I would argue that visiting folk dance performances can also be seen as a moment of transmission of traditions, where different techniques can be learned. The process of transmission in this case then comprises: a symbolic meaning of traditions as an ancient practice once shared with all Finno-Ugric groups, and; the incorporation of
a knowledge that is based on previous embodied experiences of dancing, which is most significant to my analysis. According to Laderman, it is possible to see dialectics between symbolic reality and bodily experiences (Laderman 1994: 196). I thus interpret Ester’s quote that she, because of her embodied knowledge of folk dancing, can also relate on an embodied level to the dancing of perceived ancestors. Further, I suggest that this contributes to her establishing a meaningful connection to the imagined relatives, in the sense that she can relate to their traditions more through her embodied experience than she would be able to do through only an abstract and descriptive knowledge about their traditions.

Maie and the ancestors’ knowledge incorporated in folk singing

As mentioned, folk singing was also an integral part of the traditions the Maausk practice was based on. Maie was interested in this, and she told me during the interview how she wanted to go to a Seto-camp in order to make a traditional string instrument called kantele. She explained that she saw it as important that her child learned to play this instrument when she grew older. Maie also wanted to organise song evenings in her house where people could come and sing regilaul (poetic folk singing) together. I asked her why, and she replied:

The songs have some kind of magic. They have a message about life and the world. They tell us how to live. The songs talk about life! Like singing a child to sleep. Also bridal songs; the bride learns about life in marriage from related songs. (...) There is a strong power in the regilaul. There is magic. They also tell us about our ancestors’ life; how they lived their life. And also they tell us about how the world came to be. The bird egg and the creation of the world are in the songs. (...) The feeling when singing a regilaul is strong. It is possible to feel all the knowledge in them. I am not musical at all. I hope my children will be (laughs), but it is still possible to reply to the singing of a lead-singer and feel their power. There is a feeling of being connected to something eternal.

According to Kuutma and Kästik, Regilaul is an Estonian musical expression that denotes ‘an archaic singing tradition involving metrical and formulaic verses’ with simple melodies. The lead singer sang the improvised verses that contained common motifs with common expressions and these verses were then repeated by the rest of the people present (Kuutma and Kästik 2014: 279). Such verses were collected by folklorists as a form of folk poetry in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was done as
part of a nation building process. According to Kuutma, these songs still symbolise Estonian identity since they were seen to reflect an idea of peasant lifestyle in addition to the perceived ‘archaic’ origin of the poetic form. (Kuutma 2008)\(^2\). Such ideas also shaped how *regilaul* were portrayed and regarded within *Maausk* as containing the wisdom of the ancestors. This is evident in the quote from Maie, when she described how powerful and important the messages and advice stored in the songs were, to her and others within *Maausk*. But in addition to the knowledge that could be found in the lyrics, she also told me that the knowledge of the songs could be *felt* while singing. That even though she described herself as unmusical, which could mean that she wanted to let me know that she was not an expert on the tradition of folk singing, she could still experience singing as being connected to something eternal.

I would thus argue that conceptions about the ancestors’ way of life and their perceived wisdom, as well as a more existential knowledge about the origins of the world, were what Maie experienced embodying while singing. Ancestors knowing, this fundamental knowledge of how to live one’s life, was represented in the songs and could be felt while singing as Maie described it. From Maie’s account, we can understand that cultural conceptions (in this case the *Maausk* understanding that the ancestors and a good relation to them, were seen as an integral part in living a good life,) were reproduced repetitively both verbally and physically as a corporeal sense of meaningfulness, through Maie’s body in the moments of singing. This connects to what Laderman (1996) suggested that embodiment is vital in maintaining symbolic meanings. While singing, Maie could be said to experience the symbolic values of the songs, which contributed to what she described as ‘feeling of the knowledge’ incorporated in the song texts.

**Terje and the social aspect of embodiment**

The embodied knowledge of the folk singing tradition was also illustrated in the interview with Terje, who was both an artist and a *Maausk* practitioner. She told me that:

> I think that one thing that is tied to *Maausk* and which is very significant for me is the whole heritage issue and the world of the *regilaul* (folk songs in poetic

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\(^2\) See similar development in Finland in Veikko Anttonen’s *Tradition through Modernity* (2005). See also Mats Lindquist on Latvian case 2003uuuw
form). I paint that topic a lot and I also sing them myself. It is a part of my worldview. [...] My art is clearly tied to the lyrics of the thematic of the regilaul.

I knew about the songs of course, but at one point I discovered the full scale of them. We have powerful collections of poetic form song, right! Everything is written down, so in that sense we are really lucky! At first I started to read. I got this sort of feeling like I was making a discovery, when I was thinking: Look at how much, how many, what kind of a world. And how they have been able to express that with such rich vocabulary! The proverbs, the proverbs are great! I read them a lot. All the old proverbs. I paint them a lot.

Even though Terje was very enthusiastic about how she discovered the lyrics and how she used them as motifs for her painting, she also told me in the interview that it was not until she started to sing in a group which sang the traditional regilaul, that she had experienced ‘a real connection’ to the songs. One aspect that she emphasised was her experience that the singing made her understand what it had been like for the ancestors to sing. This is another example, like when Ester talked about her folk dancing practice, of how the actual practicing of the traditions could give the practitioners a corporeal sense of what it was like in the past for their ancestors to sing and dance. The meaning of the traditions was, in other words, strengthened through the bodily experience of those traditions.

Later on in the interview, Terje explained that she had actually had a glimpse of the singing tradition even before it had become relevant in her life. She had come into contact with some of the first initiators of Maauusk when she was living in the countryside after having moved there from the city in the 1990s. During the period of political and social turmoil during the collapse of the Soviet Union in Estonia, many people returned to the countryside, partly because living there offered at least a possibility to live a somewhat self-sustained life, during a period that was characterised by a scarcity of products. The area where she lived was a national park with distinctive nature, a place that was and still is perceived in Estonia as a particular cultural heritage site. The idea of the place as a site for cultural heritage is also promoted by the inhabitants, for instance they have experimented with traditional methods of farming based on how the agricultural society is described in the folklore archives. Terje told me that it was during this time that she was introduced to the ideas of heritage protection and the value of a distinctive Estonian culture. Her more personal relationship with the heritage practices grew later when she discovered the singing tradition.
As mentioned, collective singing has many meanings and serves various purposes in Estonia. The symbolic meaning of the regilaul still prevails, as discussed in relation to the example from Maie. Estonia is in general regarded as a singing nation, which was evident in how the ‘singing revolution’ is seen to have played a role in the events that led to the country’s independence (Randjärv 2014: 64). In addition to this wider societal background, Terje socialised with people who were involved with the heritage protection club in the particular location where she lived. Thus, her understanding of the singing tradition can be seen to be tied to both the historical and the personal context that she talked about in the interview. The symbolic meaning of singing had been circulating among the group members just like in the wider society because of the particular significance of singing in Estonian society. Terje also described a bodily experience of connecting with the ancestors’ practice with the singing. Her experience of singing can be understood as an embodied experience that in turn had a social aspect connected to her personal history, as well as being connected to the society she lived in. It is important to note that while symbolic meanings are inscribed in the body, embodied experiences also generate the cultural object of tradition while recreate it in connection with others. Thus the embodied aspect of experiencing the tradition of singing maintains, communicates and shares the values and meanings in Maausk.

The transmission of traditions as rituals

Yet another way to understand the kind of processes and experiences the interviewees described when it came to how traditions were embodied, is by seeing them as rituals. This perspective also says something about how the symbolic meaning of traditions is maintained within the Maausk community. Nick Crossley, who has written about rituals and generally leaves the definition of the concept quite open, emphasises that rituals are embodied, that is, that the doing of rituals are bodily acts (Crossley, 2004: 31). He also writes that different kinds of rituals have common threads with various kinds of social practices (Crossley, 2004: 32). Transmitting traditions can be understood as social practice and because of this I feel comfortable with considering the Maausk practice of transmitting traditions as rituals, in order to discuss some of the points Crossley raises about rituals as embodied.
Crossley is interested in revealing what bodies are used for. He sees the body as active in the creation and understanding of the social world, and illustrates this through Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) ideas that the body is not an external object in our experience, but a fundamental part of our embodied experience of the world. Therefore, it is not enough to describe the world with our minds; we also embody it with our bodies. Crossley thinks that the same goes for uses of the body – body techniques. What he concludes then is that body techniques are acquired and embodied cultural competencies. (Crossley, 2004: 36).

Crossley argues that rituals manifest and create an understanding of the social world to which agents belong. Values, beliefs, positions and hierarchies are then embedded in ritual practices. Further, they ‘constitute the practical know-how necessary for the reproduction of that social world’ (Crossley, 2004: 38). He continues that the ritual practice requires the embodied competence to perform a certain act. At the same time the semiotic and discursive meanings that constitute the meaning of the practice are also significant. These are structured by the norms and history of the social group. In this respect Crossley argues that rituals are practical embodied knowledge of the social world and social relationships, at the same time, they are techniques reproducing those aspects of the world (Crossley, 2004: 39). Furthermore, Crossley points out that through ritual practice people embody, act and reproduce social norms and understandings (Crossley, 2004: 43).

Based on Crossley ideas, I would argue that one way to interpret the quotes from Ester, Maie and Terje, would be that the singing and dancing they took part in, can be seen as transmission moments of traditions considered as rituals, where Maausk values and symbolic meanings as well as embodied cultural competencies were repeatedly reproduced. Treating the transmission moments as rituals especially emphasised the aspect of repetition as a main way of maintaining and reproducing the understandings of the social group that Maausk can be understood to constitute. For example, Ester’s dancing could be understood as a specific cultural-corporeal competence through which she could also repetitively embody the dancing of other traditions, such as the Finno-Ugric traditions. Being a bearer of these traditions defined Ester as someone with a particular origin, emphasised in the Maausk construction of identity, as described in detail in chapter three. Maie’s and Terje’s descriptions of their experiences of folk singing, on the other hand could be understood as embodied connection to
the ancestors’ knowledge, which could be seen to be repetitively formatted through the ritual of singing folk traditions.

In addition, all three of the empirical examples presented in this chapter described the experience of understanding what it was like for the ancestors to dance and sing, through the experience of practicing the same traditions themselves. Through the ritual practice of the traditions of folk dancing and singing, a kind of continuity was thus produced. One can say that the past somehow moved closer and became more tangible, as it became carved into the memory of the body as a feeling. Hence, the traditions could be said to provide affective embodied pathways to the past for the practitioners. I suggest then, based on these descriptions from Ester, Maie and Terje, that what was embodied through dancing and singing was the ancient past, the tradition, and the identity of being a nature worshipper from Estonia who practices and continues the old ways of the ancestors and Finno-Ugric people.

Embodiment as affective pattern

This discussion about rituals and embodied knowledge is also relevant when considering the affective patterns of Maausk practices. According to Crossley, when conducting a ritual we can make imaginative leaps and invest social meaning in moments that would otherwise seem arbitrary (Crossley, 2004: 40). In my material it was evident that imagination was also an important component when embodying past traditions within Maausk. The ancestors’ practices needed to be imagined, since there was no way to access the reality of the past. Taking part in the imagined past practices could be an emotional experience, for example having a corporeal experience while practicing certain traditions could make the individuals feel connected to the past. Thus when embodying past practices the meaning of them as ancestral practice could be strongly felt. According to Crossley, ritual practices have the power to evoke emotions and imaginations (Crossley, 2004: 40). According to him rituals invoke imagination and emotions directed in a specific way. I argue that this is tied to the identity construction and meaning-making practices in Maausk, which portrays practitioners as preservers of the past and of traditions and sources of knowledge.

According to Crossley, rituals are sometimes there to invoke a particular emotional state. Emotions then are not an ‘inner state’ but intentional (Crossley, 2004: 43). Dancing and singing can subsequently also be seen as ritual attempts to experience particular feelings connected to the importance of actually re-enacting the ancestors’ tradition, which is part of socially
important sense-making. Similarly, Wetherell argues that affective practices are actually processes of ‘embodied meaning-making’ (Wetherell, 2012: 4). In these affective patterns she argues that the meanings and body/brain responses flow together (Wetherell, 2012: 14). The rituals of transmitting traditions can then be seen as affective patterns where the sense of embodiment and meaning combine to construct specific kinds of emotional subjects who are repetitively materialised (Wetherell, 2012: 14) through the ritual practices of singing and dancing. These feelings connect practitioners to their Maausk group and position them in a particular way as bearers of tradition.

However, such affective bodily knowing does not have to be conscious. Affective patterns do not need to be conscious, argues Wetherell, but this does not mean that they are pre-social, since ‘social actions are not necessarily initiated by conscious intention’ (Wetherell, 2012: 63). Cognition and affect operate in the same system when traditions are embodied in the practice of Maausk, although not always in a fully conscious way.

It can be hard to explain the full meaning of the ritual, just as it is hard to explain the affective pattern of the rituals. However, the meaning of the rituals, which can be invoked by emotional and imaginative practice, can be known and constituted in the body – in the embodiment of particular ritual practices. When practicing the rituals of transmission of traditions, bodies are used to create a sense of belonging, a sense of identity. That is belonging to a religious group, and in a wider context, belonging to a group that has distinctive cultural traits, such as language, customs, practice and distinctive cultural traditions.

Constituting the meaning of tradition through embodiment

The embodiment of traditions in Maausk can explain the role of the body when one practices Maausk. According to Csordas, the constitution of cultural objects happens through the body (Csordas 2002 [1988]: 61). Based on the empirical examples in this chapter I would suggest that in Maausk, bodies have an active role in the constitution of traditions in the moment of transmission. The process of doing is embodied and techniques are tested, and also the meaning of doing ‘the tradition’ is evaluated and embodied. In that process traditions become constituted repetitively but always in a new way, so that they maintain a flexible dynamic character.

The aspect of transmission makes the constitution of traditions a shared dynamic process. Cultural meanings are created with the help of “doing”.
However, in the *Maausk* case what is done is legitimised through references to the past. According to Laurajane Smith a sense of identity and cultural meanings are created when practicing traditions. Additionally, networks and relations concerning social and cultural values, meanings and understandings about the past and the present are worked out, negotiated, and recreated from the social, cultural and political needs of the present (Smith 2006: 83). When traditions are repeated and rehearsed continuously in the transmission process of the *Maausk* community, the meaning of traditions as knowledge of the ancestors is constituted through the embodied processes. This provides a sense of connection to the past, but also give validation, enrichment, legitimation and guidance for the present lives of the practitioners of *Maausk*.

According to Simon Bronner traditions are not followed blindly, but are practiced for a reason. Bronner says that following traditions is a strategy for, “maintaining social identities and connections, communicating symbols and values to themselves and others, and projecting and attempting to resolve their anxieties and conflict” (Bronner 2011: 10). Translating this to the practice of *Maausk*, would mean that through embodying traditions in the transmission processes, the practitioners maintain the social identity and group cohesion of the religious group that practiced what was perceived as continuous traditions. It can be understood that embodying traditions opens up a space in the world for an alternative way of living in the current post-social, post-modern, global world they live in. But it does not necessarily mean that the practitioners wanted to live in the past. I would rather term it as their wanting to bring the past to the present. This means however, that in order for the traditions to make sense in the present world, the knowledge of traditions that is gained from archives, books, other members of *Maausk* and the actual practicing of traditions, needs to be adjusted and altered, and then also repeated in order to keep them alive. Thus traditions need to be continuously reconstituted in the transmission processes.

In conclusion, I have suggested in this chapter that shared moments of practicing *Maausk* can be understood as moments of transmission of traditions inside a particular group of *Maausk*. In addition, I have argued that the practicing of traditions described in the various quotes from the research material, should be seen as moments within a vertical transmission process, which in form is rather repetitive. The repetitive nature of the transmission moments of tradition suggest a kind of learning process. However, in each transmission moment the tradition was reconstituted in a
new way, even though it was still tied to the earlier moments of transmission. I have also demonstrated with the help of my empirical material that the active practice of traditions in *Maausk* in these moments results in embodied knowledge about traditions. Further, embodiment happens in dialogue with the symbolic meanings of them (Laderman 1994: 196). This was observed in the moments of embodying the traditions not only as techniques but also as symbolic meanings. The moments of connecting to the ancestors through *Maausk* practitioner’s embodiment of traditions could be understood as one example of this.
The purpose of this thesis has been twofold: Firstly, I have been analysing the affective and sometimes embodied experiences of being a *Maausk* practitioner from a phenomenological perspective. Secondly, I have been contextualizing the *Maausk* movement and the practitioners’ understandings in relation to history and the surrounding society.

Throughout the thesis I have in my analysis emphasized the importance of paying attention to the cultural and societal context when trying to understand *Maausk* as a phenomenon and as a practice, an approach that has also been promoted in studies on similar modern paganist groups (Magliocco 2004, Roundtree 2015 Bender 2010). Such an approach also connects to the discussions within the field of sociology of religion, where one recurring ambition has been to study changes in the religious landscape in a modern society. Some scholars in that field have claimed that the shift that has happened in the modern religious and spiritual lives can be explained with that individuals are currently primarily preoccupied with their own subjective experiences. While in turn the everyday life in the past did not necessarily value or consider individual goals and preferences. Consequently, it has been claimed that people in modern secular societies do no longer want to belong to established religious orders from the past, but rather want to focus on the future and the individual improvement of the psychological self. (Heelas, Woodhead 2005: 2–3.) However, what has been shown in my study is that the kind of religious practice that *Maausk* represents, should not be seen only as an individual and subjective project of self-improvement. Instead, in relation to modern religious life’s there might be other goals that are seen as just as important, both within the organization and for the individual practitioners, goals that are, in this case, influenced by the structures of the Estonian society and its history and coloured by the political and economic systems.
In addition to contributing to the study of religious groups and expressions in current Europe this study has added knowledge to the long-term ethnological preoccupation with the study of vernacular popular beliefs as well as the study of the meaning and use of traditions and their relationship to authenticity. It seems that folk traditions may still contribute to the search for identity and authenticity. My analysis has shown how traditions, authenticity and identity in Maausk were constructed, experienced as well as used in identity building in relation to the Estonian neoliberal transformation to capitalist society as well as in relation to globalization and the European Union.

I have shown how it has been fruitful to take emotional and affective elements of human experience into the consideration when making analysis, but doing that needs a special consideration over the methods of collecting the research material. That is how to learn or to be attentive to other people’s affective states? How to make use of researchers own affective experiences in the fieldwork. In order to be able to examine and analyse the affective and embodied aspects of the meaning making processes of the Maausk practitioners, I chose to use a methodological approach based on a particular kind of sensory ethnography (Pink 2009). This method, where the sensorial experiences of the researcher are in focus, has been highly useful in order to acknowledge the affective aspects of both the interviews, observations and other fieldwork experiences. In addition to using my own senses, when gathering information about affects in the fieldwork, I have also paid special attention to the descriptions of affective and emotional experiences. Finally, I have paid attention to observable information of other people’s corporeal reaction that could be interpreted as signs of affects, like tears, shakes and shivers and laughs to name a few.

In my analysis I have understood affects as complicated patterns that entail corporal reactions, emotions and feelings, memories and histories as well as discourses from the society. Why I have chosen to look at embodied affects is that they can tell us something about not only emotions, feelings and affects but how they can be intimately linked with society; its history, living conditions and narratives. Furthermore, paying attention to embodied affective patterns can be a fruitful way to explore the role of body and emotions when it comes to how people make meanings and maintain them. And furthermore show the significance of embodiment and emotions in the constitution and reconstitution process of Maausk understanding and values. Values and understandings that are formed in relation to time and space of current Estonia and global world. This focus on the role of
embodiment and affective patterns has also helped to illuminate how becoming a Maausk practitioner is not only a lifestyle choice, but could be seen as a transformative experience where perceptions are changed and people become involved to the meanings and values with their bodies as well as emotional lives.

Native faith in an Estonian context

What is also relevant to consider when trying to put Maausk, as a group and as a phenomenon into a wider context, is how this particular organization and the group members’ practice, might relate to other kinds of neo-pagan groups. It has been suggested that Neopaganism is a global movement with branches on all continents, but that each of the branches has its own peculiarities according to the different cultural politics and characteristics of that specific location (Magliocco, 2004: 3). I have argued throughout the thesis that Maausk cannot simply be labelled as a religious movement or a neo-pagan group, due to the particular societal, cultural and political context where it is situated. Instead I have defined Maausk as a ‘native faith’ group, which is a concept that has been created partly in order to distinguish the branch of modern paganist groups that have their origin in Eastern and Central European countries. One can find a paganist group in literally every former Soviet and post-socialist state in Europe and beyond. Each of the Baltic countries also has their own movements around paganism.

As mentioned previously the historical context is important when trying to find explanations for why particular kinds of religious practices and expressions exist in a certain society (see also Bender 2010). In respect to native faith groups it is for instance often seen as highly significant that the establishment of the movements happened at a very specific time, namely during the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was a time when, for example, the search for a national or ethnic identity was heightened in the society in general (cf Västrik 2015, Kuutma 2005) and the transformation to a capitalist system was still in its early phase. My analysis has also illustrated how Maausk was preoccupied to a large extent with issues revolving around identity, and particularly forming an identity around genealogical roots and indigenous rights to the land. It would, however, be a simplification to frame Maausk as only a post-Soviet phenomenon – since my analysis has showed that the Maausk identity was formed also in relation to more current developments within the Estonian society. In addition, there existed
a similar movement in Estonia already between the world wars. To deepen the analysis of the *Maausk* identity formation I thus needed to go beyond Soviet history, taking into account the current social, political and economic situation. More precisely how the neoliberal policies and economic austerity measures have had an impact on the Estonian society and the relation between the state and its citizens, in a society that can no longer simply be labelled only as post-socialist.

But even if one must pay attention to the particular context of Eastern and Central European neo-paganism, there are also similarities between various paganist movements all over the world. One common denominator is for instance the desire to get to a deeper level of connection with nature (Magliocco 2004: 4). My analysis indicated that within *Maausk* this desire to have a deeper connection with nature was connected to the idea of belonging to an ancient community with long roots in nature worship. It was particularly in the sacred places in nature that this connection to nature, but also to the past, to the ancestors and consequently to an ancient community, was deeply felt. The sacred places in nature provided actual physical places where these connections to the past were enforced and sensed, through the ritual practice of folk traditions. Consequently, sacred places as part of nature were constructed and experienced as “having always been there”, in other words as having a longer history than the modern Estonian state. The *Maausk* connection to these places furthermore contributed to constructing an imagined community based on the idea of being connected with nature perceived as something ancient and stable, but also as something other people in the modern world were thought to be alienated from.

The *Maausk* practitioners’ search for an ancient community could also be understood in relation to the history of Estonia. Their continuous search for a community that was seen as based on particular traditions does, in some respects, resemble the ideas of nineteenth and twentieth century Romanticism concerning for instance that national identity could be traced from past traditions and customs, which were used in national identity building projects at the same time all over Europe as well as in Estonia (cf Waldron, 2008). As I have discussed, such ideas surfaced again in the Estonian society at the time of the folklore movement of the 1970s, when they could be seen as parts of an anti-Soviet identity building, and after the Soviet collapse these kind of ideas appeared to peak again in the former Soviet countries. Even though the ideas around continuity of cultural traces have been questioned by most folklorists and ethnologists by now, my results show that this kind of thinking was still common among the *Maausk*
practitioners. The view they conveyed in the interviews was to a large extent coloured by the idea that the ancestors’ knowledge had disappeared from the modern world, but that they could access this through recreating old folk traditions, or in some cases creating new ones in the same spirit. This thus illustrates how nationalistic ideas and discourses were employed in Maausk identity formation processes.

Another aspect that has been pointed out as recurring in various native faith groups in post-Soviet Europe, is that they have tended to be informed by nationalistic impulses and even extreme ethno-nationalism and racism (Roundtree 2015: 2). The rise of neo-nationalism and ethno-nationalist movements as well as groups based on exclusive ethnicities and religious identities in and around Europe and the world, has at times been interpreted as a response to the material and cultural dispossession inherent in neoliberal globalization that influence the state policies and opportunities of its citizens that in turn impacts on people’s livelihoods and class positions (Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman 2013, Kalb, 2011: 1).

However, even though Maausk in certain respects was drawing from the same ideals as ethno-nationalist groups, my analysis has clearly shown that it was not primarily the national identity as ‘Estonians’ that the Maausk practitioners identified with. Instead the construction of their collective, cultural identity was founded in ideas connected to the local, the indigenous and the Finno-Ugric ethnicity. In spite of the apparent lack of interest in an Estonian national identity, the attitudes expressed by the Maausk practitioners may still be interpreted as a response to the global neoliberal policies on a state level, based on how these have been seen to cause also ‘ethnification’ and fragmented identities inside a state where allies and mutual relationships are built inside exclusive communities based on ethnicity and ‘indigenouness’ for instance (Ekman-Friedman and Friedman 2013). I have argued in the thesis that the Maausk construction of an imagined Finno-Ugric indigenous and local identity can be seen as such a fragmented identity, since the identification with the state was sometimes rather weak and the state was not thought to be concerned with the same values and worries for instance regarding heritage protection as the Maausk community was. It was also argued in the thesis, based on Niezen (2003) that the idea of indigenousness offered a kind of political identity through which allies could be sought from worldwide indigenous struggles. The Maausk claims regarding local and national nature and heritage protection could, subsequently, be strengthened by the connection to the human rights discourses concerning rights for indigenous people.
Accordingly, I have claimed in the thesis that the identification as an ‘indigenous group’ could be seen as contributing to preventing racist nationalist discourses developing within the Maausk community, since such discourses do not fit with the lower hierarchical status of ‘indigenous’ peoples who are often impacted by racism themselves. My research shows that the Maausk variation of native faith did at least not include explicit racist discourses, even though generally people from ethnicities outside the Finno-Ugric community could not join the group, since they were understood as being bearers of a different tradition\(^1\). At the time of my fieldwork, the ideas that were described as “threatening” were identified as originating from globalization, Europeanization and from local level Estonian governmental policies unfavourable to the ideals of Maausk, rather than from those of other ethnicities.

However, what does need to be commented on is that at the time of writing this concluding chapter, Europe was facing a heavy influx of refugees and migration from Middle Eastern countries like Syria, Iran and Afghanistan as well as some of the African countries. The European Union suggested that the Baltic countries should also contribute to the aid of these people, a request that set off quite a vivid public debate on the issue in Estonia. Following the mainstream news media of Estonia indicated that the general media discourse concerning the migrants and refugees quickly became extremely negative, depicting them either as terrorists, ‘free-riders’ of social benefits, or ignorant of Western values of gender equality in particular. These opinions were repeated by some of the Maausk practitioners in social media. However, it is hard to say if these can be seen as Maausk opinions related to Maausk values or opinions depicting the mainstream Estonian views of refugees and migration from these particular Middle Eastern countries. This is a question that would need further investigation.

\(^1\) During the research period there was for example no negativity expressed towards the Russian-speaking minority of Estonia, even though the ethnic exclusiveness of Maausk could easily suggest otherwise. Instead, the Maausk practitioners made several emphatic comments about the Russian-speaking minority and their difficulties with the language laws of Estonia, and some intermarriage occurred as well among the members. Another aspect of this, that might have had a certain influence, was the circumstance that one of the founding figures of Maausk was not a representative of the Finno-Ugric identity.
Resisting hegemonies

The idea that native faith movements can actually be seen as a ‘reaction against foreign cultural hegemony and against the invasion of foreign patterns of culture at the cost of local and native cultures throughout the history’, as has been suggested by other scholars, was evident also in my analysis (Wiench, 2013: 12). For example, the practitioners often described Christianity as something that was “imported” from abroad and so as something that was thought to be in direct opposition to Maausk. Christian practices and understandings were generally seen to have corrupted the pure form of the folk beliefs and practices that were so highly valued by the practitioners, and this could, as I have argued, be understood as a way of resisting Christian hegemonies in Europe. Furthermore, the way the practitioners’ described their life choices and motivations for practicing Maausk, could also be seen as a kind of opposition to European hegemonies as well as to the hegemony of neoliberal globalization and its influences on a state level.

I have further argued that the way hegemonies were opposed within Maausk, was inspired by the resistance to past hegemonies. Certain elements in the Maausk identity formation, such as the emphasis on being part of a perceived Finno-ugric identity, were used to resist Russian hegemonies in the nineteenth century as well as Soviet hegemonies in the 1970s, while opposing Christianity was used in the beginning of twentieth century to resist Indo-European hegemonies in the time of first independence of Estonia in order to build the national identity. In addition, various kinds of folk culture was used as elements in an anti-Soviet identity construction within Estonia, even though paradoxically the Soviet cultural politics encouraged the performance of aesthetic folk culture practices of different ethnic groups in order to display the variety of ethnicities in Soviet Union. As a parallel from those times I argued in the thesis that also today the practising and relating to folk culture could be understood as something that constituted a way of life that was opposing the modern life a source of meaningful life and identity. Also the practice of folk culture could thus be understood as a kind of alternative way of living, or as a way of resisting the current influence of the European Union and globalization.
As my examples have illustrated, this resistance took place in the everyday life of the practitioners, through the various *Maausk* practices that formed a kind of alternative way of living. Subsequently I have claimed that it is important to look at the values and practices of each individual native faith group, since the attempts to live alternative lives are generally not verbalized by the practitioners as resistance to all these complex hegemonies that influence their everyday lives. In my analysis it was clear that the resistance was instead primarily present and noticeable as a part of the embodied affective patterns that were element in the formation of cultural meanings in relation to the group’s values and understandings. These patterns influenced also the formation of *Maausk* related subjectivities and identities constructed to offer a way to influence and take part in Estonian society from a position that was not tied to national identity and so a kind of alternative identity.

Complexities of affective patterns

So, now that I have discussed *Maausk* in relation to Native faith studies and showed that the existence of the movement is embedded in the societal and historical context where it exists, I will turn to the other overarching aim stated in the introduction: to examine the affective embodied experiences that in various ways constituted a part of the *Maausk* practices, values and understandings. An affect has been understood in this thesis as an emotional or affective state or narrative of that state, which is a combination of perceptions, cognitions, and performances as well as corporeal sensations. Furthermore, this emotional state has been defined, aligning with Margaret Wetherell (2012), as a complex assemblage or pattern of different elements starting from psychological and personal qualities combined with personal and social histories as well as narratives and discourses of the society. I have been focusing on affective patterns narrated to me or in some cases felt by me while participating in *Maausk* events. More specifically I have been unpacking different features of affective patterns throughout the thesis. My analysis was thus based on the idea that affective patterns have complex contexts – they are not just innate psychological states, or reactions of the

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2 See also Sarah Pink (2012) *Situating everyday life* about everyday life as a site of activism and resistance in relation to environmental movements
body, as is sometimes claimed. Instead affective patterns, as I have shown in my study, can be manipulated and used and since they are part of people’s meaning making processes they are also closely connected to the context in which they appear.

Affective communication possibilities about *Maausk*

One of the affective patterns that was quite evident in my material, was the expressed negativity towards the concepts ‘religioon’ and ‘usk’, the two Estonian words that denote religion. The negativity was expressed in a number of ways, for instance in that *Maausk* was generally not considered to be, or described as a religious group, and that there was a recurring reluctance among the practitioners to be identified as religious. In my analysis I suggested that the negativity expressed towards religion by the *Maausk* practitioners was actually reflecting the meaning of these words in the Estonian society, and tightly tied to the historical context and in particular the country’s Soviet past. The practitioners tended to associate the concept of religion with Christianity, which was in turn seen as representing a foreign and violent power, as mentioned above. The absence of religious education within and outside of school also meant that the knowledge and experience of religious practices and ideas has been quite limited within the Estonian society. And, finally, the image that Soviet atheistic policies had painted of religion and religious people was very negative, something that was still influencing how these concepts were regarded in current Estonia.

One affective pattern that I found in my analysis, was related to the changing ways of expressing sacred and religious experiences and describing the religious sphere within the Estonian society. That the *Maausk* practice tended to take place in the private sphere inside homes and close by nature, could be seen as a result of how religious practices and religious organizations were banned and openly religious people were ridiculed during the Soviet era. The ridiculing of religion and religious people appeared to still have an impact on how people in Estonia, in this case the *Maausk* practitioners, talked about religion. This was illustrated in how the interviewed practitioners generally expressed a negative attitude towards the concept of ‘religion’ and did not want describe their practices as religious.

The shift of the religious practices to the private sphere in addition changed the context of where the sacred was located. My analysis showed that practitioners tended to have equal friend-like relationships to perceived gods
and spirits (cf Luhrmann 2012). Their encounters with the supernatural was regularly told as humorous stories of forces where the character of the spirits influenced the everyday life of the practitioners. As I have argued in the thesis, the shift of religious practices to the private sphere could also be seen as having an impact on the ‘communicative possibilities’ of how to talk about religious experiences or expressing belief in the supernatural, and, not least, on the ‘affective regimes’ that influenced how the supernatural was felt and in what way these feelings were communicated. The unserious tone and equal relationship that the practitioners described they had with the supernatural could be seen to illustrate such a shift in how to talk about these encounters and where they were taking place.

I have furthermore suggested that what might have influenced this shift of ‘communicative possibilities and ‘affective regimes’ was the scientific worldview propagated by the atheistic policies of Soviet Union as well as rational worldview seen as characteristic of late-modern time. These both made the doubting of the supernatural more feasible as well as faith more difficult to justify. My analysis has shown how doubt was sometimes present in the interviews when talking about the beliefs, but also how magic and the supernatural tended to exist on an everyday level and in the home sphere.

Forming positions through affective patterns

Considering what I have explained about the context of the Estonian political and economic situation I argued that it is possible to view Estonia as a country with unequal opportunities and precarious working conditions, and where citizenship might not offer the security of livelihood and healthcare which one would expect from a national state. It is not only Estonia where this is happening, but all over world. The states’ withdrawal from particular tasks of diminishing the uneven economic opportunities, social norms and legal rights has stopped people to access the imagined ‘good-life’ with the possibility for upward mobility between class positions, job security and social equality. And this condition, Berlant has argued, has been felt as an affective experience of a shattered fantasy of a ‘good life’ that cannot be reached anymore (Berlant 2011:2–3.). It has been claimed that people’s solution has been to ‘exit’ Estonia as a result of the heavy austerity measures (Sommers et al. 2014). However, what I have been arguing in my thesis is that the Maausk identity and practice could actually be seen as a way to have a ‘voice’ in the society instead of ‘exiting’ it.
It was evident in my material that this alternative position was formed through a number of affective patterns where subjective feelings got aligned with the position that the practitioners took in the society through their construction of identity. When the practitioners for instance expressed emotional connections to other Finno-Ugric groups that were perceived as related folk groups, this was in turn part of the Maausk identity formation. Furthermore, the affective positioning of the group as indigenous and local, which was evident in the interview material as well as in the documents published by the official organization, illustrated an alternative position in the Estonian society that the practitioners were constructing for themselves that aided them to claim rights in society. But it could also be interpreted as a resistance to the current conditions in Estonia and the apparent diminishing opportunities to live a good life there, particularly in relation to what was perceived as a foreign influence by the European Union. This is thus yet another aspect of my claim that the Maausk identity can be defined as opposing hegemonies and constructing an alternative identity, where the affective lives and affective positioning of the Maausk practitioners play a major part.

Another affective pattern that was related to the identity construction within Maausk was evident in how some of the practitioners talked about the sacred places in nature. What was expressed in many of the interviews was an experience of being able to feel the ancestors in the sacred places. The practitioners described a sense of being part of a long line of people visiting these places. I have in the thesis interpreted this talk about being able to feel the ancestors, as an affective positioning act where the practitioners were framing themselves as bearers of traditions with a sense of history; people who had a connection to the land, claiming to have been occupying it for generations. Furthermore, the nature and sacred places in it were also experienced and described as something ancient and eternal with historical origins that were understood to be more real and deep than the roots of the modern living. People were perceived as having lost their connection to nature, whose existence was seen as dating back to the eternal. This understanding of nature could also be seen as contributing to creating an affective position of Maausk practitioner as sensing and appreciating nature as something that had always been there – also at the times of the ancestors. This showed how the affective practices of the Maausk practitioners were linked with communal identities, enforcing, supporting and recruiting them. Through various kinds of affective positioning the Maausk practitioners could thus be seen to construct a
particular identity with a long and continuous connection to sacred places, which in its turn contributed to creating an idea of inhabiting a position as the rightful owners of these places.

One final affective pattern that could be seen as constructing a particular position in society, was the sense of personal authenticity. I have explained how this feeling of a sense of personal authenticity arose both when the individuals were practicing Maausk, and in the various negotiations that surrounded the practice. What was significant was that the Maausk practices were framed by the official organization and perceived by some of the practitioners to be based on continuous folk traditions, which in turn could provide the desired sense of authenticity. The relationship between the sense of personal authenticity and continuous authentic folk traditions that were part of the Maausk practice was, however, more complicated than that. Some practitioners took the stance that traditions should be seen as something dynamic that could change with time, claiming that defining the practices too strictly based on folk traditions could, in fact, prohibit the feeling of personal authenticity. The affective patterns connected to the perceived feeling of authenticity was thus in many ways influenced by negotiations concerning the ideas of Maausk practice, as my examples have illustrated. Sometimes these patterns were also tied to other discourses in society like for instance the discourse of the importance to find out whom one really is and then staying true to oneself.

The practice of Maausk was thus connected to the individuals’ identity formations in various ways, not least when it came to the idea of being “an authentic person”, firmly anchored in what was viewed as far reaching roots and long established traditions. I do, however, want to underline that the construction of a particular identity through Maausk practice was not necessarily a conscious action in order to oppose perceived hegemonies. What I mean by this is that this particular positioning was not done in the conscious way that it might be done for instance in environmental protection groups or global rights movements, even though some of the practitioners did combine for example environmental protection interests with Maausk values. I thus want to emphasize the need to be careful with claiming a too causal relationship between affective patterns and identity. Still, I do claim that the emotional lives of Maausk practitioners; affective attachment and positioning acts for instance, could be seen as a part of their meaning making processes. Such meaning making processes of affective patterns are used when identities are formatted, when different positions are being occupied and actively created in the society and when a
meaningful way of living is constructed. Which, in the case of Maausk, can be seen as being a kind of alternative or minority position and a way of life inside a community that offers support, a sense of authenticity, and a way to claim a voice in the society.

Affective patterns in relation to bodies, embodiment and materiality

In addition to affective patterns that were entangled with the history and society of Estonia, I have also discussed other kinds of affective patterns, namely the ones that were connected to bodies or materiality. These were not separate from the societal context, but other questions were highlighted in this part of the analysis, such as to what extent affect can be orchestrated and anticipated, since the affect has been often understood as pre-social and pre-conscious. Another question was related to what the role of a sensing and moving body might be in affective experiences. The final question was related to the relationship between materiality and affect which was connected to the question of whether affect takes place in the subject or is caused by something outside the subject.

The analysis showed how affective atmospheres or moods experienced in the sacred places could be created with the help of behavioural rules attached to the sacred places. This has implications for how to conceptualize affect in the first place. To see affect as pre-social bodily reactions lacks the aspects of affect that are informed by previous experiences for instance. My examples illustrated how the practitioners were sometimes attuned by certain explicit or implicit behavioural codes that influenced their affective experiences of sacred places. Furthermore, I argued that their attunement was informed or oriented by the previous experiences of recurring visits to the sacred places and that also corporeality and sensed experiences could be seen as part of the affective patterns. For instance, when dancing in the sacred places, the rhythm of moving bodies was seen as contributing to the affective atmosphere of the place. Another way of looking at the role of corporeality in the affective patterns was that some of the practitioners described an experience of feeling the force of the sacred places in their bodies.

All of these aspects have implications on the question of whether affect is actually caused by something outside of ourselves or if it is tied to our subjectivities. I suggested that these aspects are intertwined, but that such an approach at the same time blurs the boundaries between object and
subject, since the past and context of the subjects could be seen as parts of constituting the affective experiences. However, affective experiences are also mixed with the materiality and semiotic meanings of that materiality in the sense that the materiality and outside meanings that circulate in the society have equal agency to the subject’s agency.

One more aspect that I want to address in the conclusion is the role of the embodiment in *Maausk* practice. As I have explained, the *Maausk* practice was based on the idea of continuous folk traditions, even though the idea of an unbreakable continuity of traditions has been questioned by a number of scholars. I suggested that the constitution of traditions actually happens in the moments they are being practiced, since this is when they also become embodied. This means that the constitution of traditions can be understood as a never-ending process. However, the repetition of meanings and ideas about traditions as well as body techniques are still important and are being transmitted in the process of doing the traditions in *Maausk* practice. The transmission process of traditions among the *Maausk* practitioners is in other words primarily based on shared practice, on actively taking part in rituals and ceremonies.

This embodiment of traditions suggests also something else, namely that to be a *Maausk* practitioner means that some of the beliefs and the practice is situated in the body. One’s body has an important role in maintaining and transmitting the *Maausk* practice and through the body one is able to perceive the traditions and their meanings. And this is a process that happens in the repetitive moments, through the actual interaction of one’s body with the traditions, but also in relation to the symbolic meaning of them in the form of ideas and understandings of the traditions circulating among the *Maausk* practitioners, and, sometimes, also in the wider society in general.

In conclusion the analysis of my material has shown that the *Maausk* movement and practice may be seen to reflect the time and space where it exists, at the same time as it is claiming ancient roots and continuous decent lines. Furthermore, since the *Maausk* practices and understandings were investigated through bodily involvement and affective patterns, my analysis has highlighted the role of emotions and senses as well as corporeality, when *Maausk* meanings were being created, negotiated and enforced. This thus illustrates how body and mind are fundamentally entwined when it comes to perceiving and constructing identities and cultural understandings.

Finally, I have in my thesis showed how the *Maausk* movement could be understood to form an alternative life that in certain respects was in
opposition to ideas of national identity and the established societal system. However, *Maausk* practitioners could not be understood as living outside of the system, but instead operating within the frames of it, and could thus be seen as not only trying to form a meaningful position within the established Estonian society but also trying to influence the future developments of it.


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www.hiis.ee (Hiite Maja* Foundation was established in 2008 to explore, present and support the natural sacred sites – sacred groves, trees, stones, springs, etc. –
as well as the broader indigenous heritage of Estonia, thus maintaining diversity in Estonian culture, landscapes and nature.)


Newspaper articles
Postimees 1995, May 5th and 6th

Interviews


Anne and Mart: Anne was born in the beginning of 1970s, higher education, job unknown. Interviewed 25.6.2012, length 01:04. Interview place: self-sustained farm of Anne’s parents in the mid-Estonian countryside.

Veiko and Sirje: Veiko was born in the mid-1970s and Sirje in the end of 1970s. Veiko had vocational education, and had done carpentry job’s. Sirje had higher education, unemployed and parental leave. Interviewed 18.6.2012, length 01:27. Interview place in a Sirjes mother house in the village by the eastern Baltic coast of Estonia.


Nina: Born in the mid-1960s, higher education, university college teacher. Interviewed 16.6.2012, length 01:26, Interview places: old farm house in the northern Estonian countryside, a sacred place and forest.
Terje: Born in the mid-1960s, higher education, artist and illustrator. Interviewed 26.6.2012, length 00:58. Interview place: Terjes house in the southern countryside of Estonia

Ester: Born in the beginning of the 1970s, higher education, craft teacher and self-employed by selling recycled handicrafts. Interviewed 1st interviewed 27.6.2013, length 01:35. Interview place: an apartment on Tallinn 2nd interview 7.6.2014, length 01:23 Interview place: in a car on the way to sacred place

Rein: Born in the middle of 1940s, higher education, in pension. interviewed 22.1.2013, length 01:50, interview place: a restaurant in Tallinn


Maie: Born in the end of 1970s, vocational education, self-employed. Interviewed 23.5.2015, length 02:05. Interview place: a farm house in the Northern Estonian countryside

Urmass: born in the end middle of 1960s, higher education, self-employed translator. Interviewed 22.1.2013, length 00:50. Interview place: a cafeteria in Tallinn

Lembit: Born in the beginning of 1960s, higher education, unemployed. Interviewed 17.4.2012, length 00:48. Interview place: a house in a village close to Pärnu

Ene: Born in the beginning of 1950s, vocational education, self-employed by selling farm products. Interviewed 6.3.2014, length 02:22: Interview places: in the car, in the sacred place of nature, in the forest

Ivo: Born in the end of 1970s, higher education, employed as journalist. Interviewed 20.6.2012, length 00:56. Interview place: An apartment in Tallinn

Kaur: Born in the mid-1970s, vocational education, employed by Estonian defence league. Interviewed 23.1.2013, length 00:42. Interview place: Kaur’s workplace in Nort-East Estonia


17. Renata Ingbrant, *From Her Point of View: Woman’s Anti-World in the Poetry of Anna Świrszczynska*, 2007

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