

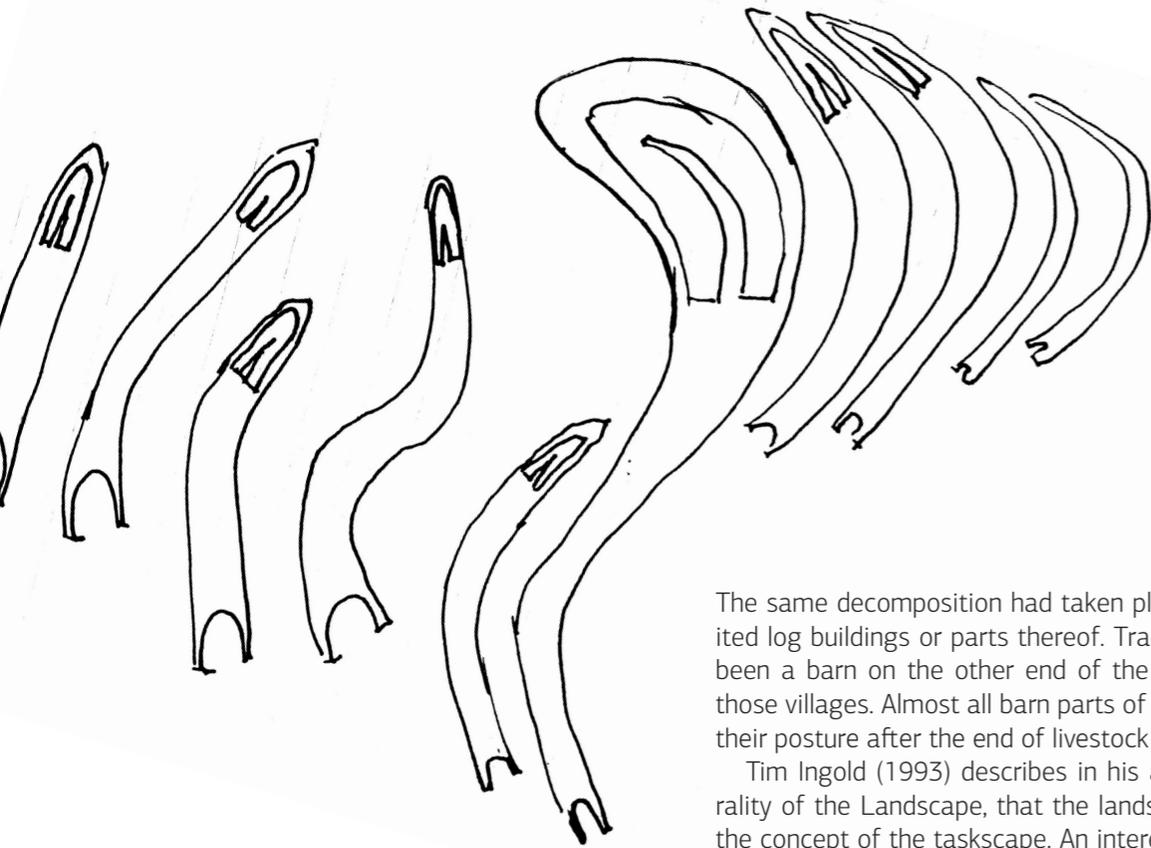


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Komi River Landscapes as Fishermen's Taskscape

It was like a trip in a time machine to another era. The old grey log houses were a distinctive feature in those small riverside villages in Komi Republic, which we visited during the LiLa summer school. Almost everything was naturally grey, but the lowest logs were exchanged for new ones in some houses; and, somewhere, there was fresh fir wood amongst the old and grey logs. The village of Kozlovka, where we had accommodation, had somehow lost its connection to the river. There was only a partly collapsed boat shed in the midst of the riverside, where some old fishing nets and other gear were found. We visited Osla village, where a living connection to the river was manifested in many ways. There were some boats on the shore of the river, which still flooded slightly. A bit further from the shoreline, tree trunks had drifted due to the spring flood, which villagers had towed by boat, as well as marked some trunks out for themselves. The closest buildings to the river were fishing or boat sheds that were still in use. Some of the decommissioned riverboats had already half decomposed in the riverbed. The cycle of life was so fascinating to see, because it did not look to be at the end of a particular era. Perhaps the end of wooden boats and wooden gears is not an environmental problem, as they will soon be used to transform the soil again.

Images & illustrations in the essay: Antti Stöckell



The same decomposition had taken place in the uninhabited log buildings or parts thereof. Traditionally, there had been a barn on the other end of the dwelling houses in those villages. Almost all barn parts of the houses had lost their posture after the end of livestock rearing.

Tim Ingold (1993) describes in his article, *The Temporality of the Landscape*, that the landscape changes with the concept of the taskscape. An interesting point of view is that man does not change the landscape, but he participates in its change by “resonating”, i.e., interacting with the different rhythms of natural phenomena. The life of riverside villages has certainly followed the natural rhythms of the river throughout the year. The starting points for my artwork came from two directions. My artwork was inspired by the use of wood as a building and tool material and, on the other hand, by Komi’s meandering rivers. Satellite imagery reveals an astonishing series of old curves in the rivers. They are like freeze-frames of past times, which show us even millennium-long meandering river changes.

The settlement and sources of livelihood have reacted to the slow change in the river flow over a long period of time. The fisherman has reacted to changes in the river, on

a daily and annual basis, or, in Ingold’s words, he has resonated with the river’s rhythm. Ingold refers to the taskscape as the landscape that is shaped in this interaction between man and nature over recurring cycles. Fishing does not change the landscape in the way it is visibly shaped, for example, in the field of farming. From fishermen’s point of view, the river landscape is living all the time and fishery is sensitive in reacting to those changes every moment.

What is most obviously the problem in these villages on the Komi riverside is the lack of a young population, which means that sharing experiences and learning traditional skills from elders rarely happen. Of course, times change, as do livelihoods, whereby unnecessary chores and skills are slipping away, while the last tools are decomposing. In the end, only an archaeologist, anthropologist or a researcher interested in folklore will find some slight references to previous generations, which resonated with cyclical natural phenomena. A new taskscape fades out the old one.





I carved traditional wooden fishing net needles, which are used for weaving and fixing the nets. Some of the needles carved by me are almost like the real thing, while others have different curves like the river. Making wooden tools resonates with natural phenomena too. Seeking good material for tools has been a seasonal chore in certain places, perhaps in the forest behind the meadows next to the village. Apparently, there was no need for new net needles that often; however, the work should have been done at a time when there was no rush to finish other seasonal chores, generally in winter, while weaving and repairing the nets should have commenced before the start of the fishing season. Men and women have both been knitting nets; but, obviously, men have been involved in fishing the most. Carving the needles and finally carrying out up-and-down weaving moves have surely brought to mind the coming fishing season, riverside feelings in general and many details in particular.

There is much in the way of tacit knowledge related to fishing and preparing fishing gears. The sharing and transmission of knowledge from one generation to another have been the lifeblood of a living fishing culture. Working together has offered the most natural environment in which to demonstrate and share knowledge about how the work is done. I tried to figure out the taskscape of fishing in its entirety by carving these meandering net needles. The movements of wood carvers, net weavers, rivers and fishermen blend together in this artwork – at least I hope so.

REFERENCE

Ingold T. 1993. The Temporality of the Landscape. *World Archaeology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Conceptions of Time and Ancient Society (Oct., 1993), pp. 152-174