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**Guided Sauna Experiences in Estonia:
Ritual Practices and Lifestyle Entrepreneurship of *Saunanaine* (Sauna Woman)**

Master's Thesis

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Introduction

The first time I had a guided sauna experience dates back to January 2020, when I visited Estonia as a travel magazine editor working for a Japanese publishing company in Tokyo. The quarterly magazine chose the Baltic countries to cover in the 2020 Spring issue, which made me visit Estonia. During the week-long trip, our magazine crew traveled from Tallinn to Tartu and finally reached Paidra Village, in Võru county in Southeast Estonia. I did not understand until that moment that the smoke sauna is a special place profoundly connected with Estonian traditions and customs. I was also simply surprised to learn that there is a ritualistic way to take a sauna. The rustic and age-old appearance of the smoke sauna, the subtle scent of smoke in the sauna room, the sound of steam sizzling and evaporating on the stones, the voice of sauna women's storytelling and spelling, the comfortable vibration of the whisking were all new experiences for me, and it was an encounter with a totally different culture. My first interest in the topic might have occurred at the time, as my description of the sauna ritual, which was jotted down with astonishment and excitement filling a two-page A4 notebook, showed.

This thesis focuses on the guided sauna experience and *saunanaine*, sauna woman in English (more details about this term will be given later), who provides the experience. When I was invited to smoke sauna as a Japanese journalist, I learned that the sauna is considered an important attraction in traditional and cultural tourism, especially rural tourism, in Estonia, and the situation is likely similar in neighboring countries such as Latvia, Finland, and Lithuania. However, the guided sauna experience is further developed from simply providing a bathing experience to a ritual-like experience in which the hostess of the sauna shares her way to take a sauna with the guests. The actions related to this sauna ritual are conducted and performed by the sauna women with some intention and direction; therefore, it contains a performative aspect.

The sauna women invite participants into the profound sauna world through storytelling, spelling, drumming and so on. They also guide healing practices using a variety of items, such as salt, honey and herbs. These are received by each participant's body and senses, creating a full sensory and bodily experience. I look at these experiences as being part of the domain of health and wellness tourism (e.g., spa), in addition to spiritual practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and

aromatherapy, which are linked with the spiritual esoteric and ritualistic elements. Those experiences are produced and consumed in the context of the socio-economic conditions surrounding contemporary society. Thus, the guided sauna experience is not only a tourism experience of traditional culture and rurality, but also a compound experience of health, wellness, spiritual tourism and other intricate elements.

Needless to say, the guided sauna experience is also a form of service and business. During my research, I noticed that informants used the term *saunanaine* when they explained their activities related to the sauna. Regarding the use of the term, it turned out to express multiple meanings: it can refer to a tradition of assisting customers in taking a sauna by whisking or doing a massage. Similar expressions are *saunameister*, sauna master in English, when not indicating gender, and *saunamees*, sauna man in English.

On the other hand, I noted that the term *saunanaine* is nowadays used mainly by my informants when they refer to their work, vocation, occupation, role, and business activities. For instance, the sauna women used the term in their conversations like, *I started saunanaine things when I was(...). What I do as saunanaine is(...). If you want to be saunanaine(...)*. One informant (Helen) handed her business card to me, on which she inscribed *saunanaine* as her work title above her name. Also, Eda Veeroja, who has the longest career in the sauna and rural tourism among the informants, said that this terminology had likely started to be used during the last decade. She and other interviewees expressed the word *saunanaine* as a “trend” and “movement” as well. Thus, *saunanaine* has become a novel lifestyle business or entrepreneurship in the modern era. I view *saunanaine* as a valuable business in that it generates additional incomes for informants in the rural areas of Võru, Southeast Estonia, where the number of jobs and options is limited compared with urban areas. Furthermore, I believe that *saunanaine* is a unique business born in Estonia from the intertwining of various external and internal factors surrounding sauna women, and the guided sauna experience will expand the possibilities of future tourism.

There are two main aspects that this thesis seeks to clarify: the entrepreneurial motivation and antecedents of sauna women and the detailed nuances of sauna rituals from a performative perspective. The following are my main research questions.

- What triggers and motivates women to provide guided sauna experiences? What are their business principles and priorities? How have they learned and elaborated guided sauna experiences as services to create value within the experience economy?
- How are guided sauna experiences structured and what are the main elements used in these rituals? What are the intentions of the sauna women who conduct/perform it? What contextual and external factors have influenced the elements used in guided sauna experiences?

This thesis answers these research questions in four main chapters. In Chapter 1, I focus on the theoretical background of the topic by applying and analyzing several theoretical materials I used for my research. I intertwine the historical background of sauna traditions and customs and women's healing practices with contemporary wellness, health and spiritual tourism. Also, I expand the meaning of experience in contemporary tourism and in the nature of sauna rituals, connecting it with the perspective of personal entrepreneurship and business. Chapter 2 proceeds to explain the process of gathering research materials from the field. In addition to showing the methodology, the reasons for adopting it, and its effectiveness, I will introduce the research participants to readers by clarifying how I found, chose, and targeted them. Chapter 3 draws on the interviews to portray the business of sauna women and their personal stories and motivations to keep up their activities. By uncovering the apprenticeship to the sauna woman, I reveal what it is like to be a professional *saunaanine*. Chapter 4 analyses the processes and elements of sauna rituals based on material collected by participant observation and autoethnography with my own sensory and bodily experiences. I shed light on how sauna women conduct sauna rituals through the use of actions and objects with their intention and purpose.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Sauna Ritual: From a Traditional Practice to a Health and Wellness Service

Sauna rituals seem to have been originally inspired by the sauna traditions practiced in everyday life, while today they are practiced or performed as health and wellness services. In this section, I will focus on what traditional sauna practices in Estonia and neighboring countries were or are like and explain the elements that may relate to the transition of the traditional practices, using two keywords: *experiencescape* (O'Dell, 2005) as a concept to describe interaction between tourism, culture and economy, and *liminality* (Turner, 1995; Van Gennep, 1960) to examine the meaning of rituals in contexts of folkloristics and anthropology.

First, I will look at the traditional sauna practices in Estonia and its neighboring countries. Some scholars, including Estonian ethnologist Tamara Habicht, have described that over the centuries, sauna culture was nurtured in the lives of peasants, and the procedure of the sauna was formed through their numerous consecrated customs and traditions (Cimdiņa, 2014; Edelsward, 1991; Habicht, 1972). In peasants' culture, the sauna was a place for healing and maintaining health so as to invigorate and relieve the tiredness of daily labor (*ibid.*). Whisking and massage were occasionally practiced in the sauna for health, alongside other curing methods such as bloodletting and cupping-glasses (Habicht, 1972, p. 156). Besides, the sauna was regarded as a spiritual place accompanied by peasants' life cycles such as birth, death, and marriage: women gave birth, the dead were purified before burial, and newlyweds were celebrated in the sauna (Cimdiņa, 2014; Hõbepappel, 2023, p. 90).

The sauna had been associated with varied beliefs, rituals, and magics (Cimdiņa, 2014; Edelsward, 1991; Habicht, 1975; Hõbepappel, 2023); for instance, in Estonia there were “traditional greetings, whisking charms and expressions of thanks for a good sauna, all in keeping with typical features of Estonian folk-songs, the most characteristic of which is the use of the old Estonian alliterative verse” (Habicht, 1975, p. 155). This description echoes elements

currently in place in the guided sauna experience (See Chapter 4: Sauna ritual). Habicht showed as an example that there were special magical whiskings of newborn babies to keep them healthy and strong and of young ladies to make them attractive to young men (ibid.). Furthermore, Habicht described the relationship between the sauna and magical power in this way: “The sauna has also been looked upon as a holy place. Even the gusts of the hot steam in the bath-house are thought to be holy. The sauna is believed to be able to endow people with various magic powers, e.g. a witch might be supposed to cast her spells either in the sauna itself or while being near the sauna” (ibid., 156). This would imply that the sauna, a special and magical place, was a suitable place for ritualistic activities to take place.

Those sauna traditions often represented rurality (Cimdiņa, 2014) and even nationality (Edelsward, 1991). For example, Finnish anthropologist Lisa-Marlene Edelsward (1991) described that the sauna tradition and custom have been regarded as a symbol of Finnishness. Also, the traditional sauna practices would be perceived as an idealized past, especially of the countryside, and have been described as an “ancient historical practice” (Cimdiņa, 2014). In today’s tourism, particularly rural tourism, in the Baltic states and Finland, the sauna tradition seems to be reevaluated and has become one of the tourism attractions that provide visitors with authentic experiences of the traditional culture.

An ethnologist researching tourism and experience economy, Tom O’Dell, insisted that experiences have become the most notable commodities tourism has to offer, and tourists seek for “engaging the world”; they prefer experience actively rather than just passively observing (O’Dell, 2005, p. 12-33). What O’Dell called “experiencescape” was “landscapes of experience”, which refers to the dynamic interplay between tourism, culture, and the economy. Tourism is not only about physically visiting destinations but also about the holistic experiences that tourists encounter through interacting with local culture, tradition, and people (ibid.). Moreover, O’Dell described that tourists are looking for memorable, immersive, and transformative experiences, and the uniqueness and otherness of experiencescape may be formed by local culture, including intangible art forms (e.g., music, dance, customs, food, craft etc.) and cultural identity. Considering those characteristics, the guided sauna experience would be an attractive experience

or experiencescape, providing the opportunity to immerse customers in traditional and bodily experiences. In experiencescape, “in which experiences are staged and consumed can be likened to stylized landscapes that are strategically planned, laid out and designed”(ibid., p. 16) by the producers. Applying it to the guided sauna experience, the interior, items for the sauna rituals, lightning, and the sounds are all designed and played out by the sauna women. As O’Dell insisted, the experiences are organized in a certain place and created through the manipulation of the material culture (ibid., p. 15). Also, in guiding the experience, mediators take critical roles in helping tourists understand the cultural setting and let them know what is important and why they should experience it (ibid., p. 16).

Looking at the guided sauna experiences as health and wellness services, O’Dell pointed out that the search for “peace and quiet” and radical change in the physical and mental state have developed in the health and wellness industries, mainly in spas and health resorts (O’Dell, 2005, p. 30; O’Dell, 2010). Even just spending time slowly can be a commodity, and there, visitors release the stresses of busy everyday life. Those kinds of experiences are expected to provide visitors with physical and psychological radical change, for example, a feeling of recharging energy and an impression of finding a new solution, in which the positive effects are hoped to remain longer after the experience too (O’Dell, 2010). This would resonate with the intention of the guided sauna experience by the sauna women to help people rest, heal, and positively transform themselves through the slow but extraordinary experience (See Chapter 4: Sauna ritual).

Experiences such as performances involving participant practice consist of a formalized sequence of behaviors and transformative aspects. Next, I will examine the meaning of rituals based on the French folklorist Arnold van Gennep's concept of "liminality", by which he sees the transitional phase in a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960). As the previous research about Finnish sauna by Edelsward (1991) and Niendorf (2000) in the classical anthropology and folkloristics context shows, an essential symbolic quality of the sauna is “liminality”. Turner (1995, p. 94-96) expressed that as a ritual process, people enter liminality, which is an ambiguous and in-between state in a “threshold” deviated from the everyday flow of activities.

Turner developed the concept from Gennep's division of rites of passage into three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation (1960, p. 11). Gennep described a variety of ways of separation, which include entering physical space, such as gates and buildings as boundaries between the sacred and secular worlds, and taking off clothes, such as shoes, coats and headdresses, as a behavior to separate oneself from the outer world (ibid., p. 33). Also, in the incorporation phase, which is a post-ritual phase, Gennep indicated that people start to retrieve their daily life, socialize, and have the same food or drink with other people (ibid., p. 132). In light of the sauna custom, people first move to the sauna facility, which is a spatially isolated place, and take off their clothes. Then they step into a sauna room, which traditionally has the meaning of holiness and sacredness, and expose their bodies to hot air and steam, where people feel the transition of physical and mental sensations through the process. After the sauna, people regain their social state smoothly, for example, by having sauna food and drink and talking to each other. Turner claimed that the transition phase temporarily demolishes customary norms and ethical standards (1995, p. 95). The extraordinariness, sacredness, nudity, behavioral change, taboo, healing process, and sense of purification and rebirth that the sauna encloses would resonate with Van Gennep's and Turner's concepts of the ritual process.

The interpretation of sauna tradition, including its meaning and symbol, in mainly a tourism context, and the fundamental meaning of the sauna or sauna ritual, the transformative aspect of passing through liminality, combine with each other, which nowadays creates the sauna as a modern experiencescape.

1.2. The Role of Women in Healing Practice

Sauna women are experience providers but also share similarities with healers in terms of being ritual masters. In this section, I will draw crossing points and differences between the roles of sauna women and female folk healers in a historical context. Also, I will look at how the healers' roles have shifted through modern times of upheavals in social and economic transition.

In medical anthropology, self-treatment and informal healing have been researched under the category of healers, which includes shamans, spirit-mediums, diviners, priests, midwives, herbalists and so on (McClain, 1989, p. 21). In early modern Europe, especially before the Renaissance, where there was no clear identity of doctors, non-university-trained practitioners and many women played an important role through healing practices (Whaley, 2011, p. 1-6). And even after medicine became accessible, folk healers filled in where medicine could not reach in the modern and postmodern age (Kõiva, 1996, p. 78; Stark, 2006, p. 319). Women's nature related to home, taking care of the ills of family members as a mother or grandmother, has encouraged engagement in care-giving, well-being, childbirth, and healing (Whaley, 2011, p. 174-195). Those women, who heal people's physical and mental disorders, were also called wise women, to some extent midwives, and occasionally designated as witches in addition to healers (ibid.).

According to Leigh Whaley (2011), such women were mainly unlicensed and autonomous healers, which means they were healers who supported people's health and wellness from an unofficial standpoint. While certificated and official doctors were occupied by a mainly male upper class, including priests in church and private physicians serving the royal and noble families, those women were ordinary people, such as peasants. Traditional healers differed from sauna women in that they offered a wide range of diverse treatments and healing practices (surgery, bloodletting, diagnosis, etc.), but they shared a common practice of incorporating herbs and magic into their healing practices. Whaley defined magic as “practical art which used the natural powers of things to achieve certain desired effects” through their prayers, charms, and incantations, embedding and combining with their physical remedies (Whaley, 2011, p. 174-195). Their approaches would be comprehensive; therefore, they took on diverse roles not only as unofficial physicians, surgeons, pharmacists, and nurses, but also as counselors, emotionally supporting all walks of life, including the poor and vulnerable, with sympathy and charitableness (Ehrenreich & English, 1972/2010, p. 25-30). It is important to note that since ancient times, the role of the female healer has been diverse, multi-skilled and unofficial.

Looking at modern Estonia, Estonian folklorist Mare Kõiva described that even though the use of traditional medicine declined in the 1960s and 1970s, the practice of healing with applied knowledge was still seen in Southeast Estonia when fieldwork by folklorists was conducted in 1986 (1996, p. 78). Also, Kõiva (*ibid.*, p. 77-78) pointed out that there were mainly two types of healers in Estonia: “witch doctors” who relied on traditional folk medicine and “urban doctors (contemporary folk healers)” who had a stronger connection with methods from the alternative medicine and New Age movement (*ibid.*). The rural folk healers mainly cured and healed varied diseases and relatively less serious illnesses, for instance, erysipelas, earache, external tumors, snake bites, creaking joints, infant diseases, and injuries, by traditional medicine with incantation (*ibid.*, p. 78-85). Against their specialty, they were often prejudiced, feared, and regarded as almost half-mythical beings. This may have something in common with sauna women, who are sometimes being viewed with prejudice or curiosity because they have a wide range of roles that are hard to explain.

About the transmission of the healer’s esoteric knowledge, Kõiva described that it has been done over a long period from generation to generation, mainly in the family, by “intuitive, non-verbal, cognitive approaches”, especially observation; watching one’s Master was crucial (*ibid.*, p. 107). However, Kõiva followed up that more people without traditional backgrounds or connections with folk medicine and without family lineage of healers or witches became healers through the ages. The apprenticeship and the knowledge transfer would resemble those of today’s sauna women (see Chapter 3: *Saunanaine*). Also, Kõiva pointed out that contemporary folk healers tended to combine their experience, including empirical observation, with knowledge about esoteric practices, oriental medicine, and philosophical ideas (*ibid.*, p. 86-94). This would suggest that contemporary folk healers relied on their interpretation and creativity.

If the sauna and guided sauna experiences contribute to people’s health and wellness, the sauna can be considered one of the healing practices of preventive and alternative medicine. How do folk healing practices relate to medical healing? Marko Uibu (2021) described that the coexistence of different therapeutic practices became common in Estonia in the 1990s, and various international spiritual and alternative teachings and techniques became a part of people’s

choices. This was driven by individual autonomy in health decisions based on consumer logic and the distrust of dominant authorities. This new type of pluralization emerged in Eastern Europe later than in Western Europe; however, it developed faster in Eastern European countries, and Uibu pointed out that this spread in Estonia especially during perestroika and liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s, which allowed more freedom and better access to different health-related teachings (Uibu, 2021, p. 1-6).

Nowadays, healing practices are commodified in global capitalism. As we see different types of healing practices as spiritual commodities, such as yoga, mindfulness, aroma therapy, Reiki, Tai Chi, and so on, spirituality and consumerism seem inseparable. Andrea Jain (2020, p. 1-16) claimed that spirituality is embedded in neoliberal capitalist social structures and commercialized and produced as a means to profit, promoting self-growth and transformation. A further complement to the goal of spiritual service is "personal spiritual growth and holistic well-being" (Uibu, 2021, p. 2) . This can fuel the booming wellness and self-care industry as well as healing practices, including providing ritualistic experiences.

1.3. Women and Lifestyle Entrepreneurship

I dedicated attention to the commodification and the way of business in guided sauna experiences in Chapter 4; therefore, I would like to stress some aspects about entrepreneurship in this section. However, regarding the motives and objectives of sauna women, they likely work on their business to seek for what they find rewarding, including their ideal lifestyle, rather than pursuing profits. Therefore, I apply the concept of "lifestyle entrepreneurship" (Ivanycheva et al., 2023) here to portray the nuanced way of entrepreneurship of my interviewees.

In social science, including economics, entrepreneurship is conceptualized as venture activities motivated primarily by wealth, income, business and profit growth, and social value creation (Ivanycheva et al., 2023). On the other hand, lifestyle entrepreneurship includes a non-growth-oriented business, prioritizing their own fulfilling life, such as better work-life

balance, autonomy in their work with a “being your own boss” mindset (Peters et al., 2009), and a slower pace of life (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). As one of the characteristics of lifestyle entrepreneurship, it balances family and labor obligations, in some cases generating money without leaving their home (Dawson et al., 2011), which would allow the management of children or day-care issues. Those focus on the way of working; however, an extensive literature review on lifestyle entrepreneurship by Ivanycheva et al. (2023) explored the entrepreneurs’ motivational aspects. It defines lifestyle entrepreneurship as an entrepreneurship motivated by personal fulfillment and objectives such as a desire to engage in specific activities that the entrepreneur finds rewarding and to live in a particular place to which they are attached (ibid., p. 2). Lifestyle entrepreneurship is commonly seen in the fields that need creative expression and rely on the attractiveness of particular locations, such as hospitality, tourism, leisure, sport and recreation, and craft industries (Ivanycheva et al., 2023; Neergaard & Christensen, 2017).

Many lifestyle entrepreneurs turn their beloved activities into professional services or products, expressing their identity and true passion (Ivanycheva et al., 2023; Neergaard & Christensen, 2017). The freedom of creativity and expression motivates them; therefore, their lifestyle ventures are not just a means of making a living but “a vehicle for self-fulfillment” (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006, p. 236). It can be said that keeping up with the activity becomes their objective and motive. Also, personal and business values are integrated with each other (Tomasella & Ali, 2019). As a result of this tendency, Ivanycheva et al. (2023) pointed out that lifestyle entrepreneurs simultaneously focus on the production and consumption of amenities that they find valuable. In other words, they attempt to do their creative tasks by themselves, which may limit business capacity and growth (ibid., 5-6).

Up to this point, I have mainly looked at internal factors of lifestyle entrepreneurship, including personal motivation, goal and purpose, yet LE is often fostered by both “push and pull factors” (Herslund & Tanvig, 2012, p. 380), for instance, a change of market and societal value as external factors. Here I would like to look at the lifestyle entrepreneurship, especially in wellness, health, and spiritual business, demonstrating important domains influencing women as lifestyle entrepreneurs and their customers.

Today, wellness, both physical and mental, is regarded as an individual responsibility and even a moral obligation, which has induced the necessity of self-care or self-help (Cederström, 2015; Lau, 2015). Enjoying overall wellness can be a prerequisite for ensuring compatibility with society and gaining the trust of others. For instance, a toned body is regarded as better than a flabby body, and healthy diets are recommended over cigarettes and fast food. Nowadays, people can choose from a variety of wellness, health, and spiritual services or products, including alternative health practices, due to global capitalism to construct personalized lifestyles (Jain, 2020). Also, those practices became more popular; for example, yoga initially was rooted in the counterculture and only some people practiced it, yet it turned into one of the mainstream health and spiritual practices (Ingram, 2020; Lau, 2015). In Denmark, wellness and spiritual practices are utilized in the business field as well, and therapeutic practices are embedded in employee training, such as leadership programs, in some companies, mainly to enhance employees' mental health and self-actualization (Bovbjerg, 2010). It can be said that those practices are now utilized to promote maximization of individual potential, personal growth, and self-realization in a capitalist economy (Ingram, 2020). Being well or healthy seems to have become an ideology in modern times, and markets attempt to encourage further consumption. That can influence how people determine how to spend their time and money, for example, as their leisure, where to go, who they spend time with, and what to do in their spare time.

Ingram et al. claimed that leisure is freedom from daily chores for women as well as “one of the life dimensions where women choose to not only relax and revitalize, but to embrace self-actualization and empowerment” (2021, p. 3). Also, Silk et al. (2016) pointed out that the border between production and consumption in modern leisure practices has become blurred. This implies that the boundary between the creators and receivers of leisure is ambiguous, with former receivers turning into the creators, and the creators themselves consuming the leisure of the same industry. With the increased demand for meaningful activities in leisure and the ease of becoming a service provider, potential lifestyle entrepreneurs may be able to start a business easier. Ivanycheva et al. (2023) described this tendency as lifestyle entrepreneurs' weakness: by sticking to consume what they value, they cannot (do not) scale their business as much as

income-motivated entrepreneurs, because “lifestyle ventures are ends in themselves (the value created and experienced in and through its operations)” (p.7).

Ingram and Slocum (2021, p. 58-69) used the term serious leisure in their analysis of lifestyle entrepreneurs who make a living from crafts in Arizona, USA. The term was described as, as noted by Stebbins (1992), an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity gaining special skills and knowledge and eventually becoming a full-fledged activity and their career. Also, if the boundary between customer and entrepreneur is blurred, customers would be fellow hobbyists, friends or acquaintances within the same community. This resonates with the fact that sauna women start their activities in their own community. Neergaard and Christensen (2017) noted that women lifestyle entrepreneurs’ customers are often friends and tend to aim to improve the life quality of their friends and community in addition to themselves.

I see commonalities in sauna women’s professional roles and those performed by yoga and fitness instructors, nutrition consultants, wellness coaches, and makers of health-focused products. In all these cases, the aim is accompanying customers to support and enhance their wellness and self-actualization. They are mentors (gurus) who share tips based on their professional knowledge and skills through body or bodily experience. What LEs in health and wellness and spiritual business have in common is that service providers prompt their customers to have "transformation" in a positive way through their services, and vice versa, customers also expect it, which makes it a viable business (Bovbjerg, 2010; Ingram, 2020; Jain, 2020; Lau, 2015; Neergaard and Christensen, 2017).

Neergaard and Christensen (2017) called this type of entrepreneurship 'soteriological lifestyle entrepreneurship', as a new type of lifestyle entrepreneurships. Soteriology means a path to or doctrine of salvation, and Neergaard and Christensen explained the soteriological process in this way: to transform from the present trapped non-ideal state to the ideal state in the future, which can be gained through individual bodily, ritualized and spiritual practices (ibid., p. 271). This would resonate that the sauna ritual includes the sense of transformation and bodily practices.

As I mentioned, lifestyle entrepreneurs tend to commodify activities they value and practices that have helped their own self-development (O'Neill, 2024) and spread them to other women because they want to help them as well (Lau, 2014; Neergaard and Christensen, 2017). This may imply that they advertise their successful experiences and ideal lifestyles that they have gained. Thus, their self-dissatisfaction in the past is often cited as the before-stage in their narratives, and the present self is the evidence of the after-stage. This means that lifestyle entrepreneurs need to be charismatic and behave in a professional manner with confidence, as if they know all the secrets to health and satisfaction.

2. Materials and Methodology

2.1. Process of Fieldwork

My fieldwork, mainly participant observations and interviews, commenced in January 2020, when I had my first guided sauna experience, and continued until February 2024. I had six guided sauna experiences by five different sauna women in total, and I interviewed six sauna women.

In the beginning of my research, for an “outsider” as a Japanese who just started to live and study in Estonia, it was difficult to know if there were other sauna women like Kairi and Egle whom I met at my first sauna ritual and where I could meet these other sauna women. Thus, I first spoke with Kairi, whom I already knew. During the conversation, Kairi told me about her teacher, Eda, and the next time I interviewed Eda, I gained information about another sauna woman. This chain of introductions helped me meet each of the informants one by one. Therefore, the process of gathering information was “snowball sampling”; one interviewee gives the researcher the name of another interviewee, who successively provides the name of the third person, and so on (Vogt, 1999).

I also informed friends, acquaintances, cohorts, supervisors, and professors around me in Estonia that I was researching sauna women, and they sometimes shared information with me. As for online research, the website Saunatee.ee, which is considered to be the largest sauna portal website in Estonia, helped to find sauna women. The website has a page called "SAUNANAISED-MEHED" (sauna women and men), which lists the farms and people offering sauna experiences. Also, the year 2023 was a sauna year in Estonia, which allowed me to access information on sauna services provided all over Estonia. In addition, I frequently checked sauna-related events on Facebook, Instagram, and websites of sauna women to collect information about them. However, the information online was not sufficient and often did not state the detailed contents, for instance, whether sauna rituals were included or not. Overall,

sauna women knew and networked with each other, and the information was best known to them; therefore, the snowball method was effective.

To begin with, the guided sauna experience is rather a special occasion for Estonian residents as well, compared to the regular saunas they take in their daily lives. It was not frequent, and the opportunities to participate were limited. However, by informing people about my research as mentioned above, I gained opportunities to be invited to guided sauna experiences by Estonian acquaintances and friends, as well as people from Japan who are traveling or visiting Estonia on business. On some occasions, I booked the guided sauna experiences for guests from Japan who were interested in the (smoke) sauna. Also, I did not miss the opportunity for public guided sauna experiences, which some sauna women hold as irregular and infrequent events.

In addition to guided sauna experiences, I went to the smoke sauna without guidance five times. Three of those times I was invited to a friend or acquaintance's home smoke sauna and twice to a public smoke sauna; within the home sauna, I was able to observe family sauna traditions (including whisking and spelling). Although these experiences are not directly described in this thesis, they provided useful opportunities to understand the differences between the smoke sauna experience as a service and the usual one with family and friends.

In Southeast Estonia, Võru, the smoke sauna, which is considered an early type of bathhouse with no chimney, became rediscovered from around the early 2000s to the early 2010s and was demanded by urban tourists and rural dwellers in the younger generation seeking old and romantic bathhouse (Võsu & Sooväli-Sepping, 2012). The smoke sauna tradition is still “alive among older inhabitants” (ibid., p. 82), and rural tourism entrepreneurs transform the tradition into tourism services by providing experiences of the tradition as a mediator and storyteller, including Eda Veeroja, who is one of the informants (ibid., p. 93-98) .

2.2. Research Participants

Some people who are called or identify themselves as *saunanaine* may not charge money and only share their sauna experiences within their own community, such as with friends and family. However, as my thesis includes the theme of women's lifestyle entrepreneurship, I chose as informants only those women who are engaged in sauna rituals as a business. In other words, it is the women who specialize in sauna activities and serve full-fledged sauna rituals as a paid service as professionals with certain experience. Having said that, there are some sauna women working on it as a business. For example, there are staff in large Estonian spa facilities who, at certain times of the day, provide customers with services like giving salt for rubbing or stirring the heat and steam in the sauna room with a towel. There are also estheticians who offer massages and beauty treatments in sauna rooms in small spas, yet I did not include them in this thesis. Moreover, I intentionally overlooked the sauna experience as an option held on tourist farms with accommodation.

I perceive that sauna rituals and *saunanaine* are in the context of wellness, health, and spiritual tourism and entrepreneurship, and they also contain elements of interpretation, application and commodification of traditions and rurality. Thus, I set the area to Võru county in Southeast Estonia, the centre of the smoke sauna tradition, and chose sauna women who are mainly active in that region. By focusing on one area, it was possible to compare the informants' relationship to the land and its impact (e.g., the situations of Kairi, a local, and Helen, a migrant, are different).

Four of the six research participants, except Egle and Annika, have smoke saunas; Annika is currently building a smoke sauna, and both Egle and Annika own their own saunas. Heating a smoke sauna takes 4-6 hours or longer, depending on the size of the room and the outside temperature, and it takes skill, knowledge, and experience. They begin by heating the smoke sauna, handcrafting whisks and herbal salts, storytelling about sauna traditions, performing sauna rituals such as whisking and spelling, and interacting with their clients, providing a holistic and bodily experience. The interviewees are in their 30s-60s, based in Võru and the length of their careers as sauna women differs from each other (each informant's details are explained in 3.1: Journey to become a *saunanaine*).

2.3. Interviews

I conducted five in-person interviews and one online interview with six sauna women. The interviews were conducted in English, and each in-person and online interview took about one and a half to two hours. I interviewed Eda Veeroja twice and the others once, because after interviewing other sauna women, I found that Eda plays the role of a mentor for some of them, and I felt that a follow-up interview was needed. I would like to note here that I was also conversing with sauna women before, during and after the sauna rituals. One of the interviews was a group interview with two informants, Egle and Annika, wherein Annika helped interpret what Egle said from Estonian to English. Collecting additional information was conducted through Facebook Messenger or email; these were used to ask questions that I could not ask during the interview or new questions that came up afterwards.

All the in-person and online interviews were semi-structured in form, as I saw the greatest benefit in it. Compared to the structured interview, which asks fixed questions and leads to answers that enable comparison across participants and quantification, the semi-structured interview has more leeway in the conversation to follow up on the angles that participants deem important, which possibly leads to more active knowledge-producing (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 19-21). At the beginning of my research, I had not grasped a clear picture of what sauna women were doing or what the exact theme of my thesis was, so I needed to tackle all the possibilities and cast questions from different directions. Semi-structured interviews gave me room and flexibility to add questions freely during the conversations.

I tried to conduct the interview as much as possible after the experience, such as the day after the sauna woman's guided sauna experience. By experiencing it before the interview, I was able to ask more in-depth and detailed questions about the experience, the sauna ritual process, and the content of the storytelling.

2.4. Participant Observation and Fieldnotes

I chose participant observation as my main research methodology. The guided sauna experience is a holistic and embodied experience; thus, experiencing and sensing it through my body should have been important. In embodied experience, participant observation by immersing in the environment with research interviewees enables researchers to fully understand what the interlocutors do and talk through the shared experience, which leads the researcher to bond with the interlocutors (Nabhan-Warren, 2022, p. 29-30). I described in detail all six guided sauna experiences in my fieldnotes. The topics I observed were wide, and I thrived to jot down the same as I saw in the sauna experiences. Starting with the basic information, including the participants and the time taken for the whole process, the main topic was what sauna women were doing in the sauna and also how the participants, including me, reacted and behaved according to the instructions of the sauna women. All the saunas likely had distinct elements to do different practices, so I described in detail each element in the whole process. I included, for example, what kind of items (salt, ash, honey,, and whisk) were used in the saunas, what kind of spells, songs, and instruments were played in the sauna and what kinds of food and drink were served.

Also, I especially focused on describing their storytelling: how the sauna women talk about Estonian sauna traditions and customs and how they connect spirituality, health and wellness to the sauna experience in their narratives. The conversations were also held in the dressing room next to the sauna, in addition to inside of the sauna.

In terms of ethical considerations, sauna is deeply related to nudity, so I paid particular attention to documentation, especially photography. I reached a consensus about photography that I might take photos in the anteroom or outside of the sauna when people wear clothes or cover their bodies with towels, yet I did not take the camera out whenever there was any nudity or any other scene with a lot of exposed skin. Although I disclosed in advance with the other participants that I was researching guided sauna experience, I avoided excessive questions or observations to avoid disturbing the other participants, who were also paying to participate in the experience, and sauna women conducting their business.

3. *Saunanaine* - Personal Stories and Business Principles

3.1. Journey to Become a *Saunanaine*

Each interviewee had a different trajectory to start activities as a sauna woman. They had their individual stories, including how they encountered the concept of *saunanaine*, what their motivations were, and how they first served a sauna ritual to customers. In this section, I will introduce their journeys to becoming sauna women along with their personal life stories.

The Story of Eda Veeroja

Eda was born in 1962 in Rõuge village, Võru county, and grew up around the city center of Võru from seven or eight years old. Before she started the sauna-related businesses, she ran her own travel agency, starting up small businesses such as hotels and guesthouses, as well as teaching tourism at Võru Vocational School. She studied tourism and hotel entrepreneurship at the University of Tartu Pärnu College, after studying law at the University of Tartu. Afterwards, she obtained a Master's degree in entrepreneurship and innovation at the University of Tartu while running her business. In 1993, she and her husband bought a house, which is the current Mooska farm, in Haanja village in Võru county because she hoped to live in the countryside close to nature, considering her children's upbringing. She built the smoke sauna there in 1996 because the smoke sauna was precious in her childhood memory and she wanted to get back the feeling. Yet, she has "no business-related ideas at the time soon after she moved and even the concept 'entrepreneurship' was not common in the transition time" (Interview with author, April 6, 2024).

From around 1998 to 2000, she and her husband Urmas started to invite their friends to their smoke sauna, and gradually the friends got to invite their friends, and they wished to pay for it, which led to establishing Mooska farm as a company in 2007. In the sauna, she "just shares her sauna practice" based on her daily childhood experiences with her family in the sauna. She was especially influenced by her great-aunt (her father's mother's sister), who lived to be 104 years old. Her sauna wisdom was obtained mainly through observation and experience by going to the sauna with her family rather than asking about the sauna practices.

Her sauna-related activities began in 2007 and became more active around the time when the smoke sauna tradition in Võromaa was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014. She initiated the preparation by collaborating with the Võru Institute, the state research and development institution in Võru county. Although she said that she has never counted the number of guided sauna experiences in total, according to her, she served 280 times in 2023, and she had similar numbers for the last six to seven years. She has had about 5000 visitors to her farm and 1000 people have experienced her guided sauna so far. However, not all of them were provided by Eda and were occasionally served by her husband and other sauna women.

In 2017, she started to teach the smoke sauna tradition and the way of whisking as a “sauna heritage course” out of a sense of urgency: “This culture has almost died out. People don't know anymore what to do in the sauna or how to behave in the sauna” (Interview with author, October 23rd, 2023). It is a four-day course conducted in Estonian, combining both lectures and hands-on practice (See Section 3.4.1: Eda Veeroja’s Sauna Workshop). She has taught more than 130 people, including the other informants for this research, Kairi, Laura, and Helen. The guided sauna experience is her main business at Mooska farm, yet she also works on production and sales of the meat smoked in the smoke sauna, education and training courses, and nature tours.

The Story of Kairi Sakla

Kairi was born in 1989, a few kilometres away from Hõbessaare in Võru County, where her smoke sauna, Hõbessaare Suitsusaun, is located. She recounted that the very first event that inspired her to become *saunanaine* was to participate in a workshop about nature and ancestors in 2010 in Võru by Mikk Sarv, an Estonian folklorist, rural activist, and educator. At that time, she had already returned to her hometown, Võru, after briefly studying interior design at the Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences (Eesti Ettevõtluskõrgkool Mainor) in Tallinn and marrying. She studied horticulture at a state-owned vocational school, Rāpina School of Horticulture, in Rāpina, Põlva county, and she sold herbs and other plants she cultivated in the market in Võru while raising her children.

She explained the reason why she joined the workshop: “I was searching for myself” (Interview with author, July 25th, 2023). She had been influenced by Mikk Sarv because he likely had some ancestry in Võru, and Kairi liked a nature movie by Estonian movie director Rein Maran, in which Mikk Sarv’s song was played. In the workshop, she learned “how to connect with herself, nature, and ancestors”, which became a core element in her sauna ritual.

Years later, in 2017, she suddenly got a call from her close friend asking her to prepare a sauna in a spiritual camp on Hiiumaa island. The friend reiterated that “we need a sauna woman and I think the sauna thing suits you”. Although she had never done such a thing before, she was planning to join a sauna whisking workshop in the near future, so she accepted the request. Before going to the camp, she took the sauna course by Eda Veeroja at the Smoke Sauna Week event in Haanja, Võru. It was a two-hour workshop, during which she learned the basic whisking skills and mindset. This course changed something about her. “I found out that this was something I was searching for, it was like our own spiritual thing that can help us. I can live in it, I can practice it, I can give it to my children and the people around me”. For Kairi, who grew up and has all four older generations of her family in Võru, the sauna was more compelling than any other exotic spirituality from foreign countries since the sauna is a tradition that has taken root in Võru for a long time. Even if she had one whisking course, she confidently went into the camp, without any practice. “I was just going and doing it.” That was the first time she even prepared the sauna, except for herself and her family.

Shortly thereafter, she received another call. This time it was from Eda Veeroja, and she asked Kairi whether she wanted to learn more about the sauna, which led her to join Eda’s longer-term sauna course. After the course, which took over one month in total, she started an apprenticeship at Eda’s farm by looking at what Eda was doing in the sauna when she gave a guided experience to her customers. After a while, she began to work at Eda’s sauna and provide guided sauna experiences instead of Eda when she did not work. Eda’s sauna had many bookings, so she needed some help from other sauna women. In 2019, Kairi constructed her own smoke sauna in Hõbessaare by renovating and relocating an abandoned smoke sauna that her grandfather and father had used before. “I thought I could do the same thing (business) as Eda does if I had my

own sauna, besides, I would like to have it for myself and my family”. She now prefers to have sauna rituals in her sauna, not in other people’s saunas. So far, she has provided guided sauna experiences approximately 200 times.

Besides the work of *saunanaine*, she makes jewelry on weekdays at a studio in the Võru city center, where her husband works, and she sometimes sells her jewelry on her website and social media, which is the same one she uses for her sauna activities. For her, *saunanaine* is not “work” but “more like lifestyle”.

As a side note, my first sauna experience was guided by Kairi. When I visited Estonia as a magazine editor from Japan, she (and Egle, described below) offered our media crews the opportunity to take her smoke sauna and the guided experience through a referral by the tourism department of Võru County. We were her first customers after she opened her own smoke sauna.

The Story of Egle Zekker

Egle was born in 1981 and grew up in Võru. She taught Võru language in kindergarten after graduating from a local high school. In 2012, she studied therapy at Alar Krautmann Health Academy (Alar Krautmani Terviseakadeemia), which is a private school specializing in traditional medicine and therapy. She also learned the Estonian sauna tradition and the basic knowledge and skills of the sauna there, and she recognized in class that the word *saunanaine* was already used the same way that it is used nowadays. After her graduation from the health academy in 2014, she was suddenly asked by a friend of a friend to prepare a sauna and do whisking and peeling for a group of four women. The client perceived that Egle learned “sauna therapy in the direction of traditional medicine”, and they expected a “new experience”. Egle went to the event in Tartu with one more female friend, who also studied at the same health academy. Egle and her friend had never provided the sauna experience to others before, so it was a new experience for them as well, as if creating something new with the client. This first experience was “just tiring” for Egle because she had to take care of each client by whisking and peeling for quite a long time.

Thereafter, she has done about 50 sauna rituals for about ten years, according to her. She mostly offers sauna rituals in different places, rarely at her own sauna, because her sauna at home in Haanja Village in Võru county is not large enough for a group. She combines what she learned in the health academy with self-knowledge in her way of the guided sauna experience. Also, she learned whisking from Eda, though there was no sauna course at that time; thus, she learned it by helping Eda when bigger groups came to Eda's sauna.

Her main profession is as a therapist, providing mainly massages. Her website mostly inscribes therapist works but partly *saunanaine* work as well. However, she does not advertise her activity as a sauna woman by herself, and she only offers it when somebody requests it. She perceives that “sauna rituals happen only on special occasions”, and it is more like a “hobby”, according to her, although she works on it seriously when she is asked.

The Story of Laura Malkov

Laura perceived that the first trigger to start sauna-related activities was her childbirth. She gave birth to her second child in the sauna with the support of a doula, who provides guidance related to health and childbirth with professional knowledge. She had a traumatic experience with hospital childbirth for her first child, and she was eager to manage the next one by herself at home. “I had to connect with my childbirth and myself on a totally different level to take responsibility for my body and my being” (Interview with author, February 11th, 2024), she said. She chose the sauna at home because it was the place where she could “connect with herself” and relax the most. After the birth of two sons, she became more interested in the sauna. She had long been interested in both national and international esoteric practices and read books about them.

Out of curiosity, she participated in an event around 2010 in Central Estonia to experience the sweat lodge, which is the primitive tent sauna of the Native American people. In the event, she became inspired by a new approach: to pray in the sauna. She was born in 1988 and grew up in Hinniala village in Võru county in a family with three saunas, including a smoke sauna and a cave smoke sauna. Laura went to the sauna with her family every week, sometimes even two

times a week. For her family, the sauna was a place to clean, relax, and rejuvenate themselves, and they whisked and used herbs even though she said, “We did not do something special like the sauna ritual”. “[In the sweat lodge event] I realized that ‘we [Estonian people] also should have had a similar cultural base [with the sweat lodge] from ancient times’”. This event made her recapture the role of sauna woman and introduced new ways of taking the sauna.

Years later, around 2018, she suddenly had the first opportunity to prepare a sauna for others. She became acquainted with Helen Moppel (one of the informants, described later), who had just moved to Võru, close to Laura’s house. Helen asked Laura to prepare a sauna for her girl’s night before her marriage. Laura had not experienced the sauna ritual, yet she already knew it after hearing that Helen was doing it. For her, what Helen was doing as a sauna woman was like the Copernican Turn. “I had not realized sharing my sauna experience with others was valuable and can be like work because taking the sauna was just a normal thing for me.” She prepared her cave smoke sauna and performed a sauna ritual for Helen and her female friends.

According to her, she has given the guided sauna experience about 100 times over the last six years. She sometimes does the sauna ritual at her cave smoke sauna, but usually she travels elsewhere to offer it since her sauna is insufficient for accommodating many people. She learned and improved her skills and knowledge about the sauna through her hands-on experiences and reading books. In the spring of 2023, she took Eda’s sauna course to check whether what she had been doing in the sauna was correct, just in case. She runs a Facebook community page, “Loov Sauna Ruum”, to share topics related to saunas, health, well-being, and sometimes her sauna events. For her, *saunanaine* is likely one of her activities or works, along with her other works as a doula and hairdresser.

The Story of Helen Moppel

Before starting activities related to the sauna, Helen worked as a costume designer, make-up artist, and film production designer for 20 years in Tallinn. She was born in 1979 and grew up in Tallinn. She studied at two universities, Tallinn University (Eesti Humanitaarinstituut) and the Estonian Academy of Arts (Eesti Kunstiakadeemia), but dropped out and stepped into the film

industry by self-learning. In 2018, she moved from Tallinn to Võru county due to family matters. Since her son had some issues at school in Tallinn, she looked for another school and found a small one in Setomaa, which was quite close to her summer house, where she lives now. One year later, after moving, she married a local man.

What brought her to first know the concept of *saunanaine* was the Hinge Festival event held on Hiiumaa island in 2017 before her relocation. At the festival, which is a spiritual festival with yoga, massage, meditation and a market, she joined “a sauna trip” for five to six hours with Kristina Paškevičius, an Estonian dancer and nature therapist. It was an intense and eye-opening first experience of the sauna ritual for her, and she expressed the experience as “my new birth physically and mentally”. In the same event, she coincidentally met Eda Veeroja and learned the term and idea of *saunanaine*. “I met Eda, and I heard it is like a profession, which you can learn. I was amazed and impressed. I told her that I wanted to take the course right away” (Interview with author, July 26th, 2023).

After taking the same course by Eda that Kairi and Laura took, she found a smoke sauna in Vatsa village, Võru, on a real estate website, bought and renovated it and opened it as “Ärni Suitsusaun” in 2020. Her sauna rituals take a unique style to bring multiple elements together, and she said that they are based on several workshops and courses: an online course about unconsciousness by Eva Lepik, a workshop about shamanism by Mikk Sarv and Kristel Vilbaste, who is an Estonian nature journalist and Sarv’s wife, and a two-year course about herbalism and holistic phytotherapy called Herbaticum.

Helen has provided around 200 sauna rituals, and she works at both her smoke sauna and other people’s saunas in different locations. She has conducted numerous types of sauna rituals, such as deep sauna, good health sauna, money energy sauna, silent sauna, men’s sauna and so on.

The Story of Annika Kääramees

Annika was born in 1993 and grew up on Hiiumaa island. After studying jewelry design at the Estonian Academy of Arts (Eesti Kunstiakadeemia) in Tallinn, she came back to the island again

in the middle of the school year following childbirth. While raising her children, she was doing several activities, including organizing dance classes, a women's choir group, and nature events for women, as well as running a vegan cafe with her sister and friends.

She grew up in a family with a sauna custom every weekend, and her family had a big sauna with a maximum capacity of 10 people. She recalled that in her childhood, she had always stayed in the sauna the longest in her family.

She explained that her first trigger to start sauna-related activities was to order-make a drum for herself in 2018. The drum is now used for her sauna rituals. After making the drum, she started to bring it to the sauna and sing with it. During her emotionally difficult times, playing the drum and singing for herself in the sauna supported her. Gradually, she had a thought: "I wanted to share this experience with my friends as well. When they had difficult times, I said, 'Okay... let's go to the sauna and sing together. I will scrub you, whisk you, and massage you if you need'" (Interview with author, September 24th, 2023). She extended what she initially did for herself to people around her.

Around that time, she had an odd experience. She joined a meditation workshop, the theme of which was ancestors, in Kassali, where she was born. According to her, she could see a vision of her ancestors in the workshop. At the last moment of the meditation, she had a vision of her ancestors handing her a gift, which was a sauna whisk. "I chuckled to myself, but after that, maybe I got a bit more courage to do it more widely."

She unexpectedly had her first opportunity to offer a guided sauna experience in 2022. An acquaintance was planning to do something special for her friend's girls' night before marriage, and she asked Annika if she could do a guided experience. She shared her ideas about the sauna ritual, explaining what she often offered to her friends in the sauna. She prepared her sauna for the future bride and her close friends and provided a sauna ritual by guiding them, body scrubbing each other, giving a special whisking to the bride, preparing flower water and singing to bless the happiness of the bride's marriage and life. "It was a real honor to do that because I did not even think before I could do it as like a job", she said.

Since then, she has continued to accumulate sauna ritual experiences, totaling about 20 times over about two years. She occasionally conducts sauna rituals in her family's sauna in Hiiumaa and sometimes travels to other locations at the client's request. She is planning to have two bases, in Hiiumaa and Võru county, where her partner lives, and now they are building a new smoke sauna in Võru.

At the end of this section, I would like to summarize basic information about the business of sauna women, such as the business forms, frequency of the sauna ritual, and price.

The interviewees work on sauna-related activities in different forms of business. Three of them run private limited companies (OÜ), one has a non-profit organization (MTÜ), one is a freelancer and the last one is both a non-profit and a freelancer.

When I asked how often they offered the sauna ritual as a sauna woman, none of them could answer clearly because they had never thought of or counted the times. The sauna ritual tends to be requested on an irregular basis at the customer's discretion, except for self-organized events by the informants. Also, some women temporarily had a break because of pregnancy and family issues. Therefore, it was likely difficult to answer with exact numbers, and they even seemed not to care about it. However, I counted the rough numbers, and the result varied from around 20 to 200. Eda was an exception, as she has possibly served around a thousand sauna rituals so far. Most of them added the comment, "It may not be an exact number but around this". They started to provide the guided sauna experience at different times; for example, one of them started 10 years ago, while another began one and a half years ago, and they differ in how actively they attempt to work on it.

The commonality was that summer is the busiest season for sauna women. Kairi said, "Sometimes there are no requests for weeks, especially during winter. In summer, however, I may receive two, three, or more requests in a week, so in total, I would say about once a week." However, Kairi has put a lot of effort into *saunanaine* activities, whereas some women answered only once a month or several months. They usually receive work requests through messengers,

emails, phone calls, and booking systems from friends, acquaintances, and people seeing their websites, social media, and the sauna portal website in Estonia (sauna2023.ee) for those who are listed.

Looking at the price and fee system of the sauna ritual, they vary. It depends on whether it is for a group or an individual, though the basic price seems to be set for a group.. The guided sauna experience for a group, including renting out the whole sauna cottage and having the guided sauna experience by the sauna woman, costs approximately 250 to 350 euros. The maximum number of people accepted to the sauna ritual depends on how spacious the sauna is and the sauna women's principles; it may range from five to ten people. Annika sets the price per person and separates the price with or without individual treatment, which includes personal massage and whisking. Some women who took Eda's sauna course mentioned that they set the price according to the "market", and Kairi answered that she referred to Eda's price. The price of the ticket to the event-like public saunas, which are open to any individual, likely also ranges from 20 to 60 euros. Helen informed me that she earned a few thousand euros with six other sauna women, separate from my research participants, for one sauna ritual, which was for a big group in a large sauna in a remote place.

This price would include the cost of firewood, salt, honey, whisks, food, drink, and water. Also, in the long run from beginning to end, it would contain the cost of linens (e.g., towels), sauna hats, sauna ladles, buckets, washbowls, instruments and maintenance costs for the sauna.

3.2. Sauna Ritual as a Service

Although my thesis' research participants are those who are paid to provide the sauna experience, some people, known or self-proclaimed as *saunanaine*, do not charge money and only share their sauna experience with friends and family. Firstly, I would like to explore the boundary between monetary and non-monetary aspects of sauna women's activities. There is a difference between taking a sauna with friends or serving for friends as an everyday practice (or festive/celebratory practice) and doing it at someone's request. In other words, only when sauna

women request a fee or get offered compensation, there is a business. It can be said that once someone paid them for the sauna ritual, they could say or advertise that they are a professional *saunanaine*. However, they need to be asked for another opportunity to continue to be active as sauna women. Regarding the stories of several of the informants who initially shared the everyday sauna practice with their family and friends, which gradually expanded the sphere, the boundaries between money-generating/non-generating and professional/non-professional may not be simple. Some informants, especially at the beginning of the activities, said that the guided sauna experience, which incurred costs, was mixed with the voluntary one.

At some public guided sauna experiences, in which individuals do not book their participation as a group, I noticed that friends of *saunanaine* and other fellow sauna women were present. I could not ask if they were paying for their participation, but it could be possible that it was free or discounted. Therefore, whether or not money is generated would depend on the relationship between the guest and the host (*saunanaine*). In fact, in one of the guided sauna experiences by Kairi, I experienced the gray zone. I have known Kairi since 2020, and I have visited her home and had dinner with her family several times. When my husband visited Estonia temporarily, I told Kairi that I would like him to experience the smoke sauna, and we, Kairi's family, and mutual friends enjoyed Kairi's smoke sauna together. At that time, Kairi did not talk about the fee, so my husband and I wondered what to do about it. Finally, we showed our gratitude after the sauna by handing out some honorarium and a souvenir from Japan, considering her expertise and the actual cost (ef. firewood). Even though the sauna was for friends, Kairi gave us a guided sauna experience sincerely and professionally, which moved us. In this way, whether or not a fee charge occurs would depend on the relationship between the sauna woman and the recipient, and the sauna rituals would be placed between service and volunteer, hospitality, friendship, and personal fulfillment.

I once made an interviewee a little uncomfortable by linking the words 'service' and 'sauna ritual' in an interview. The interviewee was Eda, and I saw her expressing her displeasure, and she claimed and explained how the word 'service' was an incorrect expression. She said that she had never thought about the sauna ritual as a service.

Eda Veeroja: I just let them (clients) into my life or my sauna world. It's sharing. I don't give rituals as a service and I don't do rituals to anybody. People are doing rituals among themselves. Nobody can give you a ritual and I just support them by going to the sauna together.

As mentioned above, the guided sauna experience needs a certain quality. For instance, Eda said that providing a comfortable sauna experience where the smoke does not hurt clients' eyes is necessary. Also, she said that her sauna ritual is not exactly the same as the way she usually takes a sauna herself and is suited for each client to some extent. Regarding the framework of lifestyle entrepreneurship, providing experiences is classified as a service in terms of generating profit, although some entrepreneurs hesitate to refer to the term. This reluctance may arise from a sense of mission and role as a sauna woman. Also, the sauna ritual is certainly not something offered passively, given the nature of the ritual and the sensory aspects. In the context of experience economy, Pine and Gilmore insisted that all experiences, like in the theatre, are co-created to some extent between the performer and the audience because the receiver's reaction influences the provider (1999/2011, p. xxi). Thus, there are interactive relationships between sauna women and their clients, which creates a sense of ambiguity for the sauna ritual as a service in a traditional sense; it is rather an experience co-created by all participants.

In the debut phase of sauna women, not all of them started performing the role of sauna woman based on rich hands-on experience. For instance, Kairi, Egle, Laura, and Helen confronted their first guided sauna experience without enough practice and preparation. Guessing from their stories, their clients perhaps asked the women based on their intuitions, considering sauna women's backgrounds, talents, and personalities. The client may not have had clear expectations or visions of the sauna rituals since those things may have been new to them. Also, there was no certification or qualification for sauna women to guarantee the quality of content and performance. What the clients would have in mind was likely the vague expectation that the sauna women would show them something new and interesting. In this situation, it was possible that neither the client nor the sauna women had a clear answer about what was the right or ideal sauna ritual.

3.3. Training and Apprenticeship

In this section, I will analyze how the informants enhanced the content of their sauna rituals and improved their practical skills through training and apprenticeship. As mentioned in the previous section, many of them went to their first performance without much experience, yet they subsequently learned and practiced the sauna ritual in different ways.

3.3.1. Eda Veeroja's Sauna Course

Eda is well known in Estonia as well as abroad as a pioneering entrepreneur who offers smoke sauna sessions and has given lectures and hosted events on sauna traditions on various occasions, as well as courses and workshops involving whisking and other practices. She teaches both one-time workshops that last a few hours (like a whisking workshop Kairi took in the beginning) and sauna courses over several sessions. Three informants, Kairi, Helen, and Laura, took Eda's sauna course at different periods. This was a course of four full days, though not in a row, which lasted one to one and a half months in duration. The course was held on an irregular basis, mainly in spring or fall, the less busy season for sauna rituals, and usually for a group of several people with both women and men. What was taught in this course? Eda calls it "a sauna course" or "a sauna heritage course" and explains that participants can learn the basics about the way of taking the sauna and whisking, in addition to a small part regarding sauna heritage. Participants have a lecture lasting a few hours in the morning and practical lessons both out and in the sauna after lunch each day of the course. According to Kairi, Helen, and Laura, they learned the local sauna tradition, elements of the sauna experience such as greeting, purifying, healing, and thanking, the uses of herbs, and the way of whisking. Kairi said that the most impressive part for her was the "sensory aspects" of the sauna.

Kairi Sakla: One part was how to whisk, compress and massage, but another part was how to communicate with the sauna, how to help people have connection with the sauna and be in the present. In the sauna, your thoughts should be in the present and you should be thinking nothing. (...) Also, we made some exercises for sensing something. For example, you are standing, your eyes closed and someone is behind you. And then you have to feel who it is.

The sensory aspects were taught not only through oral communication but also by doing, as in the direct experience of taking saunas together with Eda. Kairi explained it as something the apprentices had to feel for themselves rather than being taught passively. “Eda guides you but it's you who experiences it. You have to find it out by yourself”, Kairi said. The apprentices also learned how to whisk and make whisks. Whisking is a common sauna practice in Estonia and, subsequently, is usually not considered something special that people have to learn anywhere in particular. However, Eda describes that whisking is one of the most important elements in the sauna, and it is an energy work.

Eda Veeroja: (When whisking) technique is not important and it is just a tool. This is not a game, but healing and energy work. If you are connected in an energetic field through whisking, the whisker's brain goes into the receiver's brain and vice versa. This means they may interrupt their energy and feel uncomfortable. (...)You can't learn it, you have to experience it by yourself. It is the interaction between whiskers and receivers. Your energy, the other person's energy, sauna energy, there are a lot of energies around us. This is a holistic cooperation of those energies.

This would imply that the sauna course has two aspects: the transmission of sauna skills and knowledge as well as the direct sharing of Eda's worldview and the sensory aspects of the sauna. Moreover, Kairi told me that during her training on the course, she had an emotional and mystical experience of seeing visions of her distant ancestor when she was with Eda in the sauna. At that time, Eda stayed by Kairi's side and told her to let all her feelings go free and accept them, after which Kairi felt better and more comfortable. From this experience, Kairi decided that she, as a *saunanaine*, would like to support someone when they have an emotional overflow in the sauna, as Eda did. By seeing Eda's actual behaviours as a sauna woman directly, Kairi may have understood the role and meaning of *saunanaine*.

Given Eda's extensive career as a sauna woman and her role in teaching courses to the informants, it is plausible that she has served as a mentor to them. Furthermore, Eda is

considered a primary source of knowledge about the *saunanaine* tradition; Kairi and Helen both noted that Eda was the first person to introduce them to it.

However, interviewees did not seem to be overly committed to the way Eda interprets and guides the sauna ritual, although many of them stated that their experiences with Eda became the foundation for their own sauna rituals. Laura took Eda's whisking course from her motivation to check whether her original way was correct or not, yet she found out that the elements of sauna rituals and the order that she learned from Eda were quite similar to what she had been doing in her own way. Also, Helen expressed her views on Eda's whisking course this way.

Helen Moppel: I think if you want to be a *saunanaine* you just have to start somewhere and it is good to go to Eda's whisking course to make a start. But the most important thing is to continue learning in the sauna how to draw this process (sauna ritual) by yourself. It's like practical learning. You can't learn these kinds of things from the course. This is like a base, which is the sauna culture from the history, in Estonian history. Then if you are studying it from Eda, and then you put yourself in this base, and you start to grow with the sauna by doing it. And I don't use this old tradition almost at all anymore. I have my own way, my own beliefs.

Although Eda provides a certificate upon completion of the course, I could not verify whether this certificate functions as a formal credential among sauna women, such as being displayed in a sauna building to inform clients of their qualifications. I only saw one post of Helen's Facebook event, in which she described that she took Eda's sauna course in her profile. The course may have influenced, depending on the person, the sauna rituals of sauna women, however, it is difficult to examine how it is structured and taught. Would she function as an authority among sauna women?

When I asked Eda a question about what she said when I participated in her sauna, which was "inhaling is future, and exhaling is past", she dodged my question and answered like this:

Eda Veeroja: If I tell you that exhaling is past, then you take it like knowledge, like a frame, and you don't search there for other feelings, information, impressions. I am writing a book now, but this is difficult because it makes people be in this frame. 'Eda said this was that'. And they don't look for anything else, which is not the right way. (...) We all can't feel the same way, nobody can tell you how to feel or what to feel.

This statement could be interpreted to mean that Eda is likely reluctant to be an authority among sauna women, and she embraces that each person can have his or her own interpretation of the sauna, its rituals and traditions. Eda also said that every family has its own sauna traditions. Moreover, it is noteworthy that different sauna women have different perspectives and learnings from the same course by Eda, as Kairi focused on sensory aspects and Helen on elements of the Estonian sauna tradition. Sensations are personal and complex, which is why the inheritance of knowledge may also have various interpretations that would sometimes be elusive.

3.3.2. *Self-taught and Bricolage*

While three informants took Eda's sauna course, two of them (Annika and Egle) had never taken it, and they said that they learned and improved their sauna rituals by themselves through hands-on experiences. For instance, Annika explained that sauna rituals are something you can learn how to do naturally as you work on them (even if there is no master). The hint comes from "your heart", and "sauna tells you (how to do it)", she said. Also, Egle pointed out that the circumstances in each sauna are always different, so the same approach doesn't always work.

Egle Zekker: Every time when people come, every situation is different, every person is different. For example, yesterday one woman didn't need whisking almost at all. She just needed smooth touching (by whisk). And you just will get this feeling, what she needs, in your heart or in your stomach. I learned how to whisk at school (Alar Krautmann Health Academy), but I sometimes use almost nothing from what I learned there.

The narrative would imply that they perceive the sauna ritual as variable, depending on who comes to the sauna, how they behave, and what they expect in the sauna. If so, they have to confront an inexperienced situation every time, and the knowledge and skills from the experience are likely difficult to accumulate. Would using the word “improve” in the sauna ritual be correct?

Looking at what they deem to be their improvements, they talked about growth in both practical skills and mindset. For example, Annika could not use two whisks with hands at first, but after a number of guided sauna experiences, she learned how to manage them. In Laura’s case, she brought too many musical instruments to her sauna in the beginning; however, gradually, she could guess what was needed for each sauna, which lightened her bag. Kairi said that her sauna ritual process was carried out more smoothly:

Kairi Sakla: Like my first sauna, I was thinking about every detail at home (before the sauna). I thought every order had to be right. But as I experienced more and more saunas, I became more relaxed, because I got to naturally know what I need to do without thinking beforehand. Sometimes the previous day’s dreams give me clues.

As Annika, Egle, and Kairi all said, there would be an aspect of sauna ritual that is improvisational and relies on the intuition of sauna women. However, it seems to me that this is not the only element that creates a sauna ritual.

Here, I would like to examine how their past studies and backgrounds relate to the content of the sauna ritual. Their educational and professional backgrounds and personal experiences, such as taking some courses and workshops, may intertwine with the contents of the guided sauna experience. For example, Kairi studied interior design and herbalism at school, which may influence the cosy spacial design in her sauna and the uses of herbs (e.g., the herbal tea, herbal salts, and whisks she makes for the sauna ritual). She said that what she learned from Eda is the basis of her sauna; however, she also applies her learnings from Mikk Sarv’s workshop about connecting with ancestors and nature to her sauna ritual. In my impression during fieldwork, Kairi’s sauna ritual was similar to Eda’s regarding the order of acts and storytelling, yet she talked about the connection with ancestors more often. Moreover, Helen, who has work

experience in the film industry, said that she applies her background to the way she stages and performs in her sauna ritual (I will explain this in 4. Sauna Rituals mentioning experiencescape). Helen has also taken various courses and workshops related to shamanism, breathing, and herbalism, which reflect her unique types of sauna rituals. It is a common characteristic for several informants that they had a period of trying different spiritual workshops and courses. Those experiences may seem unrelated to the sauna at first glance, but they may be a milestone leading to their activity as a sauna woman.

It can be claimed that sauna women are combining their experience and knowledge from their previous careers to create a new work or business of *saunanaine*. Baker and Nelson used the term “entrepreneurial bricolage” to refer to entrepreneurs who create new economic value by combining heterogeneous resources that can be applied to new opportunities (2005, p. 362). The term “bricolage” was originally used by anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss to indicate that a new meaning can be made by recombining ideas, practices, and objects that are already accessible (Levi-Strauss, 1969, p. 1-33). Regarding the phrase all informants said, “no one sauna (ritual) is exactly the same”, it can be assumed that sauna women combine different knowledge from their experiences and use their senses to improvise and create the most suitable sauna rituals for their customers.

3.4. *Saunanaine* is a Lifestyle

In this subchapter, I would like to dissect what motivates sauna women and what actions they take in their business, as well as the challenges they face. The activities of sauna women should be valuable business regarding their ability to generate income in Võru county, a relatively rural environment with limited job options and numbers. However, none of my informants started their activities with a clear business plan in advance. For example, Eda and Helen moved to their current location not to do sauna business, but because of family and other personal circumstances. They only realized the business opportunity after settling in the area. Herslund and Tanvig (2012, p. 376) describe the word “opportunity entrepreneur” as people who discover local resources that have been overlooked by locals and turn them into new business opportunities in the context of micro-businesses in Danish rural areas, comparing them with local

entrepreneurs who have lived in the area for many years and tend to set up old businesses. Most informants could effortlessly obtain (smoke) saunas, which became their business resource, because their family owned saunas or there were undervalued, abandoned ones. Also, it was natural for those women to have saunas for themselves and their families. The informants are all mothers who are or were raising children. Being able to do business in the sauna close to home should be convenient for childcare.

Looking at informants' mindset towards sauna activities, their motivation, growth intentions, and the frequency of receiving work requests vary from person to person. For instance, Eda and Helen work on the sauna business full-time and develop it in several forms besides providing the sauna rituals. Eda works on smoked meat production and sales and provides workshops and courses about the sauna tradition. Also, Helen is currently attempting to expand her business as a sauna woman with a sauna education business. On the other hand, Kairi, Laura, and Egle have other jobs besides *saunanaine*. Kairi makes jewelry by silversmithing when she has no requests for the sauna ritual. Laura works as a hairdresser and doula, the careers that she has held longer than *saunanaine*. Egle works mainly as a therapist and does the sauna ritual if requested. While Kairi, Egle, and Annika basically wait for requests, Helen and Laura plan public sauna events actively and promote them on social media. Another characteristic is that their commitment and frequency of sauna business change depending on their life stage, such as pregnancy.

What motivates these women to work as a *saunanaine*? As a premise, what they all have in common is a love and passion for sauna. As Kairi said, "I don't mean that I want to earn more money, I want to serve sauna (rituals) more". The similar financial aspect narrative was heard by Eda, when she half-jokingly told me, "If I wanted to earn more money, I would have done business in the IT industry". Also, Annika and Eda looked back at their childhood and said that they were always the first person going to the sauna simultaneously and the last one leaving it. Demetry (2017, p. 188) employed the term "labor of love" to characterize how individuals transform their beloved activities into a professional activity that fulfills their lives. Egle calls it "hobby", Annika calls it "interest", and Kairi calls it "lifestyle" when they describe the activity as a sauna woman, which may imply that they perceive their activities as "experimentation, hobbies, or passion projects"(ibid.) rather than business or entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Kairi

emphasized that she works when she wants, on what she likes, and that she enjoys the process of the creative activities themselves. For her, freedom of creativity (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006) is important, and both *saunanaine* and jewelry making are activities that allow her to express her talent and creativity.

Compared to other sauna women, Eda would tend to intertwine her activity more with the place (Haanja and Võru) and its traditions, history, and culture, which seems to enhance her business value. She said that her mission is “to keep (the smoke sauna) tradition (in Võrumaa) alive”, and this comes from her sense of urgency: “the old traditions are vanishing very fast and we have to do something about it”. She shares the natural beauty of the place where she lives and the tradition-based lifestyle besides the sauna through social media and her website. Ivanycheva et al. described that lifestyle entrepreneurs strive to maintain a desired traditional lifestyle that is based on community in particular locations (2023, p. 7). Also, they tend to “sustain tradition by reimagining and inventing new ways to incorporate tradition into their products (services), while simultaneously promoting their adoption” (ibid., p. 16). Not only personal fulfillment and taste, but also the deep connection to the place and its traditional culture likely influence Eda's service, and for her, increasing the value of local traditions is directly related to increasing the value of her own business.

Laura describes the motivation behind her activities as a sauna woman as “self-help” and “self-growth”, as well as the health and self-improvement of the participants in her sauna rituals.

Laura Malkov: I would like to improve their (customers’) health, offer them something valuable, and connect themselves to the higher values, which we cannot buy with money from the shop, and which we have to grow in ourselves. Also it deeply moves me to change women's perspective, change the values, and lift them higher.

Neergaard and Christensen described that soteriological lifestyle entrepreneurs (explained in 2.2 Women and lifestyle entrepreneurship) often initiate their business from their intention to transform their lifestyle and value into something meaningful and profitable and aim to “create life quality and lifestyle both for themselves and for others” (2017, p. 272). For Laura, sauna

rituals encourage her own growth, so she is willing to share them with others because she believes they work for others as well.

As a general characteristic of their business as sauna women, the number of their services is limited because it takes a few hours and it is difficult to provide many sauna rituals in a day. Moreover, all the sauna women are service providers themselves and usually do not outsource, except for Eda. The sauna woman is an individualistic business that relies on personality; therefore, it is meaningless if the person does not directly provide services. Kairi pointed out that the nature of the sauna ritual also restricts the limitation.

Kairi Sakla: I cannot manage both mentally and physically to do sauna rituals so frequently, like everyday, like Eda. It needs a lot of energy. (...) I think Eda receives much help from her family, her son and husband, for example to heat the sauna, and other ladies (sauna women) who learned at Eda's to do sauna rituals instead of her. I also sometimes help her when she is ill or busy.

Considering that sauna women perform the creative tasks (sauna ritual) with their own hands and that the process itself is a joy and the purpose of their business, it can be said that they simultaneously engage in the production and consumption of amenities, which would constrain business scalability compared to profit-driven entrepreneurs (Ivanycheva et al., 2023, p. 6).

Some informants noted that the listing of the smoke sauna tradition in Võru in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014 and the documentary *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* (Savvusanna Sõsarad; 2023), which has won international awards, may have pushed the sauna fever, which may mean that the market surrounding sauna women is currently buoyant, although it is still a niche market. However, Ivanycheva et al. pointed out that while lifestyle and commercial orientation can easily be balanced in a thriving market environment, in an unfavorable market, lifestyle and commercial goals do not have a positive impact on each other, which forces lifestyle entrepreneurs to compromise their ideal way of doing business (ibid., p.9). If the market were to no longer allow the creative expression they desire and they had to adopt a commercial orientation, would sauna women continue their businesses?

Saunanaine is a business form, but it is for more than profit and income and is like a vehicle to sustain their commitment to their beloved and passionate object (sauna). Each informant achieves her own values (e.g., freedom of creativity, continuation of local tradition, self-improvement, and autonomy in life) through activities as a sauna woman. Furthermore, it was found that sauna rituals and *saunanaine*, as a form of lifestyle entrepreneurship, were an acquired opportunity rather than something that was initiated with a clear plan. It can be said that *saunanaine* is a creative business or entrepreneurship that was invented by applying a familiar object in the informants' daily lives, the sauna.

4. Sauna Rituals

The sauna ritual is an experience that fully engages all five senses. The age-old smoke sauna nestled in the forest evokes a primitive countryside scene where time has stopped. Entering the dim and sooty sauna room, the smoky aroma of firewood and silence cover my whole body, which isolates me from the outside world. Hearing the sound of sizzling water evaporating on the stones of the stove, a heat wave blows over my body, and beads of sweat stand out on my skin. I hear the sound of myself and the person next to me breathing, the voice of the sauna woman's storytelling and singing (spelling). Herbal salts and honey applied to the skin melt with sweat and are absorbed into my skin. Whisks of leafy birch twigs touch my body gently and sometimes powerfully in sauna women's whisking, which makes a rhythmic sound and spreads the scent of birch all over the room. Stepping outside of the sauna, I hear the silence in winter and the sound of a gentle breeze swaying the trees and birds singing in summer. A soak in the pond washes everything away, and I feel invigorated. And the warm herbal tea or sap of birch and maple trees soaks into my still-hot body in the anteroom. These bodily and sensory experiences are spatially and temporally designed by the host, the sauna woman.

In a regular sauna with friends, family, or alone, each participant would enter and exit the sauna room individually at will. However, the sauna ritual has a program conducted by *saunanaine*, in which the participants gather in the sauna room, experience the contents that the sauna woman guides or performs, disperse during rest outside the sauna room, and repeat this flow several times. In that sense, sauna women play a variety of roles in composing the (customer's) experience. *Saunanaine* is a space designer who crafts interiors and exteriors to make people feel comfortable, a holder of the room who facilitates the certain program, a performer of songs and musical instruments, a healer using different items (e.f., salt, ash, honey, and whisk), and a storyteller who talks about local tradition.

The consensus among the sauna women was that each sauna experience varies, depending on the participants and the specific sauna conditions. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the informants' guided sauna experiences, yet I found some mutual elements in the process:

greeting, purifying, healing, and thanking. The details will be explained in later sections, but the general flow of the sauna ritual is as follows: upon entering the sauna, participants first greet the sauna, and following that, they scrub salt or ash all over the body to “purify their bodies and souls”. This is followed by applying honey to the skin to heal and treat themselves, whisking (to gently beat the body with a bundle of leafy [birch] twigs) starts sometimes by the sauna women, sometimes by themselves. After whisking, the sauna rituals tend to end with a final thanksgiving to the sauna. The ritual often starts out in a relaxed mood, reaches its maximum voltage during the whisking, and returns to a calm atmosphere at the end. In this chapter, I will look at how sauna women structure and perform a series of programs, element by element.



Figure 1. The smoke sauna *Höbessaare Suitsusaun* in Höbessaare, Võru county. Hammocks and benches provided comfort for participants when they rested outside enjoying air bathing. Photo by author (October, 2022)

4.1. Attunement and Storytelling

Sauna women often suggest, though not explicitly explain, the intent and goal of the sauna ritual before it begins. This would imply that there is a process of attunement for the client, with some orientation of the state they are going to be in from now on. For example, Kairi said at the beginning of her sauna ritual, “today you can get rid of something you no longer need and want to leave them behind in the sauna”. This includes not only physical tiredness and health issues but also concerns and worries that are stuck in the mind, she complemented. It seemed that she predicted or promised that the clients would be able to release their troubles in her sauna. The sauna rituals by Laura and Helen, which invited people publicly, kept some time for sharing worries, fears, and ideal future states with other participants and the sauna woman before the sauna ritual. For instance, Helen asked the participants these questions: “What is your current dissatisfaction? How do you want to change in the future?” They explained that having intentions assists people to enter more deeply into the world of the sauna ritual, and getting participants and the sauna woman acquainted with each other better creates a safe atmosphere. As several of the women in their rituals were in a smoke sauna for the first time, basic instructions, such as drinking a lot of tea and leaving the sauna when not feeling well, were also explained at the beginning. In Eda’s sauna, she prompted participants to soak in the pond before taking the sauna so as to “purify themselves” before going into the sauna. In this way, sauna women gradually invite their clients into sauna rituals.

Both in the sauna room and anteroom, sauna women also talked about the sauna tradition in Estonia, including the rules and principles. In my first guided sauna ritual by Kairi, I was surprised to learn for the first time that sauna was and is a place for Estonians to engage in the life cycle, including childbirth, death, and marriage (explained in Chapter 1.1: Sauna Ritual). Also, Kairi said that by throwing the warm water over the vaporising stove, the steam and water connect the world of death; thus, the participants may be able to see (communicate or channel) ancestors in the sauna, and she recommended that they imagine and be aware of their ancestors in her sauna. Those mysterious and implied stories about the sauna stimulated my further interest. Eda emphasized the long and deep connection in history between the Estonians and the sauna tradition in this way.

Eda Veeroja: Estonia has been occupied by several countries in history. Therefore, the sauna would have been a place for Estonian people to get rid of many things, such as painful experiences and stress caused by violence and harassment.

Such narratives about the interpretation of a place suggest and emphasize that the (smoke) sauna is a special place in the traditional context. From Kairi and Eda's narratives, the idea that the sauna is a holy place and people respect it could be read. In the first guided sauna experience, I had my legs crossed in the sauna, and Kairi advised me not to do so because “the sauna is a living thing, and we should respect it and be in a good manner in the sauna”. In the sauna, I felt that each sauna woman applied her own rules and principles. For example, Kairi advised me to align the length of my inhales and exhales in the sauna and start with the left leg when applying salt and honey to my skin since I am a woman, whereas men should start from the right leg. Kairi also said that she is conscious of "making everyone have their roots", in other words, helping people (clients) to be in the present in this sauna room, and that she is scanning people in the sauna. In attunement, sauna women observe the client's condition, and through storytelling and behaviour switching, they try to immerse their clients in the ritual.



Figure 3. Eda Veeroja (sauna woman) and the participants from Japan and Taiwan at Mooska farm, in Haanja Village, Võru county. Eda provided a small tour including showing one of the smoke saunas specified to produce smoked meat (in the photo) and introduced the local tradition before her guided sauna experience. Photo by author (September, 2023)

4.2. Spelling Out - Greeting and Thanking

The starting and ending of the sauna ritual consist of greeting and thanking the sauna. This may be because, as Kairi said, the sauna is not considered an object but a living thing among sauna women. Eda mentioned that in Estonian old peasant culture, all creations (e.g., trees, stones, buildings, etc.) were thought to have a soul, and people could talk to them. Eda and Kairi said that their greetings and thanks to the sauna are also directed to all things as well. They said that it includes steam, stones, water, whisks, land, sauna baths, ancestors, those who heated the sauna, who built the sauna, who carried the firewood, who created the forest, who chopped the firewood, and in old time, even the horse that carried the logs from the forest.

Greetings and thanks to the sauna are expressed by casting a spell, yet when I first heard it, I perceived it as singing a song. It was like a song with a consistent rhythm and verse. It repeats certain rhythms and verses over and over again, with only the lyrics transforming. Eda and Kairi called the style “Regilaul”, or Runo song in English, and they uttered the spell, in which the words often consisted of eight syllables, in Võro dialect, which is one of the Finno-Ugric languages along with Estonian, spoken in the region called Vana-Võromaa in South East Estonia (See Appendix for lyrics).

Eda and Kairi pointed out that the spell was different every time, and what happened in the sauna and what brought attention to the sauna women were woven into the song; for example, if there were children, they mentioned them, and when their dogs were active on that day, the dog appeared in the spells. This means that those spells contain elements of improvisation. Once the sauna women finished singing a phrase, the participants repeated it in the same way. It was difficult for foreigners who did not understand the language to follow the words, yet they tried to imitate the words as closely as possible.

As a general tendency, sauna rituals encourage the participants themselves to be vocal, including chanting the spells. Eda and Kairi had other spells in addition to greeting and thanking, such as a ‘protection and cleansing spell with salt’, ‘Whisking and healing spells’, and ‘Empowering spell’, and each of them is used in different timing. In Kairi’s sauna ritual, the participants cast the spells that they learned from Kairi and chanted freely in mumbled voices when rubbing salt on their entire bodies. Their sounds mixed with Kairi’s singing (spelling) voice and the drum sound by her, which harmonized like music. Moreover, Helen did not use specific spells in her sauna rituals, yet she prompted the participants to make a loud noise intentionally because she thinks that “by putting energy and uttering the strong voices out, people can get rid of something that lies in the depth of their bodies”. I was embarrassed and hesitant at first, but in the end, I, along with the other participants, enjoyed making loud and strange noises that I would not normally make.

Chanting songs (spells) that reflect a deep connection to nature and tradition seems to add a fascinating dimension to the experience. The improvised spells created by the environment and

the sensibilities of the sauna women make each ritual different and unique. Also, the ritual may encourage vocal participation by the participants and provides an extraordinary opportunity to try different voicing and enjoy harmony with others.

4.3. Uses of Healing Items

Various items appear in each of the sauna ritual processes, and sauna women effectively manipulate these items to compose the experience. The element of purification was embedded in all the sauna rituals I participated in during the fieldwork; thus, it seemed an essential part. There are two key materials in purification: salt and ash. According to Kairi, salt can be any kind of sea salt, and it is for “purifying and energetically cleansing” the skin. Salt was used in all sauna rituals I experienced, and sometimes it was mixed with some herbs (e.f., ground elder, nettle, and bird cherry [“Toomingas” in Estonian]) handmade by sauna women. The participants took as much herbal salt as they wanted and scrubbed it on their legs, arms, stomach, back, and face as they massaged themselves. On some occasions, the sauna woman helped scrub participants, especially on the parts that were difficult to reach with their hands, such as the back, and sometimes they helped rub each other with other female participants. The sound of the salt scrubbing was pleasant, and although it was slightly sticky immediately after application, it felt clean and refreshing after rinsing off with water. Ash was used in Eda's guided sauna experience for almost the same use and purpose as salt. The ash was from her sauna stove, and Eda said, “Although some cosmetics products containing ash are sold in stores, why don't people use something natural and available to get for free from stoves?”. Helen pointed out that ash was used for washing the body in old traditions when there was no soap.

Honey was used after the rubbing with salt or ash and before whisking. Eda and Kairi said that the use of honey in saunas in Estonia is a relatively recent trend, and it is for “nurturing the skin”. Kairi said that the honey she uses is local honey. In some sauna rituals, a generous amount of honey, enough to overflow from one hand, is handed out by sauna women, and participants apply it themselves to their face, décolleté and whole body. Honey can also be mixed with herbs, like salt; Eda's honey contained lemongrass (oil). Kairi also said that honey should be applied to

painful parts, such as muscle aches and stiff shoulders. Laura added “Honey is a treat for yourself to heal, and you can eat as well”. In Helen’s sauna, honey mixed with herbs and cacao batter was used, and this was invented from her own idea. Considering honey has been used as folk medicine for therapeutic use since ancient times and is still nowadays used as a home remedy (El-Soud, 2012), as well as in the beauty industry (e.g., spa massage), the use of honey in sauna rituals may be natural.

Salt and honey are home remedies that can be obtained from the kitchen; ashes are easily accessible from the sauna stove; and herbs are also collected from the forests and gardens. This means that all of them are relatively accessible, natural, unchanged everyday items that would have been considered to have a positive effect on the body. The clients were able to buy hand-made products by sauna women (e.f. Helen's homemade honey with herbs and cacao batter and Kairi's herbal balm made from pine resin and some herbs [for example, chamomile and spruce]) in the anteroom.

Also, the frame drum was used when sauna women were singing (spelling) in some sauna rituals. Kairi said that the drum (sound) helps the participants to “come from everyday vibe to a different sphere, where everything is slow, calm, and simple”, which makes it easy to initiate their healing. It is a flat drum that can be held in one hand and is large enough to cover the torso of a sauna woman. Kairi called it a “Siberian type shamanic drum”, made of roe deer skin, and explained that it was made by a craftsman in Estonia. She also said that she already had it before she became a sauna woman and bought it when she started learning shamanism. According to Von Stuckrad, in the context of modern Western shamanism, the shamanic journey reaches a different layer of reality that is inaccessible in normal states of consciousness, and it is sometimes prompted by the sound of a frame drum and chanting in a different language (2002, p. 776-779). This suggests the relevance between the sauna rituals, which have elements of chanting and drumming, and shamanism. Other musical instruments seen in sauna rituals were various types of bells (e.g., tapping or shaking to make sounds), which were sometimes used towards the end of the sauna ritual, creating a healing and relaxing mood.

Helen, who has worked for the film industry, talked about staging with material in sauna rituals in this way:

Helen Moppel: Since I was a film production designer in Tallinn, who is in charge of preparing all things in shooting locations, I set and use a lot of items in my sauna ritual, like one scene of a film . I like to use different kinds of instruments, a variety of herbs, fabrics, and even more (...).

Considering that Helen designed the guided sauna experience as if creating a scene in a film, sauna women may create an experiencescape (see 2.1: Sauna Ritual) by manipulating various items. O'Dell said that in experiencescape, the landscape and space that participants see are “stylised, strategically planned, laid out, and designed” by the producers (sauna women), yet the experience is “highly personal, subjectively perceived, and intangible”; therefore, it is organized by both producers and consumers (2005, p. 15-16). In sauna rituals, it could be said that the participants react with their own bodily senses to the use of the sauna women's items and the space design, creating the experience together.



Figure 4 & 5. Inside of the anteroom of Kairi’s smoke sauna (Hõbessaare Suitsusaun). Candles were lit and herbal tea and maple sap were prepared. / Inside of Helen’s dressing room next to her smoke sauna (Ärni Suitsusaun). Before the sauna ritual, participants and sauna women talked to each other, having herbal tea and snacks. Photos by author (October, 2022 / December, 2023)

4.4. Whisking - Empowerment and Transformation

Whisking, along with purification with salt and ashes, may be one of the most vibrant and intensifying elements in sauna rituals. Nonetheless, whisking is a bodily and sensory experience that engages various senses: it is a massage in which the whole body is vibrated by the whisk, and it is phytotherapy to feel and smell the plants. Also, it expresses cultural and traditional meanings; as Habicht described, whisks are thought to possess magic powers, and various magical whisking have been passed down from generation to generation (Habicht, 1975, p. 155).

In my fieldwork, the typical whisks were made of leafy birch branches, yet Eda said that she also makes them with linden, blackcurrant, willow, cherry, lilac, apple, fir, spruce, and more, and she used 20 different kinds of whisks at a large event, though not a sauna ritual, once. Most informants mentioned that each plant has a different influence on humans, and they choose the whisks differently depending on the situation with their intuition. In Eda's guided sauna experience, there were two types of whisks: birch and linden. Eda told us to choose one from them, and she explained that linden was good for those who wanted to have a baby, since linden connected with love and the new start. As women in our 30s, from Japan and Taiwan, all childless, we were a little bewildered by her straight expression.

Some informants said that materials for whisks are from local trees and that they collect them themselves from the forest around the sauna. Eda, and occasionally her husband, prepares the handmade whisks by herself, and she emphasized that how they collect the materials for the whisk is important.

Eda Veeroja: If you make a whisk, you kill the branches. How can you hope that they can help you if you kill them?(...) If you don't communicate with the plants who are killed by your will, because you want this, we kill the plants who want to grow. This is a complicated relationship.

To avoid cutting young trees as much as possible, she mainly uses disposed trees by the forestry department in the region, where her sauna is located. When the State Forest Management Center cleans the land and inevitably cuts the trees before planting new trees, much of the tree material

occurs and remains unused; therefore, she makes whisks from the material. Moreover, Eda uses the whisks “until their ends”. She burns whisks when she thinks they are “gone”, but if she feels they are capable of going to the sauna again, she collects them and uses them the next time. She said, “As long as they can still help people, they deserve to be respected several times because we took them from nature”. The way Eda makes and treats her whisks may reflect her interpretation of and values about the relationship between nature and humans.



Figure 6 & 7. Whisks of birch (mixed with blackcurrant) (left) and linden (right) observed at Mooska farm. Photos by author (September, 2023)

Whisking is sometimes served by the sauna women and sometimes practiced by the participants themselves under the guidance of the sauna women. My first experience of whisking was given by two sauna women, Kairi and Egle, at Kairi’s smoke sauna (Höbessare Suitsusaun). Kairi whisked me with two whisks, while Egle played the frame drum beside Kairi. First, I lay face down on the sauna bench, and Kairi started pressing the whisk gently on each body part, such as the shoulders, head, and hands, with her whisks soaked with warm water and softened. Then Kairi started gently flapping the whole body rhythmically with the whisks, and I realised that the touch and stroke of the whisking had variations. For instance, she was chanting some spells in a whispering voice and simultaneously moving the whisks as if she were sweeping something out of my body. Other touches included poking gently with the tip of the whisk and sprinkling with water-soaked whisks. The whisking had a flow, starting gently, softly, and slowly, after which it became more powerful in the middle. Kairi's whisking, song-like spelling and Egle's drumming synchronised, and together they became more dynamic. At the time, with no prior knowledge, I felt the spell was like “chanting a mantra”, and I simply immersed myself in its mystical

performance with a vague sensation. Despite her dynamic movement, whisking was not painful at all but rather pleasant. Afterwards, when I laid on my back, Kairi's spelling and Egle's drums, which had been in a gallant tone with a low and strong sound, shifted to a lullaby-like tone with a soft and gentle melody, and the last part ended with a calm whisking and drumming. After this whisking, I walked to the icy pond outside, with Kairi and Egle accompanying me, and soaked my body in its cold water for a few seconds. Since I had never experienced soaking in water after a sauna before, it took courage for me. I felt extremely cold, in which I felt like my head emptied and my sensory organs opened up. I felt like the sights and sounds around me suddenly became clearer.



Figure 8 & 9. A hole dug in an icy pond at Kairi's smoke sauna. Participants soaked in the pond using a ladder. / The smoke sauna in Mooska farm in winter. Photos by author (January, 2023 / February, 2024)

When I asked Kairi about the meaning of various strokes of whisking later, she said that she tries to sense the person's health issues and mental problems through whisking and try to get rid of them by combining different whisking and spells. Certainly, when I was listening to the sound in the anteroom and other participants were whisked, I noticed that Kairi and Egle were spelling and drumming in very different tones from mine, which meant that they tuned up for each person individually. Kairi and Egle also later shared what they felt from the person during whisking, including what they saw as visions, which may have worked like a diviner, as they were able to say or guess what the person's current situation or concerns were as well as something like future projections.

Looking back on the whisking experience, I might savor the feeling of “floating” in a sauna room with relatively high temperatures, where I could lie down and be massaged (whisked) for a certain period of time, slumbering and relaxing my whole body. The harmony of Kairi’s singing (spelling) and Egle’s drumming was fluid, smooth, and pleasant, like improvised music, which had seamless weaving and a sense of immersion. Turner (1969/1991, p. 95-96) used the term “liminality” to describe the ambiguous and indeterminate state in ritual processes and showed that liminality is often associated with being in the dark or womb, and that liminal beings are represented as having nothing (e.g., naked or wearing only a strip of clothing). Although this may be applicable not only to whisking but to the entire sauna ritual, the sense of floating and immersion was created by sauna women, which may be considered as prompting the transition to a state of liminality.

In Eda’s sauna, the participants whisked by themselves. Eda showed herself whisking, and the participants followed it. She also taught some short spells (similar to hollo) in English and encouraged the participants to chant them. One of the hollos was "I am who I am!" and each participant whisked her entire body, including legs, arms, and back, while chanting it over and over to themselves. This can be interpreted as an intention to empower oneself. Kairi said that through whisking, participants can manifest what they want to be like in the future.

Kairi Sakla: After sweating all things off you do not need anymore (before whisking), that we usually carry along us, then you have a room. Then you can create in your mind through the whisking what you would like to have in your life, like all the emotions or love or happiness, freedom. Through the whisking, you can manifest this everything new and better to yourself.

Such a narrative of the intention to transform into one’s ideal state through whisking, or sauna ritual as a whole, was commonly heard from other sauna women, including Helen and Laura. Dynamic and improvisational whisking, spelling and drumming may create a sense of floating and deep immersion in the clients and help them achieve that transformation by encouraging them to move into a liminal state. I personally felt that the drastic change in physical sensations, such as going from a hot sauna to a cold pond, had a sensory and physical impact and even gave a sense of accomplishment. Whisking, which is a sensory experience packed with important

elements (sense of purification, healing, and empowerment), plays a very important role as a climax in the sauna ritual.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the ritual practice and entrepreneurship of the sauna women, who provide guided sauna experiences in Võru County, Southeast Estonia. The research had two main aspects: the composition and performance of guided sauna experiences, and the entrepreneurial motivations and approaches of the sauna women. I also examined various factors influencing their business, such as tourism dynamics, socioeconomic perspectives, and societal needs for spirituality, health, and wellness.

The theoretical framework contained the historical and cultural significance of sauna rituals, their consumption within wellness, health, and spiritual tourism, and their influence on sauna women's entrepreneurial activities. Sauna traditions rooted in Estonian peasant culture, such as health maintenance and spiritual practices, are now marketed as authentic tourism experiences. Using O'Dell's (2005) theory of "experiencescape", this study highlighted the importance of experience in contemporary tourism, where the interplay of culture and economy shapes the tourism landscape and the space and materiality of experience create the relationship between the tourist (consumer) and the producer. Moreover, Arnold van Gennep's (1960) theory of "liminality" illuminated the transformative nature of sauna rituals, aligning with the concept of experiencescape.

Additionally, the thesis examined the transition of healing practices, the role of contemporary folk healers, and the relationship between spirituality and consumerism. By developing Ivanycheva et al.'s (2023) "lifestyle entrepreneurship" model, the study revealed that sauna women's entrepreneurship is driven by personal fulfillment rather than profit, prioritizing self-fulfillment and personal values. The concept of "soteriological lifestyle entrepreneurship" (Neergaard and Christensen, 2017) was applied to show how sauna women promote personal growth and transformation.

This thesis used ethnographic methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews with six sauna women, which provided a comprehensive understanding of their unique business practices and nuanced intentions for bodily experiences. The findings revealed that each sauna woman had distinct business motivations and practices. Business durations ranged from 1.5 years to over 10 years, with service frequencies varying from 20 to a thousand sessions in total. Some operated as private limited companies (OÜ), others as non-profit organizations (MTÜ) or freelancers. The sauna business was often seasonal and irregular, with some women working full-time and others balancing multiple jobs.

Training under Eda Veeroja, a prominent figure in sauna tourism, influenced many sauna women. Her hands-on transmission of sauna skills and knowledge helped participants grasp her worldview and sensory approach to sauna rituals, as well as the role of *saunanaine*. However, sauna women also integrated their professional and educational experiences, flexibly adapting rituals to suit clients and situations; thus, they engaged in "entrepreneurial bricolage" (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 362) by combining personal knowledge and resources.

The common motivation among sauna women included a passion for sauna, corresponding with lifestyle entrepreneurship, wherein sustaining a certain lifestyle takes precedence over profit. Some women emphasized creativity, sustainability of local traditions, and their own and their clients' health and self-improvement. The last reflects soteriological lifestyle entrepreneurship driven by personal transformation.

Despite variations in guided sauna experiences, common elements such as greeting, purifying, healing, and thanking were commonly observed. Sauna rituals involved chanting spells, body scrubbing with salt or ash, applying honey to the skin, and whisking with (birch) twigs. These actions and behaviors were likely designed to prompt a transition to a liminal state, fostering a sense of transformation and immersion.

Pre-ritual storytelling about Estonian sauna traditions, including rules in the sauna and sharing personal anxieties, helped participants focus and created a safe atmosphere. Spells, often chanted in Võru dialect, added an enchanting dimension to the experience, while everyday items like salt,

honey, and ash were used for their purifying and healing properties. Instruments such as shamanic drums and bells enhanced the immersive experience. Whisking brought a sense of floating and immersion as well as empowerment, resonating with the transition to liminality.

Regarding the whole process of the sauna ritual, sauna women played multiple roles, as space designers, performers, healers, and storytellers, thereby creating a holistic and transformative experience for participants. The composed and performed experience allowed participants to feel a significant “before and after” change, promoting a sense of release, refreshment, and small achievement.

This topic could be explored further in different ways. Future research could compare similar guided sauna experiences in neighboring countries like Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania, offering insights into different interpretations of sauna traditions and tourism experiences. Additionally, examining the authenticity of sauna rituals in a traditional context could enhance their validity and the quality of the experience. Hopefully, this study can provide a unique example of multifaceted experiences, in which tradition, spirituality, and bodily practices are innovatively integrated into tourism.

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Empirical Sources

Interviews:

Kairi Sakla, 25.07.2023, Võru County

Helen Moppel, 26.07.2023, Võru County

Egle Zekker & Annika Kääramees, 24.09.2023, Hiiumaa island

Eda Veeroja, 23.10.2023, Võru County / 06.04.2024, online

Laura Malkov, 11.02.2024, Võru County

Participant Observations:

[With the guided sauna experience]

Hõbessare Sitsusaun, Võru County, 23.01.2020 (sauna women: Kairi Sakla & Egle Zekker)

Hõbessare Sitsusaun, Võru County, 02.10.2022 (sauna woman: Kairi Sakla)

Hõbessare Sitsusaun, Võru County, 04.08.2023 (sauna woman: Kairi Sakla)

Mooska Farm, Võru County, 27.09.2023 (sauna woman: Eda Veeroja)

Ärni Suitsusaun, Võru County, 06.12.2023 (sauna woman: Helen Moppel)

Mooska Farm, Võru County, 10.02.2024 (sauna woman: Laura Malkov)

[Without the guided sauna experience]

Hõbessare Suitsusaun, Võru County, 29.01.2023 (sauna woman: Kairi Sakla)

Home smoke sauna, Võru County, 27.07.2023

Home smoke sauna, Seto County, 05.08.2023

Public smoke sauna at Karula National Park, Võru and Valga County, 09.09.2023

Tsuooru Ujuv Suitsusaun, Võru County, 13.11.2023

Resümee

Juhendatud saunakogemus Eestis: rituaalid ja elustiiliettevõtlus saunanaiste näitel

Magistritöö uurib saunanaiste poolt läbi viidavaid ühiseid saunaskäike, rituaale ning sellega seotud ettevõtlust Võrumaal.

Juhendatud ühine saun on rituaalilaadne sündmus, kus sauna perenaine õpetab leili võtma, seda kogemust analüüsima ja külalistega jagama. Lisaks saunas käimisele räägitakse jutte, loitsitakse, kasutatakse trummi ja teisi instrumente. Sarnaselt spaa, esoteeriliste praktikate või muude heaoluturismi teenustele hõlmab see osalejate keha ja meeli lisaks vaimsetele aspektidele, mida pakutakse traditsiooni tutvustamise ja isiklike lugude jagamise kaudu.

Uurimusel on kaks fookust: vaadeldakse, kuidas saunanaised oma tegevust selgitavad ja põhjendavad, kuidas viiakse saunaskäik läbi ning kuidas see on saanud naiste jaoks ettevõtlusvormiks.

1. peatükk loob teoreetilise tausta, kirjeldades saunatraditsioone ja -kombeid Eestis ja naaberriikides, samuti naiste tervendamispriktikaid kaasaegses heaolu-, tervise- ja spirituaalses turismis. 2. peatükk selgitab etnograafilist meetodit, mille käigus koguti uurimismaterjal, samuti tutvustatakse uurimuses osalejaid. 3. peatükk kirjeldab saunanaiste õpiaega ja nende kujunemist ettevõtjateks. 4. peatükk analüüsib saunarituaali ja selle elemente, tuginedes autori kehalistele ja meelelistele kogemustele välitöödel, mis hõlmasid osalusvaatlust.

Töö teoreetiliselt osas vaadeldakse Ivanycheva jt (2023) poolt kasutatud terminit "elustiili ettevõtlus", millega peetakse silmas äritegevuse põimitust isiklikku ellu. Samuti kasutatakse "soterioloogilise elustiiliettevõtluse" (Neergaard ja Christensen 2017) mõistet, et viidata uue ettevõtluse tüübi esilekerkimisele, mis lisaks igapäevaellu lõimitusele rõhutab ka vaimset arengut. Nii sauna kui saunarituaali saab vaadelda Arnold van Gennepi (1960) järgi kui argielust eelmal olevat liminaalset paika ja ruumi, mida rakendatakse kultuuri, majanduse ja turismi koostoimes loodava "kogemuskeskkonnana". (O'Dell 2005)

Uurimus põhineb poolstruktureeritud intervjuudel kuue saunanaisega ning autori osalusvaatlusel erinevates Lõuna-Eesti saunades.

Saunanaiste tegevust juhib kirg sauna vastu, samuti soov säilitada teatud elustiil, mis mängib olulisemat rolli kui äriline kasum. Mõned informandid rõhutasid loovust, võimalust kohalikku traditsiooni jätkata ning toetada enda ja klientide tervist ja enesearengut. Äritegevus põhineb elamuse pakkumisel, seega liigitatakse see teenuseks. Samas ei taju saunanaised saunarituaali teenusena, vaid pigem osalejate poolt ühiselt loodud kogemusena.

Saunarituaali läbi viimist jälgides selgus, et saunanaistel oli selles mitmeid rolle: nad tegutsesid ruumikujundajate, esinejate, tervendajate ja jutuvestjatena, luues osalejatele tervikliku ja transformatiivse kogemuse. See võimaldas osalejatel tunda märkimisväärset "enne ja pärast" muutust, luues vabanemise, värskenduse ja väikese saavutuse tunde.

Magistritöös analüüsitakse mitmetahulist ja ainulaadset sündmust, milles traditsioon, vaimsus ja kehalised praktikad on turismiteenusesse integreeritud. Saunanaiste näitel võib ütelda, et selle kogemuse turundamine loob täiendavat sissetulekuvõimalust Võru maakonnas, kus töökohtade hulk on linnapiirkondadega võrreldes piiratud. Seega on saunanaistel ainulaadne äri, mis on sündinud Eestis erinevate tegurite põimumise tulemusena ning juhendatud saunakogemus avab loovalt võimalusi turismi arendamiseks tulevikus.

Appendix

Interview Questions

<i>Category:</i>	<i>Questions</i>
<i>Motivation and trigger</i>	How or when did you start providing sauna rituals as a sauna woman?
	What motivates you to continue your activities as a sauna woman?
<i>Apprenticeship and training</i>	How did you learn how to provide sauna rituals?
	Do you have a ritualistic sauna experience in your childhood? If you have it, how does it influence your current sauna ritual?
<i>Business</i>	What form of business do you operate as a sauna woman?
	How often do you provide sauna rituals? How many times have you provided sauna rituals so far?
	Who are your clients?
	How do you obtain requests from your clients?
	How do you advertise your business? What tools (e.g., social media and webpages) do you use for it?
	Do you have any other jobs except for sauna-related activities? How much of your overall work is sauna-related?
	Do you have your own smoke sauna?
	How long do you live in Võru (county)? Which part of Estonia are you from?
<i>Term of saunnanaine</i>	How did you first know the word <i>saunnanaine</i> ?
	What do you think about and associate the word <i>saunnanaine</i> ? Do you call yourself <i>saunnanaine</i> or use other words?
<i>Sauna Ritual</i>	What is your process of sauna rituals? Is there a common process or routine you always do in your sauna ritual?
	Do you have any rules or principles for the sauna ritual?
	What items do you use in sauna rituals? And how do you use them?
	Do you have any stories about old customs that you often talk about in your sauna ritual?
	What kind of plants do you use for whisks?
	What do you think is the role of a sauna woman in the sauna ritual?
	What is the difference between an everyday sauna and the sauna ritual?

Spells in Sauna Rituals

Greeting Spell (provided by Eda Veeroja)

(in Võru language)

*Tere-tere sannakõnõ tere sanna lõunõkõnõ
Lõunõt puile lõunõt maile lõunõt kõgõle elävalõ
Tere kernesses kivikõnõ tere pühä viikõnõ
Tere tuli elo luuja savukõnõ lämmä tuuja
Lõunõt puile lõunõt mailõ lõunõt kõgõlõ püsüvalõ
Tere naaseq kinäkõsõ nigu pihla marjakõsõ
Nigu kõo ridvakõsõ nigu kuu kumõra
Tere meheq nigu tammõq nigu häräq nigu karuq
Lõunõt puile lõunõt maile lõunõt kõgõlõ vägeväle
Tere esä esäkõnõ tere esäesäesä
Tere imä imäkõnõ tere imäimäimä
Terekõik mi häönüq hõimuq tulkõ tii kah miika sanna
Lõunõt puile lõunõt maile lõunõt kõgõle kaduvalõ
Tere poig no pojakõnõ tere pojapoja latsõ
Tere lats no latskõnõ tere latsõlatsõ latsõ
Terekõik mi vahtõq hõimuq tulkõ tii kah miika sanna
Lõunõt puile lõunõt maile lõunõt kõgõlü tulõvalõ
Tere-tere sannakõnõ vihakõnõ velekõnõ
Lõunõkõnõ sõsarõkõnõ tulõkõnõ sõbrakõnõ
Viikõnõ vabastaja tuulõkõnõ sõna tuuja
Lõunõt puile lõunõt maile lõunõt kõgõlõ olõvalõ
Tere tere tere*

(English translated by Eda Veeroja)

Hello sauna, hello steam

Let the trees, earth and all living have the steam
Hello stones on the stove, hello sacred water
Hello fire, the creator of life, and smoke who carries the warmth
Let the trees, earth and all permanent (stable) have the steam
Hello beautiful woman like rowan tree berries,
Like British trees, like the moon
Hello man like oak trees like bears, like bulls
Let the trees, earth and all powerful have the steam
Hello father, grandfather, all the great grandfathers
Hello mother, grandmothers, great grandmothers
Hello all the perished tribes, come along to sauna with us
Let the trees, earth and all the vanished have the steam
Hello sons, sons children and grandchildren
Hello daughters, daughters children and grandchildren
Hello all the arising tribes, come along to sauna with us
Let the trees, earth and all future souls have the steam
Hello sauna, whisk our brother.
Steam our sister, fire our friend
Hello the water, who takes away and the wind who brings the new destiny
Let the trees, earth and all being has steam
Hello hello hello

Thanking Spell (provided by Kairi Sakla)

(in Võru language)

Aitüma sannakõnõ!

Aitüma viikõnõ!

Aitüma vihakõsõ!

Aitüma kivikõsõ!

Aitüma lõunõkõnõ!

Aitüma sannalidse!

Vesi vii vaiva, valu!

Alla sügavalla!

Külmä vette alla!

Tuul tuu uue tuulõ!

Maaimä anna jõudu!

Taivaesä tuu tarkust!

Aitüma esiimä!

Aitüma esiesä!

Aitüma sannakõnõ!

(English translated by Kairi Sakla)

Thank you dear sauna!

Thank you holy water!

Thank you whisks!

Thank you stones!

Thank you sauna steam!

Thank you everyone in sauna!

Water- take away pain!

Take it deep!

Take into the cold water!

Wind brings new!

Mother earth, give strength!

Father heaven, bring wisdom!

Thank you mother ancestor!

Thank you father ancestor!

Thank you sauna!

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Anna Matsuura

23/05/2024