Understanding the problems and ethics of the transfer of experiential knowledge in traditional communities

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Abstract: This research investigates whether and how the tacit knowledge of tradition bearers can provide an artist or a designer with new ideas. I review the previous discussion of ethnosemioticians in order to explain the role of the messages which are conveyed through codes and specific sign languages, and are as important as the messages conveyed through verbal texts. I explain the role of fieldwork of an art practitioner as an important and meaningful method to gain inspiration. In order to understand the problems and ethics of the transfer of experiential knowledge in traditional peasant community, I give two examples of the fieldwork to analyze the non-propositional (experiential and procedural) knowledge of the tradition bearer that tacitly underlies the process of making an artefact. I aim to provide a basis for the further development of the research on local folklore in general, and of some aspects of practice-based research in particular.

Key words: experiential knowledge, fieldwork, artefacts, sign language, inspiration, practice-based research.

1. Introduction
A common problem in research in art and design is related to the creative interpretation of local values and details of traditional communities. It focuses on the tacit knowledge of tradition bearers that can provide designer-researchers with new ideas (Summatavet 2005, 2006). For example, European designers and art educators are looking for content and symbols of local cultural heritage, its stories and means of expression. To know the roots of one’s local culture helps the world to keep its many-sided colourful richness, and preserves the traditional backbone. It also creates the possibility to make a worthy contribution to the cultural property of the community (Summatavet&Raud 2006: 9) and helps to develop new trends of the local creative industry. One of the crucial contributions of the design education is therefore not only to offer new skills and innovative visions, but also the knowledge to translate the details of local tangible heritage in a modern way which is accessible to a wider audience.

The most efficient way to gain this knowledge is to do research on the intangible heritage and the symbolism of traditional local communication. However, the outside community represented by artists and designers often subordinates this traditional knowledge, cutting a piece of a certain size and shape from it, and starting to shape it, using it as reflection of the reality of the traditional community for its own purpose. The crucial contribution of an artist or a designer is to understand the reality of the members of the traditional community and to bridge the gaps between the experiential knowledge of the members of the traditional community and professional artists or designers.
In this paper, I therefore aim to provide new aspects of the fieldwork of the creative practitioner. Instead of thoughtlessly going along with the uniformity and fusion accompanying globalization, emphasis is placed on the local distinctiveness of cultural heritage. I thus aim to provide an important basis for the further development of the research on local folklore in general, and some aspects of practice-based research in particular.

Before proceeding, it seems important to explain, that Estonian artists, designers and art educators have collected folklore and items of folk heritage, have been actively studying them, drawing, making copies and using them as a source of inspiration (see, for example Summatavet 2007, 2008). The study trips carried out in Estonian villages and the villages of the other Finno-Ugric people have preserved the form of study founded already in the beginning of 20th century. Since I have fortunately been engaged in this particular field of art education for many years, I attempt to explain some aspects of this rewarding sphere of work. I will give two examples how students of art and design were introduced to the folklore in several Estonian villages in the course of the projects ‘Remembering the Future’ and ‘NEiD - New European Identities’.

The second aspect that might need clarification is the role of fieldwork that provides an artist or designer with new ideas and practices related to the folklore. I propose that the experiential knowledge of an artist or designer is crucial to understand and reflect the experiential knowledge of the tradition bearer through his or her artwork. The fieldwork and research of an art practitioner becomes an important and meaningful tool that can challenge the role of cognitive and experiential knowledge of practice-based research in particular.

2. Using Fieldwork

In order to facilitate a comparison between the fieldwork of an artist-practitioner and a researcher from other fields it is important to point out that fieldwork is an accepted method used in ethnography and cultural anthropology. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss the aim of the ethnographer is to try to put himself or herself in the place of the people from another culture, to understand the essence and the rhythm of their aspirations, to comprehend an epoch or a culture as a meaningful whole (Lévi-Strauss 2001: 368). Fieldwork in cultural anthropology usually deals with the studies of the ‘other’, modern folklore and ethnology on the other hand study one's own ethnic groups. For an example tradition is vigorous and now evolving mainly in two Estonian regions: among the Setus (South-East of Estonia) and among the inhabitants of the Kihnu Island (the western coast of Estonia). However, the cultural background of a modern artist is considerably different from the reality of the tradition bearers. We are united by Estonian cultural space and language but the traditions and beliefs preserved in the isolation of the studied border areas are 'other' to us.

I propose that fieldwork and practice-based research add new professional, didactic-pedagogical and cognitive levels to the artist's existing knowledge. Because of their different aims a researcher and an artist-artisan have different approaches to tradition material. A researcher discovers a certain part of a tradition and conveys the results by the means and methods of research of this particular field. An artist also does some research work but he or she also makes something on the basis of collected information. An artist studies the information and
communicates the results of the research with his or her art works or artefacts. As Lévi-Strauss points out, the artist represents simultaneously a scholar and a master of crafts: he or she makes a material object with the tools of craftsman which is simultaneously also an intellectual object (Lévi-Strauss 2001: 46). I therefore argue that a professional artist or designer is an expert in visual communication and compared to other researchers of material culture he or she has an advantage, having mastered the basic truths of visual composition and the so-called trained eye (Summatavet 2005: 25).

2.1 The ‘right’ logic of visual language

In the course of the fieldwork it became apparent that the informants, as makers of artefacts, use the ‘right’ logic of composition, taking into consideration the shape, function and the size of the artefact according to the norms, values and a certain visual code system. The principles and meaning of the ‘right’ logic of composition is not clear for an outsider who is not a member of the traditional community. According to ethnosemioticion Mihály Hoppál, everyday beliefs are interconnected structures which build on each other (linguistic, religious, everyday belief structures) and function by influencing each other. Therefore, in reconstructing the system, no subsystem should be overlooked. In studying one phenomenon we easily neglect some other hidden structure which covertly influences our everyday work, because a belief system inevitably functions as a programme of everyday activity (Hoppál 2009: 147).

Religious convictions play an important role in every culture, and the belief system and everyday language of a specific community are closely linked. The mother tongue always stands at the centre of the system because out of all the sign systems which are used by people and which form a culture, this is one which has been most exhaustively worked out (Hoppál 2009: 146). As one of the most eminent theoreticians of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, Juri Lotman, claims, a collective memory of the traditional community is preserved through rituals, customs and the elevation of specific “memory preserving” institutions, but the emergence of written culture probably sentenced the highly evolved oral culture to oblivion (Lotman 1999: 118). I suggest that the material culture of peasant community, with both orally transferred beliefs as well as experiential knowledge are forming the memory structures of a member of the traditional community (Summatavet 2005: 44), which like the mother tongue, is passed on in the community from generation to generation through teaching, practical skills training, various norms and taboos and oral, material and visual practices of one’s creative self-expression.

Hoppál claims that a person belonging to a traditional community uses beliefs to define his place and relationship with the world on an everyday level. The most important function of the everyday ideology of a community is to find answers and guidance for ‘correctly’ solving problems which arise in specific situations. Beliefs connected to people’s worldview are very important because an individual acquires the accepted belief system of a community just like he acquires his mother tongue (Hoppál 2009: 146). The religious background of a traditional community and archaic customs are acquired in a manner similar to how one acquires one’s mother tongue. However, the visual literacy accepted by the community and the artefacts created by the individual communicate messages that in some instances carry a more profound meaning (see for example Summatavet 2006: 102). From the viewpoint of an artist and designer, this kind of creative activity which follows traditions is especially interesting, and instead of striving towards beauty and decorations, it aims to ‘speak’ in a certain manner by using ‘right’ visual signs and ordered sign systems.
In traditional peasant communities, the messages which are conveyed through room placement, folk art ornaments, gestures, dance and other non-linguistic codes, are just as important as the messages conveyed through oral linguistic texts. Hoppál claims that it is nearly impossible to express a content linguistically, which is connected to certain channels of expression, because one can ‘say them out loud’ only through a specific coded language (Hoppál 2009: 28). The code is an agreement shaped by the community, used by the members of the community to arrange cultural elements when they wish to create a message of some kind (Hoppál 2009: 27).

How does one study and transfer the messages which are not expressed in words? Fieldwork enables the artist to ‘spring into the unknown’ and let the experts in tradition tell him or her about their ideas. The artist is let into secrets that are usually known and used only by the members of a certain traditional community.

2.2 Ethnosemiotic analysis of traditional artefacts

In this section, I review some of the previous discussion of ethnosemioticians in order to explain the meaning of artefacts created by members of a traditional community, to find out how cultural texts, both oral and material, which have been passed on from generation to generation within a community, influence the creative practices of an individual.

Romanian scholar Mihai Pop, like Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, does not consider cultural texts to be only oral texts but also customs, clothing, architecture and objects. They are studied as a structure and system arranged according to the inherent logic of a culture (Hoppál 2009: 37). According to Hoppál, the Hungarian scholar Vilmos Voigt also considers ethnosemiotics a transitional area between ethnography and semiotics (Voigt 1986: 236). Since culture is not inherited biologically but through traditions, Boris Uspenski claims it is at the service of preserving, accumulating and exchanging information (Uspenski 1973: 1).

Hoppál says, the beliefs and everyday knowledge which form the basis of a person’s worldview help her to fit into her natural and social environment. The belief system does not only shape why to believe but also how to believe, providing the members of the community with a certain programme of action. The processes of the creation of personal and cultural self-consciousness can be similar to the processes of belief formation. Even though the sign worlds of traditional village life are gradually disappearing, getting to know their functioning mechanisms is far from useless because many of these are still alive and keep functioning covertly. Through them, we can glean more information about the functioning of a specific culture and understand better the hidden mechanisms to be found in oral culture (Hoppál 2009: 14-15).

2.3 Artefacts as signs of beliefs and ritual

Since artefacts cannot be divorced from the world of beliefs and rituals, it is not practical to view signs and ornament as simply décor. Through their creation process, a complex structure of folk beliefs emerges, which is linked to preventive and protective, healing, numerological, colour and name magic (Summatavet 2000). Traditional belief systems have a great influence because they provide a programme of action for even the smallest possible event that can occur in life, helping the individual with ready-made decision models (Hoppál 2009: 148). For example, in Estonian regions which have retained a more archaic tradition – Setomaa and Kihnu.
Island – decorating, embroidering patterns and knitting is called *writings* (*kiri, kirjad*). Messages of oral culture are ‘written down’ in the language of symbols, signs, colours, ornaments, and they can be seen as an attempt to create their ‘own world’ and bring order to it (see Summatavet 2002: 104). Since the ornament comprised of single signs is most widely used around the ‘holes’ in clothes it has to be seen as a border between the personal space of the wearer and the surrounding space, between ‘own’ and ‘other’, ‘our world’ and the ‘other world’ (see for example Summatavet 2002: 100).

According to ethnologist Ildikó Lehtinen, clothes are a sign (see, for example Barthes 1967: 59) and a message from the wearer to the viewer (Lehtinen 1999: 8). Ornaments and patterns work as a certain sign language, the message of which is understood only by the members of the community to which the wearer of the costume or the ornaments belongs (Lehtinen 1979: 10). Petr Bogatyrev in his work *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia* (1971) says, that in order to grasp the social function of costumes we must learn to read them as signs in the same way we learn to read and understand different languages (Bogatyrev 1971: 83). Bogatyrev draws an analogy of ‘our costume’ with our mother tongue which like ‘our costume’ functions as a multi-functional structure (Bogatyrev 1971: 96).

My own fieldwork shows that the wearer of traditional jewellery has an emotional and intimate connection to her costume (Summatavet 2005: 158). In their traditional handicraft the informants rely both on values shared by the community and linked to local beliefs, as well as on personal experience which is influenced by the generally approved system of norms, but they also hide certain personal and intimate messages in artefacts, using a visually organised and ordered sign system. I argue that my informants find it the most difficult to explain messages of artefacts because verbalising them is not included in the local practices of visual communication.

### 2.4 Sign language

Sign language is acquired through habits and role models; they are ‘domesticated’ into a personal repertoire and are used intuitively and by applying individual experiential knowledge and imagination (see, for example Summatavet 2005: 65, 135-136). The mothers and grandmothers taught them to visualize their experiences and to conceal them in the lyrics of songs and handicraft. The creative methods of a traditional community and the intimate and personal secrets of tradition bearers, handed down from generation to another, have been passed on from mothers to daughters. This kind of psychological and social ‘adaption’ of passing on their experiential knowledge directly influenced my informant’s creative practice (Summatavet 2006: 102-103).

The traditional beliefs and a system of beliefs expressed through creative practice and artefacts which still exists in Setomaa and Kihnu Island directly influences the individual’s behaviour and search for identity both on a communal and individual level. According to Clifford Geertz, the belief system not only shapes what the community or individual believes but also gives guidance on how to believe (Geertz 1966: 29). Hoppáł emphasises that as beliefs concern the social reality around the individual, they build their self-identity, they don’t require proof and are the first beliefs from childhood, therefore firmly lodging themselves in the individual’s memory (Hoppál 2009: 156). I suggest that the modes of action and decision making linked to traditions are clearly evident in the communal practice of the two aforementioned Estonian regions.
Researchers of belief systems argue that beliefs are inseparable from the ordered chain of certain actions and direct the individual’s actions and arrange his behaviour (see for example Parsons & Shils 1962: 169). Therefore, the formation of local identity requires a constant dialogue with oneself on the one hand, and between oneself and the culture and other members of the society on the other. Lotman notes that it is no accident that the destruction of a culture usually begins with the destruction of tokens because the texts important to the culture are ‘wiped away’ and the connections fade into oblivion (Lotman 1973: 277, Hoppál 2009: 138). My fieldwork leads me to agree that the connections attached to forgotten cultural phenomena are preserved in other activities, customs, beliefs, rituals, artefacts, songs, and fairy tales, and in studying them we can in some cases restore, rediscover, and recreate even the texts which have been forgotten.

3. Supporting Creative Work through Fieldwork: two examples

In the following section, I explain why I consider in depth direct contact with the bearers of a living tradition, which is acquired in the course of fieldwork, to be an extremely important form of finding inspiration for contemporary creative work and design. In order to understand the problems and ethics of the transfer of experiential knowledge in traditional communities, I will give two examples of the fieldwork.

3.1 Case no. 1: ‘Remembering the Future’

In 2005-2006 the students of three universities – Estonian Academy of Arts, Design Academy Eindhoven and University of Art and Design Helsinki – were introduced to the folklore of the three countries in the course of the project ‘Remembering the Future’ (funded by Education and Culture Socrates-Erasmus programme). According to trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort the recollecting and rethinking of folklore will be an intrinsic part of our life: “Young designers will live in an immaterial virtual universe and therefore will want to bring a stronger sense of tactility and a definite identity to their work. They will have the desire to empower their ideas and lend soul to design. They long to express sometimes rather intuitive and primitive feelings and wish to gather in groups and clans; they need tribal fetishistic artefacts to belong. The individual self is given to better the function of the greater group…” (Edelkoort 2006: 7)

In Estonia, all participating students visited the local tradition bearers in Kihnu Island in Autumn 2005. The aim of the fieldwork was to introduce the art and design students to folklore not only in museum archives and through various publications, but to create an opportunity for them to see the island’s artefacts in their natural habitat and to meet tradition bearers. The students were encouraged to ask the locals questions about the problems which interested them. They saw how local handicraft was made and they were taught handicraft techniques by local craftsmen. The informant for my Ph.D. thesis, Rosaali Karjami demonstrated her extremely rich collection of handicraft in her home and taught the students several local handicraft techniques.

In the course of the conversation, these students of various cultural backgrounds were introduced to the creation process of artefacts, to the meanings and beliefs linked to signs, patterns, and colours. In addition, the local women arranged for them to take part in the traditional local collective handicraft evening üläljõstmine (sitting together) where they told stories of customs and the everyday life of locals, with handicraft forming an
Getting to know the folklore of Estonia, Finland and Holland enabled the students to create fashion collections based on folklore (see Remembering the Future, 2006), where the aim was not to merge different cultures but to come up with collections where traditional details of different origin preserve their recognisable and honourable position in the collection (Supplement: Fig. 3). Becoming acquainted with subjects linked to religion provided the students with many new themes they could interpret and depict in their work.

According to the feedback forms filled out by the students, the greatest experience and inspirational impulse came from meetings and direct communication with local people. The hours spent at the museum did not make up for the experience of living in the midst of a living culture. The example of locals, watching them and their communication during the handicraft process enabled the students to experience folklore in a novel way and helped them to reflect the verbal messages in their work as well as experiential knowledge they had learned on location.

3.2 Case No. 2: ‘New European Identities’

Project ‘NEiD - New European Identities’ (funded by EAC Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013) allowed us to visit the local museums in Setumaa (Seto Rural Museum in Värksa, Obinitsa Museum) with two international student groups. During the first visit in February 2008, there was no snow in Setumaa, the weather was damp and warm. Easter, which is a very important holiday for this village community with an orthodox background, was approaching and for this reason the locals did not eat meat. The students mainly ate traditional local pre-Easter food (Supplements: Fig. 4). They had an opportunity to meet my informant Anna Kõivo and listen to her stories about local traditions and customs and the connection between important transitional rituals (customs related to birth, death, weddings) and handicraft and beliefs (Supplements: Fig. 5).

The students gained new personal experiences and unexpectedly strong feelings, listened the still preserved archaic song culture of Setomaa and had a look at local costume traditions and extremely rich silver jewellery (Supplement: Fig. 6). We introduced them to various beliefs related to clothes and jewellery and they watched the films about the Seto wedding, birth and death customs. The students also visited a handicraft enterprise of elderly Seto women and witnessed the extreme accuracy and skill that is required in weaving, for example, patterned fabrics and ornamented belts.

During the second visit with a new group of participating students, the research week of March 2009 we became thoroughly acquainted with the collections of the Seto Rural Museum. The weather was cold and a thick layer of snow covered the ground (Supplement: Fig. 7). We ate traditional post-lent food and met local choir songstresses and old handicraft masters (Supplement: Fig. 8).

3.3 The role and result of the fieldwork

The feedback of the project indicated that the students were dissatisfied with the explanations given by local museum staff about the handicraft held in museum collections and the students emphasised that these collections...
only served as a general overview of the richness and variety of local material and oral folklore. The real experience was meeting the local choir songstresses and Anna Kõivo. They also noted meeting and talking to local handicraft seamstresses and masters, the stories they told them and new knowledge on the hierarchical structure of tradition and the meaning of transitional rituals (especially wedding customs). The weather (especially snow), local traditional food and the opportunity to gather inspiration on location were listed as another important inspirational source.

As a result of the fieldwork of these two research weeks the students produced their own fashion and design collections (see, for example Fig. 9-12). The group workshops held in Helsinki (2008) and Eindhoven (2009) focused on folklore subjects that centred around two important design issues: sustainability and recycling. The subjects of the workshop were connected to conceptual group projects inspired by the birth, death and wedding customs, in which students of various ethnic and cultural background interpreted the stories and folklore they had collected in Estonia, Finland and Holland.

These two examples demonstrate the importance of fieldwork in finding inspiration in local cultural tradition. I have already indicated that culturally significant texts and the beliefs and connections linked with them can be subject to changes and become useless and forgotten over time. I have also shown that in traditional peasant communities the messages communicated through room placement, folk ornaments, gestures, dance and other tacit linguistic codes are equally important to verbal texts. I also indicated that certain cultural texts are usually not expressed in words or verbal language by the community and individuals because they are passed on by personal example and certain activities (including studying handicraft).

According to folklorist Lauri Honko, in the course of fieldwork there is an interaction, mutual giving and receiving between the researcher and the member of the traditional community (Honko 1992: 131). I argue that during the fieldwork the transfer of experiential knowledge of the tradition bearer to an artist-researcher is interlaced with the procedural knowledge in order to communicate one’s personal experience and skills that tacitly underlies the process of making an artefact. Kristina Niedderer says, that non-propositional (experiential and procedural) knowledge is usually associated with tacit knowledge, but there is an explicit component (propositional content) to non-propositional knowledge, which allows for its partial communication (Niedderer 2007: 9).

As Niedderer and Yassaman Imani relay on Polanyi’s explanation, that tacit knowledge is the “personal coefficient” part of any explicit knowledge, which is essential for the understanding and comprehension of any knowledge, they propose that the experiential and procedural knowledge have both explicit and tacit dimensions (see, for example Niedderer & Imani 2008: 6). The non-propositional knowledge is a natural part of studying and working process of the creative practices of the tradition bearers I have studied, and I suggest that this is even not made conscious because it has been acquired with the first experiences of the handicraft process from a more experienced member of the community: for example a daughter from a mother (see Summatavet 2005: 68-69).
4. Conveying Traditional Experiential Knowledge

The stance, grunt, quick scowl, hand gesture or a meaningful and deep glance of the tradition bearer can sometimes speak more loudly than a multitude of words because even the best connoisseurs of folklore cannot always explain what was being conveyed in creating the artefact. They do it because it is the ‘right’ way and they have been taught like that. We can find numerous examples in fieldwork research about how informants use at least to methods to convey non-propositional knowledge to the students: 1) a keyword which is understood without additional explanation by the members of the community but a researcher who is an outsider has to ask for a more detailed explanation; 2) a story, a song or a narrative about specific everyday and sacred actions connected to the artefact, because the tradition bearer also needs indirect methods for verbalising tacit texts.

Analysing fieldwork results, it transpired that non-propositional knowledge is usually used in the creative practices of informants intuitively and peculiarly, and in most cases they do not know how to verbally explain this knowledge because there is no tradition or vocabulary to accurately describe it. However, the feedback of the students who participated in the two projects makes it clear that the keywords and stories proved to be the greatest source of fascination and inspiration in order to understand the process of making the artefact. Meeting tradition bearers, talking to them, listening to songs and stories, sharing the same smells, food, local weather conditions and emotions determined the success of the research week.

As Niedderer and Imani propose, the problem with non-propositional knowledge persists because, its essence being tacit, personal, and situated, it is difficult to communicate and share (Niedderer & Imani 2008: 6). Interviewing and mapping the skills and creative practices of tradition bearers, some knowledge and skills can be made explicit by mapping the collections of artefacts, keywords and stories, naming the experience and describing the quality and order of the creative process of the informants, but the essence of the experience of the bearers of the tradition cannot be communicated (e.g. the description of mental world view or feelings of the bearer of the tradition).

We can only name details the tradition bearer communicates to us about the hierarchical structure of memory and meaning of her knowledge, but we are faced with the problem of being able to map and describe only a fraction of the reality of the tradition bearer, because we are not the bearers of that tradition and do not know how to connect all the parts of this complex network. Therefore, we cannot take a peek at the time and environment the informant happens to talk about, what kind of environment has given birth to the codes which were formed in the community and guide his behaviour, nor can we see where the informant really feels, or finds inspiration for her creative work.

Studying the creative practices of a talented informant who belongs to a traditional community as an artist, we usually strive to understand the procedural and experiential knowledge of the member of a traditional society. However, an artist or designer as a practitioner of professional creative work has the skills for identifying with the depicted person or environment by careful inspection and certain emphatic abilities. If the tradition bearer shares a certain portion of her traditional reality with the artist, a creative professional will be able to imagine similar experiences and emotions connected with them.
In Estonian archaic language, there are expressions like *manas vaimusilmata ette* (‘brought in front of his spirit’s eye’) or *näen oma vaimusilmas* (‘I can see in my spirit’s eye’).\(^1\) I loved that expression already when I was a child because I knew what it meant without any explanation from older people. ‘The mind’s eye’ is a local traditional method and tool which enables to create artefact without sketches or drawings. I asked Estonian students of these two projects what this expression could mean. They found it difficult to explain the expression. I then asked them to remember and describe what was happening when their parents were reading them bedtime stories or telling fairy tales. The entire group unanimously replied that in their imagination, they saw the whole story unfolding like a film or a cartoon. We concluded that there is no point in trying to describe ‘the mind’s eye’; it exists and works without the need to explain it in specific words.

As indicated above, one of the key factors of understanding the problems and ethics of the transfer of experiential knowledge in traditional community is to value the shared experience and shared mother tongue, but also individual experiences which can be noticed and understood only when one knows certain keywords that are also, among other things, expressed in fairytales and songs which have been passed on from generation to generation.

5. Conclusions

In this research, I have explored the existing problems concerning the use of fieldwork which regard to its contribution to gain new knowledge and inspiration through the transfer of local experiential knowledge in traditional community into the creative practice of an artist or a designer. However, for artists and design students it is crucial to identify the importance of traditional sign language and visual literacy embedded in folklore and traditional material culture. The mindset of the tradition bearers becomes crucial if we aim to understand the importance of the experiential knowledge in traditional communities. The difficulty to gain access to tacit knowledge of the tradition bearers are partially solved through fieldwork. I have shown that the two examples demonstrate the importance of fieldwork as an efficient method of ‘tuning in’ to the mindset of the tradition bearers. The experiential knowledge has an important role in understanding specific cultures and research enables an artist-researcher to glean new information about the functioning of a specific culture and understand the hidden sign language to be found in oral culture. Researcher, whose background lays in art and design has an advantage in being attuned to communicating through visual literacy and metaphors, sign language and important narratives various skills and human values.

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\(^1\) in Estonian the spirit’s eye means the mind’s eye.
Supplements

Fig. 1
The local women still wear traditional costumes in their everyday life. Kihnu Cultural Space is included in the list of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO).
Left: Rosalii Karjam explaining the natural dying techniques of woollen yarn (2005).

Fig. 2
Ualjõsimine (sitting together) together with international group of students (2005).
Fig. 3
The sign language of Khmu traditional striped skirt for elderly women (left) and younger women (right) inspired the textile design student Klart Ojavee (2006).

Fig. 4
Traditional local pre-Easter food (2008).
Fig. 5 Anna Kõiv (left) speaks to the young people about her childhood, wedding, the birth of her children, customs she has learned from her mother and relatives, and her life experience in the Seto Rural Museum’s Tea House (2009).

Fig. 6 The Seto women are singing a lament that in a traditional Seto wedding is sung by the daughter to her mother before leaving her childhood home. The songstresses are demonstrating how, even at today's weddings, the bride is singing this lament and tell stories about their own weddings: what they were feeling, how it all unfolded. The Seto women are wearing national costume like they do at all formal occasions, holidays related to customs, weddings, birthdays and also when they are performing traditional archaic Seto songs (Seto Rural Museum’s Tea House 2009).
Fig. 7
The courtyard of the Seto Rural Museum (2009).

Fig. 8
The elderly local women preparing the loom in their private workshop of NGO Karuvaž (2008).
Fig. 9
Collection of Erle Võsa-Tangsoo (2008)

Fig. 10
Wedding-bag for the newly wed to spend their wedding night
Design: Liis Koort (2009)

Fig. 11
Collection of Kerrii Laane (2009)

Fig. 12
Collection of Kirill Safonov (2009)
References


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