

Fragile Mires as Living Heritage: Human-Nature Relations in Contemporary Digital Life

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Abstract : This study focuses on human-mire relations in the context of digital aestheticization and the long-standing tradition of folklore concerning mires. The study concentrates on the Patvinsuo mire in Eastern Finland and the Viiankiaapa mire in Finnish Lapland. Patvinsuo is a national park, and Viiankiaapa is a protected mire area with hiking trails and other recreational infrastructure. Perceiving the environment through digital technology can help to notice aesthetic details in nature. In addition, sharing images and texts digitally through social media adds a sense of community to the relationship with nature and, at the same time, creates a different kind of living heritage where old and new traditions meet and mingle. People visiting and camping in these areas 'self-care' themselves through recreation in nature. However, these practices and digital aestheticization can sometimes lead to the erosion of fragile mires. The research focuses on understanding the impact of digital aestheticization, such as taking digital photos, on the relationship with nature for individuals moving and working in mires. Additionally, the study aims to explore the contemporary perception of the water environment in mires and its cultural heritage, including mythical and folkloric elements. The research material consists of senso-digital walking interviews and digital recordings (audio recordings, photographs, videos) made during the mire walks, as well as archival material from the Finnish Literature Society's Archives on mire folklore. The analysis of the material relies centrally on theories from sensory anthropology on the relationship between sensory perception and culture. The modern-day interviewees include outdoor enthusiasts spending their leisure time in mires, artists treating mires in their art, and nature experts (scientists, civil servants, and nature guides). The senso-digital walking interviews were conducted in Patvinsuo and Viiankiaapa mires on a trail chosen by the interviewees themselves. The material selected from the archive consists mainly of folk beliefs and folk poetry from the 19th and 20th centuries that express the relationship of the narrator to the mires. The interview and archival materials date from different periods and are different in character, which has to be taken into account in the analysis. However, in the analysis of both materials, particular attention is paid to the descriptions of sensations that appear in them. Analyzing the materials in parallel is limited by the fact that they date from different periods, but on the other hand, it is their different ages that make it possible to perceive the changes in the cultural heritage of mires.

Keywords : mires, living heritage, digital aestheticization, folklore, sensory anthropology

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