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Hanna Leipämaa-Leskinen, Henna Syrjälä, Hannele Kauppinen-Räisänen & Minna-Maarit Jaskari

Abstract—In this paper, we introduce the concept of saunascape. To that end, we explore *what kind of socio-material practices are carried out within sauna bathing, and thereby discover the elements of saunascape*. We focus on interrelated practices of sauna bathing and address the agentic capacity of saunascape as it structures these practices. The data were generated through interviews that took place in sauna departments at five different hotels in Finland. In total, 39 informants participated in interviews. The findings show four interconnected socio-material practices relating to sauna bathing: purification, nostalgization, medicalization and democratization. As saunascape emerges in the nexus of these practices, its spatially-constructed elements (places, people, meanings and material processes) appear connected to practices. The study participates in discussions in which the spatiality and non-human agency in consumption practices are evolved. Furthermore, it showcases an example of how an understudied cultural-historical phenomenon may be linked to modern consumption trends.

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In this paper, we introduce the concept of saunascape as it appears in the nexus of various socio-material sauna bathing practices. The historical roots of sauna can be located in Finland, even though sauna bathing is common in several other cultural contexts. It is assumed that there are over 2.3 million saunas in Finland, which is a country of 5.5 million inhabitants (Official Statistics of Finland 2019). Besides private saunas, there are numerous public saunas in apartments, gyms, and hotels, where also tourists are able to experience Finnish sauna bathing. When referring to Finnish sauna, we follow Tsonis' (2016, 44-45) definition of the sweat bathing; i.e. a very hot room in which people sit and throw water on hot rocks, usually followed by a cold shower or water plunge.

To date, surprisingly few academic discussions have taken sauna into the focus of analysis. Most of the prior studies regarding sauna have approached sauna bathing from the viewpoint of health and well-being (Tsonis 2016). Majority of these studies have examined precisely Finnish sauna bathing, and addressed its medical benefits (Hannuksela and Ellahham 2001). Also, a couple of works in technology and design discipline have elaborated on the technical aspects of sauna. There are only a few culturally and sociologically oriented studies on sauna, which are most aligned with the current investigation. This very dispersed and rather outdated array of literature addresses mainly the historical and cultural aspects of sauna bathing (Lockwood 1977; Edelsward 1991). When it comes to prior consumption research, our literature analysis reveals that sauna is still largely untouched area, and when sauna appears, it is only a by-product in a couple of studies. To illustrate, Jalas and Rinkinen (2013) bring forward sauna as a spatial place related to socio-technical practices of wooden heating.

Inspired by the idea of sauna as a spatial place, we explore *what kind of socio-material practices are carried out within sauna bathing*. By so doing, we aim to discover through which kinds of practices saunascape is constructed. We lean on the post-human practice approach, noticing also the agentic capacities of non-human entities that are considered pivotal in carrying out socio-material practices (Schatzki 2001).

The suffix of scape has been used in various fields to refer to the complex interaction systems of spatially arranged artifacts, social systems, environments and humans (Mikkelsen 2011). The prior examples include foodscapes (Brembeck and Johansson 2010; Dolphijn 2004), snackscapes (Syrjälä et al. 2017), sensescapes (Markuksela and Valtonen 2011), servicescapes (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy 2003) and therapeutic servicescapes (Rosenbaum et al., 2020; Leighanne and Hamilton, 2019). All the works build on Appadurai's (1996)

seminal typology of five scapes: financescapes, ideoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes and ethnoscapes, in which it is proposed that people live in ever-changing worlds, where people, materiality, ideas, countries and economies are connected situationally to each other at a global scale (Askegaard and Eckhardt 2012; Ger and Belk 1996).

In this paper, we lean on the general idea of foodscape as "a dynamic social construction that relates food to places, people, meanings and material processes" (Johnston and Bauman 2014, 3), however to generate the practices taking place within saunascape, the central focus is on sauna instead that of food. We, thus, highlight the agentic capacity of saunascape as it structures the practices of sauna bathing (Mikkelsen 2011; Syrjälä et al. 2017) by creating spatial, material, sensory, cultural and social boundaries for carrying out the practices. Further, we agree with Fuentes (2014, 6) as while discovering socio-material practices, we regard "materiality and its meanings, image and things, humans and non-humans simultaneously and as intrinsically interlinked."

The data were generated through interviews with39 Finnish sauna bathers, 11 women and 28 men. The interviews took place in sauna departments at five different hotels in Finland. The informants stayed at the hotel either for vacation (13 persons) or because of work travelling (26 persons). They were encouraged to discuss freely about the rituals and practices of sauna bathing, elements of sauna environment, and physical objects related to sauna bathing. The discussions dealt with sauna bathing in various contexts, covering the current sauna experience but also how the informants practice sauna bathing in their everyday lives. Therefore, the current experience acted as an elicitation technique to generate cultural talk (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006, p. 79) on sauna bathing in general, and not as the sole focus of the interviews. The findings derived through an iterative process between the data, theory and the emerging concepts.

Figure 1 illuminates our findings. The findings show four interconnected socio-material practices that are connected to sauna bathing and build the elements of saunascape.

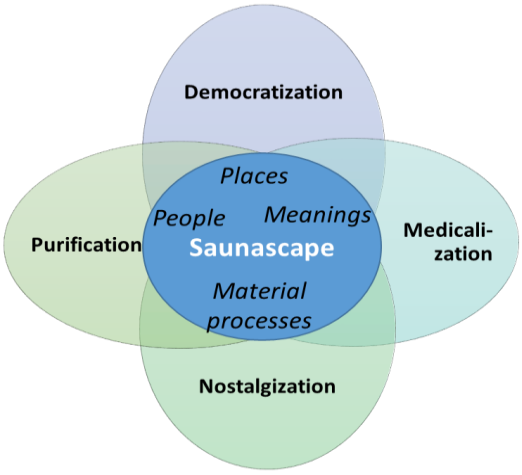

Figure 1. Saunascape in the nexus of practices.

Purification practices stem from the Finnish cultural-historical roots in which the purity of sauna comes from closeness to nature (Canniford and Shankar 2013) as it is described as a spiritual place, where all sorts of ills are healed. The spirituality of sauna is related to its multisensorial nature that shows how visual aesthetics of sauna environment and its materialities carry the meanings of silence and relaxation. Thus, for humans, it is not only physical purification, but also mental washing of worries, stress and burdens as they are literally sweat away. *Nostalgization practices* connect sauna and Finnish cultural identity together. The places, material processes and meanings of saunascape provoke recollections of earliest sauna experiences in which certain spatial and material elements are traditionally connected to sauna (e.g., ideally located by the waters). This also brings up the cultural rituals of the whole family bathing in the sauna together and often the most sensitive discussions taking place in sauna.

Medicalization practices show how the traditional meanings of sauna as a health-boosting place are interconnected with present day activities related to wellness. While sauna is historically used for various health-care related purposes (e.g., cupping), the current trends relating to well-being give a novel hint to medicalization practices. To illustrate, increasingly popular self-tracking activities and knowledge about medical benefits of sauna bathing may boost its usage as a means to the meditative relaxation, where both muscles and mind get relaxed (Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli 2015). Finally, *democratization practices* are intertwined with the ideologies of equality and approval. Sauna constructs as a place that collects people together as they are, without fancy titles or external status symbols. Besides the obvious reason – nudity – democratization practices arise from unwritten sauna etiquette in which good manners and gentle small talk even with strangers are expected.

These practices reveal the emergence of the elements of saunascape constructing of place, people, meanings and material processes. The place is not only the physical sauna room or building, but also the idea of sauna being created over the decades varying from traditional smoke saunas to modern plainly aesthetic saunas. Material processes refer to the various non-human objects (e.g., washing equipment, towels) and interactions between and with those objects in the saunascape. The element of people includes all the subtle ways of social interaction that are "allowed" in sauna. For example, it brings forward the virtue of being silent in company. Finally, the element of meanings is connected to beauty, purity, traditions, equality and healing. It is strongly emphasized that sauna is the place where all the social hierarchies are taken off and individuals are presented in their purest forms.

Theoretically, the current study participates in discussions in which the spatiality and non-human agency in consumption practices are evolved (e.g., Fuentes 2014; Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007; Syrjälä et al. 2017). Further, it shows an example of how an understudied cultural-historical phenomenon is linked to contemporary consumer trends, such as wellness (Askegaard and Eckhardt 2012), spirituality (e.g. Rinallo, Scott, and Maclaran 2013) and therapeutic consumption (Rosenbaum et al., 2020; Leighanne and Hamilton, 2019.) Also, the study offers new insights for practitioners, e.g. travel providers, hotel managers and health professionals, operating with businesses related to sauna.

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