A search for the sacred -
contemporary shamanism in the north of Norway and Sweden

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Abstract

The research I present within this thesis is a meaning analysis of contemporary shamanism for practitioners in the north of Norway and Sweden. I have used ethnographic research methods of observation, participation, conversations, interviews, context research and analysis of written texts. My aim has been to research the meaning of the sacred in the lives of contemporary shamanic practitioners, by using a theoretical framework from psychology of religion made by Paloutzian (2005). By using this frame I have focused on practitioners understanding of spiritual beliefs and ultimate concerns. As to view how these come forth in expressions of self-definition, values, goals, purposes and attitudes.

My conclusions have been that contemporary shamanism is viewed as a spiritual understanding of the world that is expressing itself differently within cultural practices and geographical spaces. It is a worldview that is connecting people through shared beliefs and understandings. These understandings create strong values on how we should act with eachother, nature and our own self, as we are viewed as belonging to each other in a spiritual perspective. These values come in conflict with social and political structures built on other values and attitudes. Practitioners speak of a call for change in structures, the need of understanding our history and our belonging with eachother and nature for our own wellbeing and our world to survive. As some engage in social activism and other social engagements, others view their goal as to”walk in beauty”(Gaup 2007).

Keywords: contemporary shamanism, ethnographic research, meaning analysis, psychology of religion, spiritual beliefs, social engagements
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References
Chapter 1 - Introduction

1. Introduction

One evening I found myself standing outside the main octagon at Isogaisa. It was during my second visit to this shamanic gathering, in 2013, and I had taken a break to reflect on the events of the day. The evening was cold with a clear sky, and I was looking at the moving shades of people dancing within the white canvas walls. A few others had also taken a break from dancing and were standing talking by the entrance door. I listened to the music from within, a group of artists playing, and from time to time I caught a glance of the sacred fire in the center of the space. From where I was standing the high lavvu’s, connected to the four corners of the octagon, looked like mountain peaks surrounding a valley.

Each lavvu could be entered from the outside. They each had their own fireplace in the middle, surrounded with benches and reindeer skins to sit on. These spaces created opportunities for both structured meetings during the day, and long night conversations, music and singing, as now in the evening. The fire in the center of the octagon was the ceremonial fire where all main ceremonies where conducted. This fire got lit in the beginning of the gathering in the opening ceremony, and was kept burning to the closing ceremony. During this specific day many different ceremonies had been performed but now in the evening it was time for celebration. For laughter after a day of listening to people tell their stories, of sharing their experiences, that had created many conversations about the situation for people around the world today. Conversations of oppression, of deaths, of destruction of our ecosystem and individual life stories. Stories where shared to both create an understanding of the situations people come from and give examples of acts that where trying to create change. In the end of this day, a woman made a comment on the celebrations ahead: “We need to laugh. We need to let go of all these feelings that we carry with us and connect to the joy of life. To dance, sing and be together”.

In watching the shades moving I could not see who was dancing, it was only a shade or several shades moving in to each other in the rhythm of the music. But I knew that on this dance floor there were shamans from different countries, healers, seijd workers, curious seekers and volunteers, organizers, cultural workers, politicians, social workers, students, craftsmen, children and many others dancing together.

I heard a voice next to me telling me to look up. Above the octagon, in the clear sky, a northern green light was moving. It was only August, and not as common to see them, and I knew there were people inside that had traveled far to come here who had never seen this light before. So I rushed in, through the dancing crowd towards one of the side lavvu’s where people had gathered around a fire. On my way I told the people I met that the northern lights can be seen above us. Some just smiling at me, as they were from the northern parts and very familiar with this light, and others rushing outside in great excitement.
In looking back on what I have learned from the research I conducted during 2012-2015, the image of the shades dancing relate in my mind to how people relate to each other in a spiritual way and the importance that is placed on gathering. To Isogaisa people come from different countries, ethnic groups, cultures, sexes, families, cities etc. All these things, definitions, could separate people from each other depending on how they are viewed. In general, it is also true, that people do view themselves as separate from each other – that we do carry different experiences, cultural values, beliefs etc. But, as the shades, people are also connected to each other in a shared spiritual understanding of who we are as individuals, of our own self, as of our context and each other.

During this research I have also seen conflicts, listened to different opinions, ways of expressing beliefs and heard many individual lifestories. I have, apart from my visits to Isogaisa, travelled to other gatherings and attended meetings discussing social issues in the north – and global issues of high concern for practitioners. It has been a search for the sacred, a relation to and understanding of shamanism, as expressed in shapes of meaning by contemporary practitioners, that I will here present.

1.1. Purpose and Aim

My main purpose and aim of this research was to view what kind of understanding practitioners have of contemporary shamanism in the northern context, through researching meaning expressions with the framework by Paloutzian(2005) and with ethnographic research methods as expressed by Bryman (2011). The aim of this research was to view how practitioners of contemporary shamanism relate to the sacred, and how the meaning of the sacred is expressing itself in self-definition, beliefs, values, purposes, goals and ultimate concerns. My aim was to try to understand, and try to communicate, how the sacred is shaping life – in acts, thoughts and relations.

1.2. Research questions

My overall research question is:

What kind of understanding of contemporary shamanism in the northern context can be made by researching meaning expressions with the theoretical framework by Paloutzian(2005)?

From the theoretical framework by Paloutzian (2005) more specific research questions where made:

What are practitioners definitions of the self and understandings of their beliefs? How are values and attitudes expressing themselves? What are the goals and purposes of their practices? What is of ultimate concern?
1.3. Limitations

My research is limited to the time-frame I have had to conduct this research. It is limited to the people I have met during these years, and to the experiences I have had. It is limited in my approach with its focus on practitioners and not including perspectives from people who feel drawn towards shamanism, or have attended gatherings or received treatments from practitioners. As my presentation within this thesis is focused on meaning expressions, on what people have said and expressed as meaningful with what they do, it does not include descriptions on specific practices, details on specific beliefs and my context research. These have been conscious choices I have made in this presentation of my research but are also limitations as not providing a complete ethnography. This has though not been possible within the scope of a master-thesis.

1.4 My own relation to the subject

This research began when I moved up to the northern parts of Sweden and for the first time came to live within Sapmi. I am the first of many generations who have grown up further south in Sweden, so for me it was a feeling of coming back to my roots but also to find myself within a new context. I had been traveling for long periods, and during the past 8 years spent most of my time in a village in the highlands of Guatemala. There, and on my other journeys, I had met and worked with local shamans, curanderas and contemporary healers from various traditions. I had been learning the local contexts, social structures and spiritual worldviews in different parts of the world and returned with these experiences to Sweden.

With me I also had my experiences from encountering many developmental and social project, who had been involved in local issues and trying to create changes for people who live in vulnerable and exposed situations: women and children who suffer abuse, alcohol problems, malnutrition and starvation as the destruction of social structures following years of oppression and civil war. The oppression of traditional spirituality and healing practices, the evangelic movement in Central America, the American war on drugs, gangwars and killings of women where just some of the social issues that was part of every day life in Guatemala. The effects of traumatic experiences in peoples lives, and how to be able to work with these issues, was something that led me in to my studies of psychology of religion, and later, the master program of Religion in Peace and Conflict. In my BA thesis for my undergraduate degree in Theology, I explored how the views on religion and spirituality is affecting the way we perceive other people, and how the need of being able to understand other worldviews is of great importance in mental health care, as in developmental and social projects. In that thesis I was comparing analysing tools of religion from social research (Rakodi 2011) and psychology of religion (DeMarines 2011). With these interests of how we can create an understanding of the worldview of other people, how understanding is vital for being able to work together, as the importance of working with issues of trauma and oppression in our societies, I came in to this research project of contemporary shamanism.
1.5 Empirical research

To create an understanding of the empirical research that had been made on shamanism I began by submitting myself to the only academic course I could find on the subject, Schamanism A15, in Gävle during the spring semester of 2012. This course was divided in three sections: the historical sources of shamanism, neoshamanism, and the writing of a 6 hp essay.

To study sources that had been written on shamanism in the past we mainly studied the work by Eliade (1956) ”Shamanism - Archaic techniques of extacy” and Mebius (2007) ”Bissie – Studier i samisk religionshistoria”. Eliade’s extensive work on shamanism has been considered the main source of understanding shamanism, but has also been criticized by the fact that Eliade himself never actually did any fieldwork and spoke to people belonging to a shamanic worldview or a shaman. The book is focused on the practices by the shaman and views shamanism as a specific way of practice, the role of extacy. Mebius (2007) has written his book on Saami religion based on how the religion has been documented in written sources from the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} Century to the middle of the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century. This book also includes Lars Levi Leastadious work on Saami mythology from the 1840s, and some contemporary records on Saami traditions about the past understandings and customs.

In the section of neoshamanism I came in to contact with:


Perruchon (2003) “I am Tsunki – gender and shamanism among the Shuar of Western Amazonia”, a study to investigate the relationship between gender and achievement of power through the shaman’s role in Shuar society.

Svanberg (2003) “Schamantropologi – i gränslandet mellan forskning och praktik”, a study on the relationship between shamanic research and neoshamanism. Svanberg states in this research that neoshamanism is a western phenomena, mainly urban, that has been happening in that past 30 years. When it began it was dependent on the literature that had been made from anthropological research as there was no continuity of shamanic practices to build on. The written sources that people had to depend on was the work by Carlos Castaneda (1968) “The Teachings of Don Juan”, as Michael Harner (1980) “The Way of the Shaman”.

In writing my 6 hp essay I took the opportunity to look at the aspect of how a Saami shamanic practitioner today is viewed. My questions was: Is a practitioner of Saami shamanism today a traditionalist and culture bearer or an innovator and neoshaman?

For this essay I made a literature study that involved reading research literature published in the books by:

My conclusions in this essay was that the answer of my research question depend on how we define shamanism itself. If shamanism is viewed as something belonging in the past, or a worldview that, as practices has changed during the years, is still the same worldview.

From this academic research, I was given a picture on how academic research in the past had been connected to the study on Nordic paganism and the belief that Saami religion had been inspired by the Germanic people. This view was changed when later research had found that Saami religion was more similar to the religious expressions of Siberian tribes (Bäckman, Hultkrantz 1985). Literature that had been published further on was focused on the historical accounts on Saami shamanism (Mebius 2007), and research on the relation between neoshamanism and anthropological research (Svanberg 2003).

Previous literature connect shamanism with New Age practices (Hammer 1997) and how the noaidie, shaman, was still a concept alive today but without having the same role as in the previous Saami community (Hultkrantz 1985, Eriksson 2009). Research was also questioning if the understandings of shamanism today could really be compared with the spiritual understandings documented from older sources (Lindquist 2005).

Bowie (2005) also stated how within neoshamanism today people speak of ideals that cannot be found within the older tradition. Examples made are of vegetarianism, feminism and that healing is separated from black magic. Bowie viewed a risk in that when neoshaman’s today are looking for their roots, they might view the older traditions as undeveloped, primitive, and give them a secondary value. Another risk is that indigenous people can feel that their traditions have been taken away from them by western people, and that their knowledge is being commercialized, leaving them feeling betrayed and exploited.

To continue my academic research review further, I wanted to find out what had been researched and written about contemporary practices of shamanism in the
north of Sweden and Norway. The research I found was a doctoral thesis made by Trude A. Fonneland (2010) "Samisk nysjamanism: i dialog med (for)tid og stad – ein kulturanalytisk studie av nysjamanar sine erfaringerforhetinger og dittstofindingar – identitetsforhandlingar og verdiskaping". This paper is described as an exploration of Sami neoshamanism that highlights values being of vital importance in neo-shamans self-development and in their marketing of shamanistic products and services. Through her informers experienced stories and personal myths she has considered three main discourses. They are related to the themes: nature, indigenous people, and the past. In her study she aims to prove: "how neo-shaman use of and focus on North Norway’s nature and on Saami culture and traditions become part of a cultural and political awareness and are expressed through strategies to enhance identities and marketing of the North Norweigan region with its nature and people"(Fonneland 2010:261).

Other literature I found in Sweden that mentioned shamanism today, neoshamanism, was very short and most often referred to the study by Galina Lindquist (1998) "Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene. Neo-shamanism in Contemporary Sweden” (Frisk 1998, Geels/Wikström 2006)

In my academic research review I attempted searches on PsychInfo and within the Diva database. Here I found no research made from within psychology of religion on shamanism in this region or in other regions that had similar aims. I also did not find any research on the spiritual beliefs of practitioners or the meaning they view and place on shamanism today in their lives. This may very well have existed, but to my own knowledge, and from what I was able to find in 2012, I saw an opportunity of researching contemporary shamanism from a new perspective and view how that would add to previous research.

That contemporary shamanism had not been written about from the perspectives on meaning, the sacred and with an aim of understanding these perspectives from the practitioners themselves shaped my approach to shamanism. Both from my own previous experiences and what I learned from the academic research review made me want to approach shamanism without using any previous academic definition. To stay away from the discussion concerning if contemporary shamanism is “old” or “new”, as I found that quite irrelevant when my focus was on understanding the views held by practitioners today.
Chapter 2 Theoretical perspectives

This chapter is to create an overview of the theoretical perspectives, their assumptions and views that has influenced my research, choice of methods and ways of gathering my material. They are views of religion/spirituality (Pargament 2009), and how we create meaning and are able to understand the meanings of what we hold sacred (Park 2005, Paloutzian 2005).

2.1 View on religion and spirituality

I am working from a view on religion and spirituality as a "search for the sacred". This comes from Pargament (2009) who describes our relation to religion and spirituality as a process of search where we as humans constantly go through stages of discovery, integration and transformation of our relation to the sacred. This is a descriptive way of a flow that I find closely related to and valuable in understanding both our perception of the sacred as it is in this particular moment, as has the element of change. Pargament views humans as searchers. We carry the ability of investigating the world we are surrounded by and as we take in truths that are given by our context we do not do so without questioning. Levels of search depends on the level of meaning that we find in our world. If we are not satisfied with the meanings we are given we search for new meanings – more understandings until we find a suitable answer to our quest. As we learn about something we go through the process of integrating our new experiences about our human existence and through this we are transforming our self.

2.2 The concept of meaning and its relation to our belief-system

To understand the concept of meaning and its relation to our belief-system I have been using the theoretical perspectives by Park (2005). Park describes meaning as a central topic in psychology that can be considered fundamental in understanding human behavior. Meaning can be defined very broadly, as encompassing many other psychological constructs, as defined very deeply related to the core of human existence. Approaching religion, as spiritual understandings, as a system of meaning, creates a view on religion and spirituality as they function as a lens through which reality is perceived and interpreted. As there exists other systems of meaning, religious and spiritual meaning systems are unique in the way that they relate to what people hold sacred.

Park (2005) describe meaning as the central role in human life. It allows people to predict and control their personal and social environments, as in the process trans-
form human experience. Park defines two basic aspects of meaning, global meaning and daily meaning. Global meaning consists of beliefs, goals and the subjective sense of meaning-fullness. Daily meaning consists of interpretations, strivings, projects, life satisfaction and positive affect.

Our global beliefs are the systems that can provide us with comprehensive and integrated frameworks of meaning to explain events that occur in the world. Park (2005) states that these frames are of particular value in interpreting and responding to challenging aspects of life such as suffering, death, tragedy and injustice but also for everyday life. Our belief systems impact our understanding of the nature of other people, of the self, of the world and of what is to be after this life.

Park (2005) describes the global goals concerns in our belief systems as central to our life purpose. They provide the ultimate motivation and primary goals for living, as well as guidelines for achieving these goals. Ultimate goals can include connecting with, or adhering to, the sacred. Other goals can be derived from such goals and include both positive and negative aspects. Positive aspects could be having peace of mind, working for peace and justice in the world, devoting oneself to the family or finding intimacy with others. Negative aspects could be achieving supremacy or promoting destruction. Closely related to these goals Park place values. Values are guidelines that individuals use to determine worth, importance and correctness. Our belief system supplies a framework for determining what is wrong and to be avoided.

A subjective ”sense of meaning” Park (2005) refer to feelings of ”meaning-fullness”, a sense of meaning or purpose in life. Meaning-fullness is described as feeling that one has a purpose or direction, as in having plans and intentions. This sense of meaning-fullness is derived from seeing one’s actions as oriented toward a desired future state or goal. Importantly, those states or goals do not ever have to be realized or achieved in order to experience meaning-fullness; the sense of being headed in the direction of, rather than actually achieving, ultimate goals creates the sense of meaning-fullness.

Global meaning systems Park (2005) views as usually constructed unwittingly. Acquired from the surrounding culture and through accumulated personal experiences, and tend to remain outside of people’s awareness. If asked to directly focus on and report on their global beliefs and goals, people may be able to do so, but generally they are engaged in daily life and do not reflect deeply on this level of their existence. Regardless of their awareness of global meaning it exerts powerful influences on people’s thoughts, actions and feelings, and gets translated into their daily lives through interpretations, strives or personal projects, and a sense of well-being and life-satisfaction.

Religion is present within the global meaning of many individuals and they experience influences on a continual basis through their interpretations of daily events, the structure and motivations of their daily lives and their general levels of mood and life satisfaction. Beliefs provide guidance regarding which goals to pursue, which decisions to make and infuse life with a deep sense of purpose (Park 2005).
Park (2005) describes how people’s understandings of why a given event occurred can be of naturalistic or religious type. Viewing perspectives on an illness in a naturalistic understanding could be stress, injury or weakened immune system while a religious understanding of it could be God’s effort to teach, a challenge or a punishment.

In relation to goals Park (2005) states how religion can create goals and prescribe behaviors to achieve such goals. Global goals are pursued through a variety of lower level and more concrete goals. Personal strives refer to these recurrent or ongoing goals that a person characteristically tries to attain or maintain. Religion often informs these strives or personal projects, and their religious or sacred nature influences individual’s well-being. Spiritual strives refer to goals that involve self-transcendence and that concerns ultimate questions of meaning and existence. In addition to strive or personal projects that are explicitly religious or spiritual in nature any personal striving could be perceived by its owner as having spiritual significance and character. It is argued that a wide range of personal strives may be invested with spiritual meaning, not merely the ones that expressly discuss a spiritual activity or values that have been espoused in spiritual literature. Religious and sacred goals appear to be related higher levels of well-being and psychological adjustments.

2.3 A theoretical framework of meaning expressions

To view closer the components of a meaning system I came in to contact with a theoretical framework by Paloutzian (2005). This framework was made to study the aspects of change within a meaning-system in a spiritual transformation, a change of worldview. In this theoretical approach the meaning system is understood as a construct that integrates cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral elements. This ultimately means that whatever serves the function of ultimate concern for a person is in the end an article of faith. Paloutzian (2005) argues that a meaning-system is a psychological construct of a dynamic set of mental processes whose operation cannot be understood as independent from some element of faith. The components of a meaning-system interact with each other in a dynamic way to affect an individual’s whole character within the context of that faith. This connection with the sacred is made evident through goals, attitudes and beliefs, overall purposes, values, self-definition and ultimate concerns.

2.3.1 Goals

According to Paloutzian (2005) a meaning-system would be incomplete unless it included an ability to be manifested in behavior. The component most closely related to behavior is that which contains the goals towards which people aspire. The relation between meaning and goal is bidirectional. That is, the goals that people strive to achieve express meanings within the system, and they also serve to construct or make meanings concrete through the very process of enacting them. Goals may range in scope from the narrow and specific to the global and
abstract. Personal goals and strivings are defined as "what a person is typically or characteristically trying to do" (Paloutzian 2005:341).

2.3.2 Attitudes and beliefs

Paloutzian (2005) describes attitudes as evaluative components of social cognition that are comprised of cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendency components and beliefs are intimately connected to them. A simple connection could be that a person believing in a particular religious doctrine would hold a more positive attitude towards that religion then towards others. A bidirectional connection could be that accepting a belief can lead to attitudes consistent with it, and holding a particular attitude is likely to function as a perceptual set to prepare a person to accept certain beliefs as foundations of the previously held attitudes.

2.3.3 Overall purposes

The things towards where a person strives Paloutzian (2005) views as elements of a meaning-system because they reflect the overall purposes and spiritual values to which a person adheres. Whatever a person values and strives to fulfill at a higher and more encompassing level is part of a person’s spirituality. Because of this the concept of spiritual intelligence may be invoked as a model of the cognitive, affective, and motivational cluster of elements that enable people to sustain behavior with a high degree of self-efficacy in pursuit of long-term or higher purposes. Thus even mundane daily tasks may be imbued with a sense of meaning for the person who performs them for a higher purpose related to the person’s ultimate concern.

2.3.4 Values

Values function as overall guides for setting priorities and for making attitudinal and behavioral choices; thus attitudes and behaviors can be regarded as expressions of values. It is also possible that values and the conflicts that can arise among them be manifestations of religious beliefs. In the context of a religious or spiritual meaning-system a person may hold a positive attitude toward and a belief in a particular religion and therefore express positively value those principles related to this belief-system. It is possible as well that values within the same meaning-system to conflict one another. In essence, moral development research has emphasized the value component of a meaning-system by pitting two or more values against one another in a storyline called a moral dilemma. How the person decides among the alternatives is an indication of the person’s level of reasoning about conflicts between those values that are inherent in the dilemma (Paloutzian 2005).
2.3.5 Self-definition

How we view our self Paloutzian (2005) describes as a changing aspect in a transformative way. Belonging within a meaning-system creates the view a person has of their own selves and is something that undergoes transformation in a change of belief-system. A change in the core-identity structure, a movement from a divided to a unified self or change in identity.

2.3.6 Ultimate concerns

The ultimate concerns are the most global and encompassing aspect of a person’s meaning system. This is what lies as an influence over all the other aspects of the meaning system – how we view our self, the values we hold, our goals in life etc. (Paloutzian 2005).

2.4 Theoretical influence on method

The theoretical perspectives on spirituality by Pargament (2009) and understanding of meaning construct by Park (2005) creates assumptions that influence research method. Depending on how spirituality is viewed we research it differently, assume different things about the people we meet and make different conclusions. The theoretical assumptions that the perspectives I am working from carry with them are:

1. When people can not find the answers they are looking for within their meaning systems a process of search for answers is initiated.

2. People, as searchers, are within a process of constant integration and transformation. This means that we do not always have all the answers to our own questions, but we can have a knowing of the direction towards where we are to go to search. We are also within an integration or transformative process where our new answers are integrating in to our lives and becoming of meaning step by step.

3. Our belief system impact how we act with eachother, towards ourselves and how we interpret our context of life and our planet.

4. A meaning-system is a psychological construct of a dynamic set of mental processes whose operation cannot be understood as independent from some element of faith. The components of a meaning-system interact with each other in a dynamic way to affect an individual’s whole character within the context of that faith.
5. The connection with the sacred is made evident through goals, attitudes and beliefs, overall purposes, values, self-definition and ultimate concerns.

What this means for my research is that if I want to research and be able to create an understanding of the meaning of shamanism to people I need to look at expressions in both words and acts. I need to look at what people express as meaningful to them by viewing the connection people make to the sacred in the way they express goals, attitudes and beliefs, purposes, self-definition and ultimate concerns. In my analysis of my fieldwork, as within the ongoing process of research that leads up to the point where I can make my conclusions I need to be aware of these different levels of meanings and take notes on them. In my research I need to be aware of the processes that people are within, I can not assume that all answers are there to be given, but pay attention to what people say and do over time. How they reflect and what happens when values or beliefs come in contact with other values and beliefs. In my research I need to pay attention to what people express as meaningful, as to how they do so and what they place in relation to this.

My research becomes a search for the sacred in these expressed meanings of self-definition, attitudes, values, goals and concerns, a search not only for words but viewing acts and finding out their reason.
Chapter 3 Method

In this chapter I present the methods I have used to gather information, how theory has influenced my research process, and how I am to make my final presentation.

3.1 An ethnographic research method

Ethnographic research has primarily been associated with social anthropology where investigators usually visits a foreign land, gains access to a group, spends considerable amount of time with that group with the aim of uncovering its culture, watches and listens to what people say and do, engages people in conversations to probe specific issues of interest, takes copious field notes and returns home to write up the fruit of his or her labors (Bryman 2012:431). Bryman describes ethnography today as a research method in which the researcher:

- is immersed in a social setting for an extended period of time
- makes regular observations of the behavior of members of that setting
- listens to and engages in conversations
- interviews informants on issues that are not directly amenable to observation or that the ethnographer is unclear about
- collects documents about the group
- develops an understanding of the culture of the group and people's behavior within the context of that culture
- writes up a detailed account of that setting

I have been conducting my research on contemporary shamanism in the northern region over a period of three years (2012-2015). It started with moving up to the north and becoming a part of this geographical space and its different social settings. I did not move here because of my intention to conduct this research, but the idea of making this research was born from coming in to contact with shamanic practices, worldview and social context here in the north. I first studied shamanism academically to learn what had been written about the topic and then traveled north to the festival of Isogaisa in 2012.

For me it was a new social and cultural context, but as I have described in my background as a researcher I was familiar with shamanism and spiritual practices in other parts of the world.
3.1.1 Access to space and gathering of material

Bryman (2012) writes that one of the key steps in ethnography is to gain access to the social setting in which the researcher is interested in. The difficulty in this depends on if it is an open or closed setting. A closed setting could be an organization, a firm, a social movement etc and a open setting could be a community.

In the beginning of my research I used the open public setting of the festival of Isogaisa, an annual shamanic gathering in the north of Norway (www.isogaisa.org), and through this meeting place of shamanic practitioners I came in contact with people who I have been able to visit, to conduct interviews with and attend smaller gatherings. Some practitioners have become my key informants with whom I have had more contact during these years but as those voices have been influencing me more I have not relied on any one source in my research.

I have traveled both north and south to participate in activities, as come to know people whom I have been able to contact via Skype, telephone and email to discuss issues that have been of concern and brought to attention at Isogaisa.

I have been able not only to participate in spiritual practices but also to attend social meetings related to specific issues of concern, listen and engage with people who have not attended Isogaisa and in this way also hear other views, reflections and understandings. Through the people I have met, I have also come in contact with written texts and been able to collect material written by shamanic practitioners that is viewed by participants as valuable sources. These books that people have mentioned are:


Eriksson, J I. (2014). Naturens återkmost, Tierps Tryckeri AB.


3.1.2 Theoretical research approach and analysis

To gather my material and analyze written texts I have been using the theoretical framework by Paloutzian (2005) to look for meaning expressions in the forms of goals, attitudes and beliefs, overall purposes, values, self-definition and ultimate concerns.

Paloutzians (2005) frame was developed to research spiritual transformation, as a theoretical guide on the different ways meaning of a worldview is expressing itself. In the beginning of this research project I had an intention of viewing the aspect of change in my research on the meaning that shamanism has today for practitioners. To research change I found quite difficult, many aspects depending on each other and as it may be what people react to within their societies that makes them turn towards shamanism today, it could also be a result of a search for meaning in relation to the sacred as the approach of Pargament (2009) suggests. The difficulty with the aspect of change did not give me enough reason to not use this
theoretical approach, as it provided a frame for research in the way that it guided towards the different ways meaning of a worldview is expressing itself.

Paloutzian (2005) does not say, or propose, how these meaning expressions are linked to each other. But he states that they are all linked to what we perceive as sacred. He also states that the ultimate concerns are viewed as the most global and encompassing aspect of a person’s meaning system and that there are these individual spiritual understandings that forms ultimate concerns. From that view on concerns, I have in the beginning of my research focused on those two points: expressions of concerns and of the sacred. I have searched for expressions of ultimate concerns and the spiritual understandings that people express as their reasons for these concerns. As I have looked for expressions of beliefs and self-definition within their context.

In the ongoing process of analysis and further research I have paid extra attention to when a value, specific issue of concern, belief, understanding of the self and other people is mentioned as something that is regarded sacred, or connected to something sacred, and looked at what kind of acts that are connected to these meaning expressions.

In this way I have worked both inductively and deductively with my analysis in different stages. Followed patterns and looked at specific expressions, as searching through texts openly to look for things, acts, that are expressed as meaning-full and viewed how these relate to what people hold sacred.

3.1.3 Context research

A big part of my research has been to understand the context that people belong to and the issues that people are concerned with. This research has been an ongoing process of researching issues that have been brought to attention in seminars, interviews and conversations. This research is not shown within my presentation as the focus is on meaning expressions, but it has been a way for me to understand my context of research, to be able to ask better questions on these topics in relation to spiritual beliefs, goals, values and concerns. I have in this research, among other things, read numerous books related to shamanism and Saami history, been attending seminars on reindeer-herding and mining, race biology, reconciliation with the Swedish Church, mental health among Saami and annually the Saami week seminars and events in Umeå (2013-2016).

3.1.4 My role as a researcher

Ethnographic researchers could take on an overt or covert role (Bryman 2011). In other words, to disclose the fact that you are a researcher or to present yourself as a researcher. The role could also be mixed, known to some and disclosed to others, depending on the setting of research.

My own role as a researcher was not intended to be covert from the beginning of my research, but because of the research setting and lack of possibility to always present myself, it became a mix of these two roles. As I have attended both public
and closed spaces my role as a researcher has been known to many but not all people I have come in contact with and had conversations with. It has not been possible, and in some circumstances not suitable to always present myself. Because of that, for many people I have just been a participator in activities, in seminars and lectures. The people I have interviewed and had longer conversations with have all known that I am conducting research on northern shamanism, and am writing on a paper on this subject. I have only on a few occasions gone in to deeper explanations on exactly what I am writing about, but I have always answered the questions people have had about my research.

3.1.5 Presentation and ethical considerations

My presentation follows the way I have been conducting my analysis when I have worked through all the material that I have gathered.

In my presentation of my research my aim has been to, as much as possible, show the different material I have found that is related to each meaning expression. A thought that has been guiding me from the beginning of this research project is a reflection Turner (2011) made on how we can create an understanding of something else:

“But through stories, for some reason, one can understand. This is a very serious business, this matter of stories. One asks, why does the inquiry work through stories? It is because of human permeability, because other people's experience may become actually ‘one's own’” (Turner 2011:114).

Because of limited space it has not been possible to present all stories that I have listened to. Choices had to be made, and as I have tried to use thick description as much as possible, I had to select stories to represent other stories that where seen to belong to the same meaning expression.

The fact that my role has been disclosed to many people have been of ethical consideration for me in the process of deciding how to present my material. As I have also noted in conversations, and in interviews with people, most of whom I have spoken with have no wish to be named in a written text or publication. One explanation given me has been due to the general view on shamanic practice that they experience in the north. A view that it is not an acceptable spiritual worldview to have in the eyes of a general public. Because of this they do not wish to be known publicly for the sake of their family or the fear of being discriminated because of spiritual views. The way of presenting my material without exposing anyone, violate any ones privacy, has been taken in to consideration and has shaped the final presentation. In my presentation I have made a few exceptions by using names. I have done so because it would be impossible to describe the situation without doing so, and it has involved people who already have a public role. Other names are mentioned as references because of that other practitioners have used them as references and therefore also given them that role of authority.

But in the cases of interviews and conversations where people have expressed discretion, as in any circumstance where people have not known of my role as a researcher, I respect their privacy. With respect of my own research and to be able to provide information on this subject I have though felt the need to still use the
information given, as also has been the wish from my informants, but to do so in a way that does not violate their privacy.

In presenting my research I have created chapters that are focused on expressions of self-definition and beliefs, values, goals and purposes. As what is of ultimate concern lies as an influence over all the other aspects of the meaning system – how we view our self, the values we hold, our goals in life etc. (Paloutzian 2005). I have throughout these chapters been including issues that people have expressed as of major concern to give as examples of how these ultimate concerns shape acts and engagements.

3.1.6 Validation

I have approached validation by choosing to work with triangulation and thick description (Bryman 2011:392). I wanted to use triangulation in my method by using several different ways to gather my material: observation, participant observations, conversation, open and semi-structured interviews as analysis of texts. To present my research I wanted to use thick description as much as possible for the reader to be able to create a good understanding of my theory, research method, the material that I have gathered and my conclusions.
This chapter is presenting the results I received from my research, the meaning expressions that I have found related to self-definition and beliefs, values and purposes, and goals. The chapter ends with my conclusions.

4.1 Self-definition and beliefs

In understanding beliefs I have focused on spiritual understandings of the Self, of other people and nature. In the way of the sacred, as these have been expressed as related to how we act towards our self, to other people and our context (Paloutzian 2005).

4.1.1 Definition of shamanism

During my first stay at Isogaisa in 2012 I listened to a lecture given by Ailo Gaup and Eirik Myrhug where they spoke about the history of shamanic practices in the northern area among the Saami. The lecture was held in one of the side lavvu’s and I can clearly remember how the room was packed with people. The burning fire casting a pile of smoke that rose between myself and the speakers, so that I was not able to see their faces. I was listening to their voices, viewing the fire and scribbling in my notebook. The wood benches where hard to sit on and it was a long lecture, several hours, but people stayed listening without leaving the space. In their talk they walked through the history of shamanism among the Saami and Ailo Gaup explained, among other things, his view on the definition on shamanism. He spoke of academic research as from his own personal experiences.

Gaup explained how the word shamanism, that we now commonly use in describing this worldview, is coming from the Siberian Tungus tribe word ”saman”. It was academic researchers who traveled to these areas that started to use the word shamanism in describing the spiritual practices of the shaman within these communities. Later when researchers found similar spiritual practices in other parts of the world, they used the same word. In this way the word became academically known for describing a spiritual practice but what it should include, and when not to use it, has since been of academic debate with several different opinions. What has though happened, is that the word shamanism has become known outside of the academic world to people from various cultures as a way of describing their own spiritual practices and beliefs. Gaup related this to the gathering of Isogaisa,
and said that even though in Saami traditional worldview the healer/guide was called noaidie it is now as common for contemporary practitioners to say shaman.

On a later occasion I brought this topic up to a group of practitioners to listen to how they viewed this concept. The discussion that followed went through the importance of definitions. Is it really important to have a definition? Yes, one said, it is important because it creates community. It brings people together.

Jörgen Eriksson (2014) defines shamanism in a similar way:

Shamanism is not a collection of methods or tricks – it is a way of living and thinking in harmony and balance with Mother Earth and the grand circle of life. It is a way of being, where one is reachable for the power and knowledge of the landscape. Shamanism is more of attitude than formal methods. It is a road of knowledge that demands patience and durance and works in small and subtle ways. It is available for all and builds upon the sole practitioner’s cooperation with and in relation to Mother Earth. Diversity is the natural and dynamic being in the world. Shamanism is usually put out as a spiritual practice with extasy, but I am more and more convinced that if so it is about a peaceful extacy, like a rain in May in North Uppland. Shamanism is an open and dynamic process with deep democratic dimension. It is each man and woman’s path to knowledge and power, to harmony and balance and to a creative cowork within the cycle of life (Eriksson 2014:5)

These have been the specific statements I have found on the definition, but how people view and define shamanism is made further visible in the next section on self-definition and beliefs.

4.1.2 Spiritual beliefs about the self, others and nature

We are half-way from earth and half-way from heaven. As a mix of wolf and angel we walk on our toes on earth, like humans (Ailo Gaup 2007:8)

Our self, our human being, is described by practitioners as both divided and connected. Divided in the way that we, as humans, are within a both physical and spiritual reality at the same time, connecting them both within our minds. Different ways of describing these two parts of the self has been portrayed. As what significant role each one has for our human function and understanding of our selves in our being part of this world. The more detailed descriptions I have found in the writings of Gaup, Eriksson and Myrhaug, but explanations and shared experiences have also been expressed orally.

Our body is a part of the landscape and the landscape a part of our body. Our thinking occurs in the meeting with our surrounding and is a shamanic thinking, a thinking in beauty (Eriksson 2014)
As in the quotes above Gaup (2007) and Eriksson (2014) describe our self as of both containing a natural and spiritual essence. Gaup furthers his description of these two parts of us as expressed within our selves in both every-day and enlightened traits. This inner world he calls our mythological landscape and what we experience in our lives, on the outside of our selves, is the lived mythology as a transformation zone for the mind.

As the self is expressed individually, in our individual experience of the world. The shamanic view is of each individual expression being connected to each living form around ourselves. The concept of being connected to all lies as a root in all expressions on spiritual beliefs.

Within this consciousness all time is sacred, all space is sacred, all activity is sacred and all thoughts are sacred. A consciousness embracing the whole organism and not just the brain. The self is not coming from the landscape but a part of it...The body is neither coming out from the landscape but a part of the landscapes body. Thinking is an integrated part of the landscape and the landscape an organic extension of mind and body (Eriksson 2014)

Myrhaug (2011) describes our self as an interaction of different levels. The experiences we have of our selves in our daily lives, with our thoughts and emotions, he views as connected with our preconceptions of reality and he describes this experience of our self as the "ego". Underneath this ego is our true self – the real person. Our true self is not connected with our past experiences and views but connected with a larger energy. Myrhaug views our self as belonging and living within an energy field of movement, particles and possibilities. To explain our being he draws from research within quantum theory as from knowledge passed on from other cultures as the Maya. Myrhaug is also connecting to other cultural systems where this energy field has been given names: Prana (Sanskrit), Ki (Japan), Chi (Chinese), Akashia (Sanskrit) and Itz (Maya).

Another way of explaining the self came from one of the people that I have interviewed:

I view our self as coming from the same source of energy, an energy dividing itself as we come in to life in this physical world. Within we then carry the connection to our source, as we are beings within a physical body

The connection to our spiritual self is viewed as constant even as we within a physical reality might not experience or understand this connection. These views creates a spiritual understanding of us humans as being part of everything. What we see outside of our selves are reflections of our inner landscape, as what we find within our own selves are a mix of elements relating to our physical and spiritual existence. We are believed to carry within us a connection to our ancestors, to our collective history and to all people and lifeforms and one reason to why we
experience a disconnection to our own self, others and to nature may be because of a trauma.

A trauma is viewed as a consequence from an experience where the soul, or part of the soul, has not managed to cope with a situation and decided to leave the body. It has fled and is not willing to return til the individual has managed to deal with the situation that has happened. When a part of the soul is missing it is described as a "soul-loss" and this state of being can have strong implications for the life of an individual. Implications could be distress, depression, various diseases etc. One of the tasks of the healer is to create the space within the body so that the part that has fled is willing to return. If this can happen a person is then "healed". Trauma is also viewed as a collective experience both when something has happened to a group of people and as people are viewed as connected to each other, to a collective memory, individual experiences are linked with each other even as people are not physically connected.

In speaking about us humans from the beginning of our existence the views on why most people are not experiencing a connection to each other, or carry an awareness of being or knowing that we have this connection, differs among people and is also something that few speak about. Some say that it is part of our human development to experience us as disconnected to each other to step by step move towards a connection, others view it as a result of events unknown to us today but should be seen as a trauma and others express that understanding this completely is of less importance then the actual work of creating an understanding of who we are today, our disconnection to our being in both a spiritual and physical self, to understand where we are coming from, what we carry with us within our own self that is influencing our well-being, our social acts and relations.

In viewing the world that we are living within it is believed that our world contains more then our human experiences. The understanding of our context is more then just a mirror of a human mind. The human mind is a part of everything – shaping our experiences but not the sole source of them. In the world that we live within, that we are a part of, many different forms of existences are believed to exist. The surrounding world contains forms and shapes of energy that is acting separate from our conscious experience. Its a world of spirits and deities, of angels, fairies and many others. Many practitioners speak of three worlds of existence, but others also mention five, seven or more. In the three world understanding there is the middle world where humans live, the under world, and the upper world. There are several different understandings of the construct of these worlds, and humans ability to journey between them – as expressed as one work by the shaman – but I will not go in to further descriptions of these.

The names given by humans to these energies are viewed as culturally shaped – described by people as ways to connect to something that both is a part of our selves – in a spiritual understanding of all being connected – but also as something acting outside of our selves – as we in our physical existence are separated from each other. All life contains a life form, being a specific energy with a pur-
pose for being, and to connect to these and learn from these are a very important part of shamanic practice. To connect with oneself is also viewed as to connect with the wind, the fire, the earth, the spirits of nature and guardian spirits of the bear, wolf, eagle and other energies that all shape our world and existence.

There are several different names given to these specific energies and forms, and it's not been part of my research to collect all these names and the specifics of their attributes or why practitioners relate to one or the other. The aim of this part of the analysis has been to understand the spiritual understandings behind these beliefs and self-definition to further understand the values, goals, visions and issues that people are concerned with today.

4.1.3 Cultural differences

I belong to one culture, but that does not limit me to specific cultural practices of shamanism – a traditional Saami shamanism that is mentioned in old books - I view my culture as a strength, not a limitation, because shamanism is about healing, connecting to oneself and the specific understanding of the world we belong to

In this statement the practitioner is referring to Saami shamanism or noaidie practices that are found in literature texts. Sources that are described as written by missionaries and others outside of the Saami context who took notes, wrote reports and other documents that are available for readers today. These sources are used by some practitioners to find ceremonies and practices of the past that can be revived today but not all view them as thrust worthy or relevant. Some also express opinions like the shaman above that using these texts have for some become a limitation as they would only use in their practices something stemming from their own shamanic culture.

In this statement the cultural practices of Saami shamanism is something related to books, to practices that has been lost in history and sometimes mentioned in written sources. Many Saami practitioners carry these views on shamanic culture as being mostly lost in history through oppression by Church and State, and as some try to rediscover practices by studying texts others turn away from these sources and use contemporary practices learned from other cultures to try to reconnect with the context they live within in the north.

This could be practices relating to connecting with spirits within nature, to relearn the knowledge of medicinal plants and reestablish connections to the Saami ancestors and spirits living within the northern context. That shamanic practices have been completely lost is not something all would agree on, many I have spoken with view shamanic practices as gone underground through the years of oppression and some of the practices being reinterpreted within the Christian faith. But in relation to shamanic culture, of shamanic practices belonging within
a community practice where knowledge has been past on through generations and kept in traditions – the culture is considered lost.

It's not only the Saami practitioners that try to find and learn from written sources about traditional practices, this is also true for many Nordic practitioners. Among the people I have talked with is a clear divide in how the importance of regaining culture is viewed. For some it is very important to reconnect with cultural practices, to reactivate ceremonies that people used to do and reestablish culture. For others it is not that important, culture is then viewed as a resource in learning practices but not as important to reestablish. But regardless of these different views in how to practice today there is an understanding of cultural practices as ways of connecting to one's own self, others, nature and specific energies that have been developed in different areas around the world.

When practitioners speak of cultural differences they express a view on that we can find our differences in the way people want to perform a ceremony and who should conduct it, in the way to perform a healing or a greeting to a specific spirit or energy. Differences are seen in the way people dress, what they eat and not eat, how they pay respect to each other and to the elders. Different cultures live in various landscapes which impacts which plants to use to treat different illnesses, as our individual life stories and the history of our land and people.

Within each culture where shamanic traditions exist we can learn something new about our world and how to connect with the energies surrounding us.

Culture is clearly viewed as something that is dividing people in their specific practices, but the differences are not viewed in a negative way but as possibilities to learn.

Many practitioners express views like this one:

I would not let my culture restrict my actions. I do not have to do or not do something because that is what people always have done.

A general view is that within cultural traditions a great deal of knowledge is being kept, a spiritual knowledge in understandings of nature, of man and of spirits. By learning from other shamanic cultures people can connect with knowledge that has been lost within their own. This is expressed many times, as Saami and Nordic people have lost so many of their cultural practices, a way of connecting and learning is through the meeting of other people who have been able to keep their connection to nature and to the spirits of their land. By learning from other cultures knowledge is being communicated in how to work with specific illnesses in healing, how to perform certain ceremonies and how to connect oneself with the spiritual world.
The importance of connecting with cultural practices is very important to many practitioners in both, as the above statement shows, as culture is viewed as a strength – a knowledge from our ancestors – and for some as an important part of a spiritual healing process from the oppression of culture and shamanic practices that has occurred, and is still is viewed as occurring today. I will return to the value of culture and the aim of connecting to cultural practices in the other sections relating to values and goals. In here, the understanding of culture and cultural differences from a spiritual understanding of our self and our context has been in focus.

4.2. Values and attitudes

During my research values and attitudes have been commonly brought up in discussions in relation to social change and to conflicts. Its been in these discussions as in descriptions, stories, of social engagements and ultimate concerns that values have been most explicitly expressed and attitudes shown. In relation to values Paloutzian (2005) wrote that it is possible for values within the same meaning-system to conflict one another so when I started to encounter these conflicts and saw how values where expressing themselves in the way people reasoned about them I gave this a specific focus to create an opportunity of learning more on the meaning of these values and how they relate to spiritual beliefs.

4.2.1 Value conflicts in relation to culture, tradition, State laws and regulations

At Isogaisa in 2013 a shaman from Alaska expressed how the rules of their government was creating obligations and restrictions on cultural practices of hunting. It implied that what his people had been doing for generations was no longer allowed. He stated:

Restrictions of following traditional ways can be met in two ways - either we obey the new laws or we break the law. By obeying we loose a cultural tradition, a way of being and working on the land of the ancestors. By breaking the law we put ourselves, our family and community at risk by causing conflict with the State, risking high fines and imprisonment

This shaman expressed the conflict within the minds of people, and his understanding of it as a cultural caretaker in his work as a shaman. He raised their questions loud for all of us who listened to think about: Why should we follow rules and regulations put on us by people who have come to our land recently and taken the governance away from us? Why should we, as a people, follow this way of thinking that goes against our culture and which leads to a breaking down of tradition to the next generation?

He expressed the fear of loosing traditions, but also for the children to loose their connection to the land they where living on. A fear that had been communicated
by other speakers at the festival that year. The value placed on these traditions are more than just a value on a tradition, its a value of life – of living in close contact with nature and having an understanding of the rhythm of the year. Of when to hunt, where to do so, and of being in contact with nature. The shaman brought up examples of what had happened in other cultures when traditions were taken away by laws of other people – people forget their knowledge, become disconnected.

A Saami shaman told me on a later occasion about hunting restrictions in Sapmi. To live with the land, knowing its ways and how to be in balance with the animals he expressed as had been of a long traditional cultural heritage past down from generation to generation. People have known when and how to hunt. How to pay respect to the land and the animals. With regulations from the State came the creation of hunting seasons by people who in his eyes completely lacked any knowledge and understanding of the land. To follow such rules he felt was not possible as they did not make any sense to the natural rhythm of the animals. But as they where there, and people had started to obey them and continue to do so over time – knowledge was also lost.

People can follow traditions without understanding them, its just something that they do. But as long as they follow them also a knowledge of their reason is being kept. Why we do something always has a reason, and we can learn so much from looking at our traditions. But as traditions disappear, also the knowledge of why we have them disappear piece by piece. And we find our selves living in a society based on completely different values. So we follow the new rules, breaking with what we have known for generations – that we need to respect nature and keep balance (Saami practitioner)

Many express how people who live within the contemporary society have lost their connection to nature and with that no longer pays respect and value it in the same way as before. This disconnection to nature is also expressed as a goal that will be brought up later in my presentation. Here the focus is on the aspect of values and how a disconnection is viewed as a source of loss of important values within our societies.

The loss of connection to nature and its value for people also has as its consequence that people forget knowledge about nature that has been passed on for many generations.

When people start living by other values that create a disharmony with nature it is not possible just to say that "ok, lets disobey the laws and do as we want" cause then the motives for doing so, the values, have been changed. Then people would create more harm, to create further destruction to the ecosystem.

One man expressed this above statement in relation to the Saami when he talked about how his people have lost their connection to their ancestral worldview. He talked about how people have been influenced by the States economical systems, systems that put a lot of pressure on production and efficiency, as laws and regulations that causes restrictions. The effects he viewed to be that people, themselves, are too caught up in the values of these systems of thought that they have forgotten the traditional ways.
Not all knowledge is forgotten, and not by all people, but he expressed how difficult it is – and almost impossible – to stand against and do things in another way today. "That is why we, as people, first need to reconnect with ourselves... reconnect to the knowledge that we have lost, in order to bring back a harmony between people and the land”. I asked him if he thought that it was truly possible to return to a traditional way of working with the land and nature? No, he replied:

But what is needed is to restore the understanding within people on how we are all connected with nature, with animals and each other, in order to create new systems that can work today. Systems that are based on our own values

In regards to the descriptions on hunting in the above two examples one can notice the relation between values, knowledge and spiritual understandings. There is a clear conflict of values when one group has laws and regulations based within their view on nature and hunting and the other group has their traditions built on their understanding of nature and hunting. The value placed on tradition is expressed as of being a communicator of knowledge based from generations of practices as spiritual understanding of nature itself. Traditions are valued but it is the values and understandings behind a tradition that gives it its value. People I have spoken with express how they would not just follow any tradition because it is a tradition, they need to understand the reason for it – what has created it. The two examples also show two kinds of value conflicts, one within their own culture, their ethnic group, and one with the State laws and regulations. When people value things very differently, and have their understandings of the world as a base for their values, it is a cause of conflict as the shaman described. A conflict both within the minds of the people in how to act, and in relation to the society that has created the laws.

This personal conflict of values in relation to society I have heard expressed many times in regards to different topics. As the hunting above relates to a value and view on nature people have also mentioned how the values of nature clash with State policies on mining and other exploitations of nature. There is a common view that nature is being viewed by their governments as a natural resource that people can use as they please. "The earth does not belong to us”, a woman said, "We belong to the earth. We have no right to do the things we do the earth, to treat it in such a destructive way!"

People I have talked with express what they do with these conflicts of values in different ways. The shaman from Alaska expressed that the choices where to either obey or break. From other conversations and seminars I have been to I would add another option: to try to create change.

To try to create a change of values in their societies I have heard several different stories of social engagements and activities. A woman I spoke with told me on her work in trying to create more awareness on social issues and values, placing more value on the need for a value change then on the need to change spiritual path. In her eyes its not important from where you find your reasons to your value of nature and other people – its the values themselves that are important.
In shamanism there is an implicit critique of industrial society and in my version of shamanism it is an explicit critique. For me shamanism is about questioning and to exceed the industrial society. Therefore my aim with this book is about how one can liberate from a western way of thinking to create liberating zones within, and contribute to healing of the self, others and the landscape. The person who walks the shamanic path do not gladly point fingers against others and that is also my aim with this book. I do hope that it may inspire many practitioners of shamanism to walk their own path, to take responsibility for their own liberation and play a positive role for Mother Earth (Eriksson 2014:5)

A similar comment was made by another practitioner who was speaking about values in relation to other religions:

I would say that religion does not hurt people... people hurt other people. To blame a book, a text, or another thing created by other people is to put responsibility for our actions outside of our own selves. A state, a religion, a political party, an organization... is a group of people that can promote values and beliefs, but it is people themselves that perform the acts of violence, of oppression or of love and understanding. A religion, as any other structure in our societies can promote or stand up against any value or belief – and it is people who go along, play the game, refuse or remain in silence. Of course structures can be strong forces to stand up against, it has caused many peoples lives not to follow man made structures – but when you look within religions you can find in each one of them both messages of peace and love as messages of oppression and violence – so who is the one choosing which message to follow?

The conflict of values is not commonly viewed as a conflict between cultures or religions, cause within cultures and religions people see that there are numerous values – its a conflict between values themselves. As practitioners have expressed many times, they feel more at home with people from other cultures and ethnic groups then their own – it all depends on values and attitudes of life.

The value conflict that is in relation to other people, social systems, religious institutions or something else is also expressed as a very individual and personal value conflict within. When you hold values that are not in a majority within your society, not valued in social regulations and systems of laws, it may be a struggle in knowing where to place one self in relation to everything. An understanding of all beings linked to each other in a spiritual way creates a sense of community. It also creates a big division between that belief and living within a world where people are disconnected from each other and nature. As it creates a value within, and a sense of responsibility to live up to in relation to nature and society – it is also expressed as a challenge.

People I have met express a search for kindred spirits, people who share the same values as they do. At a gathering like Isogaisa this is found, and a community is being shaped. A spiritual community. Community is given a very high value when practitioners speak of their sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, mothers and
fathers. But also within this community there are conflicts of values and in this next section I will bring up some of these.

4.2.2. Value conflicts within the shamanic community

At Isogaisa in 2013, in a smaller lavvu that had been put up behind the main octagon, Eirik Myrhaug was holding a seminar on his shamanic work as a healer. Many people had gathered and when I came the lavvu was already full so I sat down close by in the grass together with some other people who had not been able to enter. After some time we saw a man leaving the lavvu and a little bit later the talk ended and people started to leave. Some sat down together with us, quite distressed, and told us what had happened.

During his talk Myrhaug had made a remark on Ayahuasca, he had called it a drug, not belonging to Nordic/Saami practice of shamanism and something to stay away from. One man, the one we had seen leave the lavvu, had stood up and exclaimed that he was not going to listen to “crap like this” and had left. The people who sat down with us said that they felt really uncomfortable, but that they had not known what to do in this situation. If they should have stayed, shown their respect to Myrhaug who is one of the practitioners who is considered an elder and well known healer, or to leave together with the man who had raised his voice. They had decided to stay, but feeling now that they should have walked out. I asked them their own opinion and they said that they felt that the comment was very disrespectful towards the Peruvian people who where there. They said that they could understand that this is Myrhaug’s personal opinion but as an elder he also needs to show respect towards people from other cultures.

Later in the day I met with one of the participants from Peru and asked if he had been at this seminar. He said that none from his group had attended but they had been told by others what had happened. He explained that in Peru the medicinal plant of Ayahuasca is sacred. Its the medicine of the people, for many its the only medicine available to them and its something deeply rooted within their hearts and culture. He was deeply disturbed by what had happened and felt very offended. Another man who joined the conversation said that he could not understand how a shaman does not respect a sacred medicine. ”All around our world we have access to many different medicinal plants that we can use to heal” he said and expressed how he could not understand how a practitioner could say that one of the sacred plants was a drug.

In the following days this was discussed in several different places. The views I heard seemed to go between people understanding Myrhaug’s view, comments where made on that Ayahuasca was not a plant that grew up in the north, had never been a part of Nordic practices, and also that it was illegal by the State laws to use it in ceremonies. Others spoke of disrespect towards other cultures, that all sacred plants (plants that are known for curing illness or healing trauma) should be respected regardless of where they grow in nature, and even if they follow State laws and regulations in their own practices they felt that there needs to be a
change in view on medicinal plants. The discussions continued from this event to enter in to the field of what is allowed by the State, the biomedical view on illness and the monopoly on medicine by pharmaceutical companies.

At Isogaisa in 2015 I listened to another seminar with Myrhaug where he also brought up Ayahuasca and other medicinal plants. At this point he did not call them a drug, but he expressed how he felt that breathing was as effective as using a plant in healing work. This remark felt to explain a little better his opinion, that we could reach the same results on our own as working with a plant. That the healing process, to be able to connect with your self, is not dependent on using any external remedy. This view is shared by others, and on another occasion a shaman from north America made a similar comment about peyote. That comment also raised a lot of discussion and what people expressed the most was that they felt unsure on how to act when an elder express such an opinion, they felt that they did not want to disrespect as they felt themselves being disrespected by the remarks.

From a spiritual viewpoint, expressed by all I have spoken with as explained clearly within all material I have analyzed, nature is considered sacred. Plants, animals, stones as other parts of nature all are expressions of energies that practitioners connect with to learn and use in their practices. What divides in these discussions is the way to do so as in where a practitioner places themselves in relation to different cultural practices, State laws and regulations. The view on medicinal plants that have been labeled illegal substances by State law has been the major conflict of value that I have come across among practitioners in the north. The example I presented on this conflict is expressing the views by Myrhaug and the reaction by others within the community, but it needs to be clear that this view is shared by many practitioners and even as its not been my intention within my research to count voices for each side I would estimate that there is an equal divide.

The discussion on medicinal plants, sacred medicine or a drug, touches several values and issues. Some express how a plant that is considered sacred with great healing properties have been labeled a drug and illegal by the State – what do we do then? To obey the law is a general view among the people I have met and talked with, but in addition to that some also suggests the need of changing these laws. For people to be able to practice their profession as healers, as for people to be able to receive treatments according to their spiritual beliefs and knowledge.

Others make the point that they feel that they want to work together with the existing laws, to work around them and to adjust their practices accordingly. As Myrhaug points out they agree that there are other ways of conducting healing work, that can be as much effective and can be carried out without breaking or changing the State laws.

In discussions were also brought up how both in Norway and Sweden it is the biomedical system that is accepted and only some other treatments are considered alternatives and approved. The consequence of belonging to another view on health and treatment is that these treatments are not an option if you are dependent on State support and insurance policies. Alternative practices are not illegal, if not by
using some substances or plants that been labeled drugs, but at the same time not available in the same way as biomedical treatments.

In Sweden there has recently been a court case involving a sacred plant, San Pedro, and a Saami shaman, Jungle Svonni. What happened to him and his story is also related to this topic as he has become a public voice of the use of sacred medicine and of the concern for changing State laws and regulations on these practices. I made a longer interview with him in Jan 2015 to create an understanding of this story.

In 2011 Svonni had made the decision to return to Sweden after spending several years in Peru. He had there gone through training in medicinal plants and been working at an Ayahuasca center as a shaman, or curandero as they are called in Peru. In preparing for his return Svonni sent a package with dried San Pedro cacti to Sweden. It is one of the medicinal plants he worked with and one that is legal in Sweden. But not long after his return custom officers entered the apartment where he stayed in Umeå, arrested him on charges of having the chemical variation of the cacti in possession and detained him for 18 days. He was there taken to the interrogation room and charged with the intent to smuggle 1 kilo of synthetic mescaline. Information on his arrest went to the press and was portrayed as that they had intercepted a branch of international mafia.

This event caused a lot of media attention and Svonni was dragged in to a court process that would take almost 2 years until he was finally cleared innocent of all charges and could collect the medicine that had been taken from him. The court case gave him a lot of unwanted attention and caused issues for the beginning of his stay in Sweden. At first he could not leave Umeå to return home, further on he had problems in finding a place to live in Kiruna due to the reputation of his charges and there was also a discussion within the shamanic community and a clear divide among people how they viewed him and his case. Through social media Svonni could though gather a lot of support for his case and create connections with people that where positive to his work. His struggles with the court case has also made him in to a public figure of the practice of shamanism and Sami shamanism in the north. He was invited as a speaker at a EU Human Rights conference in Warsawa, hosted by the Inter group on Freedom of Religion and Belief and Religious Tolerance in 2014.

Svonni’s story has highlighted the issue of the use of medicinal plants, and what is considered legal and illegal by the State laws. That he was cleared from all charges, as a shaman, is also seen as a victory and important step towards more tolerance and acceptance of shamanic practices in Sweden.

There are several other people who believe that changes are needed within the legal systems and social systems of healthcare. What people express the most is that it is not an easy question to work with. Many express concern about speaking up publicly about the use of medicinal plants that are considered illegal by the States as they have families, work, and social relations that they value and do not wish to enter conflict with.
That using these plants are not allowed at Isogaisa, that is a completely substance free gathering (including alcohol and other plants that grow in the north that both are legal and illegal by the State) is not an issue as there is a respect towards the people who do organize the event. The people I have spoken with are in agreement on that the use of these medicinal plants for individual healing purposes is also a work that is not carried out in the public space of a gathering. The issue that divide is within the importance of these plants for healing illness, the respect of the use of them within other cultures, where to place one self in relation to others of opposite opinion and towards the laws and regulations by the States.

4.2.3 To pay respect, take responsibility and community values

As there are conflicts of values that divide people there are also understandings of these conflicts that people bring in to the discussions. Within the community people express how all do carry with them different views and values but these do not have to be in conflict with each other. At Isogaisa ceremonies and seminars are carried out by shamanic practitioners from many different traditions who describe their way to conduct their work. During the festival people participate in ceremonies held by practitioners from other cultures and there is a focus on sharing and creating understandings. People are viewed as belonging to the same path but walking it in their individual way, and that is something people express as important to be respected.

A man I spoke with highlighted this in the image of the sacred fire that burns in the middle of the main octagon during the festival:

When I enter the lavvu I walk up to the fire, pick up a piece of wood, take a moment, and place it on the flames... When I stand in front of the fire I can think about all the things I am grateful for, or I can think about something difficult that I need help with, or something that I need to let go of... then I lay my wood on the pile and say my thanks to Spirit for bringing me here

He continued talking about how this is what people do when they come to Isogaisa:

We all bring with us everything we carry with us, everything we are grateful for – the joy of being together and sharing ceremony – but also everything else, our own conflicts and drama. The fire is our center, and as we place pieces of wood on the fire to gather our strength we are also sharing all our sadness and conflicts. But this is ok, its a part of our process. If people did not have any conflicts they would never reflect on their own understandings

On a later occasion he added:

We need to face each other with respect and humility. We all have our own issues that we are trying to solve, the busyness of life and our past trauma. It is time we face that, heal this, and start focusing on helping others. But towards the people we work we should never loose our respect for their specific path, their journey
What he brought up I have heard mentioned many times before in talks about peoples different values. Expressions on how people need to understand where they are coming from, reflect on their own process, and pay respect towards other peoples processes. But on the other hand people also need to take responsibility for their understandings and act accordingly.

The level of responsibility placed on people seem to go in accordance to who they are themselves. People who are outside of the community are more viewed as trapped in trauma or disconnected from themselves – they are responsible for their actions but also caught unaware in processes – on the far other side is the shaman – the one who knows and sees peoples pains and can act as a healer – on this person a far greater responsibility for what they say and how they act is placed both by themselves and by others. This could be seen quite clearly in the reactions towards Myrhaug’s expression on Ayahuasca.

Within the shamanic community I have met people who have expressed how they have turned to shamanic practices as they experience these as being more related to their own inner values and experience of the world. Belonging to the shamanic community they express as a feeling of ”coming home”. What is found is a community of others who share the same understanding of the world, a spiritual belonging, as people who share the same experience of living within a world of social structures that are not supporting them and built on their values. In shamanism, with other practitioners, they experience a community of like-minded thinkers, and from this sense of community arises a sense of belonging and strength. Within the community I have also met practitioners who have all their lives been involved with these kind of practices, in different cultural settings, and who have step by step started to work more openly in healing practices and communication of their views to others. There are still many who feel that they cannot speak openly about their own spiritual views, who are feeling that the communities that they live within would not be accepting them and are afraid of consequences. People also express a change in the surrounding community, of more acceptance and more opportunities, but that changes are coming slowly, too slowly.

In a session held by a shaman at Isogaisa 2013 I listened to him telling the story of his own spiritual process. He grew up knowing from a young age that he was within the journey of becoming a shaman. He was later trained with teachers from his community and also came in to contact with spiritual teachers. For a long time in his youth he experienced a struggle with being in a position of power in regards to other people. He could see in to people, in to their past history and new things about them that others did not. People where drawn to him for help, with illness or mental instabilities, and especially women where attracted to him. For many years he found himself taking advantage of this position til he came to an age where he realized what he was doing. He could see that he was involving himself in a way that was not ethical and without taking responsibility for who he was and his position as a healer. He did learn through his journey to take final responsibility for who he was and from that knowledge he could work better and more in harmony with others.

The story by this man I have found descriptions of from other shamans and shows how spiritual growth is viewed as a process. Belonging within a spiritual practice
people continue to grow with time, becoming of more awareness of their own self and how this self is reflected to the outside world. The story also shows humility as it shows the struggles of leadership and not taking advantage of a position as a leader – and how the internal process is very important for each individual. “By taking responsibility for our own selves we can take responsibility for others”, a woman said once. The story travels back to the spiritual understandings of how we as humans are seen as creating our own worlds through the understandings we have within us. By growing, learning more, we change the reality in which we are and with understandings come responsibility. In this way people understand conflicts of values as tools in a process of learning, not in a way of peacefully accepting them but as a part of life.

4.3. Goals and overall purpose

When I have researched and analyzed goals I have come across several different goals that at first appear to be quite separated but in further research also are expressed as related to each other. I have tried in my analysis to look at them both individually as together with each other to be able to understand them as well as possible.

4.3.1 To understand where we are coming from

To understand where we are coming from I have found expressed both in the way of creating awareness of things that have happened to people individually and collectively in the past. A goal for individual practices is to create an understanding of their own story which is done both by spiritual practices such as the soul journey, by reading books and doing research.

This is explained as important because what is carried within might be a cause of soul loss and reason for illness, issues in social and personal relationships as what hinders people from a state of physical and mental well-being. To heal a soul loss, a trauma, it is emphasized that we need to understand where we are coming from – what incident or incidents in our past that has created trauma – in order to make our peace and release the memories that are blocking us from being whole. In this way the goal to understand the past is the same as a goal to heal, to create awareness of ones self, others, and create social change. The view on the past as filled with traumatic experiences is also found in collective practices that are focused on bringing awareness. To connect with a shared memory in the past that is within the collective memory causing a soul loss.

The work of creating awareness of the past I have seen at Isogaisa each year when I have attended different talks and seminars with shamanic practitioners from North and South America, New Zealand, Mexico and different parts of Europe. People share memories from their individual life stories as memories past down through generations of oppression, structured abuse and discrimination of their ethnic group, spiritual beliefs and values. Sharing memories and stories people express as a way of connecting with each other, of creating the possibility to relate
to each other’s history, support each other in a common struggle of liberation and bring awareness to global issues that we all need to work on.

A decolonization of Sapmi is here related to a decolonization of our minds, our way of thinking about our own selves and our possibilities to create change. With the loss of community and spiritual understanding – people have become separated from themselves, powerless and traumatized – this is what is in need of healing (Saami practitioner)

The issues people express within the Saami society are of separation and silence, of low self esteem and not feeling that any change can be made. These current issues are viewed as consequences of hundreds of years of oppression by the States, the Church, and people who have acted accordingly with their saying. To understand these issues people express how they work in different ways, some focus on their own life story, their community or expand across the globe to understand the different systems of thought that are viewed as reasons to our way of experiencing and thinking about our worlds today.

In an interview a man said:

It's not possible to understand everything, as I am trying to learn what has happened in the past it feels like the more I dig I find another layer. But what is important is not to get stuck, I am trying to learn what has happened to understand the patterns that it has created within my own self, in my family and within my community. Step by step. But it is not an easy process, and many people get angry and upset with me for raising questions. But I feel that they are important to be shared, and when I look at the young people today I get both a lot of hope and feel a lot of distress. Some are waking up, trying to create change, while others have taken on the structures of being from their parents and are stuck in these same patterns. But I am hopeful. I do believe that we also will find our way even though it takes time.

Many people I have spoken with have been or are researching history. They follow current debates on historical accounts in hope to find out more about why something has happened in the past, and what actually did happen. The man who made the comment above has a focus within his own life-story. But also within the research he is conducting he is looking at the history of the Saami, how the relationships between different groups have developed over time, how State regulations and laws have impacted Saami people. When he learns something new he raises the topic with his family, friends as with other people he meets. In this way he is sharing his own process of understanding with others and also tries to help them to start to reflect on what they carry with them. Something that he, and many others I have spoken with express strongly, is that we can not let what has happened in the past create our future.

We can't get stuck in being victims, it's a kind of role that many people stay living in... but it makes them powerless. Yes, many horrible things has happened to us Saami, that has also happened to many other people around the world, but we need to understand and make peace.
with our past if we want any chance of creating a better future (Saami practitioner)

A majority of people I have spoken with and texts I have read are by practitioners with a Saami ethnicity, but the issues Saami are struggling with are not isolated to one ethnic group – same issues are expressed as affecting us all even as they are experienced and expressed differently. To understand the past, what we carry with us, is the same goal for all practitioners. As focus is directed differently people in the north share the same collective stories though the memory and relation to them are different.

Discussions raised as necessary to look closer at in our past enter Saami politics, race biology, mining industry, western democracy, the development of capitalism, and political as social structures. These issues are very connected to goals in the way of creating awareness and understanding. Another issue, to give as an example, is the loss of culture. This creates the goal to regain culture, remember culture, through creating awareness about our past:

I do not have a culture, everything has been taken away from me.
People seem to think that we white people have just appeared out of nothing! We did have a culture, we came from a land and we also belong here in the North..

When people from a Saami ethnicity speak about the loss of culture in the north it seems to be depending on where they come from in the area, what decisions their parents and grandparents made on keeping traditions and language to what extent they have experienced oppression or loss of culture. Among the Nordic practitioners it is expressed as in the statement above, as a complete loss of tradition and culture and a creation, dating back a very long time, of becoming ”Norwegian” or ”Swedish”.

The goal here is to look closer at the past and questions raised are: what has actually happened and how is that effecting me within my own life? Are the patterns of my family making me act in specific ways? What about my own culture? Do we as people carry things with us that is making us think in specific patterns, make choices in certain ways?

I have spoken to many people about what it means to make peace, to let go of the past to release its power. What people say is that making peace is not about forgetting, or forgiving, its about acknowledging what has happened – ”to look it in the eyes” as one man said. When something that has happened is recognized its possible to let go of the power that it has over our being, its a process of healing that is connected with the goal of connecting to, or creating awareness of, our own self in a spiritual way.

4.3.2 To connect with our self

Each year at Isogaisa there is a workshop in joijk. I have attended on two occasions and been speaking to several people who have participated. When people
explain what it means to joijk it is expressed as having both a cultural and spiritual meaning but these two are also very connected to each other. The act of joijking as a spiritual practice is explained as by using your own voice you are connecting yourself with a specific part of the world we live in – a tree, an animal, a person, a part of history, a geographical space etc. Its different from singing about something, about something that has happened as in telling a story about a person or something that has happened – the joijk is viewed as you actually connecting yourself with what you are within and transfer that sound.

In a cultural perspective to recover the practice of joijk after a long period of joijk being forbidden is expressed by practitioners as healing a collective soul loss. Joijk was an important part of shamanic practices that was taken away but now can be regained. Ailo Gaup expressed once that to bring joijk in to the Church he views as a part of a collective healing process, of reinstating a traditional practice where it belongs, in the sacred room. To joijk has a deep spiritual meaning in shamanic practices both as an individual practice and as a part of ceremony where the joijk can be used as a tool in a shamans journey. In a shamanic journey the sound is viewed as a lifeline, a thread on which the shaman can journey and later is able to return his/her consciousness to the body.

Another practice that is described with the goal to connect people is the use of the drum. In a similar way to joijk the sound of the drum is described as a way to focus attention, to journey within and connect oneself for a specific purpose. The drum is used by practitioners in individual healing sessions, in collective ceremonies and other activities. In a healing or ceremony the drum is used to both call for the guidance of specific energies – spirits, animals, guides as others – as for people to travel within to connect themselves to memories in the past and make spiritual journeys.

To beat the drum and to create a drum is also viewed as a part of a collective healing process. As the drums where forbidden, collected and burnt by authorities, the meaning of bringing this practice back is viewed as to regain another piece that has been lost. There are several people who are involved in creating drums and at Isogaisa there has some years been a workshop in drum-making where participants in the end have initiated their drums in a ceremony. "The world needs more drums" a man expressed in one of these ceremonies.

Some practitioners do not paint their drums, others do in various ways. The symbols used are both contemporary images and ones practitioners have found in old text descriptions of drums and on stone carvings. The use of symbols is very individual and personal but the way people have described their choosing of specific symbols is connected to their own spiritual guides, and their own way of connecting to the surrounding world. To use it in practices is though as described above, to connect and direct oneself awareness.

With both the practice of joijk and the drum practitioners describe how to connect oneself with a practice belonging to a time prior to oppression is a part of a healing process. To connect with a state of freedom that lies beyond cultural and systematic oppression creates a liberation of this oppression. To do this work is expressed as becoming a part of a collective healing process, learning a tool to connect with ones own self and be able to assist others on their journey.

These two practices are viewed as belonging within Saami cultural practices of shamanism but available to all other practitioners as well. There are several other
practices to connect with oneself that people from different cultural and ethnic groups are using such as breathing techniques and meditations. One viewed as belonging within Nordic traditional practices is sejd that is described as a way of both placing one's awareness in a special state as to come in to contact with spiritual guides and energies to receive specific knowledge that the practitioner asks for. Practitioners choose different ways to achieve this goal, belonging within a cultural practice or not. The practice itself is important in terms of collective healing but the goal is of main importance for individual practice.

4.3.3 To connect with others

We could view the time we are living within with fear of all our differences – or we decide to embrace our differences and learn from each other. Our different experiences of the world all contain knowledge, if we maintain a separation we will cease to learn – our minds will be narrowly directed – by embracing other people's experiences the opportunity of healing is created (Expression at Isogaisa 2014, shamanic practitioner)

In the mornings at Isogaisa people gather for a morning greeting, a greeting to the sun of a new day. The ceremony is carried out by different people each morning, from different cultures and traditions. The ceremony is made to awake to a new day, place your focus on what is to come and remember all the things that you are grateful for. For your life, for the morning sun, for your brothers and sisters, for the river, the moon and all spirits within our world.

In the festival of Isogaisa I have taken part in different kinds of ceremonies. Some by practitioners from the north, and also with practitioners from other cultures and countries. In other ceremonies people meet and create together a ceremony for a specific reason. In the opening ceremony of Isogaisa all shamans and active participants in the festival (who has been invited to do ceremony, workshops or give lectures) participate. A mix of voices, clothing, cultures, languages and traditions circling around the sacred fire that is lit by the mother of Isogaisa, a grandmother from Russia, who has given her blessing to the festival.

In the exchanges that have been occurring at the festival of Isogaisa the sharing and learning about cultural practices have held an important place in the gathering. Shamanic practitioners from various cultures have been invited to speak and share of their knowledge, joined ceremonies have been created and many seminars and group conversations have been about cultural practices. A group of older Nenetz women shared a theater at Isogaisa in 2013 where they sang and showed by movement the traditional crafts from their culture. A Saami man, from Sweden, who was sitting next to me made the comment on how he could see the practices he remembered from his mother in their movements, even though he could not understand the language itself it was a very emotional experience for him.

In the cultural exchange project between Isogaisa and a Latvian organization the importance of connecting to each others cultures has also been explained in different ways. As a beginning the connection itself between two cultures, sharing of practices and ways of relating to the world creates a space for learning both simil-
arities and differences. The history of the Saami and Latvian people is very different, as the current situation today, but among practitioners who are focused on bringing back traditions and spiritual understandings from the past they work in similar ways. Repeated views are that when stories are shared other people reflect, compare and discuss.

To connect with other people as a goal is about learning from each other, creating awareness but also about a necessary call for change in human behavior towards each other for all of us to be able to coexist together in peace.

4.3.4 To connect with nature

We are nature and may need to learn how to return to a state of balance both with our inner and outer nature. It is few who would contest such a statement in our present time of so many human-made wars and crises. The war against nature is the only one that each one of us must stop for the sake of ourselves and our fellow man. New understandings, new approaches and actions must be made, and inspiration for this could be found in each shamanic tradition (Ailo Gaup 2007:10-11)

Ailo Gaup (2007) describes in his text how within us all exists an exchange with our surrounding nature, regardless of our thoughts and understandings we as humans are a nature phenomena. We do not need to go out in nature as we are nature. We exist in a correlation, a relation between wind and waves, the roots and the earth. The animals we carry in our genes, within our temperament, and our goal is to take hold of this heritage and control it to reach the height of human capability.

For people to connect with nature is the same as to connect with our self as the belief is that there really is no separation between the two. When people speak about creating a connection with nature it is viewed as important in relation to the structures we now have within our societies. In society structures the value of nature is expressed as coming both from a Christian perspective of us being caretakers of nature, instead of a part of nature, and a capitalistic political system where nature is viewed as a resource to be used and exploited.

There are several issues of concern related to this disconnection where economic and social structures, hunting, protection of species and the destruction of farmland are some of them most commonly expressed. A major issue many people are involved with in the north concerns the mining industry and I have listened to many discussions relating to this subject. At Isogaisa in 2014 a couple of people came who had been part of the demonstration in Gallok against the exploitation of an area by a foreign mining company. People had followed this event as it had been lifted up in social media and got covered both in television and on radio by reporters. What was seen there was that it had involved people for various reasons, there where nature activists from the south and people from the area who where both Swedish and Saami. The engagement of these people was expressed as of value as a part of the work in creating awareness of issues that are causing damage to our ecosystem.
In ceremony at Isogaisa both in 2014 and 2015, two practitioners, performed a ceremony together for the Earth, to give strength and protection against the exploitation of mining companies in both Norway and Sweden. To raise awareness of the politics of the two States people where sharing stories of what had happened in their areas of living as some shared memories from the Alta conflict in the 80s.

There are several different practices I have come across in my research that are focused specifically on connecting with plants, with trees, with animals and other spirits that are viewed as helpers in learning about our reality and our own selves. The meaning of these, the goals expressed in relation, are of: healing a trauma, to learn something specifically about something, to assist in creating change, to help others, as to assist our whole world to change our relation to nature so that we have a possibility to survive. While some express a need for social activism to save nature from destruction others focus on an individual engagement – to create a life where you “walk in beauty” (Gaup 2009) and find ways to live in harmony with your own self and nature.

4.4. Conclusions

The aim of this research has been to view how practitioners of contemporary shamanism relate to the sacred, and how the meaning of the sacred is expressing itself in self-definition, attitudes, beliefs, values, overall purposes, goals and ultimate concerns. My aim has been to try to understand how the sacred is shaping life – in acts, thoughts and relations.

Through my research on the specific research questions I have gathered material that have been presented above. Here I will present the conclusions I have been able to make in answering my main research question:

What kind of understanding of contemporary shamanism among practitioners in the northern context can be made by researching meaning expressions with the theoretical framework by Paloutzian(2005)?

My conclusions are:

Shamanism is defined by practitioners as a spiritual worldview. Its presented as an understanding of how people, nature and all forms of existence belong together and is within our individual experience of the world perceived as separate.

Shamanism is viewed both as a spiritual worldview belonging to our ancestors and a contemporary spiritual worldview:

As a spiritual worldview of our ancestors, shamanism today is viewed as carrying the same beliefs and attitudes - an understanding of how we belong with each other and with nature - as in the past prior to Christian missionary. The
knowledge that has been lost through history can be recovered by connecting to
the spirits of our ancestors, as connecting with other cultures and people who have
been able to keep spiritual practices and traditions alive in their communities.

As a contemporary shamanic worldview, it is not the practices themselves that
define what is, or what is not, shamanism. Its defined by the way people relate to
the world, to the sacred.

The sacred is not something people relate to as external to themselves, it is
viewed as internal and integrated with all forms of existance outside of
themselves. This means that the sacred is not something people relate to, its the
existence of being itself. Our experience of our self is though divided with a
spiritual and fysical nature – a mix of angel and wolf (Gaup 2007).

What is held sacred is life itself, and how life is manifesting itself in forms of
nature, people, spirits, other beings and lifeforms. The names given to these spirits
and beings in different languages and cultures are viewed as different ways of
expressing the same reality to understand and to connect. Shamanic practices of
healing illness and trauma, as the making of ceremonies, are in a similar way
viewed as different ways of connecting with the self, nature, and spirits.

This understanding of the sacred is a part of daily life. It comes forth in how to
relate to the own self, to nature and other people. It comes forth in discussions on
social issues. It creates goals of creating a connection with spirit/spirits, to
understand what has happened in the past and how traumas are affecting daily
life. It leads to values of community, nature and brother/sisterhood.

Who we are as individuals is viewed as in a relation between where we are
coming from and where we aim to go. With us we carry our own individual
history of experiences that has occured during our life. Our bodies tell of these
experiences with scars, illness or health – in our thoughts are our memories of
what has happened and could have happened – in our emotional experiences we
carry our reactions in forms of joy, sadness, anger, happiness etc.

In our relation to other people we bring with our own history as we interact,
assume, try to exchange etc. The view on our personal history is not just as we are
carrying a history that began at birth and will end with our last breath, history is
viewed as a continuum from previous life-times. All that is experienced within this
life we are now living is connected with our roots. The views I have heard of this
are expressed in different ways, some as we carry the memory of our ancestors,
others as a collection of various life-times spent in different cultures, communities
or worlds and others express it as more being a part of a collective being.

Our own specific manifestation of the energy that we are is what creates
experiences within this life. In this way we are carriers of both individual and
collective traumas, experiences that have caused a soul loss, that we need to
create awareness of and heal. The things we are able to view in our societies
today, as states of illness and mental health problems, are viewed as consequences
of past traumas like oppression against culture, spiritual beliefs, and individual
life events.
To connect with the sacred, heal traumas, practitioners search for ways and methods within their own culture, as within other cultures. Methods and practices are paths towards the same goal which creates an openness towards the individual choices people make. There is not only one way, but several ways to reach these goals.

To find new ways, deepen the understanding of life, as to learn what has been lost in the northern traditions of shamanism due to oppression, practitioners have a goal of connecting with other people. This also creates awareness of the situation for people around the world, creates networks and builds support for social engagements.

To create awareness of the past, as of oppressive structures that are limiting peoples possibilities to live according to their own spiritual beliefs and values, have been noticed as of major concern. As most concern relates to local issues, through connecting with others at gatherings and social networks these concerns are also global.

As practitioners value community, sisterhood and brotherhood, there is little acceptance for systems and social structures, both based within religions and other worldviews, that keep seperating people and are upholding our disconnection to nature and to eachother.

The values held by practitioners come in great contrast to societies, like Sweden and Norway, where individual values, economical structures are viewed as causing harm to the natural environment. In these structures laws and systems are held which cause harm to individual well-being and life opportunities.

Many practitioners express a personal value conflict within themselves in relation with other people, social structures, and within the shamanic community. But within the community there is also an understanding of values and conflicts as ways of learning, of self-development and tools to understand the issues we carry with us from the past. It is within conflicts that values, assumptions etc. are highlighted and the possibility of healing them is created.

To understand the past, what is causing the existance of political and social structures, and what we carry within us that limits our view on our possibilities and health, is one of the major goals expressed. To create this understanding is viewed as creating a process of liberation from collective and individual soul loss.

The social issues that people are faced with today, both individually and collectively, are viewed as causes from our disconnection to our spiritual reality, to our own selves, to each other and to nature. It is therefore an aim of shamanic practice to create a connection. This is carried out in various ways: through spreading of information on social issues, history, politics and spiritual worldview as in other social engagements such as creating gatherings, ceremonies, writing texts, arranging workshops etc. There are also practitioners who choose not to engage in public and social activities, who choose to stand outside of mainstream
social systems in various degrees and view their spiritual belonging as a path with an aim to ”walk in beauty” (Gaup 2007).

As there is a shared understanding among practitioners of that we all carry structures from our past that we need to work on, what separates is the way people view these issues. The different ways of healing them, and where people are within their own process. The most frequent issues from our past that are brought up is the relation that practitioners have to the Christian church, to the State and how these two institutions have impacted peoples way of thinking about themselves, their relation to each other and to nature. As seen in the goal of understanding our past experiences, these experiences are viewed as consequences for what we experience today. But how they are linked is viewed very dependent on our own life story, who we are and what has affected us. In a spiritual perspective what we are concerned with today is also related to what we in our own selves need to work on, heal, or let go of in our own lives.

To heal is not expressed as forgetting or saying that what has happened in the past is ok – healing is acknowledging, facing what has occurred and understanding how it has affected us. Healing is not being trapped by the past in thought and emotional patterns – it is liberating from the past, learning from it and working from it to create a better future.
Chapter 5 Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the theory I have worked from, the methods choosen, the relation my research has to previous research, contribution and give a closing reflection.

5.1 Theory

My intention from the beginning of my research was to use the theoretical perspectives as guides in the search for meaning expressions and as standing points in how to relate to research methods and focus the gathering of material.

To work with Pargaments (2009) view on spirituality I found very helpful in the way of understanding the processes that we as people are within. Park (2005) also added to this understanding with showing how it is very difficult to provide answers to questions on meaning. It would have been impossible for me to walk around asking people: what is the meaning of shamanism for you?

The theoretical perspectives shaped my research in the view of the sacred as being a part of life that lies behind acts, expressions of thoughts and engagement. A meaning-system that is functioning out of our daily consious awareness but shapes our goals and attitudes towards other people as our understanding of our self and the world we live within. In relation to the material that I gathered, the views people had of the world, I found these perspectives easy to work with. It is very difficult to say if there is some aspect that is not included as the theory is not making any spiritual claims but rather focuses on how we create meaning.

I found it very interesting to work with the frame by Paloutzian (2005). As it was a guide in my research process it was during the times after a fieldstudy, when I was going through my material, that I worked most closely with it. Going through all notebooks and searching for different expressions and how they where relating to other values and beliefs. From what I could see during this research I found it very valuable to try to divide aspects of meaning. I could see that a belief, like the view on the self, was related to several values, goals, aims and concerns – sometimes a challenge to seperate – but it also gave new perspectives in trying to separate them.

5.2 Method

My choice of conducting this research with ethnographic methods I choose as it seemed to be the best way to research the views held by practitioners. To get to
know the context properly, as to be able to relate and understand their perspectives better. I found this method very interesting to work with. It suits me well as a researcher as I enjoy meeting people, have conversations, listen to people share their stories, and be within different spaces and learn by experience rather than reading about a subject. On this subject there was never the choice of conducting research by only reading texts either. I could not find previous research that had been made on meaning expressions, and if I had chosen a pure literature study on books made by shamanic practitioners my research would have been limited to the practitioners who write, or have had the opportunity to be published. In this way I was able to meet many different practitioners, especially at the gathering of Isogaisa.

In choosing Isogaisa as my beginning point of research gave me a way to meet people from various countries and contexts. Specifically practitioners from both Sweden and Norway who are involved in shamanistic practices. It was a way of meeting people, connect and learn.

A limitation I found during my research is that not all practitioners attend Isogaisa, some attend other gatherings and some do not attend gatherings at all. In that way the practitioners I have met are very socially active, they are all involved in the community in some ways. That is also something positive as it was practitioners I wanted to meet and learn from, not people who are feeling drawn towards or are curious. As Isogaisa is in a quite remote space in the north I was given the impression that it is only people who are very interested who attend.

To use different methods is part of ethnographic research and during the process I felt that it was a very good way of making sure that things had been understood correctly. When something was not clear I could follow it up with questions, and when I found something written in a text I could on a later occasion bring this up in a discussion, or conversation, to hear other views. I found this method very interesting to work with as I was not only looking at what people did, their acts, but was also searching for the meanings behind these acts, the reason to why people were doing what they were doing. To look at both acts, and their meanings, both listen to what people say and find out more by asking questions – this was a very interesting combination that served my aims of wanting to understand shamanism in the views of the practitioners.

As using different methods was part of my approach to validation I hope that this has become visible in my research. The second validation tool I wanted to focus on was thick description. This was more difficult then I had thought in the beginning and due to space I felt on numerous times in my presentation that I had to exclude texts that I would have liked to keep.

5.3 Empirical reflection

My aim has not been to compare my research with previous research as they had all been made with other aims, methods and theory. The way I look at research is that research is constructed by individuals or groups of people who all carry their
own perspectives and experiences. All these hopefully could add to create an understanding of a more whole picture. That is why I wanted to conduct this research, at this time and in this context. To add to the bigger picture by including the views from the practitioners in how they relate to the sacred. During my research process I have encountered more academic literature then I did in the beginning. And more literature has been published during these past years. But in this reflection I am reflecting from what I found in my research review in 2012.

From my research conclusions I can see that the understanding of what shamanism is, and how it is defined, is different from how previous research approaches and definitions of shamanism. In previous research shamanism is defined by the practices of the shaman within a shamanic community (Elliade 1956) but what people have expressed is that they view shamanism as a belonging to a spiritual understanding of the world. Its an understanding of how people are linked with each other and the practices themselves, the way they conduct ceremonies or how the shaman connects with spirits, these are cultural expressions – not what shamanism itself stands for. Shamanism is not viewed as a structure of specific practices, but a worldview, a spiritual approach and understanding of the world.

This contrasts what Svanberg (2003) states when he says that shamanic practices depend on sources such as Castenada (1968) and Harner (1980). The literature that I have found people referring to during this research is by Ailo Gaup, Eirik Myrhaug and Jörgen I Eriksson. What these authors are expressing, and other practitioners do too, is not only a practice built on shamanic research made from anthropology. They express an exchange of practices coming from different cultural practices in the world that they view as resources. People use meditations, breathing techniques and other practices to connect themselves with the sacred and the academic research is more mentioned in the context of understanding the views that have been shaped of shamanism among practitioners, to understand history and learn more about what people used to do in the past. None of the practitioners I have met, Saami, Nordic or other ethnic group, have said that they rely on academic research for their practices.

Svanberg (2003) also states that neoshamanism started in the past 30 years. What I have found is many stories of parents, grandparents and even further back, who have been involved in shamanic practices that they have passed along to their children or been safekeeping because of a social oppression of these practices. That shamanism is growing today people relate to new State laws, to the break between the Church and State, a changing social awareness that is more allowing of other spiritual practices and even are expressing the importance of them.

That contemporary shamanism should belong to New Age practices (Hammer 1997, Frisk 1998) is not brought up in any discussion but people express themselves as belonging to a spiritual worldview of their ancestors, a worldview that though it has been oppressed by other religions and State laws and regulations, is a faith belonging to their grandfathers and grandmothers. They do not view this as a new faith, but a reconnection to a worldview of the people prior to christian missionary work in the north.
The examples of ideals that Bowie (2000) brings up are not found in my research in the north. Most people are not vegetarians, feminists or view their work as separated from black magic – these concepts are not a part of the views people have been expressing. Neither the fear of that practices should be exploited by westerners has been noticed, practitioners do have practices they do not share and view as part of a family or spiritual, legacy – but these practices are ones of the shamans that are considered things you learn along the way in the relation you create with the Spirits. From what I have seen practitioners have been very open with sharing, at Isogaisa people come from several different parts around the world to share of their knowledge, and this is expressed as a goal in creating awareness.

The understanding of the role of the shaman as not the same as in the previous Saami community (Hultkrantz 1985, Eriksson 2009) is similar to what I have found in my research. The status of the shaman belongs to when shamanism, as a worldview, belonged to the whole social community, but also within the contemporary shamanic community the shamans are well respected and some regarded as elders.

It is difficult to comment on the research that question if the understandings of shamanism today could really be compared with the spiritual understandings documented from older sources (Lindquist 2005) as practitioners themselves are both very sceptical to the level of truth in these sources, use them for learning more about their past themselves, as express a view on how practices change, names given to energies/spirits change, but the understanding of them – the existence of them is constant.

5.4 Contribution

What my research has shown is that contemporary shamanism is viewed as a spiritual, existential worldview among practitioners in the north. This does not say that shamanism is not a part of culture, or of a cultural identity for some practitioners, but it says that it is also much more then that. What I found that I thought was interesting, was that shamanism has been looked at within the academy as a system of practices, instead of as a religion or spiritual understanding. For contemporary practitioners shamanism is a spiritual understanding of the world with aims of connecting people to themselves, to eachother and to nature. With goals of creating social changes of structures of oppression against people and nature. Its hard for myself to judge in what way my research has contributed, but if it has contributed in some way I do hope that it has created a better understanding of the people who are involved in the shamanic community, how they view their own practices and goals of life. That it has added to the understanding of contemporary shamanic beliefs and was able to give another perspective on why people are engaged with the issues that they are.

5.5 Closing reflections
As I in this research presentation was able only to add the research I have made on the meaning expressions themselves and their relation to the sacred it would be interesting to on another occasion be able to write a further presentation that included also my context research and more detailed descriptions, including more of the stories, expressions on beliefs as issues people are concerned with in the north.

As a majority of people I have spoken with are Saami and focused on practices belonging within their culture it would have been interesting to research further on practices belonging within the Norröna traditions and seidwork.

No specific questions for future research within this topic has come to my attention. But as my research has been about understanding how people relate to the sacred, this research could be further analyzed and compared from different perspectives. Some ways could be: to look closer at values and how they link with social engagements, to view how the thoughts on trauma being passed down through generations relate to other research within psychology, or to look closer at any aspect of meaning expressions: self-definition, beliefs, attitudes, values, goals and ultimate concerns.

From my own research position I have during this research come in contact with practitioners from different parts of Europe, and for a future research project I would like to continue on my previous research from Guatemala, and other parts of the world, to explore the art of healing individual and collective trauma.
Referenser

**Litterature**


E Eriksson, J I. (2014). Naturens återkmost, Tierps Tryckeri AB.


Articles


Webdocuments


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Isogaisa Festival: www.isogaisa.org