

Casus Pyalmiae: A city dweller and his village

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Abstract. On the example of the Karelian village Pyalma, the author considers the construction of the image of the Russian traditional Northern village by former city dwellers. Based on their own ideas about the rural authenticity, they represent rural traditions to urban tourists, whose knowledge of the rural is determined by popular culture and is not supported by practical skills. By comparing the history of Pyalma with other examples of the contemporary public work with natural-cultural heritage in North-West Russia, the author shows that the typification and museumification of traditional rurality in many villages are determined by the individual desire to preserve them and ensure their development by attracting tourists and introducing activities of the ‘economy of impressions’. The author notes that for most ‘seasonal’ residents (local and urban summer residents), the historicity of the place is not as important as the natural-infrastructure features of the village location. Thus, today urban projections of rurality in historical settlements are clearly divided into general and private, commemorative-tourist and personal economic practices, which together form a post-productivist ‘new rurality’ of historical villages in the Russian North.

Key words: new rurality, rural tourism, Russian village, Russian North, heritage, natural-cultural landscape

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‘New rurality’ (ruralization, rurbanization, etc.; see: Melnikova, 2020a: 7) has become a characteristic feature of the contemporary social landscape. This phenomenon in its diverse forms is typical not only for Russia but also for other postindustrial countries (Gorakova et al., 2018), which makes researchers reconsider the status and functions of rural areas — primarily in their urban perception but also in the perception of villagers (Bogdanova, Brednikova, 2013). New ideas and meanings of the terms ‘village’, ‘countryside’, ‘rural’ and their derivatives, which were identified in case studies, make the research optics ‘post-productive’, i.e., the village and the rural are reasonably defined not so much as places of agricultural production as spaces of leisure and loci of natural and cultural heritage (Nikiforova, 2012; Selivanenko, 2015). The late Soviet version of the ‘village myth’ remains partly relevant (Razuvalova, 2015), but the concept of ‘rural’ changed its content to the fundamentally different from the ethnographic studies of the 19th — 20th centuries.

One of the consequences of the new public understanding of the village and rurality is a change in the direction of migration flows between the village and the city. In the industrial era, under the active colonization of the countryside, there was a mass outflow to cities; since the 1980s, there has been a gradual change — city dwellers increasingly choose the village as a place of temporary or permanent residence (Vinogradskaya, 2018; Prilutsky, Lebedev, 2020), which is typical for both ‘former villagers’, who for some reasons did not fully adapt to urban life, and for ‘hereditary city dwellers’, who choose the village due to various circumstances and values. This reverse migration contributes to the revival of the village and to the preservation of the rural way of life due to new economic options — from purely traditional to technologically advanced, when rural life seems only an external manifestation of the location (‘a house in the village’), while in all other features the resettlers’ *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* are predominantly urban. Such a reverse migration and efforts of ‘new villagers’ (city dwellers who left urban agglomerations for the benefits of rural life, albeit often imagined and idealized; see: Rodoman, 2011; Darieva et al., 2018; Ilbery, Bowler, 1998) lead to a rebirth of some villages that have recently looked doomed to extinction but now are strongholds for the development of surrounding territories¹.

Perhaps, the clearest example is villages of the Russian North — a vast cultural and geographical space from the northeast of the Leningrad region (Lodeynopolsky and Podporozhsky districts) to the coast of the White Sea (Karelia and Arkhangelsk Region) and to the eastern borders of the Vologda Region (Shabaev et al., 2012; Melnikova, 2019). In 2018–2022, I visited many villages in this area and watched how some (not all) previously semi-abandoned settlements (along the Pinega River in the Arkhangelsk Region or along the shore of the Onega Lake) were coming back to life by the efforts of ‘new villagers’, striving in every possible way to develop villages and areas around them (Habeck, 2019). It should be noted that the same applies to the Yaroslavl Region (Kupriyanov, Savina, 2020) and partly to the Tver Region as neighbors of ‘northern’ regions, while in the Pskov and Novgorod Regions, unfortunately, the extinction of villages only accelerates (Panchenko, 2021). Such a difference seems to be determined by both geographical proximity to Moscow (as a main source of ‘new villagers’) and ‘cultural prestige’ of Yaroslavl and Tver in comparison with Novgorod and Pskov (Manakov, 2002.)

1. Certainly, it is too early to evaluate the success of such project (in each case and in general); however, the very fact that there are so many deurbanization initiatives attracts attention (Steshin, 2020, referring to the statistical data of the Center for Sectoral Expertise of the Russian Agricultural Bank for 2020).

The article focuses on the revival of one village in the Russian North — the historical village of Pyalma in the Onega region: since the early 2000s, the local ‘migrant’ community has worked to restore and develop this rural settlement. The first part of the article presents a short history of Pyalma and a general description of methods used for its revival; the second part — personal story of a former city dweller and now a rural resident, a native of Pyalma, who played a key role in the transformation of the village space. Thus, the article considers the features of the transformation of ‘rurality’ into ‘new rurality’ in Russia.

Two Pyalmas

If you drive from Pudozh to Medvezhyegorsk along the Lake Onega, not knowing local geography but trying to get to the ancient Onega village of Pyalma, you risk missing the right turn: at first, there is a not-catchy brown sign (for cultural objects), and a few kilometers later a blue one; if you miss the first one and turn at the second one, you will be disappointed as the ‘blue’ Pyalma does not look like a candidate member for the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages and Towns of Russia (<https://krasaderevni.ru>²). You will have to return to the highway and drive back to the right turn (there is no direct road between two Pyalmas) or even postpone your visit to the ‘genuine’ Pyalma. The risk of missing the right Pyalma increases significantly if you move from Medvezhyegorsk to Pudozh, since in this case you see the blue sign first (and car navigators lead you to the ‘big’ Pyalma). Thus, it is not easy to find the ‘right’ Pyalma, which may partly explain a relatively small number of tourists here (about 2,000 in 2020). However, for such a small village, even this number of visitors is considered by locals excessive; therefore, Pyalma has practically stopped its advertising.

The historical, ‘right’ Pyalma is located on the banks of the Pyalma River, at a kilometer distance from the Lake Onega, and forms a ‘cluster’ of three settlements — Novinki, Zarechye and Pyalma founded in the 14th century. According to the Pudozh local historian A. G. Kostin (2017; Nilov, 2000), Pyalma was mentioned in 1375 as a part of the possessions of the Novgorod *boyar* Grigory Semenovich and his sons Obakun and Savely; during the church schism, there were numerous monasteries of the Vygoretsk Hermitage around the village; in the 18th century, Pyalma with 1,000 villagers became the fishing, industrial

2. According to the newspaper *Karelia* from March 2019: “Today in Karelia only one village — Kinerma — is officially included in the list of the most beautiful villages of Russia. We believe that several more villages of the Republic can claim the title: Sheltozero in the Prionezhsky district, Pyalma in the Pudozhsky district, and Khaikolya in the Kalevalsky district” (Sheltozero was added to the list).

and commercial center of the Onega region³ and established economic and trade relations with settlements around the Onega Lake, including Shuya near Petrozavodsk. However, the preserved buildings date back to a later period — the second half of the 19th century⁴.

The main attractions of the historical Pyalma are three houses: of the peasant N. P. Sokolov and of the representatives of the local family of fishermen and merchants — A. F. Potashev and E. L. Potashev (according to the museum website, another Potashevs' house — the one-story “house-purse of the peasant Potashev” — was transported from Pyalma to the Pudozh sector of the Kizhi Museum-Reserve in 1978.) Near the village cemetery, there is Ilyinskaya Chapel in the honor of Elijah the Prophet with a carved fence (the local church holiday is Elijah's Day⁵); its iconostasis was removed during restoration in the late 1970s, now some of its icons are kept in the State Museum of the *History of Saint Petersburg*, some — in the Hermitage storerooms, and 12 icons are exhibited in the Fine Arts Museum of the Republic of Karelia in Petrozavodsk (Platonov, 2018; Catalog, 2017). The black baths in Zarechye are also conditionally historical buildings, although they have been renovated, restored and remodeled after construction.

In terms of its heritage preservation and attractiveness, Pyalma is inferior to many historical settlements in Russia, be it the Karelian, relatively close (350 km around the Onega Lake) village of Sheltozero, villages of Kimzha and Karpogory in the Arkhangelsk Region or the village of Vyatskoye in the Yaroslavl Region (see, e.g.: Druchevskaya,

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3. “Having traveled 12 *versts* from the village of Myatosova, for a change of rowers we stopped at 6 p.m. near the Pilma cemetery. In this churchyard, there is a wooden church of the Transfiguration of the Lord and Barlamius of Khutyn. Here, on the Pilma river flowing into the Svir river, at the very mouth, there are two saw barns or mills of the Olonets merchant Patap Terentyev Svisnikov; in these sawmills, there are two machines, one barn saws from 60 to 65 logs per day, and planks are sent on large barges to Saint Petersburg and Olonets” (Chelishchev, 1886: 16).
 4. The ‘blue’ Pyalma was founded on the site of the Soviet labor settlement: in 1938, the 2nd Onega branch of the White Sea-Baltic Combine of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs “Dry Stream” was opened in the historical Pyalma with 7 camps and 3 labor settlements in the surrounding area (Kostin, 2017). Today, the ‘blue’ Pyalma has nothing attractive for tourists, except for the fact that it borrowed the name of the historical village and misleads some visitors. One can get additional information on the history of Pyalma at the local museum of the history of Pyalma and on the Pyalma Timber Industry Enterprise — at the Pyalma Rural Library (URL: <http://pudozhlib.krl.muzkult.ru/pyalma>).
 5. According to the website of the Karelian Republican Center for the State Protection of Cultural Heritage Objects (URL: <https://monuments.karelia.ru>), the tradition of the patron saint day was revived in Pyalma “with the assistance of the Pyalma House of Culture”, but local informants did not confirm it.

Avilova, 2014). However, Pyalma's natural-cultural ensemble, which is formed by the river, bridge across it, buildings on both banks, chapel and surrounding forests, creates a bright and memorable landscape attractive to tourists and in many ways contributing to the preservation of the village, since the local community appreciated the potential of such a landscape and began to promote it.

Revival of the village

Since the late 1960s, Pyalma had experienced an outflow of its residents — the younger generation with their families moved to cities (Petrozavodsk, Leningrad, even Arkhangelsk), the older generation died. In the mid-1990s, no more than 10 people permanently lived here (the same number as today in winter). At the very end of the 1990s, there was a turning point in this 'exodus' — those who had left began to return, and in 2001, in Pyalma, for the first time in Karelia, a territorial public self-government⁶ was formed — the Pyalma community. Today there are about 70 people; not all live in the village permanently, but, according to the Karelian media, take part in the village improvement.

There are almost no natives of Pyalma in the territorial public self-government; its members are mainly city dwellers attracted by the local beauty. As the village chief P. A. Potashev says, "*those who wanted to help out of friendship, those who simply liked it with us, they stayed, and some bought land and built a house*". As the note about Pyalma on the website of the Karelian Republican Center for the State Protection of Cultural Heritage Objects states, over the past seven years in Petrozavodsk there were annual meetings of the Pyalma community — natives of the village, who left their small homeland in the late Soviet years, do not want to return but feel nostalgic⁷. The note mentions that at one meeting at "the Petrozavodsk Pedagogical University, people of different ages and professions gathered⁸... to

6. See the information of the Office of the Head of the Republic of Karelia on municipal development: URL: <https://www.pudogadm.ru/assets/page-files/0021/2054/PrezentaciyaO.A.Burak.pptx>.

7. There are different types of nostalgia: "nostalgia from a safe distance" (Oushakine, 2007); rural nostalgia (Paxson, 2005); local rather than temporal nostalgia (Starovoitenko, 2021, referring to the works by A. Giddens). On the features of 'rural nostalgia' in the rural areas of the Russian North see, e.g.: Arkhipova, 2018.

8. The not dated note (URL: <https://monuments.karelia.ru/napравlenija-dejatel-nosti/populjarizacija/stat-i-ob-ob-ektah-kul-turnogo-nasledija/pudozhskij-rajon/istoricheskaja-derevnja-pjal-ma>) states that "this year" (?) representatives of the committee attended a meeting of the community. The Karelian media often mentions the Pudozh community, meetings of fellow countrymen and activities of this organization, but there is practically no information about the Pyalma community except for a video report from 2016 (URL: <https://tv-karelia.ru/lyudey-malo-no-delaetsya-mnogo-tradit>

meet their classmates, acquaintances and relatives since most Pyalma's residents are descendants of ancient families: Potashevs, Sokolovs, Svetovs, Mostakovs. For many years, community activists have been collecting materials about residents of Pyalma and its history: documents, household items, tools for fishing and economic activities".

With the community help and financial support of regional authorities, the old bridge over the Pyalma River was repaired using the 'people's construction' method⁹. The grant from the Republican Ministry for National Policy and Relations with Religious Associations allowed to start the restoration of the chapel iconostasis: "*I talked in Petrozavodsk and went to Saint Petersburg, asking for permission to make copies of our icons... They wanted so much money for a copy that I immediately understood that it would be easier to redraw icons from pictures [reproductions]*"¹⁰. *We found artists, we slowly set up our chapel*"¹¹.

The community also tries to repair the dirt road from the A-119 highway to the village, adding gravel as needed ("*the guys were*

sii-pyalmskogo-zemlyachestva). Perhaps, the Pyalma community is an integral part of the Pudozh community that also meets annually in Petrozavodsk; therefore, when the Pyalma chief speaks confidently about "more than a hundred of participants" (Meshkova, 2011), he means the larger community of the 'Pudozh land' rather than the Pyalma community.

9. Even after repairs not every driver will dare to cross the river on this bridge.
10. "*I went to the Museum of Fine Arts a long time ago and asked if it was possible to make copies of the icons. They said that students could do this for free, but the materials cost 5,000 rubles per icon. For comparison: at that time, for 6,000 we managed to concrete a bridge cage — we bought 2 cars of concrete; we bought a picket fence to completely replace the fence around the cemetery, 2 cars of soil and 1 car of crushed stone. And here 5,000 for one icon! We couldn't afford it. We decided to make photocopies for 500 rubles per piece. But in the museum, they charged us 200 rubles for each photograph of our own icons! And there are 12 of them. I said: "These are our icons, we don't demand them back, but at least let us photograph them for free!". And the museum employee answered: "I have an order from the Ministry of Culture, we have no right". Of course, I objected to her: "Even in Saint Petersburg in the Hermitage one can pay 200 rubles and click all day long, but here it's 200 rubles for each icon!". I only had 200 rubles with me. We took a photo of one icon and left. On the other hand, every cloud has a silver lining. We made copies of the icons, which is much better. How? Representatives of one branch of the Academy of Sciences came to us several times; they even wanted to hold a government meeting and finally held a board meeting of the Ministry of Nationalities [of the Republic of Karelia]. The minister arrived with his retinue, we told him about our problems, and he advised us to take part in a project competition. I submitted the project "Historical Memory", we won this competition and received a grant. The Ministry of Nationalities allocated us 50,000 rubles, and we ordered 5 icons from an icon-painting workshop. Then, in the same way, through the Ministry of Culture, 5 more icons were made" (Kurakina, 2016).*
11. Unfortunately, the chapel is open only on religious holidays and for memorial services; when I visited Pyalma, it was closed.

repairing the highway, I agreed with them that I would let them go to the bathhouse to wash and they would give us some gravel”) and cutting down bushes along roadsides, and monitors the condition of village houses. According to the website of the Karelian Republican Center for the State Protection of Cultural Heritage Objects, such works are carried out by locals under the supervision of the Center¹²; however, the village chief did not mention this Center participation in the preservation of the village (“*we do everything ourselves, with our own hands we build and restore everything, we find or make construction materials*”¹³). In 2014, in Pyalma environmental activists and locals organized the Forest Festival — an educational event dedicated to caring for forests and to protecting nature reserves. Due to the pandemic restrictions, the festival was cancelled in 2019–2021, and its future is in doubt: the festival group on the social network VK (200 participants) is inactive, there is no information in local news, and locals answer evasively, talking mainly about past festivals. Nevertheless, the festival raised an information wave about Pyalma (especially in 2015, when the second festival was held; see, e.g.: Gavrilova, 2016), which helped to ‘promote’ the village: since that time, there has been a relatively stable tourist inflow.

The village preserves and develops masterclasses for organized tourists and local activists: for instance, as a part of the project “When Villages Were Big” (in the summer of 2020, in the Pudozhsky district, with the support of the Presidential Grant Foundation¹⁴), a ‘craft’ section was organized — “Traditional crafts and handicrafts of Pudozh”, and its masterclasses reminded participants of the pre-modern way of life — “Weaving from pine shingles”, “Bath construction in the old days”, “The old way fishing” (Bulletin..., 2020). Moreover, there is a museum of rural life in the village, which is sometimes opened for visitors: its exhibits are typical for the provincial local-history museums (Golovin, 2019; Kupriyanov, Savina, 2020; see also the analytical network project “New Museon” presenting a number of rural museums in North-West Russia¹⁵).

12. URL: <http://monuments.karelia.ru/napravlenija-dejatel-nosti/popularizacija/stat-i-ob-ob-ektah-kul-turnogo-nasledija/pudozhskij-rajon/istoricheskaja-derevnja-pjal-ma>.

13. Perhaps, such discrepancies in interpretations are determined by the ‘politics of memory’ which the village chief adheres to and which, as far as one can judge from his stories, implies a considerable exaggeration of his (and his community) role in the revival and improvement of the village.

14. See, e.g.: Enthusiasts try to save the preserved villages in Karelia. URL: <https://ptzgovorit.ru/news/my-est-entuziasty-pytayutsya-sohranit-ostavshiesya-derevni>; URL: <https://moyaokrug.ru/vestnikpudozha/Articles.aspx?articleId=395008>; <https://xn--8cafedbalict6afooklq150.xn--p1ai/public/application/item?id=E0DE22E6-4D1B-4320-A380-946370E38A4F>.

15. URL: <https://www.vk.com/newmuseon>.

In general, as far as I can judge from my observations, rare publications in the regional and republican media and in travel blogs¹⁶, in recent years, the rural community of Pyalma has refused wide publicity of its project in favor of the ‘event’ strategy in public field and purely local efforts for developing the village. This is hardly surprising, provided the fact that the village revival and its current fame were achieved by the efforts of one person, and his powers are not limitless.

Personal story in the contemporary history of Pyalma

When you look through articles about Pyalma in the media and travel blogs, after 2001 you cannot help noticing in literally all articles the surname Potashev: this man tells guests about the village, gives masterclasses and rare tours of the local museum, participates in the village improvement, is responsible for communication with the ‘external world’ (represents the community interests in contacts with the authorities and organizes economic relations like the above-mentioned gravel exchange), participates in public events, i.e., he is a kind of ‘personal brand’ and personification of Pyalma¹⁷. To a certain extent this is explained by his position in the community as the village chief; however, reducing his activities to ‘noblesse oblige’ would be wrong. All Potashev’s activities after returning to Pyalma in the first half of the 1990s to take up farming (he left the village in the 1970s, graduated from university and settled in Petrozavodsk) may look like a conscious attempt to ‘take over’ this place by right of birth and virtue of belonging to a local family of fishermen, lumbermen and merchants, and due to the entrepreneurial spirit that encourages him to put forward new initiatives for the village development and to take advantage of opportunities offered by the current social-political and social-economic agenda (for instance, the Forest Festival grew out of the ‘folk’ environmental project to create the Pyalma River reserve; Yarovoy, 2015¹⁸) in order to make Pyalma a ‘hotspot of rural tourism’ (Panzer-Krause, 2019).

When Potashev left Pyalma in the 1970s, the village was already unpromising, i.e., doomed to destruction (Fates..., 1995; Mazur, 2005; Kalugina, Fadeeva; 2009). Therefore, the decision of the young

16. See, e.g., the blog “Beyond Everyday Life”. URL: <https://holiday-trips.ru>.

17. Less often the media mentions another native of Pyalma — T. P. Kerimova, who gives masterclasses on Karelian embroidery.

18. See the page of the festival and the reserve on the website of the project “Forests of the High Environmental Status” implemented by the Russian branch of the World Wildlife Fund. URL: <https://hcvf.ru/ru/news/events/starosta-derevni-pyalma-petr-potashev-mechtaet-sohranit-netronutuyu-karelskuyu-taygu-dlya>.

man (Potashev was born in 1953) to settle in a large city seemed logical; however, he always wanted to return but “was afraid of becoming known as a parasite, because there was no work in the village: the local sawmill was moved to the neighboring village” (Yarovaya, 2015). This is a typical late Soviet life trajectory of the villager (see, e.g.: Kovalev, 2009), but *perestroika* and the announced state support for cooperative and farmer movements changed this trajectory: Potashev rented agricultural lands around his native village. It may seem that under other circumstances Potashev would have remained in the city, and historical Pyalma would have shared the fate of many disappeared villages of the Russian North. Potashev’s story about the dying and reviving Onega village is the story of the personal and direct participation of the former Soviet employee in its saving. Such a ‘romanticized version’ of the village revival (which to a certain extent corresponds to the actual course of events and to the intentions of their participants) raises some doubts as the current status of the historical village is rather a result of the territorial public self-government efforts (and perhaps of the Pyalma community) and a consequence of the complex impact of social-economic factors. Thereby, the village chief’s ‘politics of memory’ can be explained by his goal setting and by the tacit approval (or indifference) of other villagers, primarily engaged in organizing their personal leisure time.

According to Potashev, when he returned to the village, he occupied the most livable and advantageously located empty house (his kin but not his family house) and spent several years restoring it at his expense. Then the owners of the house, who had not visited Pyalma for years, unexpectedly arrived, thanked Potashev for taking care of their house and “*offered, as they say, to vacate the premises, they showed the papers, everything was as it should be*”. Today Potashev settles in and renovates his family house which is also the village museum. Travel blogs (see, e.g., the blog “Beyond Everyday Life” or the LiveJournal blog of the user Vikni¹⁹) may give a funny impression that Potashev is always the first person the visitors of the village meet²⁰. I also met him right on the bridge over the river, while other villagers (in Pyalma but not in Novinki or Zarechye) did not show. Probably, when Potashev is in the village, he considers it his duty to wait for tourists, ‘pretending’ to be busy (in my case, he was hauling gravel in a wheelbarrow from the far bank). This is only an assumption, and in response to a direct question the village chief laughed off, saying that it was just a coincidence, “*as*

19. Personal blog “Evening in the Karelian village of Pyalma”. URL: <https://vikni.livejournal.com/176039.html>.

20. My friends, who traveled around the Onega Lake in the spring of 2022 and visited Pyalma, said that the first person they met was none other than the village chief.

you see, I'm working". A kind of intrusive presence of Potashev in the village public space, be it physical or virtual (in the media), suggests that over time, due to bureaucratic obstacles, he became disillusioned with farming but discovered the benefits of rural tourism for preserving the village and local landscape. Thereby, his presence is an integral part of rural development through the promotion of rural tourism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Potashev is the 'face' of Pyalma (it is not clear whether self-appointed or approved by the community), and his personal story of leaving his small homeland and return fits well (perhaps, is deliberately inserted) into the constructed history of the village as a revival of almost lost traditions and way of life.

Unfortunately, I did not talk to other villagers (they avoid communication); therefore, the article is based on the media materials and research. It should be noted that almost all publications (Sources; Morozova, 2006; Mironova, 2010; Permilovskaya, 2011, etc.) refer to Potashev as the 'voice of Pyalma'. On the contrary, in the Karelian village of Tolvuya (Medvezhyegorsky district), the 'voice' and 'face' of the community is not a person but a public council; in the village of Velikaya Guba in the same district, there is a group of local activists (Morozova, 2006: 168–169). In Pyalma, there seems to be 'nothing but Potashev' or the Potashevs, since another representative of this family lives in Petrozavodsk but writes a poetic chronicle of the village, thus, indirectly participating in constructing the history of Pyalma (this chronicle is not publicly available even on the author's page on the social network VK, and she ignored my request²¹). It would not be an exaggeration to say that anyone interested in the life of Pyalma would get the feeling of its 'potashevization'. Certainly, any more or less thorough field research would show that there are many other attractions in historical Pyalma and around it, but I did not get a chance to talk to other locals. Thus, today the story of the village revival is presented to any outsider from Potashev's point of view, and in this story, he is the main character.

Pyalma in the old and new spaces of the Russian village

Since the mid-2000s, there have been many public initiatives that can be considered the 'grassroots' politics of memory²²: numer-

21. See, e.g.: Morozova, 2010: 175: "One of the Potashevs... wrote poems describing the life in Pyalma in chronological order".

22. Politics of memory is a type of symbolic (or historical) politics that aims at introducing in the present certain ways for interpreting the social reality of the past (retrospective reconstruction of the past for the needs of the present; see, e.g.: Bourdieu, 2007).

ous private/‘folk’ museums (Korolev, 2018; 2021; Cherkaeva, 2019; Shekhvatova, 2021), popularization of reconstruction movements and events (Koloskov, 2021; Testov, 2019), and other practices of the ‘spontaneous’ commodification of memory: local and regional branding through the public ‘folklorization’ of local history (see, e.g.: Akhmetova, Petrov, Baiduzh, 2018; Petrova 2013), memorialization of natural and cultural landscapes through public environmental and local-history projects (see, e.g.: Prokhorovich, 2017; etc.). There are also attempts of local communities and activists to museumify and commodify rural heritage (Rural Russia..., 2019; Nefedova, 2013): former city dwellers move to the countryside and try to ‘culturally renovate’ it (as one official in the Leningrad Region put it), being guided by a complex of mercantile, nostalgic, cultural and even patriotic considerations (Melnikova, 2020b). Such attempts turn village buildings and rural landscapes into tourism sites, thus radically changing the function of the village: rural labor loses its agrarian character (albeit not completely, given the inevitable infrastructural and economic costs of rural life) and becomes largely ‘service’, i.e., urban (Petrikov, 2020).

This transformation has become so widespread that there is a need to somehow systematize such grassroots initiatives. For instance, there are non-profit partnerships (like the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Russia created in 2014) and other public organizations (like associations of local private museums) which aim at promoting the Russian rural hinterland in an organized way, including in cooperation with the state (see, e.g.: Mozganova, 2021), at increasing its tourist attractiveness (through commodification of the rural way of life; Osipov et al., 2019) and at contributing to the preservation and revival of Russian villages, even if the concept of ‘village’ gets some new interpretation, different from the traditional one.

In the Russian North-West (and other regions), ‘rural transformation’ is uneven since settlements close to federal and regional highways are the first to gradually become tourist attractions due to their transport accessibility for the average traveler or proximity to regional and local urban centers (for instance, the village of Vyatskoye near Yaroslavl is the ‘headquarters’ of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Russia; the village of Lozhgovo near Slantsy in the Leningrad Region hosts the annual festival “Big Christmas Festivities”²³). Sometimes such a tourist transfor-

23. On the other hand, this factor is not always decisive: for instance, the Karelian village of Kinerma or the Arkhangelsk village of Kiltsa are located far from main highways and urban centers, but this only increases their attractiveness for experienced tourists travelling by car, who go to the hinterland for ‘genuine antiquity’ and are ready to overcome bad roads (as one of my informants, a Saint Petersburg guide, explained). This seem to be

mation is so large-scale, primarily in terms of the number of visitors, that locals suffer from the consequences of ‘over-tourism’ (Milano et al., 2019). Thus, in January 2017, villagers of Kinerma (the first Karelian village included in the list of the most beautiful villages of Russia) complained to the Karelian Ministry of Culture about the excessive influx of tourists: “*in the village only 5 people live, but there are 16 houses, 6 of which are architectural monuments. In 2016, about 300 tourists visited the village... It physically cannot accept all visitors if they don’t apply in advance*” (Lysenko, Semenova; 2017). However, such tourist development of the rural Russian North continues (in this area), and many dying villages in Arkhangelsk Region create local ‘points of interest’ in order to be saved from final destruction through by former city dwellers (Drannikova, 2017; Ivanova, 2019).

Historical Pyalma in its current state is a clear example of such touristic development. As an economic entity, the village ‘died’ in the late Soviet period, and the farming projects of the 1990s did not change situation²⁴; the revival of the village is the direct result of the promotion efforts of the local community and of the village chief Potashev to attract tourists. All public initiatives of the last decade, including the Forest Festival, aimed at popularizing this settlement as a ‘depository’ of rural traditions and a focal point of the local natural-cultural landscape (for instance, an art object in mandala form, presented at the Forest Festival, according to its creators, was to show the need to preserve the ‘Karelian *taiga*’ around Pyalma, endless “love for its lands and forests, and the coexistence of man and nature”; Potashov, 2015). Even in the implicit confrontation with the neighboring village of the same name, authenticity as a ‘stronghold’ of tradition is emphasized: “*They are new, while the real Pyalma is here, with us; [in the other village], there was a forestry enterprise, the taiga was cut down recklessly, such beauty was destroyed, although our people have always lived in harmony with nature*”. Today this rural tradition in its tourist representation is the key to the preservation of Pyalma as an independent settlement (at least according to the village chief), and tourists, as far as one can judge from blogs and reports, come to Pyalma exactly for the tradition (as they understand it).

As a rule, local activists transform rural landscape or its elements into a tourism product, based on their ideas about the village beauty, features and values of rural life. Such ideas are largely determined by popular culture that imposes certain stereotypes of rurality

an effect of the presentations of some city dwellers, who want to ‘know the true Russia’, like a part of the late Soviet intelligentsia called to go “to the village, to the people” (Razuvalova, 2015; Neplyuev, 2020, etc.).

24. See, e.g.: Nefedova, 2019; today the village chief considers his past attempts to become a farmer as an ‘adventure’.

through the ‘landscape patriotism’ of school textbooks with excerpts from classical ‘village’ texts, through the media and its visual images (Shtyrkov, 2016; Zhelamsky, 2018). Thus, activists (and the local authorities supporting public initiatives) become both producers of a generalized, conventional rurality and consumers of collective knowledge about the rural (Panzer-Krause, 2019: 7). Thereby, even provided original ideas and solutions for transforming the rural, activists have to adapt their original ideas to mass demand (images of popular culture) — “everywhere we see traditional spinning wheels, spindles and cradles” (Golovin 2019; this is not a purely Russian phenomenon; see, e.g. Deitch, 1987 on the similar impact of tourism on the vernacular Indian culture). Tourists go to the village for a rural idyll as they imagine it under the influence of popular culture and are disappointed if their expectations are not met, as far as I can tell from conversations with several groups of organized tourists and with local activists in the Arkhangelsk Region in 2019 (Kargopolye) and 2020 (Pinega region, Mezen).

In general, local representations of rurality and tourist expectations can be called ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell, 1976) due to being determined not by rural but by urban culture which acts today as popular culture (Korolev, 2019: 92–101, 157–211) and cannot but affect ideas about the authentic rural ‘idyll’ that both sides try to imagine, represent and ‘preserve’. The producer of such ‘canned’ rurality is mainly a former city dweller, who offers visitors of the rural location a tourism product that can hardly be considered truly rural but corresponds to the common ideas of what rurality is.

Today historical Pyalma is an example of such widespread views: the dirt road from the highway to the village, the bridge without railings across the river, the river itself, the chapel partially hidden by willows, the solid, albeit slightly dilapidated ancient peasant houses — this village fully corresponds to the popular image of the traditional rural settlement in the Russian North (see, e.g.: Permilovskaya, 2011; Usov, 2021; etc.). Excursions, masterclasses, communication practices and social activities of the local village chief organically complement this urban image of the Russian Northern village and aim at the potential tourist whose visit (with the subsequent spread of impressions via word of mouth and the Internet) can attract new visitors to Pyalma²⁵, thus extending its existence as a historical settlement and the main highlight of this natural-cultural landscape. Such a tourist can stay in the vicinity of the village for several days (there is a

25. From my recent conversation with the guide who made a car tourist route around the Lake Onega: “*After Medvezhyegorsk and Sandarmokh, you cannot help but stop in Pyalma. Everyone knows that this is a historical village*”. The generalization ‘everyone’ can be explained by the interested guide expressiveness which emphasizes and reflects the undoubted fame of Pyalma in the ‘space of rumors’ (P. Shchedrovitsky).

guest house near Pyalma; see, e.g.: Averkieva, 2020) and get a deeper understanding of the local ‘rural idyll’ without experiencing the truly traditional village life hardly acceptable for the contemporary city dweller. ‘Staged authenticity’ combined with city amenities (hot water, indoor toilet, etc.) provides the picture that the travelling city dweller wants to see in the countryside, which means that the ‘new rurality’ proposed by Pyalma would be reproduced. However, Pyalma is unlikely to face over-tourism, given its remoteness from local urban centers (the nearest large city Petrozavodsk is 250 km away²⁶, Vologda — 530 km, Saint Petersburg — almost 700 km); the influx of tourists is unlikely to become massive; only those purposefully going to the village will get here.

What is next?

Today in many ways Pyalma is the village chief Potashev. But what will happen if for some reason he loses interest in his brainchild²⁷ (which seems unlikely, based on his words and his activities) or retires due to age?

In his interview for the video series “Private Museum: A Young Fighter Course” (a part of the analytical network project “New Museum”), the director of the Road of Life Museum in the village of Kobona (Leningrad Region) S. V. Markov said that he is most worried about the fate of the museum in the relatively near future (in 10–

26. Approximately the same distance is between Vologda and Totma which is also located far from the main routes (Moscow–Vologda–Arkhangelsk highway) but in recent years Totma, through the efforts of local activists, has become a role model for the effective work with historical heritage and natural landscape if not for the country, then for the European part of Russia. However, the status of the settlement should be kept in mind: Totma is a regional center, once a district center and a merchant city, a center of trade routes, while Pyalma is a village that lost its economic significance long ago. Moreover, in Totma, there is a team of like-minded people passionate about developing and enhancing its heritage, while in Pyalma a lot depends on one person. Therefore, it would be incorrect to compare Pyalma with Totma based on the distance from large cities. About Totma and local projects, see, e.g.: Novoselov, 2019; Mastenitsa, 2020; Chernega 2020.

27. It is interesting that in September 2022, when discussing the next interregional conference “Development of forms of the local self-government in the North-Western Federal District” on the social network VK, the Association of the Territorial Public Self-Government of the Republic of Karelia stated about the Pyalma community: “We have little information about the results of this TPS work, since it practically did not participate in regional competitions. This TPS participated in the competition of socially significant TPS projects in 2018 but not in the recent republican competitions such as the Best TPS, the Best TPS Practice, the Best Village Holiday, the Most Beautiful Village” (URL: https://vk.com/wall-169034427_1349?w=all-1690344271349).

15 years), when he will no longer be able to work due to age: “*Children do not show interest, and not only my children. They say that they are not interested. So, the question is whether anyone would pick the fallen banner, so to speak. That’s what I am worried about*” (Markov, 2019). These are concerns of many creators of private museums in the northwest, with whom I had the opportunity to talk. I guess the Pyalma chief must feel the same way as he has not found a successor for his public activities among his fellow villagers (see, e.g.: Lebedev, 2007). Moreover, other villagers — both the larger ‘summer’ or *dacha* population and the small ‘winter’ population — do not seem to strive for any active participation in the preservation of historical buildings and natural landscape, focusing on their households and leisure time. Such a way of rural life is typical for many Russian villages²⁸: most villagers are former city dwellers, who bought houses and moved to the countryside, and summer residents; they are engaged mainly in farming (gardening) and fishing, less often in hunting, and their everyday life becomes increasingly similar to the urban one (water supply, dry closet, etc.).

Thus, the fate of the historical Pyalma and its heritage depends on the village chief and his ‘politics of rural memory’ (quite conventional). (Certainly, this does not mean that the loss of the historical status (if this suddenly happens) would deprive Pyalma of its status of the rural settlement, but it would be a different Pyalma — not a historical or tourist location but a place for fishing trips or a ‘*dacha*’ village with vegetable gardens.) This ‘politics of rural memory’ seems to come down to the implementation of a commemorative-tourist scenario for the preservation of the village, implies typical (as far as one can judge from the research in this field) urban projections of ‘rurality’: preservation and presentation of the village landscape with a slope and birch trees²⁹ (for instance, in 2021, the Russian list of the World Tourism Organization included the Tula village of Bekhovo due to such a landscape³⁰); local chapel as an integral part of landscape; indispensable (and traditional in contents) village museum; reproduction of popular economic and everyday practices that are already alien to the rural life in the form of masterclasses and ‘games’ for outsiders.

28. See the recent study of the way of life in several historical settlements of the Leningrad Region (Alekseev et al., 2020).

29. See, e.g., views of rural spaces from the recently reconstructed (or built) river embankments in small towns — from Velsk in the Arkhangelsk Region to Vyazma in the Kaluga Region (small towns with the embankment located relatively far from the river); it seems that the visitor gets a representation/projection of ‘rurality’ in the form of the surrounding nature which is to be admired as one of this location attractions (Vandyshev et al., 2022; Ponomareva et al., 2022).

30. And to some paintings by V. D. Polenov (Polenovo Museum-Reserve is located nearby); see: Gershkovich, 2022.

Such a commemoration of the former way of life is in demand among urban tourists, who want to touch ‘peasant antiquity’. In full accordance with the principles of popular culture, rurality becomes a clichéd imaginary product presented in ‘natural’ conditions (compared with local-history museums or such reserves of rural architecture as Arkhangelsk Malye Korely, Novgorod Vitoslavlitsy or Tver Vasilevo), thus being perceived by consumers as the ‘authentic rural’ (both historical and contemporary³¹). The producer and the consumer of this experience (both city dwellers; one in the past but does not lose ties with the city; both reproduce models of urban popular culture) speak the same cultural language, which significantly facilitates communication and contributes to the strengthening and popularization of this conditional, popular print image of the ‘living Onega village’. This approach may be adopted by other historical settlements of the Russian North (and other regions) to preserve and ‘revive’ the village: a historical core is identified and as if secured in its ‘postcard’ form; commemorative and economic practices are developed/organized to bring income for the preservation of this form; rural space is gradually built up in accordance with the wishes of its ‘seasonal’ residents — this is the current situation in historical Pyalma. This type of ‘new rurality’ is in demand among those city dwellers who choose the village as a place of residence, provided they are interested in preserving the historical core of this settlement rather than in organizing personal leisure)³².

Certainly, it would be an exaggeration to say that without its chief the village of Pyalma is doomed, but the development of its riverbanks seems purely of the ‘*dacha*’ type: only the riverbank with the chapel and three old houses retained its former appearance, while the rest of the village gradually loses its originality. ‘After Potashev’, if the Karelian Ministry of Culture, management of national parks or federal bodies (or museums) do not take measures, these ancient buildings would disappear. And the natural area around the village would also be damaged, since the Pyalma River Reserve, for which environmentalists and the village chief fight, is still in the list of the specially protected natural areas of Karelia only as ‘promising’ (since 2007). Meanwhile, according to Potashev, the local forest is regularly encroached upon; he even calls himself “*the only local defender of the Karelian taiga*” (let’s leave this statement on his conscience). Thus, in Pyalma and its vicinity, almost all attempts to preserve the histor-

31. In Malye Korely, I heard from visitors of the ethnographic park that “*certainly, everything is beautiful but looks artificial, kind of lifeless, and only nature saves the situation*”. In Vitoslavlitsy, a local guide said (in 2016) that the collected houses were undoubtedly interesting, but it would be better to look at them in their natural environment, if possible.

32. See the story of the former city dweller about getting used to rural life and adding urban features to it (Kupriyanov, Savina, 2020: 18–21).

ical appearance of the village take place with the direct participation of the village chief, and his role in caring for the local rural heritage as the totality of nature and culture is extremely large, which is necessary to remember when analyzing the current state of the village and the image of 'new rurality' it produces.

For an outside observer/tourist/seeker of antiquity familiar with the local landscape only from 'pictures on the Internet', Pylma in its contemporary form would look like an open-air museum exhibit rather than a living village (despite the fact that in summer it is quite crowded³³). In such a 'perception' (of the potential urban tourist, who wants to see 'real' rural life with his own eyes), the village typifies the imaginary traditional rurality of the Russian North in its Onega 'version', and this type of amateur museumification seems to be in demand. In today's Karelia, Pylma is not the only case: for instance, in the Onega village of Lelikovo, which was almost deserted in the 1960s and later was preserved through the efforts of city dwellers and summer residents (mostly former villagers), there is independent and amateur museumification of the area in order to preserve the settlement that has not been considered an administrative unit for more than half a century (Nagurnaya, 2019). This imagined 'true rurality', constituted by city dwellers and combined with *dacha* leisure by most 'seasonal' residents, can certainly preserve the historical Pylma for some time (even for a long time); however, one can only guess about its margin of safety, if there is no active development with the preservation of landscape.

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33. According to the village chief, not long ago the second squad of the Zenit football club (Saint Petersburg), in whose administration one of the village natives works, came to stay and 'play a ball' at the local sports ground (behind the historical houses).

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Карельская деревня Пяльма: горожанин и его деревня

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Аннотация. В статье на примере карельской деревни Пяльма, расположенной в Поонежье, рассмотрено характерное для нынешней социокультурной ситуации конструирование образа традиционной северорусской деревни бывшими горожанами. Опираясь на собственные представления об аутентичности сельского, они репрезентируют сельскую традицию для туристов-горожан, чьи знания о сельском опосредованы массовой культурой и не подкреплены практическими умениями. Сопоставляя историю Пяльмы с другими примерами общественной работы с природно-культурным наследием на Северо-Западе России, автор показывает, что типизация и музеефикация традиционной сельскости, характерная для многих деревень региона, во многом обусловлена индивидуальным стремлением сохранить их, обеспечить их развитие за счет привлечения туристов и деятельности в про странстве «экономики впечатлений». Автор отмечает, что для большинства «сезонных» жителей таких поселений (местных и дачников) историчность места не имеет принципиального значения, в отличие от его природных и инфраструктурных осо-

бенностей. Наблюдаемые сегодня городские проекции сельскости в исторических поселениях все отчетливее разделяются на общие и частные, коммеморативно-туристические и личные хозяйственные практики, которые вместе образуют постпродуктивистскую «новую сельскость» исторических деревень Русского Севера.

Ключевые слова: новая сельскость, сельский туризм, русская деревня, Русский Север, наследие, природно-культурный ландшафт