Original Article

Pension Time, Pension Space: Escaping from Work to Labor at the Siberian Huts

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Abstract: The article examines how — due to certain infrastructural, bureaucratic, legislative, regional conditions, and contexts — territories, communities, biographical trajectories, and temporalities that do not obey rural social logic emerged in the Middle Ob region in the 2010s–2020s. The focus is on a layer of little-studied spaces — huts, fishing bases, farmsteads outside settlements. The temporal logic within which these spaces develop is the logic of expectation, preparation for life in retirement. The originality of the situation under study is determined by the gap that manifests itself in various forms of social tension. In the same year, both 40- and 65-year-old men can retire, each of whom spend time in huts, but differently estimate the remaining time of active life in the space between the village and the hut. The frustration of the older generation, often not hidden in conversation, and the young generation's questions about their plans for retirement make one wonder what is "wrong" with this situation — apart from the inequality of opportunities. A place in the structural hierarchy, a place that pays for a living, is not the ultimate goal of my interlocutors; such unfreedom turns out to be an instrument for liberation in retirement. In order to describe how, thanks to different types of decelerations and accelerations, a special retirement time emerges, created by the expectations of the owners of the huts, I consider what the work that men do in the huts consists of. These questions are in counterpoint to what men's work looks like in rural institutions: the perception of work in a position as "delirious" confirms the specificity of the two-part strategy of young pensioners. They seek work "dependence" in order

to gain “independence” and freedom, which they invest in life and work in the huts.

Keywords: interpretation of labor, autoethnography, self-transformation, humility

Пенсионное время, пенсионное пространство: побег от работы к труду на сибирских избушках

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Резюме: В статье рассматривается, каким образом благодаря определенным инфраструктурным, бюрократическим, законодательным, региональным условиям и контекстам в Среднем Приобье 2010–2020-х годов возникают территории, сообщества, биографические траектории и темпоральности, которые не подчиняются сельской социальной логике. В фокусе внимания — слой малоизученных пространств — избушки, рыбацкие базы, заимки за пределами населенных пунктов. Темпоральная логика, в рамках которой развиваются эти пространства, — логика ожидания, подготовки к жизни на пенсии. Оригинальность изучаемой ситуации определяется разрывом, проявляющимся в различных формах социального напряжения. В один и тот же год на пенсию могут выйти 40-летние и 65-летние мужчины, каждый из которых проводит время на избушках, однако по-разному оценивает оставшееся время активной жизни в пространстве между селом и избушкой. Досада старшего поколения, часто не скрываемая в разговоре, расспросы молодых о планах на пенсии заставляют задуматься о том, что же в этой ситуации «не так», кроме неравенства возможностей. Место в структурной иерархии, наличие кормящего рабочего места — не конечная цель моих собеседников; такая несвобода оказывается инструментом для освобождения на пенсии. Для того чтобы описать, как благодаря разным типам замедлений и ускорений появляется особое пенсионное время, создаваемое ожиданиями владельцев избушек, я рассматриваю то, в чем заключается труд, которым занимаются мужчины на избушках. Эти вопросы находятся в контрапункте с тем, как выглядит мужская работа в сельских учреждениях: восприятие работы на должности в качестве «бредовой» подтверждает специфику двухчастной стратегии молодых пенсионеров. Они ищут трудовую «зависимость», чтобы обрести «независимость» и свободу, которые они инвестируют в жизнь и труд на избушках.

Ключевые слова: труд, работа, пенсия, свобода, отдых, темпоральная стратегия, ускорение, избушка, Среднее Приобье, скрытый межпоколенческий конфликт

Once, we were sitting on the veranda of a fishing base, dreaming. We dreamed about what we could do and how we could earn money if each of us were not burdened by our current jobs: in administration, emergency services, the university, the fire department, and forestry.

— A lot of time would be freed up! Just like Fedor1! He is a fine fellow: he worked, did his job, just like the doctor ordered. Now he is retiring, but he is still young, full of strength! And he, well, now we have a specialist in "telochki"! (The last phrase is spoken in a voice ringing with suppressed laughter.)

— Which "telochkis" are you referring to? (I am puzzled, starting to smile, sensing something suspicious.)

— Oh, those, what are they called… the helifords!

— He-li-fords?

— Yes, that's what they call them: the heliford heifers are his favorites! (*He squints at me and smiles*) Cows, that is. (*Laughs, pleased that the play on words worked*) He has a free hand now, unlike us! We are tied down. But when he retires, he will immediately take a subsidy or a loan and buy some calves, cows, and so on… He doesn't have any helifords yet, but he is already mowing hay with Ilyukha. They are pooling resources. So that by winter, he can have his own hay and his own heifers. He has thought of everything! Preparing in advance.

As I discovered many days later, by consulting Wikipedia and entering, according to pronunciation, "heliford cows," in the county of Herefordshire, a breed of cattle known as Hereford was indeed raised in the 19th century, which was exported worldwide, including to the USSR. In Siberia, this breed that was highly adaptable to climatic conditions was bred at experimental stations.

It seems that my acquaintances had planned out everything! Both the breed and its resilience to harsh frosts, as well as productivity, the season for purchasing them, and the terms of credit! They even considered the preparation of hay for the yet-to-be-acquired cows.

However, the main topic of that dreamy conversation was retirement: my interlocutors envisioned retirement as a time to fulfill long-held desires and the most ambitious plans. In contrast, youth was perceived as a time of peonage and scarcity. The 'heliford heifers' as companions of 'real', 'high-quality' life lingered in my thoughts for a long time.

Once, as the hay-cutting and collection season was nearing its end in the deep autumn, I asked Fedor and his companions whether he would apply for a subsidy or take out a loan. He explained that he was

1 All names of my interlocutors have been altered.

gathering documents and letters of recommendation that could persuade the officials to grant him the subsidy. However, his partner interrupted him, saying:

— Even if you don't get that money, Fedya, what difference does it make? We all know you had a great project, and who better than you, a free man (he paused meaningfully here), to implement this idea? And if they do give it to you — then they are the fools!

— Why?

— It is well known that subsidies for these small farms are rarely pay off. They provide money to get started, but it is all very difficult to develop, very difficult. And everyone tries to cover it up: they say, livestock losses... (At this moment, Fedor was indignant, eager to interject, but he was not given the chance to speak.) But that is all nonsense, really, Fedya! The main thing is, you are now cutting hay, look at yourself, you have been visiting us more often! When you retire, you will have even more time, living in huts. You will have your own place.

Thus, the conversation about agriculture, haymaking, and cattle breeding has returned to familiar themes: life in "huts", shared fishing and hunting experiences, as well as lively gatherings among men.

Interestingly, grazing animals do not constitute the core of the "pension fund" of Siberian men1, unlike the situation for men in Lesotho (Ferguson, Loman 2016, p. 161): in my case, cattle breeding serves as one of the "covers" or justifications for living a "hut life". Hut life unfolds in a physical and social space beyond villages and towns; it is permeated with numerous friendly connections, mutual assistance, and collaborative efforts among fishermen/bureaucrats, beekeepers/hunters/builders, warehouse managers/farmers/stovemakers, tractor drivers, and firefighters/fishermen — the roles, professions, and areas of employment here are simply too many to list!

Yet, they are all united by one common thread: a passionate desire to spend time in huts and at dachas (both their own and those belonging to friends), working according to their skills and experiences. This is made possible only through a "break" (on vacation or retirement) from "official" employment.

1 "If the pet sellers surveyed by development experts claim that they have no other sources of income apart from agriculture, it does not imply that they are 'serious farmer-breeders' in contrast to 'migrant workers'; they may simply have 'retired'" (Ferguson, Loman 2016, p. 161).

Introduction

> There are good historical reasons why the spectacle of people seeking out their own subjection and dependence makes us so uncomfortable.
> *(Fergusson 2013, p. 224)*

This narrative, depicting rural and taiga labor in post-Soviet Russia in 2015-2020s, is not focused on survival strategies. I will discuss the physical labour associated with hunting and fishing as forms of subsistence (Humphrey 2000), as well as the intriguing system of sustenance in huts located beyond rural settlements. However, the logic and imagination that govern these 'islands' of life in Siberia are far removed from the logic and poetry of country house [dacha] 'six hundred square meters' (Pallot, Nefedova 2003, 2007; Clarke et al. 2000; Kasatkina 2015, 2024). Instead of 'potato ontologies' (Ries 2009), which emerge where even the joy of labor (and the habit of working) in the garden is tied to the necessity of feeding a family, I propose the 'hut ontologies' of young retirees who are creating their own universe beyond the spatial and temporal confines of bullshit job (Graeber 2020). While engaged in a job they despise, which they consider largely meaningless, in anticipation of early retirement, they dedicate every spare moment to constructing huts.

This universe unfolds in the Middle reaches of the Ob' river over the last ten to fifteen years, driven by new forms of labor and career strategies among men aged 30 to 50. The huts constructed by this aforementioned generation have created an entirely different social and geographical "layer" of the hut network: this has been made possible through male ingenuity and loopholes in labor legislation. In contrast to the tales of the arduous labor of hunters and fishermen who survived on their catch in the late 1990s to early 2000s, this narrative is filled with many pleasures and joys, as well as laziness and hidden relaxation.

My research curiosity is rooted in the astonishment of the older generation of retirees, who, while actively engaging in discussions about the future plans of their younger friends, have observed that the latter possess a completely different attitude towards work, retirement, labor, and leisure compared to their own. In certain instances, I could only discern the outrage experienced by men aged 60 to 70, who have recently retired and feel as though they have aged, losing their physical (and overall — life) strength. Now, at last, they are free from the schedule of a job that only allowed them to escape to their fishing hut, hunt, and simply enjoy the tranquility away from family and village life during weekends or vacations.

However, the opportunity to freely use time is not fully realized: by the time of retirement, there is very little strength left to complete the construction of a house, engage in heavy physical labor, or hunt in the taiga, whether on skis or on foot. The context described above puts me in a quandary as a researcher: since my work and biographical circumstances differ significantly from those of my informants, it took me several years to delve into this complex social situation and formulate a research question.

In my research, I aim to understand how early retirement is interpreted by different generations of men in rural Russia — ranging from unqualified career and bureaucratic success ("well done [orig. – 'krasava!'], you have effectively utilized the opportunities provided by the state!") to disapproving behavior ("in your time, we toiled, and you…!"); as well as how these judgments are fueled not only by observable temporal changes in life strategies (retirement age) but also by spatial changes in the non-urbanized areas of Siberia (the boom in the construction of forest and river huts).

Since pension is a temporary and bureaucratic category directly linked to the concept of labor, I identify one of the objectives of this article as the problematization of the relationship between labor and leisure in various contexts.

Firstly, I enhance the realm of labor, leisure, and daily life in the village by introducing an additional, flickering, and periodically sought-after space of bases and huts (dachas). Secondly, I expand and problematize the relationship between labor and leisure temporally: to achieve this, it is necessary to also introduce distinctions between "labor" and "work" (in the sense of official employment), as well as "deserved leisure" in retirement, which can only be "earned" through such official work with pension and insurance contributions.

The second, temporal context is manifested, on one hand, in the perspective of bureaucratic classification of male and female ages (active working, pre-retirement, retirement), and on the other hand, in the biographical narratives of each of my interlocutors and research subjects. The bureaucratic definition of the temporal boundaries of retirement age can be "shifted," "deceived," or adjusted conveniently through various strategies. The birth of children, northern allowances, public service, and other maneuvers can lower the age threshold for retirement. These individual strategies and methods of utilizing the official conceptual framework by rural residents in Russia illustrate, how does the escape from the state system and life support occur due to the resources of this system itself.

The concepts of "elusion [from the State]" and "avoidance" have been thoroughly studied ethnographically in the context of 'the art of not

being governed' (Scott 2009). They are associated with evading the gaze of the state and its intense control over income, access to resources, reproductive strategies, labor quality, mobility opportunities, and ideological sentiments. However, my research does not concentrate on radical examples of ungovernability; rather, it illustrates a case of the most intensive modes of inclusion within the system of state provision and social benefits. The security and economic stability of contemporary dacha owners have nothing to do with the intention of "Forest Passage"1 and living without a passport and tax identification number. On the contrary, the motto of such individuals is, "to the forest *only* with a passport! To the forest — only after fulfilling civic labor duties and years of service!". In examining these strategies, I ponder what exactly post-Soviet men habitually manage to elude ('habitually escape' (Scott 1998, p. 191)) as they flee into the realm of huts' life in taiga? Are they truly evading something, or are they, in fact, collecting and concentrating all opportunities to find in the huts what the rural world cannot provide them? Below, we will observe that the emphasis on evasion "from" and flight "to" or "for" is also fundamental to the logic of two distinct generations of men.

What the hut saves you from: rural routines and bullshit job

In the regions that I have regarded as my ethnographic field for over eight years—among remote villages, Soviet logging settlements, and scattered huts along riverbanks and in the taiga—hard physical labor is evident everywhere. This masculine labor, which is marginally profitable and yields very meager returns (Clarke 2000, p. 491), continues to maintain its priority status in the culture of small settlements, despite the catastrophic financial conditions of families and the unimaginable degradation of transport and social infrastructures. However, it would be an excessive generalization to assert that such informal economic practices related to natural resource management constitute the primary, let alone the sole, source of income for families2.

Modest salaries in the public sector, maternal capital, benefits, pensions, and the wife's income are more suitable for supporting a family

1 This is an allusion to Ernst Jünger book (eng. Translation: Thomas Friese, Telos Press Publishing. 2013 (ed. By Russell A. Berman).

2 "If the pet sellers surveyed by development experts claim that they have no other sources of income apart from agriculture, it does not imply that they are 'serious farmer-breeders' in contrast to 'migrant workers'; they may simply have 'retired'" (Ferguson, Loman 2016, p. 161).

than the exhausting and sometimes backbreaking labor of a fisherman pulling in nets filled with bream!

Here, we encounter a certain "peculiarity" in men's choices, characterized by a mysterious pragmatism of labor without reward, akin to how cattle are valued in Lesotho, despite the family's dire circumstances (Fergusson 1985). From my perspective, I propose a different viewpoint on the inertia of the value of hunting and fishing practices in huts: is the skill itself valuable, or does it serve as a justification and cover for pursuing other practices and desires? Conversations among young and older hunters regarding skills and hunting traditions often refer to a "routine of calamities": in this logic, those engaged in these trades are the ones who have managed to survive without formal employment and resources.

Here, this argument is closely related to the concept of the "routine of disasters" as discussed by James Scott in the context of peasant (rather than hunting) alternative means of sustenance, rescue, and flexibility. Interestingly, the term "nourishing labor," typically understood as the pursuit of food resources, has another interpretation. Employment in a "nourishing" budget position (actually – and allusion to a 'feeding trough') within administration, at warehouses, in garages and repair shops of the agency, in schools, or at the post office requires minimal physical effort while demanding constant engagement in monotonous "paperwork." A key characteristic of such positions in towns and villages is their unproductive nature; they exist outside and beyond the policies of production (Burawoy 1985). In interviews and informal discussions, my interlocutors frequently expressed nostalgia for the period before 1995, when many of them were involved in "real" production: timber harvesting, log rafting, and canning at the fish processing plant. The very act of resource utilization (fishing, logging) was inextricably linked to small-scale factory production.

Currently, production has become dispersed among stores, bakeries, and refrigeration units of fish dealers; the remaining population, according to informants, is relegated to a sector that produces nothing: administrative work, security provision, property accounting, engagement with the civilian population, and social welfare. This is precisely what my interlocutors perceive as "bullshit" in the definition provided by David Graeber (2020). My interlocutors have repeatedly noted that even if they were to sit idly in this position or not show up for their duty/shift at all, it is likely that no one would even notice.

Simple administrative tasks involving the "shuffling" of papers in a budget institution or conducting sanitary inspections merely for the sake of compliance of the village represent a form of work where the act of labor is intentionally demonstrated, yet in reality, it is nearly

nonexistent. However, this is merely my description of the observed practices of administrative employees. From an ethnographic perspective, it is of great significance how the men employed in the district center and villages perceive the futility and ineffectiveness of their activities, which nonetheless provide them with income. I will present an excerpt from my field diary (AFM 2024, February):

> *A particularly revealing conversation occurred in a rural hospital while I was waiting for my turn to see the doctor. Two men were discussing matters concerning the village and the surrounding area, where several huts belonging to friendly owners are located nearby. A villager, who is a family man, shared that he is purchasing a mini-sawmill and pursuing online education "just for certificates," which he believes will "never hurts. So why not obtain them while there is still time?". His companion was astonished at how his friend manages to accomplish so much. The latter explained that his duties at his primary job do not drain his attention and emotional energy, but merely take up time, thus leaving him with a spark to engage in entrepreneurship and "earn certificates." He then chuckled and emphasized that due to the nature of his work in the village, "I have quite a collection of diplomas from various institutions across the country!" It seemed that the strategy for work, earnings, and leisure was clear. However, that was not the case! The conversation then shifted to the notion that all these efforts and attempts in various fields of activity for a man were merely a way to pass the time while waiting for a certain official to retire due to age, at which point he (with all his credentials and experience) would take that position.*

Listening to this conversation, I began to feel that I was in an environment where everyone was either anticipating their own retirement to free up time and energy or waiting for others to retire so they could take their positions. Interestingly, during the waiting period, when a desirable position becomes available, candidates for that role do not view the job as trivial. However, once they obtain it, they only express their feelings about it to a select group of friends, often in frustration: it is inappropriate to complain about something they once longed to achieve.

In this context, a third aspect of the 'nurturing labor' of a bureaucrat emerges, a type of work that appears relatively easy (both physically and intellectually) from the outside, yet leads to quicker retirement benefits. This is the image of 'comfortable' bureaucratic work for an enterprising middle-aged man from a large village.

How do the fortunate individuals engaged in a nice cushy work operate?

In this context, I am drawn to the ease with which they navigate their tasks, avoiding the burdens of trivial employment, while nonetheless yearning for liberation from it—not at the end of the workday, but at the end of their career. This release from trivial pursuits is dis-

tinctly different from the liberation from the 'torment' of organized wage labor, as discussed by S. Petryakov, who reflects on the understanding of labor among berry pickers who have escaped their previous work routines: 'the 'torment', i.e., the structural necessity to earn a living, becomes materialized through the dreaded Mondays, morning frost, or heat' (Petryakov 2024, p. 67). Conversely, my informants emphasize that the humiliation of trivial work lies in its outward appearance of being very light and unburdensome, which does not provide a sufficient justification for a man's engagement. Work 'in the hut' (during weekends, vacations, or retirement) is commendable not only for its meaningfulness but also for being sufficiently demanding to command respect.

But do, for example, fish inspectors consider their duties to be a convenient job? It is important to note that their activities during raids combine bureaucratic work of documentation with physical labor — spending entire days in a boat or on a snowmobile, enduring blizzards and storms, while searching for heating or resting points. Here, I will provide a contrasting example to illustrate how what may appear to be an ideal job as a stepping stone to retirement is not viewed as such by the officials themselves.

On one of the cold winter evenings, two inspectors stopped by a hut on their snowmobile. They were quite fatigued from their journey, but after warming up, they began to converse and share their unfortunate circumstances. As responsible employees, they were required to "show" results (reports) and the very practice of 'going into the raid'. The first was necessary for management, while the second was done in a demonstrative manner for the fishing community, to prove that "they are here," diligently fulfilling their inspector duties and not intending to give up or halt their patrols due to the severe cold. However, they were greatly disheartened by the fact that, due to the freezing temperatures and the challenging situation with fish stocks (the catches were scanty), there was hardly anyone to check or "catch." Thus, their heroic effort to maintain authority on the river proved futile—they encountered no one, and no one saw them! Only through the network of hut network gossips could they indirectly convey to the local residents that they were indeed "working" and had been on patrol.

It was precisely at this moment that it became clear to me under what particularly strange circumstances the "absurdity" of inspector work was constructed. It is not as monotonously meaningless as the work of an administrative employee: during moments of success, with numerous protocols, chases, and disputes, the absurd work of the inspector takes on an almost heroic glow! However, that was not the case today: this instance demonstrates that some jobs reveal their absurdity and meaninglessness in contrast to success. Thus, what can reconcile the worker with the meaninglessness of their work is the

periodic “flashes” during which a result appears: when something is evidently produced, created, or formed: a haystack, a protocol, a petition, a fire reservoir, etc.

However, the village and the countryside represent a realm of “paperwork,” while the work in a hut is associated with physical labor, where the efforts invested are tangible, and the results belong not to the employer but to the hunter or fisherman themselves. In contrast, paperwork constitutes a form of labor that cannot be alienated, as it is, according to the informants, not considered productive. This context allows for the overcoming of the duality in the perception of labor, as discussed by M. Mollona (2005), who compares the work of employees in hot and cold workshops at a factory, where some receive a fixed salary regardless of the output produced, while others aim to exceed the minimum production plan. In the Russian case I am examining, neither skill, nor connection to tradition, nor interest in premium payments tied to “output” guide the workers occupying “feeding positions” in the post-Soviet rural labor landscape. Working hours, quarterly and daily labor productivity are concepts irrelevant to the working positions that my informants aspire to occupy, while simultaneously wishing to rid themselves of it as soon as possible. Their perspectives on labor only become clear in the context of several decades.

In the village, working men consistently show their employers a repetitive and unproductive routine as a blind. But do they truly labor “in the huts”? Where does the liberated labor go to in their case, and does it lead to the long-awaited freedom? Moreover, are my interlocutors genuinely seeking freedom? In this context, labor and work are also entangled in a web of cunning, deceit, and even self-deception, which are necessary to break through to the “simple” labor “in the huts” amidst the routine of bullshit job. Upon reviewing field diaries, I have come to the conclusion that liberated labor, the intention to work, does not necessarily manifest itself outside the settlement (in the hut). Furthermore, by “resting” in the huts or working very little, the men disguise themselves with the appearance of active hard labor, as if justifying their imminent departure from “bullshit job” (Graeber 2020) into retirement. If the task of seasonal berry pickers, who have escaped from the “agony” of factory or office life, is to make their work distinct from their previous employment experiences by “stitching” breaks and rest with physical exertion (Petryakov 2024, p. 63), then in my case, breaks and rest are often concealed, showcasing the arduous labor of chopping wood and constructing a log cabin. What matters is not how the desired freedom appears to the individual man;

rather, it is essential that others perceive this freedom as a form of hard work that justifies an early retirement.

Here, the pursuit of non-absurdity in labor conceptually intersects with freedom — but not in a bureaucratic sense, rather in a spatial one (the freedom to live away from home). In light of these observations, I would like to pose a provocative question: does anyone actually *work* "in the huts" at all? Or is this a grand illusion, collectively created by men who frequently venture beyond the inhabited village space into the unknown?

Labor and challenges as an integral part of life in the huts

To understand how the local residents perceive and differentiate between labor and work, labor and rest, as well as the value and futility/meaninglessness of labor, it is essential to systematically describe the components that make up a day "in the hut" across different seasons, and to identify the types of practices that are an inseparable part of this complex economic activity. Primarily, the labor of the hut owner involves the construction and maintenance of the building and the surrounding outbuildings. The tasks that form the context of these labor efforts become clear when one considers what might happen to a hut that has not been visited by its owner for an extended period. There is a threat from people (malicious individuals or, conversely, inebriated random "guests" may set the hut on fire, or it may decay, with its remains being consumed by the taiga) (see Fig. 1).

As of today, even in the taiga, it is not particularly easy to harvest timber for a hut: often, in areas where public hunting grounds are located, parts of which are informally regarded by local residents as the hunting territory of a specific hunter or family, there is no suitable timber available. Furthermore, if one wishes to build officially, it is necessary to obtain a permit for logging: the zone where permit is active may be located quite far from the intended construction site. The situation regarding the forest resources in post-Soviet Western Siberia is critical: reforestation efforts following the collapse of the Soviet Union were poorly executed, with saplings in most cases dying within the first few years. Consequently, the taiga is filled with untended clearings, overgrown thickets, and abandoned logging sites. This scenario is starkly different from the conditions under which a Soviet hunter established his forest hut in the 1950s. Nevertheless, this forest, damaged by chaotic logging, remains a habitat for fur-bearing animals and game birds.

Fig. 1. The carcass of a burned hut/carriage in the West Siberian taiga. September 2018. Source: by the author.

These circumstances not only define the conditions under which the labor practices of hut owners unfold: the construction and maintenance of life in this space are associated with a number of challenges. How do the hunters themselves understand and differentiate between the concepts of "labor" and "difficulties"?

A striking illustration of such a division and play with concepts is the story of a Soviet hunter who raised his sons during the 1990s. During this time, the role of 'official hunters' ceased to be a 'job': it became impossible to find employment as a hunter. My interlocutor assessed the situation and realized that he had nurtured his boys from childhood with a love for the taiga, a love for shared physical labor aimed at maintaining a hunting 'household.' Now, it was time to 'dissuade' them from the taiga, to make them disillusioned with it, so they could find their place in a world where there is official 'employment' rather than just labor. He decided to disaccustom them from the taiga through exhausting work, which, in the context of the opposition I proposed between rural 'official employment' and hunting labor, is a noteworthy fact.

> *— So how did I manage to dissuade them? I assigned them daunting tasks to make them lose interest, to instill a hatred for this labor. I compelled them to clear a path to the hut, preparing a winter road for the autumn. They chopped branches, cleared debris, and dealt with heavy logs! I also burdened them with heavy machinery; they carried saws and a generator through the forest on foot...*

> *— And did it work, did you manage to 'dissuade' them?*
> *— I believe so (smirking). I observe that they now have decent jobs, urban ones. They have found their place and received an education. Otherwise, what would they be doing—sitting in the taiga with me? I managed to intervene in time (m., 65, hunter, formerly a fisherman, entrepreneur in scrap metal sales)*

This episode illustrates how hard work can be used for mentoring purposes: what was presented as a value by the father during childhood, requiring selflessness, has now been completely reversed: physical labor is no longer esteemed. It has been replaced by a more suitable form of work for the economic conditions of the 1990s and 2000s, which is intellectual and highly skilled, associated with education and offering the prospect of moving from rural areas to urban centers, along with other social mobility opportunities1.

Nevertheless, the hunter, a father of two sons, made a different choice for himself: by 'dissuading' the boys from the taiga, he decided to remain there himself. Moreover, by capitalizing on the metal he found in the taiga (remnants of narrow-gauge railways and logging equipment), he created conditions that allowed him to continue living a hunting lifestyle. Thus, through small entrepreneurship and with an irregular income, the hunter was able to financially support his own time spent working in the taiga: his modest pension, established during the period of Russian reforms, did not allow him to live solely on its benefits.

Left alone, without any assistance, he establishes his own work and rest schedule at the homestead—a complex of outbuildings that includes a small hut, a bathhouse, a wood shed, and a toilet. His responsibilities consist of chopping wood, maintaining warmth in the hut, and checking the snares and traps for hares and sables. Walking along the snow-

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1 The peer of these adolescents is a boy nicknamed Churchill, who during the same years found himself in a challenging situation in the Evenki taiga following the death of his parents. N. Ssorin-Chaikov, while observing his upbringing and maturation in two reindeer herding enterprises, also recalls the reaction of a people's deputy from the regional committee. Upon learning that the boy did not return to school in the autumn, choosing instead to master the skills of a reindeer herder and hunter, the deputy remarked: "No matter how much you feed a wolf, it always looks to the forest" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003, p. 39–44). The policies of the Soviet and post-Soviet era regarding the 'taming' of backwardness through education are also highlighted in this context by the political stance towards the indigenous peoples of the North. In my case, despite the decontextualization from an ethnic perspective, the taiga and river fishing remain domains of 'savagery,' while the skills of the taiga are contrasted with the knowledge and education required for urban life.

covered trail[1] (see Fig. 2) requires skill and considerable physical effort. In the evening, illuminated by a kerosene lamp or a LED strip powered by a car accumulator, the owner prepares the sables and initially processes the pelts, hanging them to dry on ceiling hooks near the stove.

Fig. 2. A hunter who owns several huts checks traps near the main hut on hunting skis. February 2024. Source: photo by the author.

What are the other burdens faced by the inhabitants of the huts? When hunting moose, one must traverse many kilometers through the taiga and swamps, and if returning before dark is not possible, one has to spend the night in a transit hut[2] or right by the campfire. Thus, the work of a hunter relies on the following skills: endurance, patience, and the ability to mobilize in critical situations. Now, let us shift our focus to the fishermen's camp and examine the peculiarities of their labor and lifestyle.

In the taiga, constructing a hut may seem like a simpler task (as the building materials grow all around), but to build a fishing hut on the riverbank requires significantly more complex logistics for transporting construction materials. During my five-month stay in the field on the banks of the Ob River in 2024, the fishermen discussed the possibilities of building new huts, repairing old ones, and constructing extensions—additional rooms adjacent to the main log structure of the central hut.

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1 The trail, a route that runs through the forest from one trap to another, along which the hunter moves.

2 The transit hut is a hunter's accommodation, a temporary base that serves as a support point away from the main camp, equipped with everything necessary for living. Typically, the transit hut is utilized for one night, provided the hunter is neither injured nor harmed.

The summer of 2023 proved to be a turning point for numerous hunting and fishing households. A hurricane felled enormous trees, creating debris that rendered hunting impossible for people and made it difficult for moose to find food and shelter. One fisherman's hut, situated in a scenic and commercially viable location, was completely buried under massive birch trees.

A significant amount of effort and time was required to locate the surviving structure beneath the rubble and to clear it. Surprisingly, this disaster, a harbinger of "difficulties," sparked tremendous enthusiasm among hut owners: even those whose homes remained unscathed began to contemplate renovations, repairs, and expansions.

To transport building materials to the riverbank, one must wait until mid-March, when the winter road on the river becomes established and the days grow longer. From the sawmill, materials are transported by truck and then by a convoy of snowmobiles, enlisting the help of friends and relatives, as the prepared timber or logs from the seasoned log cabin are hauled along the winter road to the construction site of the cabin.

This event necessitates preparation, luck, and the convergence of several factors: favorable clear weather, the absence of an unexpected winter-spring thaw, and the alignment of weekends and time off for the host's assistants, who occasionally need to request leave from their primary jobs to assist a friend.

It is particularly important to note that physically and technically demanding tasks require a team of individuals, some of whom work in the village, some are retired, and others have returned home during their student breaks. All of them synchronize their efforts, contributing their time and labor, thus allowing the hut to be gradually constructed or renovated during these "temporary gaps" between rural and urban activities and jobs, as well as in accordance with the understanding of ecological time (Evans-Pritchard 1940, p. 100–102). In fact, a new space is created (or rather, the space of unutilized (or abandoned) hunting and fishing grounds and territories is redefined) through the release of time beyond the confines of work.

Bureaucratic accelerations, biographical slowdowns: games with time around the huts

"We all wait for futures – yet not for the same ones, nor in the same way, nor at the same tempo" (Rundell 2009, p. 51)

Considering ethnographically what the labor "in the huts" entails for both young and elderly hunters and fishers, I propose to raise the question of *who* works in the forest and by the river. It is essential to under-

stand the rhythms of labor in the hut and to identify who is working there and who is resting. It is necessary to distinguish between two generations of men. The older generation consists of those who spent the majority of their working lives during the Soviet era but retired already in the Russian Federation. They actively utilize innovations in transportation technology and weaponry; however, their generation primarily relies on a strong fishing and hunting tradition that existed before the widespread adoption of "Burans" and rifles with optical sights. The younger generation includes individuals aged 25 to 45. In their childhood, they had the opportunity to learn from their grandfather or father how to move silently through the forest, create fire when matches were wet, track animals, spending several nights in a raincoat tent, and accurately shoot prey with open sights. However, all technological innovations in the fields of hunting and fishing allow young individuals to disregard the knowledge and skills imparted by teachers and mentors of previous generations.

This undoubtedly alters their perspective not only towards labor, but also towards the potential "difficulties" that await a practitioner of the hut life. The first shift I observe through discussions during collaborative labor practices and conversations at the table afterwards is that labor is reinterpreted by young hunters as the ideal of "activity without difficulties." In turn, activity without difficulties and labor without difficulties1 possess another crucial characteristic: they occur at a faster pace; labor without difficulties is characterized as "accelerated labor." At the most apparent level, this is reflected in the higher speeds of modern snowmobiles compared to the old "Buran" models; a more rapid and efficient method of tracking game (aerial observation); and more frequent and quicker shots during hunting (thanks to multichamber rifles, as well as increased shooting range, which creates more opportunities). Consequently, younger hunters who have the financial means to acquire equipment due to their paid employment are able to create a technological and infrastructural acceleration: hunting often occurs more swiftly, and the time taken to travel from home to the hunting lodge is reduced.

However, the acceleration of various types does not end here: the primary temporal modality (Zigon 2018, p. 65), which is subject to restructuring, is created by bureaucratic rules through which the state identifies the boundaries of retirement and working age for each citizen using biopolitical tools. Here, I find it important not so much the

1 In Russian labor [trud] and difficulties [trudnosti] include the same core of the word: [trud]. That's why in Russian this phrase becomes a little bit absurd: trud without trudnosti.

disciplinary aspect of biopolitics, but rather the 'more subtle, more rational mechanisms: insurance, individual and collective savings, security measures' (Foucault 1997, p. 243–244). The very 'promise of a pension' from the state, the method of constructing a pension both as monetary support and as freed time for the former worker, immediately refers to several fundamental forms of 'concern' among citizens: it represents a deferred form of insurance (and backup in old age); but it also embodies a form of realizing 'savings' in a complex interplay of saved energy, health, and free time that the worker has postponed for later.

What my informants experience and the temporal modality they inhabit is not a state of hope, but rather a state of *anticipation*[1]. Another significant conceptual distinction becomes possible through the development of the English terms "waiting" and "expectation," along with the corresponding verbs that indicate that one can "wait" in various ways. Gasparini (1995, p. 31) also introduces a third concept—"anticipation"—which reflects the intentionality of waiting, as well as the contentious issue of what we can truly control and bring closer from what we anticipate. In the context of the retirement strategies I am studying, the concept of intentionality is crucial for ethnographic description of whose actions and inactions, or non-doing (Scott 2007), contribute to the formation of relationships among men in the huts. This approach allows to integrate of issues related to the ethnography of labor and the anthropology of time in my current analysis. For my idea, it is not all these preferences that are offered by the state to retired working citizens that are of particular importance, but how these preferences create a rhetorical image of a "well-deserved rest": a kind of trope, which is a core subject of debate between different generations of workers.

If one has worked longer than others or under more challenging conditions, such as in northern or arctic environments, they are deemed worthy of a higher pension. However, how should we interpret the type of encouragement provided by the state that is reflected not in the amount of pension support and benefits, but in the reduction of the official working lifespan? How can we justify the gift of time rather than financial resources? For my interlocutors—men who are preparing for retirement over the course of several years, investing all their efforts, time, and money into building huts—present a significant dilemma: their hunting and fishing partners retired much later, having devoted their entire youth to wage labor. How do hunters from younger gen-

1 See the distinction in: (Zigon 2018, p. 65).

eration justify their right to retire early to elder comrades? Why is it necessary for them to do so?

Early retirement can be pursued for various reasons. For men aged 30 to 40, the primary arguments in the list of "privileges" include service in critical civilian infrastructure sectors (such as working in the village fire department), as well as the working conditions in Arctic regions and areas classified as equivalent to the Far North.

In this case, it is essential to pose the question: what does retirement signify from the perspective of the moral careers of rural officials and workers in the North and the Arctic?[1] I suggest examining the retirement process as a kind of reflective manifestation of Goffman's moral career (Goffman 1964, 1990), which is not only associated with the acquisition of a new status, identity, and condition, but rather, as a departure from a role due to the conclusion of one's official work activities (Scott 2018; Scott, Hardie-Bick 2022, p. 82). The strategies employed by the hut owners I am familiar with, the anticipation, expectation, and actions aimed at approaching retirement age, coalesce into a singular pattern where temporal modalities play a crucial role: various types of acceleration and slowdown. What an anthropologist may grasp and describe as acceleration and deceleration is possibly due to the relationship between 'temporal singularity and multiplicity' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2021, p. 82). By presenting this conceptual approach, I aim to illustrate how the process of early retirement for rural workers serves as a radical ethnographic example of the "moral career" of young retirees who aspire to a life and work in huts.

Double acceleration: bureaucratic and technological tricks on the path to life in a hut

In order to achieve a prolonged life "in the hut," free from work and obligations, young men exploit the pliability of the state system, utilizing its hidden resources not only to "escape" from the "time" of work but also to "escape" from the time and space of family. In the article dedicated to the impact of female absence "in the huts" and loans as traditionally male domains (Rakhmanova 2024), I demonstrate how men differently navigate the gap that exists between the gender order

1 I propose to examine the phenomenon of moral career (Goffman 1968, 1990) within various institutional and non-institutional contexts (Scott, Hardie-Bick 2022, p. 74), engaging in dialogue with other researchers who have explored this concept in the realms of sports, leisure practices across different subcultures, motherhood, and other aspects of everyday life (see: Cohen, Taylor 1993; Liamputtong 2006; Scott, Hardie-Bick 2022).

of the village and taiga life. Obligations to a wife, children, and family as a whole—unlike the value of labor and the state's portrayal of the impossibility for a citizen to be a dependent—restrict men's freedom. However, negotiating with a wife is simpler than dealing with the pension system. Below, I will illustrate the arguments that young pensioners use in disputes with their wives. Elderly hunters and fishermen typically have fewer obligations: their children have grown up, and the wifes' grumpiness has become not a instrument of restraint, but rather an incentive to escape from the village to a hut.

The fact that in this article I ethnographically examine only male decisions, male destinies, and priorities highlights the ambiguity in the perception of work and leisure in retirement. Work and leisure, freedom and the value of labor, idleness and achievements, absurdity and meaningfulness of work — all these concepts are gender-defined and defined unequally: based on entirely different grounds. For instance, men note that their wives' work in schools or kindergartens is more creative than their positions as warehouse managers, clerks, or deputy directors of budget municipal institutions. Despite the prevailing opinion in rural communities that in rural Siberia, even with a good education, graduates have little chance of escaping poverty and routine, the teaching process itself is not regarded as either useless or absurd. In my article, by selecting a narrow focus and examining only male labor and leisure, I attempt to approach this issue from a new perspective, without concentrating on the problem of gender wage inequality in post-Soviet Russia.

Thus, the inequality of opportunities among men from different generations in terms of access to labor, leisure, and pension provision I primarily conceptualize as temporal inequality. The temporalities that I can identify here are described by my interlocutors in terms of labor, work, and pensions. The latter two categories represent two distinct segments of a singular biographical time: retirement begins when labor at work concludes. In this context, "labor" is a rather ambiguous concept, as it manifests both in the chronotope of huts (the arduous work of checking networks or constructing buildings), and in the hustle concerning the organization of an early retirement, as well as in the actual work within rural institutions1.

1 It is important to note that I am considering a strategy focused on stable positions located in rural areas that are supported by the government (such as administration, postal services, healthcare facilities, emergency services, fire departments, morgues, forensic examinations, schools, etc.). This strategy is not typically followed by young entrepreneurs, self-employed individuals, or employees of private stores. Consequently, retirement strategies and future

The connection between the inequality of temporal opportunities and the categories of labor, work, and pensions has been adopted by me from my interlocutors. In turn, to clarify these concepts within the context of anthropological studies of labor, I make an additional move by linking temporal inequalities during transitions between work and pension modes, labor and rest, to the phenomenon of cabin life. Young hunters and fishermen find themselves in a more advantageous position compared to older men. What do they pay for this acceleration, and how do they plan to utilize the 'saved' time gained from early retirement? Is life and work in the hut the central pillar of their existence?

In this section, I aim to demonstrate that for the older generation, life and work in a hunting lodge serve as a means of generating additional income, as well as a method to postpone aging (the delay attributed to lodge life); for the younger generation of men, the lifestyle associated with the lodge is more of a goal for which they allocate time (accelerating their work and years of service), save funds for the construction and improvement of the lodge's facilities, and acquire more powerful equipment to expedite the transportation of people and goods between the village and the lodge/base.

David Harvey notes that "since modernity is an experience of progress through modernization, discussions on this topic typically emphasize temporality, the process of becoming, rather than existence in space and place" (Harvey 1992, p. 205). In contrast, for my interlocutors, the emphasis on life "in the hut," its construction in a remote location, the joy of creation, and the preparation for future existence "in space and place" are defining elements. It may seem obvious and trivial: in a rural village or settlement, one must somehow cling to the budgetary sector, curry favor, and receive pension contributions. Life will "begin" when the absurd job comes to an end. At that point, one can stop working and live comfortably on state funds. However, something does not quite add up from the very beginning: the owner builds a house, supports a family, invests effort, yet it is precisely the pension that becomes the basis for gaining the freedom to live outside the primary residence.

During the winter trips to the huts as part of the field expedition of 2024, I engaged in discussions with men regarding the prospects of life in taiga and their future plans. Most of my interlocutors, young fishermen approaching retirement or resignation, spoke of dreams cen-

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planning methods vary significantly even within a single rural community. However, it can be confidently stated that there are far fewer entrepreneurs among the owners of small huts compared to those who have worked in stable positions.

tered around relocating with their families to a remote area or cabin base. In fact, if there were enough women willing to exchange their accustomed comfortable living conditions in a village or town with shops, accessible medical care, and other amenities, we could witness the emergence of an entirely new type of rural settlement along the banks of fish-rich rivers and in the taiga. However, this is not happening: firstly, because few companions of young retirees agree to such a move, and secondly, because some of these structures, according to regulations, are non-foundation buildings1, making it impossible to construct a large homestead in such a natural setting.

Considering the aspirations and dreams of men and women in the communities I study, I inevitably find myself re-evaluating the concept of "home." What does this "home" mean for a fisherman, and how does his wife perceive it? In fact, we can observe a "splitting" of the notion of home among men as they approach retirement age. When planning for retirement, the "home" where the family resides, which the man has cared for over many years, shifts in value towards a hut or a dacha as the primary home (the focus of care and investment gradually transitions to it). This shift cannot help but alter the gender-defined landscape both within and outside of settlements. In a rural "home," a man typically shares his responsibilities with other household members, such as his wife or partner, whereas in a hut as a "home," where the man often manages all tasks independently, he takes on both traditionally female and male roles and responsibilities.

In the article discussing the phenomenon of an dividual in the Siberian lodge (Rakhmanova 2024), I illustrate how the spatial remoteness from the settlement, the unique landscape, and the rhythm of life facilitate the emergence of the dividual as a form of distributed personality. In this article, it is also crucial for me to demonstrate that this process is marked not only by gender but also by generational factors.

Men who have a permanent job (fire department, administration, hospital, water utility, etc.) continue to improve their huts, using all their free time—weekends and vacations.

It is evident that their absences from the main house and the village often lead to conflicts with their wives and may even provoke divorce. However, the dream of living most of the time outside the village, away

1 Houses and huts without foundations are constructed on piles or other types of supports for two reasons. First, according to legislation, the water protection zone near rivers, especially around sources of drinking water, does not permit the construction of concrete structures when the water protection zone is supplemented by a sanitary zone. Second, from a pragmatic perspective, houses on piles can be easily adapted to flood conditions.

from the familiar rural community, and outside the confines of an office with its disciplining atmosphere, remains a strong motivation in all discussions and biographical interviews. How can this dream (this future) be realized? By working even harder, they accumulate seniority, so that they can finally spend more than just a day and a half at the hut as a space of freedom and relaxation, but rather stay there as long as they wish (turning a blind eye to their wives' complaints). Thus, the first acceleration that hunting and fishing men readily resort to is the acceleration of the work experience intensity, the acceleration of service time recognition. All legal and bureaucratic mechanisms that provide benefits and expedite the accumulation of service time are employed for this purpose.

The second acceleration refers to technical and infrastructural sphere. It became evident to me through conversations with elderly hunters. As I mentioned earlier, the acquisition of more powerful equipment makes the journey from civilization to the hunting lodge easier and faster. The criticism of this method of acceleration comes from elderly retirees who lack the means to save up for and purchase such vehicles, boats, and snowmobiles. They ironically point out that those who have everything handed to them easily, including access to remote hunting grounds or lodges, tend to lose their health, and their bodies become less adapted to the harsh conditions of travel and labor. However, in my case, the elderly interlocutors found a willing listener in me, joking about the younger generation, while the latter merely smirk, taking some pride in glancing out the window at the brand-new snowmobile parked outside (in contrast to the dilapidated 'Buran' models of the older informants).

To what extent is physical labor considered a form of rest, a duty, or a necessity in each individual case? When a man retires at the age of 40, how does he choose to spend his newfound free time? Does he truly desire to spend more time at the hut, as he once dreamed? Is he resting or working? It is clear that he is not engaged in work in the sense of bureaucratically defined tasks. Before examining how rest and leisure are masked by labor and become indistinguishable from one another, I will explore the temporal modalities and the relationship with time of the older generation of hunters and fishermen who have since retired.

A hut as a tool for slowing down aging

In order to shift from the perspective of future young retirees to that of their older peers and comrades, I propose we examine the statement made by Michael Burawoy in his article "Facing an unequal world"

(Burawoy, 2014): “a privilege to be exploited.” How can such a paradoxical statement be understood? Does it reflect a fear of job loss and wage reduction? How can this trend be contextualized within the struggle against idleness in the USSR? Informal discussions often revolved around the benefits of having an officially paid job.

For older men, despite their bitter nostalgic memories of hard labor on narrow-gauge railways, in the forestry industry, and in fishing collective farms during the Soviet era, the right to work officially was seen as a privilege. However, these fond memories were often accompanied by caveats regarding acquired chronic diseases and the ever-aching arms and shoulders, as well as the long-term ailments they had developed.

Unnoticed, conversations at the table seamlessly transitioned from the benefits of employment to tales of the early deaths of their colleagues, who had been overly diligent workers. In none of these recollections and discussions did I encounter the mention of the concept of ‘freedom.’ Even if we take as a reference point the social shift that led to a redefinition of freedom, linking it not to independence but to a multitude of possibilities of ‘dependence’ (Fergusson 2013, p. 226), this illusion of choice, which provides agency, was hardly accessible to Soviet workers in the timber industry and fishing brigades with whom I interacted during my extensive field research.

In my fieldwork, I observed that such conversations often seemed to dissolve into the air, lacking a clear argument for conclusion. In the eyes of the young fishermen, a silent question lingered: ‘Is this your benefit?’ — they seemed to want to ask each time they debated the right to retire early. Yet, they still remained cautiously silent. Caroline Humphrey writes about this paradox of intergenerational disconnection: “who is to go and do the backbreaking work? Who will stay for months in a tiny, comfortless hut? Who will go to the market to sell the produce?” Observation leads her to the answer: “it is the elderly retired people who bear these burdens”” (Humphrey 2000, p. 152).

If we attempt to explain this paradox from an ethnographic perspective, we will find ourselves going in circles. Why do retirees, who were born and worked in the USSR, not attempt to change their circumstances, and accept the state-designated retirement age? Is this a lack of will, inaction, or a form of agency? Does it reflect an expectation which waits for “everything to come from others” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 237) — both in terms of paternalistic expectations towards the Soviet state that abandoned them, and in terms of hopes for familial connections and support from their children? Certainly not! Here, I concur with the notion that “to live socially is to wait for its (the promise. — L. R.) fulfilment, which is also to believe in it, not in

the cognitive sense of mentally assenting to a set of propositions …, but in the volitional-economic sense of giving credit (credere) to a promise" (Reinhardt 2018, p. 117). Fulfilling promises is a crucial aspect of how the dignity of a Soviet citizen is understood, even as it has somewhat evolved in the post-Soviet reality. James Ferguson (2013), while developing the concept of "declaration of dependence," illustrates how the value of human autonomy and independence, which was directly associated with freedom and dignity, has mutated beyond recognition and transformed into a race for comfortable forms of subjugation.

This vague discomfort stemming from the 'spectacle' in which young men queued for a 'nurturing' budget position —'discomfort with dependence' (Ferguson 2013, p. 226) — accurately reflects the sentiments of my older interlocutors. It was their caustic remarks that guided me to articulate my research question, which I presented in the introduction. As young candidates for retirement appear on the horizon, having decided to pursue a different path by hastening the passage of time and approaching their release from work through retirement, older men have inadvertently become the "career others" (Lindesmith et al. 1999) for the younger generation. On one hand, elders were the subject of jokes, while on the other, their approval of this strategy was anticipated. In those moments of conversation when the acknowledgment of the acceptability of early retirement could have been expressed, the discussion awkwardly shifted or transitioned to an entirely different topic: the older hunters and fishermen would begin recounting why a late retirement and work "in the huts" even after leaving their jobs is undoubtedly a blessing and privilege of their generation.

For the older generation, labor "in the huts," which encompasses all the aforementioned labor elements and challenges, serves as a means of engaging with time, even as a struggle against its fleeting nature. Upon retiring later in life, a man realizes that his strength, energy, and agility have diminished. There remains little time and energy for cherished activities such as fishing and hunting as forms of labor. However, precisely because it seems that there is little strength left, one should subject oneself to exhausting physical work: although not immediately, it can help maintain excellent physical condition and extend retirement as a period that is active and, in many ways, joyful.

Thus, without hastening or approaching retirement age, but rather intensifying the burden of labor "in the hut," the older generation remarkably responds to the challenges of aging and the inevitability of death, as well as the challenge and pressure of biographical time

(which is drawing to a close, running out). Most of my interlocutors described old age and death in terms of exhaustion of strength and rapid fatigue; less frequently, they spoke of it in terms of clarity of consciousness and sharpness of memory. In this sense, the time of life and fullness of strength is secular. Elderly individuals raised in the Soviet Union mentioned prayer, atonement for sins, and reconciliation with the reality of impending death through faith in God with a degree of hesitation,. For instance, a recently deceased hunter became devout in his later years, according to his friends, and even constructed a chapel in the taiga (see Fig. 3).

Despite the fact that discussions in the huts frequently touched upon matters of faith and superstition, and various forms of religious experience were explored, the time of earthly existence continued to be equated with biological life on earth. The construction of a chapel in the taiga held significance for the owner of the homestead, yet after his passing, the prospect of eternity through this unusual chapel did not become any closer for his friends and neighbors. Thus, we observe that acceleration becomes possible through avoidance of work (not labor) during different periods of a man's life; whereas, deceleration occurs through intensive practices (such as building a hut or even a chapel, chopping wood, or exhausting ski treks during hunting).

Fig. 3. The chapel in taiga, a part of the complex of buildings at the lodge. March 2024. Source: photo by the author.

The visibility of fishing and the concealed time

Thus a negatively defined symbolic social object is not like a black hole, destroying energy and matter; on the contrary, it has the power to generate a whole other chain of events in the social world, which would not otherwise have existed if the original (not-done) action had been taken. *(Scott 2007, p. 7)*

In this section, I propose to revisit the scenario where generations of working men and retirees are united in a single space (the hut) and at a single time (of work and leisure) outside of populated areas. In addition to how prospective retirees justify their right and ability to retire early, as well as how their older counterparts perceive and evaluate this loophole, I suggest we ask the question: what are both generations actually doing "in the huts" once they are finally freed from their work obligations? Here, the concept of "serious leisure" (Stebbins 1992) will assist me, while it be pursued so intensely, almost "professionally" and publicly, that it eventually begins to demand significant dramatic effort (Scott 2007, p. 11).

Interestingly, researchers who advocate for an ethnographically rich understanding of the concept of moral career, while exploring various life domains through this lens, also employ the notion of "leisure career" (Cohen and Taylor 1993, p. 38; Scott, Hardie-Bick 2022, p. 75). This concept encompasses both the seriousness of intentions and the significant performative gestures utilized by "recreational professionals." In this context, I have the fortunate opportunity to compare how regulars in this space mask their leisure with hard work at the huts, and how newcomers attempt to do the same.

Susie Scott notes that "micro-level gestures of power and resistance can be expressed in everyday talk about nothingness. For example, consider the exchange, 'What are you doing?' / 'Nothing...', whereby the reply defends the doing of a 'something' that is none of the enquirer's business. Stating that one 'did nothing' at the weekend is a performance of idleness as conspicuous leisure, signalling freedom from the obligation to do unwanted things" (Scott 2007, p. 3). Who in my context regarding the cabins dares to openly declare that they 'did nothing'? Neither the hosts nor the visitors ever utter this phrase. The play of serious work (serious leisure) fills all our gatherings and conversations.

Urban males are compelled to travel to "guest" locations at bases and areas adjacent to huts owned by more determined and resourceful individuals, who at various ages have established their own structures along the river. However, justifying the need to leave for an overnight stay by the river proves to be quite challeng-

ing: a guest, unlike the hut owner, is not responsible for heating it or ensuring its upkeep. Consequently, city dwellers must endure a journey of 4 to 5 hours through the winter darkness, navigating ruts and snowdrifts, all for a few hours of fishing. In this scenario, the effort involved (the exhausting driving, the journey, and the extreme fishing conditions — spending many hours in the cold) is not mitigated by the presence or absence of a hut. While it offers a chance to warm up along the way, it cannot serve as a justification for escaping (in the eyes of a wife or a family), nor can it be considered a goal or a tool. Therefore, those fleeing the city must seek alternative justifications. If one fails to catch enough fish on their own, they are left with no choice but to purchase fish from local fishermen.

The purchase of fish intended to demonstrate that one has not only "worked diligently" but also "made the most of" their fishing experience, is remarkably noteworthy. These male guests, regardless of their age, do not exhibit the various aforementioned forms of engagement with time — bureaucratic retirement time, daylight hours, and the time of active life. This interestingly confirms my idea of an unobvious connection between forms of work and labor, temporal tricks and politics, and the way in which a hut far from populated areas participates in them. Previously, in an article discussing female constitutive absence and dividuality among subjects living in "huts" (Rakhmanova 2024), I proposed an intellectual approach suggesting that one can "think" through or with the means of the hut. In this instance, I advance this idea further by demonstrating the inseparability of two aspects: the hut as a means of thinking (through it and alongside it) and the hut as a means of acting (via it, for its sake, or with its assistance). Within the context of labor ethnography, the hut as a method of acting and thinking emerges as a significant phenomenon, justifying inaction and "transforming" serious leisure into arduous labor. The hut is an integral participant in games where labor seamlessly transitions into rest and vice versa. It is crucial to note that it exists beyond the physical and social confines of populated areas, where the logic of "work" transitions into retirement.

Conclusion

In this text, we have journeyed through the dreams of Siberian men residing in rural areas. Based on ethnographic material—observations and conversations over a drink or a cup of tea—I was able to identify several temporal modalities (Ssorin-Chaikov 2021, p. 82; Zigon 2018, p. 65), or, more specifically,—the techniques of accelerating and decelerat-

ing time within various social logics: bureaucratic, ecological, and biographical. The focus was on discussions in the huts, informal chatter, and the formulation of plans to realize dreams. The aspirations of the older and younger generations were strikingly different: not only were well-being and happiness considered, but also freedom, (in)dependence, personal dignity, and the understanding of labor were subject to reevaluation and discussion. The point of reference for both my attention and the older generation of hut owners was a vague discomfort related to how actively young men sought ways to secure a comfortable 'nurturing' job in order to retire as soon as possible, utilizing northern benefits, years of service, experience, and other mechanisms.

Their predecessors closely linked working in a Soviet enterprise to labor practices, and the two were not sharply opposed to one another. In contrast, young fishermen and hunters fervently sought this anticipated, advantageous "dependency," as termed by Ferguson (2013), only to arrive at what they themselves regarded as "freedom," independence, and autonomy. The realization of this desired freedom was intended, according to their plans, to unfold precisely beyond the boundaries of populated areas, at huts and bases.

The research indicated that candidates for young retirees required the approval of their strategy not from family members or fellow villagers, but from the community of forest lodge owners—fishermen and hunters—who would become their primary reference group and brotherhood after retirement. Without seeing the entire picture and not labeling, as I do, all these tricks and strategies of young men as acceleration, the elderly nonetheless sense a hidden anxiety when they observe the clear biographical and infrastructural superiority of their younger companions. However, neither the snowmobile nor the size of the pension constitutes a significant social, economic, or legal gain for young retirees. It is the time and space of the little hut that is acquired and contested, and it is this that can provoke irritation and envy, as some experience this "hut time" later than others.

Thus, returning to the potato ontologies of post-Soviet gardeners, I propose a different perspective on Nancy Ries's idea, which portrays potatoes as a "symbolically, historically, and politically charged phenomenon, immensely overburdenedwith significance for all of its (or because of all of its) lumpen banality. Potato represents the investments of labor and devotion that carry persons and nations across historical eras" (Ries 2009, p. 202). For the older generation of hunters and fishermen, the hut, much like the potato in Ries's study, represents a symbolically, historically, and politically laden phenomenon.

These lodges create an “island of time” (see: Ssorin-Chaikov 2021, p. 82), distinct from rural and urban spaces with their “work schedules” and fates, along with their intense surveillance and gossip about fellow villagers. It is precisely because the object of labor application (the potato harvest, the structure of the hut, the catch of fish) represents, in one way or another, enormous investments of will and effort, that this “redefinition” of huts as entirely different spaces for retirement leisure, disguised by labor, terrifies the elderly mentors of young retirees.

What exactly triggers the hidden discontent of the older generation of men? What concerns them more: the consistent actions within the framework of labor legislation that allows for early retirement, or the justification behind the younger men’s desire to retire quicker and earlier than they did? Despite the differences in descriptive language and the vast cultural, social, and class distances, the observations of the elders closely align with the interpretation of J. Ferguson: “Rather than striving to escape, cast off, or struggle against relations of hierarchical subordination (as the emancipatory liberal mind would expect and approve), they are putting extraordinary energies into seeking them out” (Ferguson 2013, p. 224). However, in the context of my research on attitudes towards labor in the post-Soviet villages of Western Siberia, the situation is not so straightforward: the desire for subordination is merely the first step in the strategy of these young retirees. This chosen conscious lack of freedom is crucial for escaping the shackles of burdensome and bullshit jobs to attain early retirement, which embodies freedom.

If they justify their aspiration not through years of hard labor, but by claiming that the time they free up is essential for them to joyfully begin working “in the hut,” a completely new type of moral career emerges for modern hunters and fishermen. This new moral career is revealed through the debates surrounding the interpretation of pension access rights. Thus, the hut, akin to the potato in Nancy Ries’s study, “discursively <…> appears as a touchstone referent, summarily capturing the multifaceted, historically and culturally meaningful strategies that families, networks, and communities feel compelled to deploy in postsocialism” (Ries 2009, p. 187).

In what sense does life in a hut serve as a reference point? Is it because it becomes, in a way, an object of passionate desires and aspirations for men working in rural areas? Can the hut and the life associated with it be considered a total social fact according to M. Mauss? If we adopt this perspective, we must acknowledge that the logic of hut life has the capacity to permeate all aspects of existence:

it shapes economic interests, influences parenting and marriage strategies, and even alters the perception of the passage of time. I tend to align with J. Baudrillard's commentary on the crisis of the social, where he employs not only the concept of 'reference' but also the notion of reflection, of the mirror: 'the social mirror' is revealed as 'a mirror reflecting the social' and 'the social playing the role of a mirror' (Baudrillard 2000, p. 13). In my text, the rapid emergence of huts, their proliferation, and the expansion of fishing and hunting bases represent a 'retirement space' and the associated spatial transformations that 'play the role of a mirror'. This is precisely what we can ethnographically grasp and observe as a trend, which serves as the impetus for formulating the research question of the article.

The concept of "pension time" and the rapid retirement of young men enables them to expand into the realm of rustic life, seizing the best locations. This phenomenon serves as a mirror reflecting social dynamics. The acceleration of youth is an image that portrays the current state of affairs in the provinces, which in turn causes concern among older hunters and fishermen. Their sense of injustice is temporary and biographical, understood through the length and structure of their lives. In this context, spatial and economic disparities and inequalities are secondary; they merely function as a "mirror" that reflects the consequences rather than the underlying causes.

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