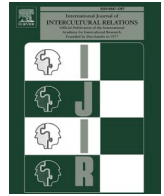




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## Review

# Social positioning and cultural capital: An ethnographic analysis of Estonian and Russian language social media discussion groups in Finland

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural capital can act as an asset for migrants in a host society, and it can be negotiated and validated in contact with the majority and minority population groups. These negotiations can occur discursively, such as in social media discussions. This study analyses minority members' discursive social positioning in social media discussions that take place in Facebook groups aimed at two of Finland's larger minority groups, Estonian- and Russian-speaking. The ethnographic analysis draws on Bourdieu's forms of cultural capital: the embodied, institutional and objectified forms. Along with validating the framework, we empirically confirmed the central role of the embodied cultural capital with regard to enhancing one's social position in host-country. The ability to grasp the host society's normative, often unwritten, rules by a process of socialisation was presented as the key to 'correctly' locating oneself in the Finnish society. Present in our analysis were the resources relating to education, taste and language. Besides serving as a means for positioning, these resources were employed in making distinctions. Accounts of familiarity and expressions of Finnish taste also offered the discussants the opportunity to highlight their cultural resources.

## Introduction

As migrants and other cultural minorities encounter a range of institutional and socio-psychological barriers to being incorporated as equals in their host countries, they seek ways to become accepted. Many develop strategies of inclusion to fight exclusion and othering, hoping to exchange compliance with societal demands for better treatment and thus legitimise their belonging (Hage, 1998). What they strive for in Bourdieusian terms is the accumulation and validation of cultural capital. We approach *cultural capital* with the help of Bourdieu, who in *Distinction* (1984) defined it as familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society, emphasising particularly its embeddedness in social relations and practices, which, when done correctly, confers social status and power (Mahar, Harker, & Wilkes, 1990).

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Erel (2010) has argued that migrants seek to negotiate their cultural capital in the host country in two ways. First, they create distinctions by using *cultural resources* (e.g., language or education) they bring with them from their previous country/countries of residence or acquire in their new homes. Secondly, they engage in developing mechanisms of validation for this cultural capital through engagement in both dominant institutions and migrants' networks.

In Bourdieusian terms, we can speak of cultural resources that are actively mobilised, enacted and validated (Erel, 2010) under conditions of *migrant positionality* (Katartzi, 2020). While being culturally precarious (Nowicka, 2018), minority members may be able to minimise their migrant positionality by mobilising their cultural capital (Katartzi, 2020). Positionality can be approached from two perspectives. From the structural point of view, it can be approached as an outcome (*social position*); by contrast, when highlighting agency, it appears as a process of *social positioning* (Anthias, 2001). In other words, social positioning looks at agents' practices, actions and meanings (Anthias, 2001). In the analysis, we chose to scrutinise the process rather than the structure. Therefore, our analytical focus is on positioning, not positionality.

As members of ethnocultural minorities actively engage in negotiations and reproduction of their cultural capital by using cultural resources at their disposal, they do not simply adopt hybrid identities (Anthias, 2001) but different positionalities are created through and in the course of this process. Erel (2010) concludes that a nuanced understanding on how cultural capital builds on existing distinctions while also creating new forms of distinction within minority groups in different societies is a field for further exploration. The goal of this paper is to contribute to this exploration in the context of Estonian and Russian speakers living in Finland through the examination of conversations on Facebook groups aimed at members of these minorities.

There is an extensive literature on migrants' *social capital*, defined as "a capital of social connections, honourability, and respectability" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 122), but less on their cultural capital. In the literature, migrants' gaining of social capital has typically been perceived as a difficulty. Migrants typically lack social connections and trust in the host society. To compensate for this, migrants can use the cultural resources in their possession. Although social capital is in some ways present in our analysis, we still make a distinction between that form and the cultural form of capital. However, both forms of capital can work in the same direction in the case of migrants, advancing their position in the host society. Social 'integration' and cultural 'bridging' approaches in migration studies often portray migrants as the interested party in gaining social and cultural capital while they are expected to work towards host country or community values (e.g., Gilmartin & Migge, 2015; Lamont & Aksartova, 2002). Also, studies have found that in the absence of social connections with majority members, migrants might turn to their own minority networks (Cederberg, 2012). However, this strategy rarely provides positive outcomes in terms of accumulating migrants' social capital. By turning the focus from social to cultural capital and its mobilisation, we can get a more nuanced picture of what a migrant's agency is about and how different aspects of cultural capital affect social positioning.

In this paper, we have intentionally focused on cultural rather than social capital, because we see it as having been granted less attention in the Finnish migration context, and its full dynamics very much depends on the very negotiations that migrants go through within their own groups. Our aim is to shed light on how migrants seek to legitimise their belonging and position themselves in the host society using the cultural capital framework. More specifically, we investigate how Estonian and Russian speakers in their respective language-specific Facebook groups negotiate their cultural capital and what cultural repertoires they bring forward. In this analysis we first attempt to answer the question *What cultural resources are present in the Facebook discussions, and how do they relate to forms of cultural capital?* Through the analysis, we approach the core question of *How do the discussants discursively construct their social position in the Finnish society?*

The article is structured as follows. First, we elucidate the role of different forms of capital in migrants' lives. Second, we familiarise the reader with the situation of Estonian and Russian speakers in Finland. Third, we discuss the data we collected and our methodological approach. Three analysis sections follow, looking into our data within a framework of different types of cultural capital and elaborating on different cultural resources become present our data. Finally, we conclude with our findings and theoretical contributions.

### Forms of capital in migrants' lives

Gaining economic, cultural, or other forms of capital largely defines the migrant's social position in the host society. Differently from *economic capital* (material assets), social and cultural capital are not straightforward forms of capital for migrants to accumulate, not to speak of *symbolic capital* that is materialised in tokens of recognition, such as titles of nobility or symbolic property (see Bourdieu (1989)). There is no fine line between social and cultural capital, since these two forms are interlinked (Erel, 2010). Social capital being defined as "a capital of social connections, honourability, and respectability" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 122) still requires certain cultural scripts to be learnt so that the shared values and understandings would be at place for mutual trust between minority and majority members to emerge. Cederberg (2012) found the mere concept of social capital without considerations of similarity and difference wanting, and in our view, it is to be accompanied by the exploration of different facets of cultural capital in a Bourdieusian vein, enabling migrants a more dynamic role and higher agency than the notion of, for example, human capital (Erel, 2010). The scrutiny of *human capital* is based on the individual's economic performance in terms of skills, "their abilities, their knowledge, and their competences—to economic growth" (Keeley, 2007, p. 29). Thus, in typical human capital considerations, there is an underlying assumption of the contribution of an individual to the national economy. On the contrary, Bourdieusian approaches to cultural capital are sensitive to power relations (Erel, 2010) and designed to make sense of social class reproduction (Cederberg, 2012), leaving room for other than economic rationales of migrants.

Pierre Bourdieu's forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – provide an interesting framework for investigating migrants' position and positioning of themselves in a host society. While economic capital self-evidently affects a migrant's position in

a new country – money and property provide an asset for all people moving from one country to another – migration scholars are increasingly incorporating the non-economic forms of capital into the analysis of minority acculturation (Cederberg, 2015; Erel, 2010, 2015; Ryan, Erel, & D'Angelo, 2015).

According to Bourdieu (1984, 1986), cultural and symbolic capital can be seen as higher forms of capital because they can be mobilised and transformed into other forms of capital. They also provide a useful framework for explaining how some minority members may be more successful in social positioning and upward mobility (see Erel (2010)), while others' mobility becomes restricted, and they become tangled in existing social and economic structures. As such, the accumulation of cultural and social capital can be approached in terms of helping migrants to secure advantage or overcome disadvantage. Furthermore, minority members can eventually aspire to transform their cultural capital into symbolic one, which may allow them recognition in the eyes of others, in particular the majority population.

While the dominant group often expects migrants to fit into the society through learning the language of the majority and practising their cultural norms and values, a process in which migrants' cultural resources are ideally transferred into host-country "national capital" to legitimise their belonging (Hage, 1998, p. 53 as cited in Erel (2010), p. 644), the migrants themselves may understand the function of cultural capital somewhat differently. Often, migrants and other minority members prefer integration to assimilation (see Berry (2005)): the goal is not to shed "their own" cultural heritage but to develop strategies that make them capable of successfully operating in and between two or more cultures.

One might seek to gain cultural capital – alongside economic capital – for the sake of social mobility (Matthys, 2013). However, migrants are not necessarily seeking social mobility in host society but when it comes to migrants from post-socialist countries like Estonia or Russia, they might look for "normal life" – an adequate standard of living and amenities provided by society (Alho & Sippola, 2019). Furthermore, the goal of migration may be social mobility in the home country (Piore, 1979; also, Annist, 2016), and increasing cultural capital in a host country may serve as a means to that end.

Bourdieu further distinguishes between *institutional, objectified and embodied forms of cultural capital*, each of which may prove useful to a different extent in different situations. The institutional form implies educational qualifications such as university diplomas and certifications. The objectified form refers to expressions of taste through books, music, and objects of design, for example. The embodied form of cultural capital, in turn, is connected to society's normative, often unwritten, rules, patterns of thinking and behaving learnt through the process of *socialisation* – the "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

Erel (2010) has criticised the limited understanding of migrants' cultural capital, the so-called "rucksack approach" which understands cultural capital as if it were stored in containers that can simply be transferred from one society to another and utilised there in a similar way. Instead, she argues that "migration results in new ways of producing and re-producing (mobilising, enacting, validating) cultural capital that builds on, rather than simply mirrors, power relations in either the country of origin or the country of migration." (Erel, 2010, p. 642).

While many previous studies have focused on the "exclusionary mechanisms" caused by the lack of cultural capital (e.g., Moskal, 2016), our goal is to explore how minority members consciously engage with accumulating cultural capital that can help them achieve inclusion and even shape power relations in a society (Cederberg, 2015, p. 33–34). Similar to Cederberg (2015, p. 34), we connect cultural capital to the "subtle normative codes" of institutional and everyday life. These codes provide access points to inclusion for those (more) familiar with the traditional and "accepted" ways of doing things, while at the same time creating barriers to belonging for those less familiar (or unwilling to comply) with the codes. This can take place in many situations – for instance, integration materials created by the host country officials give some guidelines as to what is considered desirable or socially acceptable behaviour in the host society. It can even be argued that state institutions participate in validating certain minority groups' cultural capital by giving more weight to certain cultural practices and categorising migrants by their likelihood to behave in a culturally accepted and expected ways.

### **Estonian- and Russian-speaking minorities in Finland**

Estonian and Russian speakers are major linguistic minorities in Finland. While it is important to note that not all Estonian and Russian speakers living in Finland are immigrants, together the two languages are spoken by more than one third of all migrants in Finland. Consequently, these groups provide a highly specific and challenging context for understanding the ways in which ethnic or linguistically based power relations have been and continue to be negotiated in Finland. The historical background of Finland's Estonian- and Russian-speaking populations is complex, so that there is no irrefutable way of defining these groups by ethnic, religious, national or historical parameters. According to the official statistics, there are some 80,000 native Russian speakers and 50,000 native Estonian speakers currently living in Finland but, as Finnish statistics do not recognise multilingualism, the real numbers are likely to be higher.

In addition to their position as the two largest ethnocultural minority groups in Finland, our choice of examining the Estonian and Russian speakers together was informed by the Finnish public discourse which often presents them as being closely related, perhaps partly as a consequence of their (real or imagined) shared Soviet past (Brylka, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Renvik, 2017). In fact, there is some overlap between the groups, as about one-third of Estonians speak Russian as their native language and, consequently, many migrants from Estonia to Finland are both Estonians and Russian speakers. However, it should be noted that this was not reflected in the Estonian language groups that we analysed, in which Russian-speaking voices seemed to be mostly absent from the conversations.

At the same time, there are also notable differences between these groups, and, as will be shown below, *within* them. Perhaps the most significant ones have to do with their legal positionality and mobility. Estonian speakers, who for the major part are EU citizens, in general enjoy greater freedom of movement than is the case for migrants from Russia and other non-EU countries. Moreover, the

geographical proximity between Finland and Estonia allows for easy and affordable frequent travel between the countries and makes building transnational ties, or even having a home in two countries at the same time, relatively simple. While this may also be possible for some members of the Russian-speaking community – in particular those who come from Estonia or are based in Eastern Finland close to the Russian border – it is usually not as straightforward. Consequently, it is less common.

Linguistic proximity (Anniste, Pukkonen, & Paas, 2017) between Estonian and Finnish languages also facilitates the acculturation of Estonians. The widely held idea of Estonians and Finns as “brother nations”, which builds on the popular understanding of significant similarities in both countries’ history and cultural heritage, is reflected in Estonians’ relatively high social standing in Finnish attitudinal surveys (Haavisto, 2019). By contrast, several attitudinal surveys have shown that the Russian(-speaking) minority is placed close to the bottom of the Finnish ethnic hierarchies (Jaakkola, 2005). Consequently, Estonian speakers may face comparatively less prejudice and discrimination in Finland.

Another notable difference is that Finland’s Russian-speaking community is marked by high levels of ethnic and cultural diversity and heterogeneity. In contemporary Finland, the Russian language connects people from a range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and is often of great practical and symbolic importance even for those native speakers who do not identify as ethnic Russians (Protassova & Tuhkanen, 2003). At present, Finland’s Russian-speaking minority includes Finland-born Russian speakers (including the so-called old Russians, whose ancestors have lived in Finland for generations), re-migrants with a Finnish background (the majority being the so-called Ingrian Finns), and first-generation migrants from other countries, some of whom identify as Russian and some of whom do not (Tuhkanen, 2021).

This diversity was clearly reflected in the two Russian language groups analysed for this article. Both were frequently attended not only by native Russian speakers of different ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds, but also by members of other minorities who know Russian, and not only Russian speakers living in Finland, but also those residing in other countries, in particular Russia and the Baltic States. Sometimes this was referred to in the conversations, particularly during disagreements – “what are you doing in this group if you live in Latvia?” – but in many cases it was not possible to tell where the participant was writing from. In fact, as we learnt from the context, both Russian- and Estonian-language Facebook groups included many people who were not themselves living in Finland but were interested in the country either because they had lived there previously, were considering or planning to move there, or had family members or relatives living there. Thus, the Facebook groups are transnational in themselves, which affected the conversations within them and informed the following analysis.

### Social media data and the ethnographic approach

The methodological approach of our study is that of ethnography. By definition, the ethnographic approach allows for an in-depth enquiry into culture or cultures. For Postill and Pink (2012), the rapid growth of social media has opened up three options for an ethnographer: it has created new sites for ethnographic fieldwork, contributed to new types of ethnographic practice, and introduced critical perspectives to internet studies. As the ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis typically involves a great deal of unpredictability and improvisation, ethnographic theorisation can be led by data rather than a fixed theoretical framework (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007). Our approach to collecting and later analysing the data was both experimentally and theoretically driven: we decided to take note of conversations and themes as they emerged from the data instead of focusing solely on predefined topics and categories. This allowed us to become aware of several unexpected but important themes and to expand the scope of our research beyond the topics that we had initially deemed significant.

Our ethnographic study was carried out from mid-2018 to the end of 2019 and its focus was social media conversations that took place between 2015 and 2018, studying the discussions to a large extent retrospectively. As such, we were generally not able to observe moderating policies or whether there were certain topics or themes that were silenced or deleted from the groups. Our field consisted of two Russian language and two Estonian language Facebook communities aimed at people living in Finland. Three of the communities were Facebook groups and one was a Facebook page; for clarity, we will refer to all four sites as groups for the remainder of this article.

The groups were relatively large, with several thousand members and active daily discussions in each, and they had many functions, from sharing information and news to providing peer support and advice to newcomers and to other members. Two of the groups were closed and two were public; while the conversations in the latter groups were visible to anyone on and off Facebook, those in the former groups were restricted to members.

Some of the important questions researchers engaging in online ethnography have to consider are the anonymity and the (lack of) consent of those whose online behaviour is being studied. We took several precautions to address these issues. When it came to the Russian-speaking groups, we chose to study only public groups, i.e., communities for which the content is visible to all Facebook users, regardless of whether they are members of the group, as well as people who do not have a Facebook account. In general, researchers tend to agree that since there is a lesser expectation of anonymity in these public groups, there are fewer problems with using them for study purposes.

Irrespective of whether the group is public or closed, not all participants may be aware of the privacy level of the groups they participate in, and in principle, informed consent would have been required. Therefore, we decided to consult the university ethics committee on how we could proceed in an ethical way. After the consultation, we were permitted to continue to have an ethnographic approach to the data. We took several extra precautions to protect the anonymity of those participating in the discussions to make sure that they could not be recognised from our output. For instance, we decided to not collect or use any direct quotes from the groups, as these could in theory be traced back to the discussions and, consequently, the individual participants, even if used in translated form. Instead, when needed, we decided to use passages from our ethnographic field notes for illustrative purposes. For the same reason, we have chosen not to identify in this paper the groups we studied. In a similar vein, we did not click on or collect any information relating

to the profile of the people participating in the discussions.

Our analysis consisted of two stages. First, we wrote ethnographic notes on specific discussions that we deemed interesting or important for answering our research questions as well as on the process of observation and knowledge production (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Differently from Postill's and Pink's (2012) approach, we limited ourselves to observing the conversations without contributing to them by commenting or directing the discussions by any means (e.g., Gubrium & Harper, 2013).

In the second stage, we used the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software to systematise our notes towards them becoming a comprehensive analysis. We identified several central themes emerging in the group discussions and cross-checked categories and their variations between Estonian- and Russian-speaking groups. It was only in the process of reading and re-reading the notes organised in codes that enabled us to see the relationships between the categories we had created (Layder, 1998).

Flexibility is an important part of ethnographic research. As our fieldwork took place over a period of 18 months, our focus and understanding of the field continued developing during the research process. We had initially started out with the focus on the construction of intergroup distinctions: how Estonian and Russian speakers construct difference vis-a-vis other minority groups in social media discussions. However, the fieldwork revealed that ideas such as that of a 'good migrant' were as if not more frequently employed in constructing intragroup distinctions. This finding serves as the starting point of the present paper.

## Analysis

In the analytical sections that follow, we identify cultural resources present in the social media discussions as manifestations of embodied and institutional cultural capital. The former comprises the knowing of society's normative, often unwritten rules, patterns of thinking and behaving learnt through the process of socialisation, whereas the latter refers to educational qualifications such as university degrees. We employed the concept of *habitus* (implying taste and dispositions), which has interconnections with the objectified form of cultural capital, in our analytical scrutiny (that is, familiarity and expressions of taste through, for example, books, music, objects of design). We regard these attributes to cultural capital as valid tools for understanding processes of social identification and differentiation—and in the end, social positioning.

### *Social positioning along with cultural capital in its embodied form*

In the conversations we observed, the knowledge of Finnish norms and patterns of behaviour was often related to migrants' ability to make sense of what is culturally appropriate and what one can realistically expect in Finland. One of the sites of weighting one's cultural competence and success is related to closeness to and the acquaintance with local people. One of the themes often repeated both in the Russian and the Estonian language conversations was the importance of Finnish contacts, particularly Finnish friends. This did not mean only getting on well with colleagues at work but also being able to spend free time together: to be able to invite people to one's home and especially being invited to visit a Finn. The issue of friendship visits was frequently brought up in Russian language groups when the topic of friendships was breached.

Many commentators pointed out that in Russia and other Post-Soviet countries it is common for people to visit their friends frequently and spontaneously, without necessarily announcing the visit beforehand. Many expressed their regret that, in Finland, such friendships seemed rare, almost unattainable—and if someone had reached this 'level' of relationship with a Finn, they often pointed out how happy they were with this development. On the other hand, many commentators reminded those longing for this type of friendship that this was Finland and things were different here, highlighting the importance of fitting into what was seen as the local cultural code and having realistic expectations of life in Finland. This suggests that at least some of the commentators saw that gaining social capital presumes orienting towards the local culture; only then can one expect fulfilling social relationships.

While this may look like an application of social capital, we argue that in this context, discussants are addressing elements of cultural competence as spaces in which cultural capital can potentially arise. What was discussed here can be interpreted as not the social isolation felt, but rather the cultural understandings of what having close relationships mean in two different cultural contexts and how one's relationships should be shaped if migrants want to be culturally incompatible.

The importance of having realistic expectations was often highlighted in the Estonian language discussions. An "appropriate" Estonian migrant was realistic about what life in Finland was or could provide, living as "normal Finns", following the local norms and regulations. At the same time, he or she was expected to remain informed about life in Estonia and be able to compare the socio-economic differences between the countries. When one celebrated too much either life in Finland or in Estonia or made comparisons about what were judged to be incomparable things, it did not give a good impression of a person's cultural competence in either society. It was important to be able to imagine correctly one's options as a migrant in Finland and to persevere in accomplishing the goals set upon arrival in Finland.

One way of asserting one's knowledgeability and gaining the embodied form of cultural capital, particularly in the Russian language discussions, was referring to the length of time one has spent in Finland. This could be done either directly—for instance, by starting the comment with "I've lived in Finland for over xx years, and...", or indirectly with the help of phrases such as "in all of my years in Finland..." (ethnographic notes). It was also common to refer to one's Finnish connections: Finland-raised children, Finnish husband, or Finnish friends. While this was rarely if ever stated explicitly, the implication seemed to be that these Finnish connections could give weight and credibility to one's words.

Similarly, when the discussants in the Estonian language groups compared certain aspects of Estonian and Finnish societies—and this happened all the time in a range of contexts—an ultimate validation of something being better in Estonian society or culture was to be able to say that "...even my Finnish friends say that". For example, that "the Estonian meat products are delicious whilst the Finnish



ones have an artificial taste, like a “gum” or that in Finland, as claimed in one of the discussions, people pay high yearly home insurance not because they are “stupid but to exchange their TV for a newer model after every couple of years since Finns know how to make the insurance company to cover that, and some Estonians share those tricks whilst others do not” (ethnographic notes). For one, to be able to have such kind of conversations with Finnish people was a definite indication of trust and ease that was created—something that was highly appreciated and not in reach just for any Estonian in Finland. Importantly, being able to find a common ground with Finns to discuss some aspects of their cultural practices indicated that a person had reached a level of deeper cultural understanding with “the locals”.

The conversations suggest that discussants saw cultural capital as something that can be accumulated with time, and that Facebook groups constituted a space in which the cultural capital was validated, albeit unsystematically. All in all, our analysis showed a common belief among the group participants that, to achieve close social relations with members of the majority population, an Estonian or a Russian speaker needed first to gain knowledge and experience of the embodied form of cultural capital. The knowledge of society’s normative rules, patterns of thinking and behaviours were seen not only as essential in this process, but also as the most important level of this form of cultural capital.

#### *Education as a manifestation of the institutionalised form of cultural capital and one’s habitus*

It is believed that in Finland, which is widely considered to be a meritocratic welfare state, social equality can be achieved by means of education. Cultural capital analysis provides an apt means for elaborating on social groups’ use of the education system (Hultqvist & Lidegran, 2020). Education was a manifestation of an institutionalised form of cultural capital in which Estonian and Russian speakers had generally obtained a level that was similar to or higher than that of the majority population. However, having the institutional cultural capital in the form of (higher) education did not guarantee them the same treatment or benefits as enjoyed by members of the majority with a similar degree. Many people taking part in the conversations reported difficulties in getting one’s educational and training certificates recognised in Finland. This was the case even in the Estonian-language groups despite the in principle policy of the EU is to have educational qualifications received in one member state accepted in the others. Interestingly, the validation of Estonian medical doctors’ qualifications in Finland did not seem to cause problems, but validation of qualifications in other professions, such as social workers, posed a bigger problem.

It was even suggested by one Estonian commentator that Finns may worry about their jobs as they lack proper training; if all Estonians were allowed to work in Finland in their professions (corresponding to their education), all Finns would become unemployed. While this comment was clearly a provocative exaggeration, some others taking part in these discussions also suggested that most Finns can safeguard their cultural capital through institutional mechanisms. Putting oneself through the Finnish education system, even if the extra educational value itself was often not recognised, was largely considered to be a practical investment in increasing one’s cultural capital. Personal experiences and practical tips regarding educational paths that pay off were frequently shared in the groups.

Institutions of education can be approached from the perspective of *habitus*, since education is also connected to questions of taste and personal dispositions. Some commentators advocated for what they viewed as “Estonian” or “Russian” attitudes towards educational rites, such as graduation celebrations. A graduation party is a traditional rite of passage, and from the point of view of cultural capital it can also be considered to be an emblem of achieving a higher stage in the accumulation of the institutional form of cultural capital. An excerpt from notes concerning an Estonian-speaking discussion group points to this:

*When in Estonia it is an important festive event for the one who graduates and the whole family, people dressing up nicely, presenting flowers etc., then in Finland, the festivity is missing, and this is regrettable. Some people, however, point out slightly different experiences saying that the graduation has been more festive, a special event in certain schools in Finland as well. Not on the level how it is in Estonia, though.*

Commentators’ accounts of familiarity and expressions of taste give discussants the opportunity to highlight their cultural resources, when multicultural background can be viewed as an asset. At the same time, going against the cultural norms and “taste” of the majority could be seen as a risky strategy, and some discussants warned the others against it, as illustrated by the following excerpt of fieldwork notes from a Russian-language group in which the issue of dressing the child for the first day of school was discussed:

*Many commentators state that, while a big milestone and celebration in Russia, Finnish children are not usually dressed up in a special way for the first day of school. Some suggest that dressing up will nevertheless make the day memorable for the child, a real celebration. Other people warn that the op [original poster] should not make their child a potential target for ridicule and jokes by dressing them up according to the Russian tradition but follow the Finnish customs and style.*

Some accounts relating to the first day at school and other similar events emphasised certain behaviour as a cultural asset. For instance, a son of a commentator in an Estonian-language group had been the only one wearing a suit and presenting flowers to his teacher on the first day of school. The teacher had been positively surprised about this, telling the parents what a gentleman they had brought up. Similar personal stories and examples were also shared in Russian-language discussions.

All in all, the participants in the discussions viewed education as central to the accumulation of the institutionalised form of cultural capital, but this alone was not necessarily viewed as sufficient. Being awarded an educational qualification played a functional role in social positioning, and distinctions were also made in terms of the familiarity with the institutions. One must make a distinction between this type of Bourdieusian cultural capital formation and the notions of human capital that are based on the individual’s economic performance in terms of skills (Keeley, 2007, p. 29). What mattered in the discussions was the individual’s awareness of the role of educational institutions and understanding their value; for many discussants, it was clear at the outset that the skills acquired in

their previous country of residence had a restricted value in Finland. In a way, the forms of cultural capital provided them with more room for manoeuvring within the limits of their human capital.

#### *Taste in clothing and food and the articulation of one's habitus*

Cultural familiarity with the host society and taste constituted a distinctive cultural resource discussed in the social media groups. Such a thematic is aptly grasped by another Bourdieusian concept of *habitus*, which besides an individual's outward appearance, also encompasses accumulated social experiences in one's life as well as observations and attitudes. In the social media discussions, questions of taste and style most often emerged in connection with personal appearance, beauty and clothing. Particularly in Russian-speaking groups, style and the difference in what was regarded as "Finnish" and "Russian" or "Eastern [European]" style was discussed. Many of these discussions were highly gendered. From fieldwork notes:

*Some participants repeated stereotypes, characterising the Finnish style as more modest and humbler and/or equating Russian style with 'the leopard print'. On the other hand, many said they did not want to generalise, noting that there were also Finnish women who wear high heels and animal prints and Russian women who dressed more 'modestly' or, as some discussants put it, 'appropriately'.*

The conversations show that the (perceived) Finnish way of doing things was often seen as the appropriate one, at least in the Finnish context. There were exceptions, however. For Estonian discussants, food provided a cultural sphere in which one's 'own' habits were often seen as superior to the Finnish ones. It was widely held that for Estonian "taste", Finns were too conservative, careful, and unconnected to nature when it came to the questions of food and nutrition. For example, they perceived that many Finns do not eat or recognise any forest mushrooms other than the chanterelle; they have allergies and intolerances not that widely recognised among Estonians yet, etc. On the other hand, in their opinion, Finns were eating the leftovers of meat: minced meat, meatballs, frankfurters and other processed meat products. All in all, the quality of meat products and food culture was generally seen as higher on the other side of the Gulf of Finland, but their own cooking and eating habits as migrants in Finland could both try to reproduce that in Estonia or shift closer to what they called Finnish as we will explain next.

Implicit to these discussions, and to conversations on style and taste more broadly, were notions of class. For some discussants food and the questions relating to it—such as preparing "proper" homemade meals, eating less processed food or knowledge of natural products—were a domain in which positive cultural distinctions could be made compared to the majority population. Yet other commentators were quick to point out the class distinctions related to food. For example, Estonian workers' economic situation and cultural habits meant that they often did their shopping in slightly more economical foreign rather than Finnish commercial chains, sometimes labelled by other Estonians as the shops meant for poor people, which were known to have less choice of quality food products. Those same commentators also highlighted that the migrants who complained about Finnish food and Finns' eating habits probably had an explicit class issue, meaning that they were likely to be surrounded by lower-class Finns whose habits and experiences resembled those of lower-class Estonians themselves.

#### *Language as a hybrid form of institutional and embodied cultural capital*

Language as a cultural resource entails various aspects of learning a host country language and maintaining one's own language. Attitudes to language as a form of cultural capital acquired in a host country play out in two respects: first, Finnish language learning is regulated and expected by the Finnish state, thus institutionally bounded, and second, language-learning has strong cultural underpinnings related to attitudes to language learning in migrants' previous home environments. In both respects, once again, the position of Russian and Estonian speakers was somewhat different in our analysis, in that due to the similarity between the languages, learning the Finnish language is generally easier for native speakers in Estonian than for native speakers in Russian. This confirms notions from earlier studies on how host-country language skills are key to migrants' possession of cultural capital (Moskal, 2016) and how the ability to use the "educated language" is essential in the adaptation to the majority culture (Sullivan, 2001).

Contrary to public opinion in Estonia, which wanted to picture the Estonians who moved to Finland as the ones escaping the difficulties and giving up their fatherland (cf. Annist, 2016), thus the weak and disloyal Estonian citizens, Finnish Estonians imagined themselves and wanted to be seen as resourceful and able to conquer the difficulties. They were unanimous in wanting to enact the image of a successful Estonian that embodied a mindset of a rationally thinking, capable, culturally competent survivor who was able to learn and move forward in life.

Conversations in both groups generally underlined the importance of learning the majority language in order to "show respect" to the majority Finns, and to gain cultural capital. Learning Finnish as quickly as possible was regarded as an asset in all discussion groups. Learning Finnish is "the cheapest investment in one's future life" as one Estonian commentator said.<sup>2</sup> However, in both language groups, language seemed to be considered to be a central element in making cultural distinctions within language group members. This was probably because it is one of the more notable aspects of cultural capital and easy to validate/invalidate as well as due to the importance given to language in the official integration contexts.

Language and prejudices related to language learning and fluency in Finnish constituted a subject about which no mercy was

<sup>2</sup> The use of Swedish, the second official language in Finland spoken by five per cent of the population, and the official requirements relating to its use in some positions, was mentioned significantly less frequently. While some research (see Tuhkanen, 2021) has shown that some Russian speakers prefer to use Swedish, seeing it as more accessible than Finnish, this did not emerge as a theme in our ethnographic analysis.

usually shown in the groups. Many participants in Estonian-language groups interpreted other Estonian speakers' poor Finnish language skills as disrespect to the host country and a sign of laziness which was seen not as a personal issue for other migrants but an insult to the whole Estonian migrant group. For many, other Estonians' (perceived) tendency to look for service providers and public servants in Finland who could serve them in Estonian was something to condemn. Language was thus a collective issue and, in that sense, although each individual acquired her/his own language related cultural capital in Finland, it was widely perceived as a collective form of capital. Commentators expressed feelings of shame about compatriots who did not speak a word of Finnish, despite living and working in Finland as well as people who pretended to know Finnish by bravely speaking Estonian with a Finnish accent while not making any effort to learn the language by heart.

Our analysis also revealed the value given to being able to speak multiple languages in Finland. Here, we found similarities to Koikkalainen's (2019) study on Scandinavian-originated migrants in London, in which she concluded that knowing languages plays an important role in enacting and validating one's cultural capital; this also affects one's position in the host country labour market. In the context of Finnish multilingualism, and especially in the Greater Helsinki area that is becoming increasingly multilingual, the fieldwork indicated that both Russian and Estonian speakers highlighted the usefulness of sharing languages of communication. For instance, in several situations, Estonians saw their knowledge of Russian to be of value in Finland. For example, when working in cleaning or other service positions or in construction, Estonians were often able to act as mediators between Finnish managers and non-Finnish speaking colleagues who were quite often Russian speakers. Thanks to the language proximity, Estonians were typically acquiring communication level Finnish skills faster than other migrants, including speakers of Russian, and this was a path for them to take up more responsibility and advance their careers. This is an interesting migration-related dynamic, because these same Estonians might have been reluctant to speak Russian to Russian speakers in Estonia. However, in Finland, they could see tangible benefits flowing from multilingualism and turned their skills into benefits.

Likewise, especially Estonians of older generations sometimes expressed a sense of communality with Russian speakers that they had developed through their common Soviet experience. In that way, while both being minorities in Finland, they were able to connect easier, and felt that knowledge of Russian was helpful in that. In fact, some Estonians were happy that contacts with Russian speakers helped them maintain their Russian-language skills, which were seen as an asset also in light of their possible return to Estonia. Similarly, those Russian speakers who had moved to Finland from Estonia and thus knew Estonian often found that it made learning Finnish easier and that they were able to learn it faster than those Russian speakers who did not have a similar advantage.

On the other hand, some of the Facebook posters in Russian-language groups expressed concern that their Estonian skills could deteriorate as, due to the similarity between Finnish and Estonian, they sometimes found themselves using Finnish words when speaking Estonian (and vice versa). In this sense, the learning and maintaining of different languages was not always straightforward or completely unproblematic. The question, particularly in Russian-speaking groups, was how best to support the linguistic development of one's children; in particular, balancing the need for children to become native-level Finnish speakers with the need to maintain fluency in the home language, particularly when it was the language used in communication with family members living abroad. Group members often sought advice on this from other group members, and many shared experiences and strategies that they had found useful. Some posters emphasised the importance of learning both the Finnish language and the "Finnish mentality", albeit not necessarily promoting Finnish as the only language and not letting it completely overshadow the other language or languages spoken within the family. The choice of an official mother tongue is of strategic importance in Finland, having an impact on the major and minor foreign languages chosen in the comprehensive school and the language options of the matriculation examination. Thus, the issue of language knowledge is of importance from the perspective of both embodied and institutional forms of cultural capital.

## Discussion and conclusion

This paper has conveyed some of the complexity that surrounds mechanisms of transferring and activating cultural capital when people settle in a new environment. We have looked into discussions of Estonian- and Russian-speaking minority members in the Facebook groups popular among the respective minority groups in Finland. We analysed cultural resources within a Bourdieusian frame of reference, within which we elaborated on how cultural capital is negotiated in these groups both with reference to the majority population and to one's own minority group. Present in our analysis were the resources relating to education, taste and language. Besides serving as means for positioning, these resources were employed in making distinctions. They were often used to distinguish between the "good" minority members who had learnt local habits and language properly (or were trying to do so) and the "lazy" ones who had not bothered to do so. At the same time, the language issue was sometimes presented as a dilemma between the need to learn the majority language and the need to maintain one's and one's children's native language skills.

We found that the different forms of cultural capital, especially when it comes to the institutional and embodied forms, constituted an apt framework for the analysis. Along with validating the framework, we empirically confirmed the central role of the embodied cultural capital regarding enhancement of one's positionality. Although the use of the local language was highly visible as a hybrid form of institutional and embodied cultural capital, perhaps the most crucial resource participants referred to in positioning themselves was the ability to understand subtle cultural codes and to read the undercurrents behind people's words and acts. As cultural advancement was expressed in the embodied form, through a 'proper' way of thinking or fluency in Finnish or other languages, or in the institutional form via educational attendance, an individual's own effort becomes emphasised.

We also argue that the domain of *objectified* cultural capital was often implicitly embedded in the articulation of one's *habitus* in the Facebook discussions. Expressions of taste concerning clothing and food are manifestations of such articulation. These cultural repertoires constituted one domain in which discussions constructed distinctions between the Estonian and Russian speakers and the mainstream population. Accounts of familiarity and expressions of Finnish taste also offered the discussants the opportunity to



highlight their cultural resources. In Erel's (2010) study, Kurdish speakers' investments in embodied cultural capital made it easier to realise institutionalised cultural capital. Among the Estonian and Russian language conversations we analysed, such a linkage did not stand out. Instead, the conversations highlighted the importance of knowing 'the Finnish way' of realising one's institutionalised cultural capital—albeit at times showing some criticism towards its manifestations.

In many conversations, the ability to grasp the host society's normative rules, often unwritten, by a process of socialisation was presented as the key to "correctly" positioning oneself in Finnish society. The ability of a person with "foreign" roots or language to use cultural capital was often understood to be based first and foremost on one's ability to show one's embeddedness in the Finnish society. At the same time, some participants, particularly in the Russian-language groups, highlighted the benefits of multilingualism and a cosmopolitan worldview, viewing the mixture of languages and different cultural habits not just as something that may set them apart from the "accepted" cultural code, but also as a potential asset.

Especially among the Estonian-speaking groups, we encountered the endeavour of positioning oneself towards the native Finnish habitat—a collectively produced and reiterated standard that hardly exists in its pure form, but is imagined and actively produced. One might argue that at play here is the social rather than cultural capital. However, we regard the discussions of the ability to use cultural codes "correctly" and habits as manifestations of cultural capital. Emphasising one's cultural resources is in line with Erel's (2010) conception of producing and re-producing cultural capital.

While some migrants may have limited resources in the host country in terms of human capital (education, work experience) or social capital (connections), bonds of cultural capital (such as language skills, education, and other cultural knowledge) may prove useful. This conclusion resonates well with the recent scholarship on migrants' capital (Cederberg, 2015; Erel, 2015; Ryan et al., 2015) that increasingly draws attention to the transferability of certain types of capital in certain situations, thus encouraging further exploration of these issues with emphasis on intersectionality (Erel, 2015, 2010) and positionality (Anthias, 2001, 2008; Cederberg, 2015; Nowicka, 2018). Particular social spaces have their cultural specificities, and we welcome further inquiries into this topic in the context of different societies and different minority groups.

We suggest that social media groups aimed at migrants and other members of linguistic and cultural minorities may provide a space for learning about cultural capital in host countries as well as testing and validating one's accumulated capital. It is a somewhat different process to that happening in interaction with the majority population and Finnish institutions, but the influence of fellow minority members, who often share similar experiences and can relate to the position of being in minority, can be of great importance to adaptation in general and, as we argue in this paper, to the understanding of different forms of capital in particular. It can also support "imaginary work" in relation to gaining, constructing and validating capital. After all, it is not only existing factual resources put into practice that matter in migrants' capital accumulation, but it is also about using one's imagination and living up to those imaginations. In that way, social media communications with peers can be seen as a form of validating migrants' cultural capital.

Our social media ethnography enabled us to highlight the recurring themes and potential problems and solutions in social media discussions touching on cultural capital accumulation in Finland. However, in the future more nuanced analyses of Estonian- and Russian-speaking minorities' cultural capital accumulation, considering migrants' generations, education, gender and pre-existing social networks in Finland, would be highly interesting and are much needed.

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## Declarations of interest

None.

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