

Estonian Migrants' Aspiration for Social Citizenship in Finland: Embracing the Finnish Welfare State and Distancing from the 'Non-deserving'

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Abstract

The consequences of immigration for the welfare states has received increased attention by scholars and in political and media debates in Europe. However, migrants' subjective understandings of the welfare state remains an understudied research topic. This study aims to address the topic by analysing the question in the Nordic context by looking at Estonian labour migrants' understandings of the Finnish welfare state. Our data consists of 51 biographical interviews with Estonian migrants in Finland. Based on the interviews, we traced interviewees' attitudes towards the Finnish welfare state. In Finland, Estonians aspire for social citizenship, which in their case refers to gaining economic welfare and embracing Finnish welfare state institutions. This aspiration for social citizenship is revealed in Estonians' 'identity talk', which takes two forms: embracement and distancing. By embracement, we mean their positive sentiments towards the institutions and norms of the Finnish welfare state. The interviewees highlight their participation in the labour market, diligent payment of taxes, justified use of the welfare benefits and services offered by the Finnish state, and membership in trade unions and unemployment funds. The interviewees underline the link between work and the deservingness of welfare benefits. They describe themselves as deserving, which, they claim, should put them on par with native Finns. Moreover, by means of distancing, the interviewed Estonians distinguish themselves from 'others' –in their opinion– 'non-deserving' migrants who 'do not contribute' to the Finnish welfare state.

Keywords

Social citizenship, distancing, embracement, labour migration, welfare state, social benefits, deservingness

Introduction

This article looks at the Estonian migrants' aspiration for social citizenship in Finland. On the basis of 51 biographical interviews conducted with Estonian migrants the paper seeks to answer the following questions: what does social citizenship mean from the interviewed Estonians' perspective? How and why do the Estonians strive for social citizenship? We understand 'social citizenship' in T.H.

Marshall's (1950, 11) terms as encompassing:

'the whole range from the right to a modicum [=moderate level] of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society'.

There is a growing scholarly interest in the relationship between the welfare state and migration e.g.; EU citizens' cross-border access to social benefits (see Blauberg and Schmidt 2014), consequences of immigration for the welfare states (see Brochmann and Hagelund 2011; Forsander 2004 Freeman and Mirilovic 2016), the effects of immigration on the majority populations' support for the welfare state (Freeman 1986; Goldschmidt 2015); the chances for migrant inclusion within European welfare states (Geddes 2003); the role of migrant workers in care work (Nordberg 2016), the generosity of different

welfare states towards immigrants (Römer 2017), migrants' access to social rights (Bech et al. 2017; Giralt and Sarlo 2017; Noy and Voorend 2016). What is common for these studies is that they mainly focus on the effects of immigration on the welfare states or on legal questions related to individuals' access to welfare. While this research provides us with a greater understanding of the intersection of migration and different welfare regimes, it does not offer insight into migrants' subjective understandings and experiences of the welfare state. In the literature on the intersection of immigration and the welfare state, the migrants' views of the welfare states remain understudied. One exception is Osipovic (2010; 2015) who has studied migrants' views on who is a 'deserving' member of the welfare state. Another exception is Timonen and Doyle's (2009) study that looked at migrants' welfare state attitudes and experience in the context of Ireland.

Our study aims to contribute to the scholarship on the intersection of the migration and the welfare state by focusing on migrants' understandings of the welfare state. We examine the case of Estonian migrants who have moved to work in Finland. We regard the subjective welfare state understandings of immigrants highly important to explore because they increase our understanding of migrants' welfare state dispositions and welfare state encounters. In an era of migration, the subjective understandings are also important to study because they have consequences on the welfare systems of the recipient countries. By looking qualitatively and in depth at a particular case –in our case Estonian workers in Finland– we aim to provide a rich description and analysis on migrants' understandings of welfare that cannot be reached by studies that only look at the effect of immigration on the welfare state. Estonian migration to Finland forms an interesting case because the welfare state systems of the two states are very dissimilar, as will be shown later.

This kind of research that is grounded in a particular contextualised case provides a nuanced picture of migrants' understanding of the welfare state, which is missing in the polarised political and media debates on the intersection of migration and the welfare state.

As the data for this study consists of interviews with migrants, our focus is on the talk migrants produce about their situation and aspirations in the host country. We are interested in the ways the interviewees express their sentiments toward the use of welfare services and benefits. In order to contextualise the Estonian migrants' aspiration for social citizenship in Finland, we have employed David Snow and Leon Anderson's (1987) theory on how individuals make sense of their life circumstances by adapting –or not adapting– to the existing societal roles and values by embracing and/or distancing themselves from social groups, roles, institutions, or ideologies. The case of Estonians in Finland is particularly interesting because Estonia and Finland represent two very dissimilar types of welfare states and it is the differences combined with higher wages that, according to our empirical research material, explains why the Estonian interviewees prefer to work and live in Finland. We argue that the Estonians' emigration to Finland and aspirations in Finland can be best understood by their strive to what T.H. Marshall's (1950) notion of 'social citizenship' grasps. We argue that there are two contrasting tendencies in the Estonians' aspiration for social citizenship: a pattern of embracing the Finnish welfare state institutions and a tendency to distance themselves from other 'non-deserving' migrants who 'do not contribute' to the welfare state. When analysing the contrasting patterns that we repeatedly encountered in the interview material, we found Snow and Anderson's (1987) theory useful –even though it was developed in a rather different societal context.

The rest of the article is organised as follows: In the next two sections, we describe the phenomenon of labour migration from Estonia to Finland and the foundations of Finnish social security. The following

sections present the theoretical framework of the article; we then describe our research methodology. An analysis follows, with a focus on the interviewed Estonian migrants' accounts of their work, migration and welfare state-related strategies and goals. The last section concludes by summarising and explaining the key findings and their implications.

Estonian Migration to Finland

Immigration to Finland has increased rapidly since the 1990s: in 2016, the foreign-born population was 7%, in 1996 only 2% (Statistics Finland 2017), and many labour market sectors are increasingly dependent on migrant workers (Author). Estonians form the largest non-national group in the country and in 2017 over 50.000 Estonians citizens were living in Finland (Statistics Finland 2018). This is a considerable figure as the number of employed persons in Estonia in 2018 is only around 650.000 (Statistics Estonia 2018). Finland has been –and is– the far most important country of destination for Estonian migrants (Anniste and Tammaru 2014). In addition to Estonians who are permanently settled in Finland there are many Estonians who live and work temporarily in Finland (Author). The Estonians who live and work in Finland are a heterogenous group as regards their occupational status (Anniste and Tammaru 2014). The occupational heterogeneity was also apparent among our interviewees who represented a variety of professions (see the Research Methods and Data section). The Estonian population is in broad terms ethnically divided into the majority population (ethnic Estonians) and a significant ethnic minority of Russian speakers (ca. 25% of the population, see Statistics Estonia 2017). Ethnic Russians from Estonia have encountered in comparison to ethnic Estonians greater challenges in sociocultural integration in Finland (Anniste and Tammaru 2014, 392). However, as our interview data is based on interviews with ethnic Estonians (with the exception of one ethnic Russian from Estonia) we will not in this article examine the potential differences as regards these groups' aspirations in

Finland.

Estonian migration to Finland is work-related due to higher income levels and better working conditions in Finland (Author). Another reason for emigration to Finland is that the Estonian neoliberal economic model is highly exposed to economic fluctuations. The fluctuations, together with weak social security, leave the Estonian workforce highly vulnerable in times of economic recession such as the post-2008 downturn. (Kallaste and Woolfson 2013; Author). Consequently, the Finnish labour market functions as an exit-option for Estonian workers struggling with low wages and weak welfare state protection. Simultaneously, many manual sectors of the Finnish labour market depend on an immigrant workforce. (Author) In sum, the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors in migration from Estonia to Finland are related to the national differences in the labour markets and the welfare regimes (readers who are interested in a more profound analysis of the post-Soviet transformation of the Estonian society towards capitalism are advised to see, for example, Saar and Helemäe’s (2006) study).

Estonian nationals have the highest labour market participation rate in Finland among all foreign nationals (Statistics Finland 2015, 55-56). In fact, the labour market participation rate of the Estonian nationals in the age group 20-64 is slightly higher than that of the native Finns (76% and 74%, respectively) (Statistics Finland 2015, 55-56). The Estonian migration to Finland is facilitated by the geographical proximity of the two countries, free mobility due to both countries being members of the EU, the Eurozone, and the Schengen area, and the linguistic proximity of Estonian and Finnish.

The Finnish Welfare State and Social Security System

Finland shares the basic characteristics of the –in broad terms social democratic– Nordic welfare state model by providing services and comparatively generous economic and social protection to its whole population throughout the entire life course (Esping-Andersen 1994). This does not, however, mean that the Finnish welfare would not have been affected by neoliberal pressures of downsizing the welfare state (e.g. Patomäki 2007). Nevertheless, the Finnish welfare state is still in a European –and especially in a global– context comparatively generous and encompassing.

The Finnish social security system is divided into two parts. The first part, which is residence-based, is provided by KELA, i.e. the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, and by the municipalities. The second part consists of employment-based insurances that are provided by semi-public insurance bodies. These insurances include work-related pensions and trade union administered unemployment funds (see, e.g. Helander et al. 2016, 4). EU citizens acquire some of the components of social citizenship ‘automatically’ when moving to Finland. Examples of such benefits are the aforementioned residence-based benefits such as the right to public healthcare. However, acquiring full social citizenship in this system requires from foreign nationals –even EU citizens– a certain period of employment and payments before they become eligible to, for example, earnings-related benefits such as earnings-related unemployment allowance. The level of old-age pensions, for example, is dependent on the person’s work history. These earning-related dimensions of social security imply such social citizenship that accumulates slowly through documented employment. This means that, for example, Estonians who work temporarily in Finland are not entitled to same levels of Finnish social security as those Estonians who are permanent residents of Finland.

According to van Oorschot (2006, 25) native populations across Europe rank immigrants as the group least deserving of welfare benefits. The political voices in Europe demanding withdrawal of

immigrants' access to the welfare state have strengthened during the last years (Graeber 2016). There is a dimension of this kind of a 'welfare chauvinism' also in the political landscape of the Nordic welfare states (e.g. Brochmann and Skevik Grødem 2013, 69), including Finland, that promotes the idea that welfare state provisions should be restricted first and foremost to the majority population (Keskinen 2016; Pyrhönen 2015). In the Finnish context, this kind of economic and labour market rationale can be seen in the fact that financial costs/gains of immigration, whether real or perceived, are in the political and public debate closely linked to the question of welfare state finances (Author 2015; Keskinen 2016; Pyrhönen 2015).

Gary Freeman (1986) argues that along with real wages, workers from less prosperous societies are attracted by higher 'social wages' in the country of destination. Freeman (1986, 55) defines social wages as consisting of both 'direct wages' (what the employer pays to the employee) *and* the 'indirect wage' (the benefits, protection and rights the employee receives from the state). Both direct and indirect wages are considerably higher in Finland than in Estonia. For example, the annual salary/capita in 2016 in Finland was approximately 34,000 euros and in Estonia 19,000 euros (OECD 2018). The state social spending in Finland in 2016 was 31% of the GDP whereas in Estonia only 17% (OECD 2017), which means that the services and provision that the Estonian state provides are substantially lower than in the Finnish case. These differences make Finland an attractive destination country for the Estonians.

In the following section, we describe the theoretical concepts we use in our analysis: social citizenship, embracement and distancing, and explain their relation to each other and their usefulness for our study.

Social Citizenship

As mentioned earlier, Marshall's (1950) definition of social citizenship encompasses 'the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society'. There are obviously many ways of defining 'social citizenship' (for mapping of different understandings of social citizenship see, e.g. Theiss 2016). We do by no means argue that what Marshall means by 'social citizenship' would necessarily need a nation-state as a guarantor –as in the Marshallian conception (see, e.g. Theiss 2016, 70). New types of social citizenship have, for example, emerged on sub-state levels in Europe alongside with state-based social citizenship (see, e.g. Keating 2009). There has also been some Europeanisation of social rights due to the EU (Sassen, 2006, 287; *ibid.*). Despite these sub- and supranational developments, we argue in lines with e.g. Keating (2009) that in the European context, the national welfare states have remained the principal guarantors of rights related to social citizenship (social citizenship understood in Marshallian terms). It is particularly in the Nordic type of welfare states, including Finland, where the welfare state has remained the main provider of social citizenship, including relatively comprehensive welfare provisions from 'cradle to grave' (see, e.g. Ervasti et al. 2008). We share Anttonen's (1998) view that it can be argued that it is the Nordic Welfare states that most clearly represent Marshall's 'grand idea of social citizenship'. The close relation of the welfare state and social citizenship in the Finnish context became evident also in the accounts of our interviewees. For these reasons, we find Marshall's (1950) welfare state-based understanding of social citizenship particularly suitable in the Finnish case where the state bears the main responsibility for the basic well-being of its citizens –including to a varying degree also different categories of non-Finnish citizens who live in Finland.

As regards Marshall's term 'social heritage' (Marshall 1950), we argue that in the Finnish context the

welfare state has become an important part of the country's social heritage because Finnish national identity is strongly embedded in the idea of the welfare state (Kettunen 2008). In the Finnish context, the use of most welfare state services and provisions cuts through all social classes and does not –in most cases– bear with it a stigma such as it does, for example, in the Anglo-Saxon context (for the discussion related to stigma and social security see e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990).

According to Marshall (1950, 10-11), the development of citizenship has evolved chronologically in three partly overlapping historical eras (the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries), each of which presumes the establishment of rights. These include civil, political and social rights (civil, political and social citizenship, respectively). One phase builds on the previous ones. In Finland, like in any democratic country, the fundamental rights (rule of law) associated with *civil citizenship* –in contrast to *social citizenship*– by default encompass all nationals and non-nationals. As regards *political citizenship*: immigrants residing in Finland in most cases automatically receive political citizenship with the exception of the right to participate in parliamentary and presidential elections, which require Finnish nationality. Social citizenship, for its part, is a dimension of citizenship that migrants accumulate temporally via embeddedness in the recipient society including a demand of 'contributions to the welfare state' –as we described earlier. As will be shown later in our analysis of the empirical research material we argue that it is *social citizenship* in Finland that is the key migratory goal of the interviewed Estonian workers.

In striving for social citizenship in the Finnish context the interviewed Estonians' simultaneously employ what we, using Leon and Anderson's (1987) terms, call 'embracement' and 'distancing'. In the following sections, we explain the meaning of embracement and distancing and why these concepts are suited for the purpose of our empirical analysis.

Aspiring for Social Citizenship by Embracement and Distancing

Snow and Anderson's (1987) classic ethnographic study on 'homeless street people' in the United States provides a theoretical framework for analysing how people make use of framings when aiming to present themselves in a favourable light. The key theoretical concepts in their study were 'embracement' and 'distancing'. We applied these two concepts in the theoretical framework of this paper in order to grasp the Estonians' aspiration for social citizenship in Finland.

A basic human need is self-worth and personal significance, which depend on the roles that are available. Through discursive framings actors seek to re-define their structurally determined roles in terms of their own interests while 'generating and maintaining a sense of meaning and self-worth' (Snow and Anderson 1987, 1337). Snow and Anderson's study focused on a stigmatized group of citizens: the homeless. We do not argue that being 'Estonian' in Finland bears with it a stigma that can be compared to that of being 'homeless'. However, we do argue –as will be explained later– that Snow and Anderson's theory is useful when making sense of the Estonians' strive for social citizenship because we repeatedly identified patterns of distancing and embracement that were similar to those present in their 1987 study –even though the Estonians are not a particularly stigmatized immigrant group in Finland. In fact, according to Jaakkola's study (2009, 53), Finns have more positive attitudes towards the immigration of Estonians than to immigration of (in descending order) Chinese, Poles, Russians, and Somalians. However, the majority population still considers Estonians as 'immigrants' –a term that often comes with negative connotations among general public. Moreover, there has been

some negative media coverage of the Estonians' use of welfare benefits. A local Helsinki newspaper *Helsingin Uutiset* (23 August 2013), for example, claimed in its headline that 'Helsinki has become the social welfare office for Estonians'. A newspaper in the city of Espoo, *Länsiväylä* (22 August 2013), stated in its headline that 'Finland spends millions on the welfare benefits of Estonians'. We argue that from the aforementioned standpoints, the Estonian interviewees are –as a category– in a somewhat subordinate position compared to the majority population, i.e. the 'native Finns'.

We argue that the subordinate position of the Estonians in Finland gave incentives for the Estonian interviewees to present themselves in a positive light by making use of their knowledge of the existing structures and ethnic hierarchies in Finland, by emphasising their contributions to the welfare state and by –in many cases– positioning themselves hierarchically 'above' other migrant groups (i.e. distancing). This becomes evident in the interview accounts, which we will present later. From these standpoints, we consider Snow and Anderson's (1987) theoretical framework suitable when analysing our immigration-related research interviews.

According to Snow and Anderson (1987), identity talk refers to 'verbal construction and assertion of personal identities' with which the homeless consciously framed themselves when describing their life circumstances. Snow and Anderson identified three types of *identity talk* among the homeless. These are: embracement, distancing and (fictive) storytelling.

Embracement refers to 'the verbal and expressive confirmation of one's acceptance of and attachment to the social identity associated with a general or specific role, a set of social relationships, or a particular ideology' (Snow and Anderson 1987, 1354). Embracement is divided into three subcategories: role embracement (which refers to identity talk that embraces categories of people

connoted with positive attributes); associational embracement (exhibiting trustworthy and reciprocal behavior in social relationships); and ideological embracement (religious or doctrinal embracement such as Christianity or the doctrines of the Alcoholic Anonymous or the Salvation Army) (Snow and Anderson (1987, 1354-8).

By means of *distancing* actors seek, according to Snow and Anderson (1987, 1358-9), to distinguish themselves from roles, other people, or institutions, which are in contrast to their desired identity. Distancing occurs in three respects (Snow and Anderson 1987, 1348-55): associational distancing (which means personal distancing towards people with certain non-desired attributes within a category of people); role distancing (distancing oneself from certain roles by an attempt to ‘foster the impression of a lack of commitment or attachment to a particular role’); and institutional distancing (distancing oneself from certain institutions that individuals do not want to identify with).

In addition to different types of embracement and distancing Snow and Anderson (1358-9) identified a pattern of ‘fictive storytelling’ in their study, which refers to ‘the narration of stories about one's past, present, or future experiences and accomplishments that have a fictive character to them’ (Snow and Anderson, 1358-9). In Snow and Anderson’s study the informants’ fictive storytelling varied from minor exaggerations to fanciful claims of one’s past in situations where the informants wanted to appear in a positive light. It was difficult for us to trace the subcategory of ‘fictive storytelling’ because we could not know for sure which parts of the interviewees’ accounts of their past were ‘true’ and which ones were fictive. Therefore, we omitted the subcategory of ‘fictive storytelling’ in our analysis and focused on embracement and distancing instead. In the next sections, we describe how the research was conducted.

Research Methods and Data

Our data consist of 51 biographical interviews with Estonians working in Finland that were conducted by a Finnish-Estonian research group. We utilized a snowballing technique to select the interviewees, accessing them in several ways. We accessed them through our social networks, by posting on an Estonian-Finnish Facebook group, by directly approaching them in popular gathering places of Estonians, and with the help of Finnish trade union officials. 28 interviewees were women and 23 were men. Forty-six of the interviewees were residents in Finland and five commuted between the two countries. One of the interviewees was unemployed and the others were employed with formal work contracts. The majority of the interviewees (20) worked as cleaners. 18 were construction workers. The others worked in restaurants, in office work, and in retail and manufacturing. The interviews were made in the framework of the (*name of project withheld*) based at (*name of university withheld*) in 2014. The interviews were carried out by a group of three researchers, two Finns and one Estonian.

A biographical interview method was applied. This means that the interviewees were first asked an opening question 'Please tell me your life story – starting from your childhood'. Additional questions were posed concerning the interviewee's life history, including thematic questions concerning experiences of work and life in both Estonia and Finland, the meaning of citizenship, integration into the Finnish society, relationships with Finns and other nationalities, and membership in associations. The idea of the biographical method is to reconstruct the interviewee's life history into a coherent whole, based on which conclusions can be made of his/her life experiences, preferences, attitudes and

perceptions (see e.g. Mrozowicki 2011; Rosenthal 1993). The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewees (Estonian) with the exception of 10 interviews that were conducted in Finnish with interviewees who spoke fluent Finnish.

Estonian migration to Finland is a gendered phenomenon, which was visible in the composition of our interviewees: the male interviewees were mostly construction workers, whereas the female interviewees mainly worked as cleaners. The majority of the interviewees had moved to Finland alone, either without having a partner or family back in Estonia or having divorced and/or left adult children in Estonia. Half of the interviewees with families had moved together with their families. The interviewees' time of stay in Finland varied from less than a year to more than 10 years. The interviewees' ages ranged between 20 and 60 years, the mean age being 37. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes, cafeterias, university premises, in a park and on the ferries between Estonia and Finland. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and they do not appear with their real names in this article.

No particular question about the interviewees' stance toward the Finnish welfare system was raised by the interviewers during the interviews. Not raising specific research issues in the interviews is in compliance with the biographical method (e.g. Rosenthal 1993). The purpose of the method is to let the interviewees raise any issues in the narrative that they regard important. However, the interviewees –by their own initiative– repeatedly addressed the issues of social citizenship when they started talking about integration into the society, the importance of work, or issues related to the welfare state such as taxes and social benefits. This shows that this aspect of social citizenship is of great importance for the interviewees.

The interviews were fully transcribed. The data was coded by using MAXQDA qualitative analysis programme. In the coding process, a category concerning social citizenship was formed, deduced from the data itself (not derived from any theoretical or thematic framework). In doing so, we followed the coding process developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Inter-coding reliability was ensured by means of investigator triangulation (Denzin 2006), whereby the other researchers of the research team occasionally checked the coding made by one researcher. While the ‘social citizenship’ category was induced from the data (as the grounded theory presumes), the categories of ‘embracement’ and ‘distancing’ were derived from the previously described theoretical framework. Combining concepts that derived from both the data and theory does not, however, create a methodological problem as to the method. The use of grounded theory method with theory-derived analytical categories – as well as having more than one researcher coding –complies with the ‘tailoring’ variation of grounded method (Bryant 2017, 294).

Analysis

This section analyses the empirical findings and is divided into two parts. The first part analyses what social citizenship means for the interviewed Estonians. The second part analyses the interviewees’ strive for social citizenship in their embracement of the Finnish welfare state institutions and distancing themselves from, in their view, non-deserving migrants.

1. The Goal of the Interviewees: Acquiring Social Citizenship through Social Rights

The interviewees' aspiration for social citizenship became evident when they repeatedly emphasised welfare state protection against social risks, i.e. protection, which is at the core of the notion of social citizenship (see Marshall 1950). The Estonians' aspiration for social citizenship in Finland was illustrated by the constant use of the Finnish labour market and welfare state as a desired point of reference into which they sought to adapt. Often, the experienced 'superiority' of the Finnish welfare system was illustrated by comparisons with the system in Estonia. Aleksandr (a construction worker), for example, complained that in Estonia an ambulance drive to the hospital costed 60 euros, while in Finland it was free of charge. Margit, who worked as a cleaner, described the accumulation of pension funds:

Well, one thing is, for example, the pension thing here... when I pay the pension insurance, I know exactly that it will return to me normally, it won't be so that it will be changed or decreased in the meantime, or I don't know, transferred and... It will be very secure, if I think of the future. Well, I don't know, these two societies are so different.

In a similar vein Tom, a construction worker, emphasised the differences between the two countries:

'... there are many, many times more possibilities in Finland. This was therefore one of the reasons why I came to Finland. [...] All these benefits and payments (...) are completely different from what they are in Estonia. In that respect, when a child benefit is some 19 euros in Estonia, which is quite ridiculous, you cannot even get nappies for a child, so I think that nobody wants to live there. In that respect. Say, it's this money thing. Or, I don't know if I am the only one who came to Finland because of money, but I guess the majority is here because of money so that they could live a better life.'

The aspiration for social citizenship among Estonians includes not only higher wages but also higher standards of welfare state provisions –as the quotes show. However, we are not witnessing a sort of ‘benefit tourism’ (i.e. non-work based migration for the purpose of benefiting of welfare systems) as it is evident based on the interviews that it is mainly the –from Estonians’ perspective– high wages that makes the Finnish labour market an attractive option.

The following sections illustrate how the interviewees’ identity talk reflected their aspiration for social citizenship, manifested in their use of embracement and distancing. In forming the axis between social citizenship and the categories of embracement and distancing, we applied an abductive approach to the grounded theory method: the category of social citizenship was formed while analysing the data, whereas the categories of embracement and distancing were found through theoretical memoing; the latter ones were also tested against the data (Bryant 2017, 271-272).

2. The Strive towards Social Citizenship: Embracement and Distancing

According to Snow and Anderson (1987), embracement and distancing takes place in a number of ways. *Role embracement* refers to identity talk that embraces categories of people connoted with positive attributes. *Associational embracement* means exhibiting trustworthy and reciprocal behaviour in social relationships. First, we describe how role embracement became evident in the Estonians’ accounts. Then we proceed to associational embracement. After that we describe how we uncovered *different types of distancing* in the interviewees’ accounts.

Role Embracement

Role embracement involved embracing the role of a ‘good worker’ and tax payer. The interviewees highlighted a ‘deservingness’ dimension of social citizenship and that they met the criteria by having a ‘strong work ethic’ and ‘being good tax payers’. The interviewees regarded paying taxes as an act that contributes to the welfare state. Tom, for example, did not consider high taxes a problem, because of his belief in the benefit of paying taxes: ‘you’ll get everything, kind of, back to you’. Tom had great confidence that taxes are collected for the right purposes in Finland. Aleksandr asserted that he pays taxes ‘with pleasure, since I know that I’ll get something in exchange for it [...] I can go to the healthcare centre and the like’. Such accounts, typical for the interviewees, stressed that social citizenship has to be earned by fulfilling duties.

The interviewees also cultivated role embracement by emphasising their role as a modest social benefit user. Valdo (a construction worker) claimed that the Estonians are the migrant group least dependent on social benefits. His comment provided a good example of the ‘deservingness argument’ that was a constantly repeating theme raised by the interviewees. Valdo added that in principle there should be a Finn doing his job and that he wanted to become worthy of the position by working and paying taxes ‘as the Finns do’. Such a sentiment is illustrative of the Estonians’ embracement of a ‘hardworking’ work-orientation and the consequent claims of not misusing the welfare benefits. These kinds of views, which were present in the interviewees’ talk, embraced the norms of the Finnish welfare regime (i.e. wage-work as a norm, necessity, duty, and source of dignity and individual autonomy, see Kettunen 2001, 240). In other words, they pointed to a ‘social heritage’ –to use Marshall’s (1950) term– which refers to sharing common ideals with the host society population. The interviewees portrayed a ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’ view of how an immigrant should live in Finland. To the question of

whether Estonians would build communities of their own in Finland, Valdo replied:

The Estonians are not like that. They are not the ones to develop communities. The Estonians ... I don't know if you have noticed, the Estonians are such that, when an Estonian comes to Finland, then he learns Finnish, he behaves like a Finn. He tries to fit into the surroundings as quickly as possible.

In this quote we find interesting similarities with Lulle's and Assmuth's (2013) study, which points to Estonian parents' aspiration to integrate their children in Finnish 'mainstream' society by having their children to attend Finnish schools instead of Estonian schools – a process, which is facilitated by the linguistic proximity of the Finnish and the Estonian languages.

Liina, a cleaner and a mother of a one-year-old son emphasised her role as a deserving social benefit user by recounting her positive experiences of dealing with the Finnish social security system:

...here people care more about children and... like, when there's a problem, then the problem will be solved. Like every time when I for example, went to KELA [The Social Insurance Institution of Finland], I always had my questions answered even if I had to use my arms and legs for that, they dealt with me very well and really, but well, like the attitude is much more positive than in Estonia....

Associational Embracement

Associational embracement was in our research displayed in a slightly different way from Snow and Anderson (1987) who defined associational embracement as trustworthy and reciprocal behaviour in micro-level social relations: the interviewees of our study highlighted their trustworthy and reciprocal behaviour *in relation to the welfare state*. We decided to name this type of embracement *institutional embracement*. This refers to embracement of the welfare state institutions themselves, and not merely

to the benefits the welfare institutions provide. Institutional embracement emphasises the positive sides of the Finnish welfare state institutions from the Estonians' perspective. Cases in point of such embracement are the accounts of two Estonian cleaners, Imbi and Viivi, who described the experience of an Estonian acquaintance. Implicit in this experience was that this person had deserved the favourable treatment she received; she had had a tumour and underwent surgery in Finland. Consequently, Viivi described that: '...now she is in a wheelchair ... and gets all the service and everything else she needs. You never have something like that in Estonia'. 'She has everything,' Viivi concluded.

Within the limits of our small sample, it seems that role embracement is prevalent among both those who have stayed a short time and those who have become more or less permanent residents of Finland. In contrast, institutional embracement seemed to develop in the long run as the interviewees became more aware of the protection offered by the welfare state institutions. Viivi and Imbi (who were inclined to institutional embracement), for example, represented persons who had worked in Finland for a longer time (around ten years).

The positive (embracement) talk was often followed by negative (distancing) talk about 'others' –i.e. other migrant nationalities or in some cases fellow Estonians– who the interviewees did not consider worthy of what the Finnish welfare state could offer. In the following section, we analyse the distancing dimension of 'identity talk' that the Estonians often used when discussing issues related to social citizenship.

Distancing

There were some instances of *institutional distancing*, by which we mean distancing oneself from

institutions that the interviewees did not want to be identified with (see Snow and Anderson 1987, 1348-55). Martin, a construction worker, for example, emphasised his non-misuse of Finnish system by pointing out that he has not been in contact with institutions that provide social assistance in Finland. Instead, he would rely solely on his own ability to find a new job with a relatively high salary should he be laid off. However, a more prevalent pattern that we identified in the interview accounts was that of ‘role distancing’ described in the following section.

Role distancing

Role distancing took place when the interviewees distanced themselves from other migrants (in some cases also fellow Estonians), who allegedly did not earn their living via work and were misusing the welfare state’s generosity. Vello, for example, argued:

I personally know two... three [Estonian] people at least. If they face just a slightly more difficult situation, downturn. Well, let’s say, they lack about three-four hundred euros until the end of the month... Then they already are visiting social offices, and are provided with some support.

Similarly, Jaanika, a cleaner, distanced herself from the Estonians who break the law or ‘misuse’ social benefits: ‘those Estonians doing illegal things, including having unmerited social benefits, have destroyed the good image of proper Estonian workers in Finland’. Some fellow Estonians were also criticised for not paying taxes. In other words, the interviewees embraced the role of a good worker and tax payer and distanced themselves from non-deserving, non-contributing welfare benefit recipients.

Associational Distancing

The most widespread form of distancing among the interviewees was *associational distancing* (personal distancing from people with certain non-desired attributes within a category of people). The desire to highlight one's justifiable use of welfare benefits and to distance oneself from those who 'misuse' welfare benefits was based on the idea of 'deservingness' of such benefits. Vello's idea of the welfare state seems to imply that only those who are employed and pay taxes deserve to be protected by the welfare state: '...the government should somehow motivate people to work more. He [a migrant who does not work but nevertheless claims welfare benefits] should be given at least some obligations'. This is well in line with how Lembit, a construction worker, sees this issue: 'I wouldn't like to live as the Somalians live. They come in, take a flat from KELA and money from social security and they don't do anything. You are supposed to do something all the time'. Dagmar, a construction worker who had lived in Finland for more than ten years, insisted that there were refugees who take 'our social benefits' while they could go to work. While Valdo embraced Estonians for not receiving social benefits in Finland he simultaneously distanced himself from migrant groups whom he did not consider 'deserving':

If you compare that to all those damn Muslims, negroes, Russians, all those from other countries, that come here [to Finland]. They hang out in their own groups, by the shop, babble their own language, don't give a shit about anything besides the fact that the KELA keeps paying them. I don't know why KELA keeps on paying them.

Timo, a construction worker, answered a question on where to appeal when there is a need for social support:

Honestly speaking, I haven't thought about it. There are certainly... some places... when you don't

have a job or something, you can go there and apply yourself for some benefits. Well, such a question fits well, say, with those with black skin colour.

Vello is an advocate of the welfare state. While embracing the welfare benefits, he, however, also criticised the generosity of the system, and distanced himself from Somalians who in his opinion exploit the welfare state:

I come from Estonia, I enter exactly the same position, as they who come from some Somalia. The next day, or let's say during the week... he will have some sort of space to live in. He will get free bus tickets. He will get... well, I do not know, kindergarten free of charge. Whatever. However, when I come here from Estonia... then I do not get all that. Except I have to find a job by myself, I have to prove myself... But they do not get this, they will have ALL just like that, very like... Well, very quickly. Something like no effort at all. [...] I go to work and I pay all the taxes. I do not owe a cent to Finland. But then part of this tax that I pay... will be on his/her plate. I do not get anything. I have never used anything... that someone should... that government should support me or... I keep my teeth clenched, and I go to the night shift.

These excerpts from our data show that some of the interviewees attributed personal shortcomings and even 'racial' attributes, instead of for example structural inequality or discrimination, as the reason for certain migrant groups being unemployed at a higher rate and more dependent on social benefits than the Estonians. These accounts show a moral irritation of the person feeling forced to contribute more than the others. For some reason, in our data, it was mainly men (in our study mainly construction workers) who cultivated this kind of distancing from other migrant groups.

In sum, the ‘deservingness’ argument was frequently repeated by the Estonians in terms of social citizenship. The interviewees reproduced existing ethnic hierarchies when distancing themselves from what they considered ‘non-deserving’ immigrant groups at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy. In some cases, the interviewees likewise distanced themselves from those fellow Estonians whom they deemed to be abusing the ‘generosity’ of the Finnish welfare state. Here we find a similarity to Osipovic’s studies (2010; 2015) on Polish labour migrants in the UK who in a comparable fashion distanced themselves from ‘non-deserving’ migrant groups. Timonen and Doyle (2009, 170) drew similar conclusions in their study on migrant care workers in Ireland, as several of their interviewees ‘hinted at a strong undercurrent of scepticism and disapproval towards other migrants’ relationship with the welfare state.’ Van Oorschot’s study (2006) showed that cross-nationally in Europe migrants are being singled out by the general public as the least deserving of welfare when compared to older people, people with disabilities and the unemployed (van Oorschot, 2006, 2008). Our study shows –in line with the aforementioned studies in the UK and Ireland– that not only the natives but also the immigrants reproduce ethnic hierarchies and welfare chauvinism in terms of deservingness and access to the welfare state.

As mentioned earlier, the persons interviewed for this study had lived between one and more than ten years in Finland. Lagerspetz (2011) has shown that the length of the time Estonians live in Finland influences their patterns of participation in Finnish cultural life and civil society. In the analysis we found, as regards the time-dimension, that while institutional embracement seems to develop with time (due to increased awareness of the role of the welfare state institutions), there does not seem to be any variation according to the interviewees’s duration of the stay with respect to different types of distancing (institutional, role and associational distancing).

Summary and Discussion

In this article we have strived to answer the following questions: what does social citizenship mean from the interviewed Estonians' perspective? How and why do the Estonians strive for social citizenship?

From the interviewees' perspective, aspiring for social citizenship in Finland is the key motivator for the move to Finland. The so called social wage –to use Freeman's (1986) term– comprises of both 'direct wages' (what the employer pays to the employee) *and* the 'indirect wage' (the benefits, protection and rights the employee receives from the state) that are considerably higher in Finland than in Estonia. Aspiring for a higher social wage is the essence of social citizenship for the Estonians we interviewed. However, we want to emphasise that even though the Estonians embrace Finnish 'welfare state' protection, we are not evidencing a strive towards 'benefit tourism' (meaning migration solely for the purposes of taking advantage of the welfare state) as the relatively high wages and job opportunities in Finland –and not welfare state protection– are the main reasons for migration. Undoubtedly, the encompassing welfare state, too, attracts Estonians to the Finnish labour market. In our case the strong attachment and access to 'generous' Finnish welfare state seems to increase –and not decrease– the interviewees' motivation for participating in the Finnish labour market. This is interestingly in contrast to the repeated political discourses on immigration and the welfare state in Finland –and beyond– where immigrants' access to the welfare state is framed as a threat to the sustainability of the welfare state.

The interviewees embraced the Finnish welfare safety net and services and were willing to contribute to it by their employment and by paying taxes. This is because their standard of living in Finland is not as directly dependent on ‘pure market forces’ as it would be in the Estonian neoliberal system.

Applying Snow and Anderson’s (1987) concept of embracement, we named this kind of embracement *institutional embracement*. We argue that the Estonians’ embracement of the Finnish welfare is explained by their experience of the welfare state protecting the individual against risks.

Our interviewees did not express a concern about the *civil* dimension of citizenship. We assume that this is because the interviewees took fundamental rights related to civil citizenship (e.g. freedom of speech) for granted in contemporary Finland (and Estonia). Social citizenship in Finland was their key aspiration. Immigrants are obviously a heterogeneous group; other groups of immigrants might raise other aspects of citizenship (e.g. civil/political). Neither did the interviewees bring up political aspects (political citizenship) when describing their reasons to migrate to and settle in Finland. We assume this has to do with the fact that the majority of the interviewees had arrived quite recently to Finland and because political citizenship is partly automatically available even for non-nationals (excluding participation in parliamentary/presidential elections). The group of migrants we interviewed for this study, could –in broad terms– be categorised as ‘labour migrants’. For migrants that could be described as e.g. refugees, asylum seekers, family migrants, or undocumented migrants, other aspects of citizenship may –or may not– be more important.

We found Snow and Anderson’s (1987) theory based on the different forms of ‘embracement’ and ‘distancing’ useful when analysing the Estonians’ strive for social citizenship. The interviewees embraced the Finnish welfare state provision and services. However, a drawback from an egalitarian perspective on which social citizenship builds, is the distancing discourse found in a large number of

the interviews. In these accounts, the welfare state was reserved only to those who were deemed 'worthy' by contributing to it –in contrast to those 'misusing' it. Those who practised distancing did it markedly from allegedly non-contributing migrant groups. In doing so, the interviewees reproduced the ethnic hierarchies in the Finnish society –in some cases also backing them with racist arguments.

Immigrants are –as earlier research (Osipovic 2010; 2015; Timonen and Doyle 2009) has demonstrated as well– not immune to attributing deservingness/non-deservingness to ethnic hierarchies. Immigrants participate in the debate on who are legitimate 'members' of the welfare state. The tension between immigration and welfare –an oft-repeated theme in the accounts of the Estonian interviewees– is probably increased by the neoliberal order, which highlights the individuals' duties of proving themselves as 'good citizens' by their economic activity.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the Estonians' attitudes can be explained as a conscious/non-conscious defensive strategy in the somewhat precarious and subordinate position of the 'migrant', and/or to what extent these hierarchical ethnic attitudes are adapted in Finland and/or Estonia. We assume that both factors play a role. In any case, we argue that the interviewees aspire for social citizenship via embracement and distancing of social roles in a similar fashion as identified in the study by Snow and Anderson (1987) by emphasising their role as 'good workers' and 'worthy members' of the welfare state, and by distancing themselves from the 'non-deserving'.

Acknowledgements (withheld)

Funding (withheld)

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