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Everyday Practices of Translocal Families: Estonian Children and a Sense of Being-in-Place

ABSTRACT

Drawing mainly on interview material collected among Estonian families living in Finland, the article approaches family mobility as a site for negotiation between children and adults. Individuals are analysed as members of both local and translocal networks, above all families, paying special attention to the ways in which territorial and social spaces connect to each other. The focus of the article is on the ways in which children make sense of relocation and mobility in their everyday lives, and on their understandings of translocal family practices. The article discusses the ways children reflect upon and incorporate experiences of relocation and a translocal way of life into their sense of being-in-place. While exploring the possibilities of feeling close over distances, the article analyses the challenges related to virtual intimacy and modes of communication that are specific to children.

Introduction

Based on a project on family migration from the children's perspective[1], this article[2] seeks to explore understandings children have about their families and mobility, and how the experiences and understandings of children shape families' translocal practices. The main research material consists of participant observation and interviews made during the years 2013 and 2014 with members of Estonian families relocated to Finland. Drawing mainly on interview material, the article discusses the ways children make sense of and negotiate relocation and relations to different places in their everyday lives. It also takes a look at patterns of distanced models of familiarity from children's perspectives, asking: how has relocation affected family relations[3]? What are the possibilities and strategies for feeling close over long distances?

This article is embedded in the so-called transnational turn in the interdisciplinary field of migration studies that has taken place over the last two decades (see Vertovec 2007). In addition to integration and acculturation of mobile individuals settling in receiving countries, this theoretical framework stresses to a greater extent processes that transcend international borders, and the parallel relations that people have to two or more states. The introduction of the concept of translocality, on the other hand, has marked a shift toward a more 'grounded transnationalism' of mobile actors (see Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013). Researchers have also started to challenge conceptual orientations based on binary thinking and to create studies of mobilities in which migration and stasis (mobility and immobility), as well as local and transnational connections, are seen as interconnected aspects of the human condition (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013; cf. also Lems 2016).

As a part of this trend, movement and settlement have been studied through relationships,

paying attention to the ways in which territorial and social spaces connect with each other (cf. Faist 2010). The article focuses attention not only on individuals, but also on individuals as members of larger, often translocal networks. In this study, the focus is on transnational families. By definition, these families live some or most of their time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood'. The term transnational family thus refers to the ways in which families have dispersed and the ways they enact their sense of being part of the same family: practices, strategies and negotiations through which family life is created across time and space. (Bryceson & Vuorela 2002, 3, 6; Körber 2012.)

When looking at migration and mobility from the family perspective, researchers have become aware of the fact that children and young people are often at the centre of these processes, either as the motivation for migration or migrating themselves with their families, and sometimes also as agents making their own decisions concerning migration, staying behind, or not returning. Parents frequently migrate on behalf of children, to create a better future for their children and families. What at first sight might seem to be purely economic or political transnationalism can often implicitly, if not overtly, be for the wellbeing of children and future generations. (See Coe et al. 2011, 3–5, 11.)

In spite of this, the majority of the literature on transnational migration has focused on adults, while children's perspectives remain an understudied topic (Punch 2009). The mobilities approach has tended to prioritise the individual mobile body, considering migration rather as an individual pursuit. Even accounts of family mobility are often too reliant on the couple as the main nexus of intimate relations. (Holdsworth 2013, 3, 83.) Far too often the position of children has been equated with that of "luggage" (Orellana et al. 2001), creating an image of children as things transported by adults; as non-persons lacking both feelings and agency of their own (Dobson 2009, 356).

However, in some contemporary research on transnational families the children's perspective has been included, or has even been at the core of the research (see for example Coe et al. 2011; Ní Laoire et al. 2011). Along this line, the aim of our research project has been to focus on the ways children take part in and comprehend family migration, and on their descriptions and interpretations of translocal family life. Exploring the way that children understand migration opens up their points of view, in addition to which understanding the way they negotiate migration can also undermine some of the conventional assumptions made on the basis of adult migrants. For example, younger migrants' identities can call into question the location of 'home' and 'host' nations. (Dobson 2009, 358.)

In this article, I ask what makes a place meaningful for children; what do they pay attention to when talking about their lives in Estonia and in Finland? Additionally, I will contemplate the methodological challenges related to studying mobile children.

On the move from Estonia to Finland – and back

Migration and mobility patterns in the Estonian-Finnish context have gone through major changes since the 1990s. Historically, Finland has been a country of net emigration, although the immigrant population has grown significantly since 1990. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, large numbers of former Soviet citizens, mostly from Estonian and Russian territories, also migrated to Finland. Former Soviet citizens with Finnish background – mainly people of Ingrian descent – were then given the opportunity to apply for the status of returning migrant, and for permission to move to Finland with their families.

Estonia, on the other hand, was a country of immigration during the Soviet period (1944–1991) and became a county of emigration only after the re-establishment of independence in 1991. In the 1990s, emigration from Estonia was mainly return migration to the original homelands of different Soviet nationalities. At the same time, Western countries once again became accessible to Estonian migrants. In the 1990s, approximate-

ly two-thirds of the emigrants going to Western countries migrated to Finland (Anniste 2014, 18; Lagerspetz 2007, 87). Apart from the return migration of people with Finnish background, other reasons for emigration to Finland were work, study, marrying a Finnish citizen and other family reasons (Liebkind et al. 2004, 22–24).

Emigration from Estonia to the old EU member states increased significantly in the 2000s, and the relative proportion of labour migration increased substantially. Cross-border work and migration of Estonian residents was strongly influenced by EU accession in 2004, and by the global economic crisis that started in 2008. In the first quarter of 2010, the unemployment rate reached an all-time high in Estonia. (See Tarum 2014, 1–3.) Being geographically, linguistically and culturally close to Estonia, and offering high incomes, Finland is an attractive choice for migrating Estonians. It has been their main destination country from the very beginning of the 1990s. In 2012, people who relocated to Finland made up 59% of all emigrants, while people working in Finland made up 65% of those working abroad but residing in Estonia (Tarum 2014, 5).

At the end of 2015, there were approximately 50,400 Estonian citizens living permanently in Finland, more than half of them in the Helsinki-Uusimaa area (Statistics Finland 2015). This constitutes the largest group of foreign citizens in the country. Only estimates exist for the number of temporary, seasonal, informal and commuting workers from Estonia (as EU citizens the Schengen Agreement guarantees Estonians free access to Finland). According to one estimate, in 2012 there were about 30,000 people working in Finland but living permanently in Estonia (Statistics Finland 2013a). It has been pointed out that Estonia is one of the major countries of origin for commuting workers in Europe: there are 15.8 cross-border commuters per thousand inhabitants in Estonia (MKW Wirtschaftsforschung GmbH 2009). Men were clearly dominant (86%) among those who worked abroad but resided in Estonia (Tarum 2014, 4; see also Telve in this volume).

Taking into account the regular contact across borders and intensive movement back and forth, it is possible to talk about an Estonian-Finnish transnational space (see Jakobson et al. 2012; on Finnish women relocating to Estonia, see also Hyvönen 2009) in which the mobility of some people affects others who do not themselves move. In several Eastern European countries, the numbers of return migrants and transit migrants are growing, which also points to a need to critically evaluate the analytical potential of thinking in dichotomies such as mobility versus immobility, movers versus stayers. There are complex patterns of mobility and immobility even within the same migratory practice. (Sandberg 2012, 88–89; see also Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013.) This is also the case in Estonia: mobility practices are also on the move. In 2014, the volume of emigration was 30% smaller than in the three previous years, in addition to which return migration has increased in recent years (Statistics Estonia 2015). However, these trends may also change according to the economic and political situation.

When analysing these patterns, the concept of translocality has also proven useful as it stresses the importance of the localised experiences of both mobile and immobile people, who together constantly co-produce connectedness. The central idea of translocality has been synthesised by human geographers Brickell and Datta (2011, 3) as situatedness during mobility. With the concept of translocality, researchers seek to integrate notions of fluidity and discontinuity associated with mobilities and movements with notions of groundedness and situatedness in particular settings (see Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013, 376). Along this line, I have explored the mobility patterns and concurrent negotiations between children and adults in the Estonian-Finnish context, trying to be sensitive to families' everyday practices, characterised by both continuity and discontinuity.

Exploring children's mobility: methodological challenges

When doing research on children, one inevitably has to contemplate whether working with children demands particular methods. The aim of child-centred methodologies is usually to recog-

nise children as active agents holding different competencies from adults. This approach, however, introduces the danger of constructing children as an artificially bounded 'tribe'. Childhood could rather be considered a relational experience, one that is influenced by wider social and economic processes, as Zeitlyn and Mand have pointed out. (Zeitlyn & Mand 2012, 990–991.) In a similar spirit, this research has focused on children, looking at them as members of societies and especially as members of family networks that extend the borders of nation states.

Thus, when studying children's mobility the focus has not been on children's practices only, but also on mobility as a site for negotiation between children and adults (see Holdsworth 2013, 87). The desire to reach an intergenerational perspective on childhood and the multiple subjectivities within families was one of the reasons why parents were also interviewed. I should stress, however, that the aim has not been to pit the accounts of children and their parents against each other: descriptions that seem to be inaccurate or too fanciful to be 'true', in a strict sense, have their own validity, helping the researcher to understand the child's perspective (Punch 2002, 327).

The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork (2013–2014) consisting of participant observation and interviews among (ethnic) Estonian families living in Finland at the time of the interviews, some of which planned to move to Estonia in the near future. Altogether 26 interviews were conducted in the greater Helsinki area and Turku (Finland), and in Tartu (Estonia). The language of the interviews was Estonian. The author is Finnish, but has lived in Estonia since 2000. Estonian is currently her second language spoken at home.[4] The interviewees were found through children's club activities, Estonian language courses, kindergarten(s), and through common acquaintances. When interviewing children, consent for the interview was gained both from the parents and from the children themselves. I believe the children had a real opportunity to abstain from cooperation with the interviewer at this point, and again later during the interviews (answering questions briefly or not at all) if the situation did not please them or if they had second thoughts (cf. Strandell 2010).

Where possible, different members of the same family have been interviewed, both parents and children. Among the interviewees there were 13 women, 4 men, 11 girls and 5 boys (the children were aged 6 to 12 years), and one young woman in her early twenties. Women were generally easier to reach. For example, they often brought their children to different activities and circles, and it was easier to persuade them to take part in the research – perhaps because the interviewers were women.

Some (7) of the interviews were group interviews in which more than one family member was present[5]. On these occasions, children were interviewed with the mother – and twice also the father – present. The effect of the parents being present could, according to my experience, be described as both positive and negative. In many cases, a younger child her/himself wished her/his mother to be present during the interview, and parents indeed often encouraged the child to talk by asking complementary questions on the basis of their own knowledge, without pushing their own opinions too much. It can be easier to a child to talk while this kind of support is available. However, sometimes the presence of parent(s) can also be disturbing: children might be less eager to answer the questions of the interviewer and talk about their own experiences. Parents may also interfere in the discussion, not giving enough time for the child to think and answer. In addition, when parents are present, the interviewer can take the easy way out and start to talk with the parents instead if the child is hesitant to answer. In the worst cases, grown-ups might also scold children if they – in the grown-ups' opinion – do not answer in an expected way or behave 'badly'. Naturally this kind of confrontational attitude does not create a relaxing atmosphere for conversation, which is evident from this excerpt from the interview with Pille and her seven-year-old daughter, Mirtel[6]:

Pihla: But do you think people are similar in Finland and Estonia?
Mirtel: No.
Pille: What are they like then?
Mirtel: Different.

Pille: How are they different? Don't do that.
Mirtel: Well I don't know the answers to every question.
Pille: But how [speaking simultaneously with Pihla]
Pihla: But there are these kinds of questions where there are no right answers, but I just thought that maybe you could tell me.
Pille: But if you know they are different, then how are they different?
Mirtel: Better not to ask, because I don't know the answer.
Pille: So they just are different, right?
Mirtel: Yes.
Pille: But you like Finns, don't you? Don't roll your eyes like that.
Mirtel: Why do you ask difficult questions?
Pille: You don't know if you like to be there with those kids, or what?
Mirtel: Yes, I like it...
Pille: Well. You can't answer a question like that. Can you?
Mirtel: No, I can't.
Pille: All the time you say that you want to be there, to play. So reply like that, how you feel inside. What kinds of thoughts you have.
Mirtel: Ok. (Woman, 30; Daughter, 7, H4: 17)

According to my experience, it was not easy to make a 'conventional interview' with younger children aged six or seven. School-aged children were much more talkative. Preschool-aged children rarely gave long, detailed answers or reflected on their experiences, which suggested that the interviewers needed to use other, complementary, methods when trying to talk with them about their experiences. Accordingly, in addition to interviewing, I experimented with alternative fieldwork techniques, for example observing younger children playing (mainly during children's circles and in daycare centres), drawing with children aged five to seven, and noting down the discussions we – or children among themselves – had during the drawing sessions. As Kinnunen (2015) has stated when studying children's spontaneous drawing in a kindergarten context, drawing is often a kind of dialogue between marks (made on paper) and thoughts. In my case, I asked children to make drawings based on certain themes, and even these more directed drawing sessions could give space for diverse and spontaneous narration.

Moving with the family

As mentioned above, cross-border commuters from Estonia are mainly men. For some Estonians commuting is of a temporary nature, and they might commute to different countries (in addition to Finland, other popular countries are Norway, Sweden, Germany, the UK and Russia) depending on the work situation (Krusell 2013, 135; Tarum 2014, 9). However, some commuters have been working abroad for years and plan to continue doing so until retirement age. As Telve's study shows, in their narratives men who were commuting at the time of the study often stressed that this kind of lifestyle is fine for them and their families, and has affected their close relations for the most part positively. Nevertheless, they would still prefer to live with their families in one country. Similarly, according to an enquiry made in 2013, the number of Estonian residents who said they would take their spouse and/or children with them if they got a job abroad increased considerably as compared to 2010. (Telve 2015, 92; Tarum 2014; Telve in this volume.) In 2012, there were approximately 10,500 families of Estonian background living in Finland (Statistics Finland 2013b).

The families interviewed for this study mainly represent the latter group of Estonians in Finland. As Jakobson et al. (2012, 170) have noticed, a typical pattern among family migrants in the Estonian-Finnish transnational space is that labour migrants first work for at least some months or years in the other country before other family members relocate. In the families interviewed, the husband typically worked in Finland for some time, after which his spouse and child/children joined him, while some of the (extended) family members remained in Estonia for different reasons. Thus, children usually have experienced living apart for some time, or travelling back and forth between Estonia and Finland with their mothers. However, there are also some one-parent families among the interviewees. In their case, more than

in others, living transnationally may be a survival strategy for coping with the disinvestment of the state in local social reproduction (Coe et al. 2011, 10; Schmalzbauer 2004).

When talking about the timing of family movement (moving to Finland or returning to Estonia), (adult) interviewees often mentioned children's schooling as an important factor affecting their decision. If possible, families would rather move before children start school, or wait until they have finished. As Siiri explains, moving during the school years is considered rather complicated:

> I have discussed it at home with my husband. Probably it would already be very difficult [for our children] to manage in an Estonian school. Since the study system is different and the curriculum as well, we just need to stay here for at least 9 years for sure. (Woman, 31, H18: 10–11)

The reason behind this precise timing is that the school systems are considered different enough to make change during the school years difficult for the child, which is something that applies in both directions. Generally parents think that the Estonian curriculum is more demanding, but the Finnish system gives the child more responsibility, which can also be difficult if the child is unaccustomed to it.

The interviewees – both adults and children – stress that members of the nuclear family have followed the 'head of the family' to Finland because of the strong will to keep the family together. At the same time, they might want to distinguish themselves from commuters – and the way of life they represent – by stating that it would not work out in their families. The unity of the family – in this case usually meaning the nuclear family – is strongly stressed discursively and given as justification for the relocation. In many cases, children have also adopted this discourse. They might emphasise, as 10-year-old Andreas did, that they did not want to live separately anymore:

> My father worked in Finland before and at that time my mother worked in a kindergarten in Estonia. And during that time my father came to Estonia sometimes and we visited him in Finland. But then we didn't want to live like that any more, separately, and thought we would also come and live in Finland. (Boy, 10, H16: 3)

Interestingly, Andreas talks about "us" in his account: "we didn't want to live like that [...] and thought we would also come and live in Finland." In this way, children are shown as full members of the family, taking part in important decisions. Similarly to the accounts stressing the importance of the family being together, some of the descriptions given by children emphasising the importance of learning Finnish presumably reflect the opinions of adults. For example, when a 12-year-old boy called Valter was talking about his hobby, football, he also cited learning Finnish from his teammates as one of the benefits of playing football with them:

> Pihla: Did you make some friends there in your football club, with whom you socialise?
> Valter: Yes, I did. They all live here close by. Sometimes I visit them, here close by I have one friend and we have gone out a lot together and now I've been to his place a lot, playing, and in this way there has been clear progress in my Finnish language skills. (Boy, 12, H23: 11)

Later in the interview he also mentions that it is good that they do not have Estonian TV channels at home: 'I like to watch Finnish films. It's very good, in Finnish.' This also affirms his orientation towards, and willingness to learn, Finnish.

When it comes to relocation, children are often faced with contradictory expectations from different directions. Their parents might be pro migration, while their grandparents, kindergarten teachers or other acquaintances argue against it. This might partly explain why children are initially eager to move, but might have second thoughts later on. Moving and travelling might also seem exciting at the beginning, although children might not be fully aware of the relative finality of the relocation.

The decision to relocate is usually made by parents, making it the children's responsibility to adapt to the decision (cf. also Telve 2015, 81). From the children's point of view, relocation was

often seen as something sudden that is imposed on them, even though the parents might say that it had already been discussed with them at an earlier stage. In principle, the same holds true when families plan to return to Estonia. Some of the children dream about moving back, at least occasionally; others, on the other hand, do not want to hear about such a plan, especially if it is imposed on them. Relocation sounds like a bad idea mainly because of the friends and relatives they would not like to leave behind. Sandra, a 12-year-old girl who has lived most of her life in Finland, finds thinking about the idea of returning to Estonia unpleasant:

> Pihla: Have you ever thought how it would be to live in Estonia?
> Sandra: Well, I wouldn't really like to go and live there, since all my friends are here and then I couldn't be with them. […]
> Ülle: Six years ago I thought I was not ready to move to Estonia yet. But now that time might be coming closer, so don't be so sure. […]
> Sandra: Oh, I wouldn't want to, Good Lord. [Pihla laughs]
> Ülle: I would like to go; I think we'll do that. I could arrange half of the matters in Estonian. Although no, I don't know.
> Pihla: Wait, your husband works part-time in Estonia, right?
> Ülle: Actually he, well yes, we are building our own home there now, so he goes to do that. […] There is no need to stay here, so in that sense he still hopes that we'll move to Estonia once our home is ready.
> Sandra: No, then I'll stay and live with granny [in Finland].
> Ülle: In that sense, we do have this back-up option. When she reaches puberty, if Sandra gets out of hand, we will immediately send her to live with her grandfather [in Estonia]. So that we would not have the kinds of problems some people have here.
> Sandra: Good Lord! If that should happen…
> Ülle: It would calm you down, Sandra, new friends. And children do make new friends quickly [laugh]. (Mother, 32; Daughter, 12, H5: 43, 78–79)

The idea of returning to Estonia or sending children back might also be a resource used by parents in order to make their children behave in a desirable way. The quotation above also reflects the common idea that children adapt easily to new surroundings.

Distanced models of familiarity

Many of the Estonian families studied during the project have moved to Finland with their immediate families – parent(s) with a child or children – while some of their family members have stayed in Estonia. Most often the family members who stayed in, or returned to, Estonia were either grandparents and/or adolescent girls and boys (16 years and older). Adolescents usually stayed with the intention of finishing school or working. Travelling is generally easier for the younger generation and keeping in touch with them is less complicated than with elderly relatives. Some grandparents have also relocated, but generally they are not too eager to change their place of residence in later life (cf. Siim 2014). This means that in many cases children have to keep in touch with their grandparents from a distance:

> Pihla: Has your grandfather in Estonia not said that he would like to live close to you, to move here? Or does he prefer to live there [in Estonia]?
> Sofia: I don't know.
> Sandra: Well, I assume he prefers to live there, I have heard something […]. You see he's too old already, he doesn't even dare to come and visit Finland. […] I have heard from him […]. But sometimes he does miss us 'cause sometimes he calls us asking how we are doing and what we are up to.
> Pihla: So you tell him how you are living here and…
> Sandra: We tell him everything, what we do and then we also ask how he's doing and like that. (Girls, 7 and 12, H5: 62)

Generally grandparents are oriented towards keeping in contact with family members living abroad. Nevertheless, they might feel that travelling is too tiring, and surprisingly many interviewees also mentioned, as this 11-year-old boy does, that the older generation can be afraid of travelling by boat: 'Guess why my grandmother

doesn't come [to Finland] at all? She is afraid of the boat, it can sink.' (H12: 18) The older generation might also have care obligations in Estonia that make travelling more complicated.

As many studies have shown, distance should not be an obstacle to keeping up the family feeling (Holdsworth 2013). Easier travel and new technologies have facilitated time-space compression, making it easier to create familiarity across greater distances. In principle, these technologies often allow members of transnational families to be actively involved in the everyday lives of distant family members in fundamentally different ways than in the past (Körber 2012, 13; Levitt 2001, 22). The way cheap calls, webcams, chats, etc. have blurred the boundaries between absence and presence (creating so-called virtual intimacy) has often been stressed (see Körber 2012).

My interviewees also pointed to the relativity of distances: it is not necessarily the location that matters if one is determined to stay in contact. For example Triin, in her forties, mentions that her mother visits her sister's family in Australia more often than Triin's family in Finland (H37: 20). However, as Körber's study (2012, 17) also shows, not everyone uses the increased travel opportunities and new communication technologies to the same extent (see also Hieta in this issue). There are inequalities related to travel opportunities and media consumption. People do not have access to adequate media equally: some people either cannot afford or lack necessary media literacy to use modern communication technologies (see Madianou & Miller 2012, 71). One factor that influences this is the age of the person in question. For example, among the interviewees, contact with the older generation is often maintained by a landline telephone. The material analysed also points to problems related to so-called virtual closeness and to restricted access and use of new technologies. Some of the interviewees focused on the shortcomings of communication through the Internet: virtual intimacy is not always considered intimate enough. In a similar vein, Madianou and Miller (2012) have indicated the different capacities of various media to convey emotion.

My adult interviewees typically placed stress on the importance of inter-generational relations and also mentioned that the greater distance between family members had not affected these relations in a significant way. However, older relatives who remain in Estonia are likely to experience this slightly differently, feeling that they have been left alone, as my earlier research indicates (Siim 2014). Children who live in Finland miss their Estonian grandparents, and vice versa. Some interviewees said that their children play games with their grandparents in Skype for hours (H3: 9). However, being virtually close does not always work since not all elderly relatives are willing or able to use a computer and the media needed for cheaper communication, as the next interview excerpt demonstrates:

> Pihla: Do your grandmother and grandfather miss you because you live so far away?
> Sandra: Well, yes. Sometimes they call and then we also talk with them and call and…
> Pihla: Do you call by phone or by Skype or…?
> Sandra: […] when we could we called by Skype, but usually more often by phone.
> Ülle (Sandra's mother): Grandfather is not very good with computers. Although we left the computer there, like that, so that when we call him one of my younger [relatives], one of my brothers, helps him. He uses a computer so rarely.
> Pihla: When he's alone, he doesn't switch on the computer, does he?
> Ülle: No, no. He doesn't even switch the lights on [laughing]. He's on an economy drive. […] We talk with grandmother, who's in Finland, on Skype, even though she lives next door [Pihla laughs]. (Mother, 32; Daughter, 12, H5: 41)

Children do keep in touch with relatives and friends in Estonia when they face no technical difficulties and parents do not restrict their communication. For example, Mirtel said in a group interview that she misses her grandmother, but that her mother does not allow her to call her. Mirtel's mother asserted that calls are too expensive: 'Sure you can make some calls, but [if you promise her] she will sit and even read aloud a book on the phone […] and that is a bit too expensive for me.' (H4: 11)

As Hieta (in this volume) has stated, children do not usually think of Skype as equivalent to a

telephone conversation: it might be easier for them than adults to consider communicating via Skype as part of normal, everyday activities, including other activities besides talking. Generally, children's communication seems to use a slightly different mode as compared to adults; they use media either to *do* something together, or to send short messages when trying to contact their relatives or friends. It seems that children are not always ready to spend too much time *talking* on the telephone with relatives; they prefer to show their faces in Skype, while someone else – usually the mother – takes care of longer reports. Nevertheless, even these short messages used for communication among family members can convey a feeling of being close and reachable. When needed, they are a way to enact a sense of being part of the same family (cf. Bryceson & Vuorela 2002).

Some parents stated that children are too restless to talk on Skype; they have other things to do, and sometimes parents themselves prefer to speak peacefully with relatives after the children have gone to bed (see also Hieta in this volume). Commuting fathers interviewed by Telve stated that younger children did not completely get the point of talking on the phone or of using Skype (Telve 2015, 79). Children might also be too occupied with other things and not ready to communicate out of a sense of duty alone. This is how Siiri, mother of two, describes communication in her family:

> Siiri: My mother communicates through Skype, but my mother-in-law not so much, they don't have this fixed broadband connection […]. With my own mother I talk through Skype twice a week for sure.
> Pihla: And the children also talk then, or…?
> Siiri: Not much, they don't have time. They shout from the other side of the room, granny this or granny that, granny when we come there make us that dessert. Now that the weather is lovely they spend an awful lot of time outdoors. That's a sign of them not being real city children yet. They want to spend a lot of time outdoors. (Woman, 31, H18: 9)

Some of the school-aged children seem to be active in using computers to keep in touch with their friends and younger relatives in Estonia. Usually they not only talk, but also play together through the Internet or use social media to socialise. The possibilities of keeping in touch with friends strongly depend on the age of the child. Often the parents also have a crucial role here – either supporting contact or not regarding it worthwhile to make a special effort. Ties with friends thus depend to a certain extent on the parents' activities and interests, and contact will probably be maintained with family friends. There are also friends whom the children meet only during their stays in Estonia, and with whom they do not keep in contact while in Finland. To quote Sander, eight years old: 'Playing at grandma's is always fun, since I have many friends here. I hope they have not forgotten me.' When I asked about communication with them while he is in Finland, Sander said: 'I don't know their address; I don't even know their name.' (H14: 12)

Keeping in touch with animals left behind is more challenging. Animals are also often considered part of the family, but for practical reasons (people are not allowed to have pets in rented apartments, for example) the interviewees have often been forced to leave them in Estonia. As one seven-year-old girl said, they came to Finland all together, and 'only our dog was left in Estonia. […] It was so big, it didn't fit anywhere.' (H15: 3) Discussing relocation from Estonia to Finland, Valter, a 12-year-old boy, mentioned that he misses his older brothers (aged 16 and 22 at the time of relocation), who did not follow the family to Finland. Valter also longs for their house in Estonia, his friends and their cat:

> Pihla: Before you came here, did you know someone, did you have any acquaintances or know someone who had also moved to Finland?
> Valter: Mm, then… I didn't know anyone, but one person who moved at the same time with us, he was the first person I knew here in Finland, and it is really good that they also came here; we visit them, they have a little cat and we also have a cat. When I start to miss cats, we sometimes visit them and I see the cat again. I like cats very much.
> Pihla: You didn't bring your cat here?
> Valter: No, we didn't, because when we moved, one of my brothers was away and the other didn't want to stay on his own. Otherwise we would have taken the

cat, but he wanted to keep it, he didn't want to stay alone at home like that. And now the cat is so used to [living with my brother] that it goes to sleep in my brother's bed and things like that. But sometimes when the cat sees me it runs away; sometimes it comes to me and I stroke it and like that.

Pihla: Has your brother told you what it is like to live alone there [in Estonia]?

Valter: No, he hasn't, and I have never thought about asking him something like how it is living alone, but I know he's doing fine, he can manage on his own. Luckily he's that old already, 19, he'll manage. Maybe I would get along at home as well if I were alone. (Boy, 12, H23: 32–33)

Valter's mother also described their relocation from her son's perspective (H6: 5). According to her, Valter initially found it exciting but later on started to long for his siblings and their house in Estonia. She stresses that they have daily contact with his siblings in Estonia and abroad through Skype. Nevertheless, there were moments when Valter said that when he grows up, he will buy back 'their' house in Estonia, the house his father had built himself. As the excerpt above shows, Valter has sometimes also pondered the possibility of himself living in Estonia without his parents.

'Every time the holidays arrive, we travel to Estonia'

The cycle of the school year affects the patterns of visits to Estonia: many interviewees find weekends too short for worthwhile visits, especially if they are heading to other parts of Estonia, not just Tallinn and its environs. When children are still at kindergarten, families are freer to travel. If they can get free days from work, they spend longer weekends in Estonia, which is also noticeable in kindergartens. Some of the interviewees have also travelled quite intensively back and forth with little children. For example, one mother, Ülle, said that at the beginning of the 2000s her partner was working in Finland, but she did not get a visa herself: 'Then [my daughter] was born, then we were going back and forth, we could stay here [in Finland] for three months and then we had to stay in Estonia for three months. I applied for a visa, but for a long time we didn't get one [...].' After two years, Ülle managed to get a job and a visa, although she continued her studies in Estonia, working in Finland at the same time. 'For two weeks we were here, [my daughter] went to kindergarten, she was two years old. [...] She was in a kindergarten here for two weeks and in an Estonian kindergarten for two weeks, and I was going to high school.' (Woman, 32, H5: 1–9) While in Estonia, Ülle's relatives helped her. Descriptions of this kind of frequent travel during early childhood do not feature in the children's accounts.

Both parents and children have described journeys that are frequently undertaken as long and tiring. When these trips are recurrent, they lose some of the attraction that holiday trips abroad, for example, might have. From the perspective of younger children particularly these trips might feel tiring and 'endless'. Ulrika describes her family's travels from the perspective of her four- and six-year-old children:

In relation to our forthcoming relocation we have visited Estonia more frequently. […] The children are completely fed up with travelling. […] Actually it's not that far, it's just that travelling to Southern Estonia takes quite a lot of time because of this ferry. […] Both my and my husband's parents live there. […] The children don't sleep in the car anymore and they are tired of travelling and grumble all the way. (Woman, 33, H19: 9, 20)

Somewhat older children also travel alone during school holidays. In the summer, children are able to spend more time in Estonia while their parents work – sometimes children are sent to their grandparents' place (or to other relatives) for the whole summer. When 12-year-old Valter was asked about travelling between Estonia and Finland, he replied that they often travel by boat and bus. Sometimes he also travels alone: on these occasions, one of their relatives comes to pick him up from the bus station and takes him to the harbour.

Valter: […] these times I go with Viking Line, there you can travel alone, like when you have a paper

with you or something, then you can enter the boat.
Pihla: So it's possible to travel alone?
Valter: Yes.
Pihla: But what is the best part of travelling?
Valter: Well, what I like best is watching the boat move so that there are waves coming from the back. I like very much to go out, to watch, to go there to the back end and watch how the waves come and smash into each other in such a way, it's so cool to watch, like down there all the water goes like 'phuuh'. I just love that. Or just to sit quietly and listen to that kind of sound, like the sound of the boat, which goes like that, rocks a bit and like that, I like that too. (Boy, 12, H23: 30)

As this description shows, not all children experience travelling as tiresome. School-aged children sometimes give quite detailed descriptions of travelling and the time spent in Estonia during the summer, including emotions and bodily memories.

Visiting Estonia and memories connected to it are often related to holidays, which also affects the relationship children have to Estonia. Typically they live their 'grey', boring everyday lives in Finland; the time spent there is characterised by routine, etc. On the other hand, memories of the time spent in Estonia relate to holidays, summer and important people. This was also discernible in the pictures drawn by children, as I asked them to draw something related to their recent visits to Estonia. All the pictures depicted summer and often also relatives or the homes of relatives.

The relation between relocated children and their relatives who stay in Estonia is likely to go through changes because they meet each other more rarely. The changes can be multidimensional, and their direction is not necessarily easy to predict. The separation can in some cases make people feel more connected, and they may appreciate the time spent together more, as Siiri, mother of two, says:

> And [the grandparents] also wait for it now – well you can immediately see it in [my father]. Like the children spent one week there during the summer, and [my mother] said she has never seen [my father] building a hut for anyone or doing something [laughing]. He agreed to buy a hook and line so that [my child] could go fishing with him. It was really sweet, I haven't noticed my father doing things with kids at all [before]. Usually he has rather stood aside. (Woman, 31, H18: 8)

Studying commuters, Telve has similarly recognised that periodic movement makes them appreciate their immediate families – and time spent with them – more. Commuters stress that they take into account each other's wishes more than before, and family gatherings are often very emotional: people expect to have a great time together. The time they spend together during holidays is supposed to help people better tolerate the separation preceding and following these gatherings. (Telve 2015, 79, 87.)

Against this background, it is perhaps easier to understand why parents sometimes seem to have a need to convince their children that it is better for them to live in Finland. From the parents' viewpoint, children who only spend their holidays in Estonia do not have too realistic a picture of what life is like there. Parents want to remind their children that one cannot compare short visits – often containing indulgences from the grandparents' side – to living permanently in Estonia. As one mother said of her daughter during an interview: 'How often have I told her that if we lived in Estonia we would not have the same kind of life as we have in Finland. She has to understand that.' (Woman, 30, H4: 21) Parents occasionally expressed frustration that in Finland their children did not appreciate the things children back in Estonia would probably not have, and sometimes parents considered 'sending kids back' to give them another perspective on life (cf. Orellana et al. 2001, 581).

Accounts of homemaking and being-in-place

It often seems that children 'live in the moment' and that it is quite difficult for them to explain in detail the feelings they had when they moved to Finland. This is especially true of younger children. For example, a six-year-old girl states only

briefly that she misses Estonia, her friends and brother, and that she prefers Estonian food. Her mother, on the other hand, talks at length about how she and her daughter cried every morning for many weeks when the daughter went to a new kindergarten, and how her daughter dislikes Finnish food (see below).

What holds equally true for both adults and children is the difficulty in verbalising sensory or bodily experiences related to relocation, in spite of the fact that non-belonging is often experienced bodily. However, food-related experiences are mentioned in many of the accounts given by the interviewees. As Kadri, talking about the experiences of her six-year-old daughter, says, the taste of Finnish food is unfamiliar and even unpleasant for many newcomers:

> And one thing she has […] is that this Finnish food in the kindergarten, it was so strange to her. For almost a year she ate perhaps once a week in the kindergarten. She came home in the evening and was so hungry, the food did not suit her. And one thing that is actually really a problem: she does not drink milk anymore. Because the children were only given low-fat milk in the kindergarten. It is so strange to her [laughing], in Estonia we have 2.5% fat milk. In principle, she does not drink any milk at home either anymore, since she disliked the milk in the kindergarten so much. It's a pity that the food here is so tasteless, as she says. It's a pity that they add no salt, no sugar, they add nothing [laughs]. (Woman, 42, H2: 21)

Children do not talk very much about their adaptation to, or coping with, the changes. The impressions remembered (and narrated) appear fragmented, and sometimes children said that they do not remember the relocation, even if it happened only two years before, as in the case of one seven-year-old girl (H15: 2). Children are often not eager to talk about their difficulties, which perhaps reflects their orientation to the future. For example, while many children did not know Finnish on their arrival, their stories connected to learning the language are still quite positive. Typical to these accounts is that children refer to important people – children or adults, most typically people working in the kindergarten – who have helped them through difficult times.

> Pihla: Do you remember when you moved here, was it easy to find friends?
> Silver: I didn't have friends, I still don't have friends outside the school. As soon as we arrived, I had friends in the kindergarten, I went there for three or four months. […] And then I got new friends at school.
> Pihla: Were there other children from Estonia in [the kindergarten]?
> Silver: One half-Estonian. He was my first friend. When I first went to the kindergarten, I stayed at a distance from the others because I didn't know who they were. And then he approached me, asked me to play. But he's not around anymore, he moved to Estonia and I am the only Estonian speaker in our class.
> Pihla: Are there any other [Estonian speakers] in your school?
> Silver: There are quite many in our school. I have a brother there and some relatives, and then there are a lot of other Estonians, who I avoid. […]
> Pihla: How is it at school, do you have a nice class, is there any bullying at your school? […]
> Silver: Well, there has been bullying, but it has been sorted out. […]
> Pihla: But they haven't bullied you, have they?
> Silver: Yes, they have, but it's water under the bridge, everybody forgot about it.
> Pihla: What was it about?
> Silver: Well, I prefer not to talk about it.
> Pihla: But it was solved then?
> Silver: Yes. (Boy, 11 years, H12: 9–11, 21)

Friends play an important role in making children feel comfortable in a new place of residence (and vice versa, they make leaving places more difficult for both adults and children). The temporary nature of relocation together with recurrent visits to Estonia can also affect 'homemaking' and the ways people relate to different places. Travelling frequently can render it more difficult for children to make friends in Finland. One family intending to return told me that they were tired of their life in Finland and travelling back and forth. Spending all the weekends in Estonia also made

it difficult for their six-year-old daughter to make friends in Finland. The mother of the family said: 'To be honest, we did her a disservice by taking her to Estonia every weekend. If we hadn't gone [so often], she would have adjusted ten times better, I think.' (see Siim & Assmuth 2016a). The positive emotions their daughter had about free time and time spent with relatives was connected to Estonia only. When I asked the daughter whether she had friends in the neighbourhood she could play with after kindergarten, she said 'no'. 'Who do you play with then, besides your friends in the kindergarten?', I continued. 'With my soft toys', she answered. (H25: 5) She also told me that she celebrates her birthday in the company of friends only in Estonia; in Finland there is only the celebration in the kindergarten. 'Because [in Finland] I don't have any acquaintances.' (H25: 28)

The things that children pay attention to when talking about relocation, mobility or their relations with different places are sometimes very unexpected 'little' things, such as the stairs they need to climb in one of the locations. Some children from rural areas have found living in a big city with a metro and a tram fascinating, while others mentioned being extremely fond of museums they had visited. For the researcher, it is challenging to try to figure out how to formulate the right kinds of (open) questions that would invite children to tell these stories about things that the researcher does not expect to hear. This is one of the reasons why I hope to continue drawing with children and observing their everyday lives in my future research, to give room for small stories and children's own perspectives.

Concluding thoughts

In this article, belonging has been approached through a focus on its emotional and social aspects and on the everydayness of place relations. The main focus has been on the ways children reflect upon and incorporate experiences of relocation and a translocal way of life into their sense of being-in-place (cf. Lems 2016) and on the possibilities of feeling close over long distances. Belonging points here first and foremost to a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place, although the ways of being-in-place are always affected by the surrounding society and social relations (see Antonsich 2010). While studying mobile Estonian families, attention has been paid to the interconnectedness of territorial and social spaces. Individuals are members of both local and translocal networks, and mobility has thus been explored as a site of negotiation. In this article, the main analysis concentrated on family relations in an Estonian-Finnish transnational space, keeping in mind that translocal spaces are constantly co-produced by mobile and immobile people (see Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013).

Estonia is often thought of as close to Finland, both geographically and culturally. It is still important to keep in mind that in the Estonian-Finnish context location does matter. In principle, distances have come to seem shorter: easier travel and new technologies have facilitated time-space compression, making it easier to keep in touch and create family life across borders. However, possibilities for travel and transnational communication are not equally available for all, and virtual intimacy has its own special characteristics and shortcomings. For children, it is essential that their parents support travel and encourage them to keep in touch with people important to them across borders. As Coe et al. have pointed out, the degree of rupture or continuity in children's experiences is associated with their perceptions of movement and the degree of support from their caregivers (Coe et al. 2011, 5). Attention has also been paid to the importance of external factors, most importantly school, which tie children and their families to a certain place and affect both the timing of their relocation and the cyclicality of their visits to Estonia.

By examining the ways children keep in touch with distant family members and friends it is possible to distinguish a special mode of communication and spatial connectedness, in which short messages combined with momentariness and doing things together are in a central position. As for the activities of *doing* family (cf. Langellier & Peterson 2004), the ways children enact their sense of being part of the same group do not depend on constructing togetherness discursively

to the same degree as with adult family members. Children are rather oriented towards activities and the current moment, and do not necessarily reflect at length on past events.

The findings thus point out the importance of living in the moment and of time- and space-specific aspects of being-in-place. In this study, belonging has been understood as an on-going process, something that is constantly negotiated and sometimes also playfully contested. Children often regarded Estonia as their home country, associated with mainly positive things and memories – some even planned to return there some day. Thinking independently about returning involves agency more directly than relocating with one's family. However, the dreams children had about the future might also be quite fanciful. The plans for the future – for both children and adults – were sometimes also related to third countries, which alludes to the experience of shortened distances and to the fact that fantasies related to faraway countries are becoming more common. As Apparurai (1996) has stated, the role of fantasy and the mass media has become increasingly important in the ways people imagine their lives. Having (once) experienced relocation makes the spectrum of imagined lives even wider for members of transnational families.

NOTES

1 The Families on the Move: Children's Perspectives on Migration in Europe research project, lead by Professor Laura Assmuth, University of Eastern Finland. The project team included Prof. Laura Assmuth, Marina Hakkarainen, PhD, Aija Lulle, PhD, Airi Markkanen, PhD, Anca Enache, and the author. During the project, the research team conducted ethnographic fieldwork on different mobility cases in Europe: Estonia/Finland, Russia/Finland, Romania/Finland and Latvia/UK. Together with Laura Assmuth, I have studied children and families who are simultaneously embedded in places and social relations both in Estonia and in Finland (see also Siim & Assmuth 2016a and 2016b).

2 This research was supported by the Kone Foundation (under the following projects: Families on the Move: Children's Perspectives on Migration in Europe 2012–2014; Inequalities in Motion: Transnational Families in Estonia and Finland 2016–2018), the Academy of Finland (Inequalities of Mobility: Relatedness and Belonging of Transnational Families in the Nordic Migration Space 2015–2019) and by institutional research funding (project 2-43) from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. The author gratefully acknowledges the contribution to the article by Prof. Laura Assmuth, with whom she has previously co-authored several articles on the topic. She is also thankful for the constructive criticism and valuable comments by the anonymous reviewers.

3 In the context of this article, family refers both to a smaller family unit living together and to a larger circle of relatives, since emotional connections – feelings of family belonging and connectedness – are not limited by household or national boundaries (cf. Widmer et al. 2008, 2–3).

4 The project leader, Prof. Laura Assmuth, who conducted fieldwork in the Turku area, has experience of conducting fieldwork among Estonians, as well as in Estonia, and has spent extended periods there annually since her first field trip there in 1995.

5 Five of the 26 interviews (H1–H26) conducted were group interviews (H5, H10, H22, H24 and H26), where either parents or (a) parent(s) and child(ren) were interviewed together. In addition, two children were interviewed with their mothers present (H4, H8). When conducting individual interviews with three of the children, their friends and/or siblings were in the same room, although these were counted as individual interviews.

6 I use pseudonyms when referring to the interviewees. In the text, the combination of the letter H followed by a number refers to a certain numbered interview, and the number after the colon to a certain part of the transcribed interview. Interview transcripts were translated from Estonian to English by the author, and were lightly edited to increase readability.

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Research material

Fieldwork notes 2013–2014. The fieldwork included participant observation during children's circles and in daycare centres, and drawing with children aged four to seven years.

Interviews 2013–2014. The interview material consists of 26 interviews (H1–H26). Most of the interviews were conducted in the greater Helsinki area.

All the research material is in the author's possession.

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KEYWORDS

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