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‘They Can’t Just Hang Around Here’

*Conditional Belonging in a Voluntary Organised Meeting Place for
Older Russian-speaking Migrants*

Anastasia Asikainen

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Pre-examiners

Professor Miikka Pyykkönen, University of Jyväskylä

Associate Professor Tiina Sotkasiira, University of Eastern Finland

Custos

Professor Sirpa Wrede, University of Helsinki

Supervisors

Docent Antero Olakivi, University of Helsinki

Professor Sirpa Wrede, University of Helsinki

Professor Vanessa May, University of Manchester

Opponent

Professor Michaela Benson, Lancaster University

University of Helsinki

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Abstract

In this study, I examine the tense dynamics of 'merely' spending time in a voluntary activity as an older migrant. Focusing on the experiences of the participants of a particular meeting place, I explore older (65+) Russian-speaking migrants' negotiations of a sense of belonging within this setting. Contributing to discussions on the sociology of migration, I present observations on what political projects become relevant to their sense of belonging in the place, and how these become negotiated in a dynamic process, creating, and reproducing social categories. Through mobilising the concept of conditional belonging, I focus on illustrating the dynamics of finding a sense of belonging while making sense of certain conditions that present themselves, what I refer to as political projects of belonging.

In Finland, the participation of migrants in voluntary activities has mainly been approached from the ambivalent and omnipresent perspective of 'integration', meaning how to activate them in Finnish society, mainly in the spheres of employment or learning Finnish language skills. Older migrants and their ways of attending voluntary activities do not by default fit these goals, as they are no longer of working age, and learning a new language to the level of being 'integrated' in old age can be demanding. In contrast, voluntary activities for older Finns without a migration background have been considered through the lens of active ageing, which in the context of voluntary activities means how to assist them in becoming active in these places. Therefore, I suggest that for older migrants attending voluntary activities, even in places meant for passing time and engaging in hobbies such as here, a set of conditions that are different from those of the local-born population present themselves that define how they should be active in these places. Analysing this conditional nature of belonging for the older migrants, even in places meant for hobbies and wellbeing, highlights the creation and presentation of demands towards different categories of people.

The data were collected using qualitative methods and consist of participant observations made over the course of one year (2018–2019), interviews with participants of the place (N=22), and interviews with other key actors of the meeting place (N=3). Based on three single-authored articles that comprise the empirical basis of this dissertation, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What kinds of political projects of belonging rendered belonging conditional for the attendees in the interactions in the everyday of the meeting place?
2. How were the attendees interpreting and negotiating their sense of belonging vis-à-vis categories that arose from the interpretations of the political projects of belonging?

My research illustrates how this conditionality of belonging is formed in a dynamic process with different actors (funders, organisers, other visitors) and explicit and implicit policy goals, and leads to multiple outcomes for the participants. The study shows how

ageing Russian-speaking migrants' belonging to community and society is dependent on individual circumstances and preferences, on the conditions and policies that structure belonging, and, on the multiple, often personally varying, relationships between these factors. I propose that belonging and experiences of belonging are formed in the place among the interactions with more general definitions and norms of who are Russian-speakers, what is integration, and how should care be arranged.

Therefore, belonging and the spaces and situations constructed for it are contested and contingent, and different for different categories of people. This is particularly evident when examining spaces and situations such as the one in this study, i.e. those built primarily for advancing wellbeing and passing time. The study therefore illustrates aspects of the dynamic processes of creating meaningful social categories in dialogue with different orderings of the migrant subject.

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Helsinki, November 2024,
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List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications:

I Asikainen, Anastasia. 2021. 'The Role of Atmosphere in Negotiations of Groupness: A Study of a Meeting Place for Older Russian-speaking Migrants'. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 42(4):478–8.

II Asikainen, Anastasia. 2023. 'A Voluntary-sector Meeting Place as a Site for Interpreting and 'Doing' Integration: A Case of Later-life Russian-speaking Migrants'. *Comparative Migration Studies* 11(1):1–17.

III Asikainen, Anastasia. Forthcoming. 'Older Migrant Women Balancing Family Responsibilities and Recreational Activities'. Under Review for the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

1 Introduction

In this study, I aim to demonstrate that for older Russian-speaking migrants, ‘just hanging around’ in a voluntary-organised meeting place is a contested matter. The quote placed in the title of this doctoral dissertation, ‘they can’t just hang around here,’ refers to an exchange I had during my fieldwork, where ‘they’ refers to the attendees of the meeting place, and the statement was made by a Finnish person who was involved in the organising of this place. This exchange sparked my sociological interest in the meaning of this ‘hanging around’ that is forbidden, what expectations are placed on the attendees aside from merely ‘hanging around’, and how is the meeting place, the ‘here’, given different meaning. The place where I conducted my fieldwork is a voluntary-organised meeting place situated in the capital area of Finland. The attendees are Russian-speaking older migrants, who have migrated to Finland mostly as adults after retiring in their home country. Apart from Russian language, they mainly share a similar age and the experience of growing up in the Soviet Union. The main reasons for their migration were related to being a part of the so-called ‘zero generation’ (Ciobanu, Fokkema, and Nedelcu 2017), meaning that they had migrated to Finland after their children, were returnees or spouses of returnees, or that they had migrated for marriage.

Through the means of fieldwork that engages closely with the research population, the study is able to demonstrate that questioning national belonging, or being rejected by political projects of belonging, does not preclude a sense of attachment to hobbies, specific locations, or other facets of their life in Finland. Indeed, belonging could be tied to specific local communities shared with a particular language group or diaspora within Finland, challenging static views of national identity, integration, or active ageing. However, this does not necessarily mean that finding belonging in these local communities comes easily. Rooted in these insights, this dissertation presents and discusses the results of my investigation of how older Russian-speaking migrants, as a heterogeneous category of people, negotiate a sense of belonging in a particular place shared by other Russian-speakers, and how their negotiations link to various politics of belonging that become visible in this place.

The concept of belonging relates here to a personal experience of ‘feeling at home’ (May 2011, 2013; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2018), whereas the politics of belonging (Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011) relate to boundaries created by

various actors to delineate what belongings are available, for whom, and with what rules and reasonings. Politics of belonging are therefore related to various wider political projects, such as ones connected to ‘desirable migrants’, nationhood, or care, but also how these are interpreted on an interactional level. One’s personal sense of belonging, as I aim to demonstrate in this study, is a dynamic process involving different and at times overlapping facets of political projects of belonging, rendering the belonging of the research participants conditional (de Waal 2020; Yodovich 2021). This conditional nature of belonging (Sadeghi 2023; de Waal 2017; Yodovich 2021) holds true for all in search of their personal sense of belonging, not only certain categories of people, such as older migrants. However, for the attendees of this particular meeting place, their belonging becomes conditional in specific ways, which I unpack in this study.

In my work, the concept of belonging is central to highlighting the personal and processual lived experiences of the research participants, who are making sense of their everyday lives as older migrants in Finland. In line with Baumeister and Leary (1995), I argue that the need to belong is fundamental, and a lack of meaningful attachments is linked to negative effects on health and well-being. Seeing a sense of belonging as a fundamental source of positive meanings to the lived experiences of older migrants is a normative underpinning throughout the whole of the dissertation. Some relevant questions that have been raised in existing research in relation to belonging include what differences count, how they are evaluated normatively and politically, what the boundaries or collectives of social bonds are, and what struggles are related to them (Anthias 2016:173). As we are relational beings in the world, to study belonging requires us to consider the structures that enable or hinder one’s personal sense of belonging. In this doctoral dissertation, I refer to these structures as politics of belonging, or political projects of belonging. Throughout the dissertation, I view belonging and the politics of belonging as intertwined and interlinked, irreducible to each other (Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Regardless of this irreducible nature, I believe that it is possible to study how these different political projects manifest in the context of the meeting place, and perform analytical work to conceptualise how these projects become meaningful in different ways.

The central argument guiding this research is that the meeting place, which was established to promote health and wellbeing, and received funding for that purpose, is a contested site, socially positioned in ambivalent and contradicting ways, highlighting how finding their ‘activity’ is a contested matter for the older migrants. In the next section I move on to describe the research participants of this study in greater detail.

1.1 The Research Participants – Attendees of a Russian-Language Voluntarily-organised Meeting Place

In a European context, the number of older migrants is growing especially quickly in Finland (Ciobanu et al. 2017), and Russian-speakers are the biggest language minority, created by the migration of approximately 84,000 people in a total population of 5.5 million (Statistics Finland 2020). Older migrants have been a relatively invisible group of migrants in Finnish society until recently, and remain so in terms of representation in the media or policy documents. The participants in this research are older migrants, who were regular visitors of a voluntarily-organised Russian-language meeting place aimed at people 65 and over. This place is uncommon in the sense that there are not many places like this in the capital region of Finland, and not many in Finland as a whole. Whereas activities for migrants or language minorities are often organised for a specific purpose, such as ‘integration’, which can include learning languages or teaching about ‘Finnish culture’, this was a place to spend time without a specific aim if one wished. People could engage in hobbies (such as painting, singing, or arts and crafts) with a low threshold or simply come drink tea and chat with their friends. However, as the dissertation examines in detail, this aim of having a place to spend time and engage in hobbies without specific aims was ultimately shaped by various political projects of belonging that became evident in the interactions of the place, as well as shaping these very interactions.

The people I met during the fieldwork were over 65 years of age, therefore they were of retirement age both in Finland and in their countries of origin. From the perspective of the Finnish state, they were older migrants who had settled in Finland with no plans to return. Older migrants are naturally a heterogeneous category, but what connects them all is a discontinuity in their life course. In other words, they have left familiar socio-cultural contexts behind, that is, their previous contexts of negotiating belonging. ‘Russian speakers’ are also a heterogeneous population category (Varjonen, Zamiatin, and Rinas 2017), as they represent different nationalities, backgrounds, religions, migration histories, and times for entering the country (Puuronen 2011). For instance, due to the heterogenous nature of the category of ‘Russian-speakers in Finland’, there is no politically-organised interest group with shared demands under the category ‘Russian-speakers’ (Luukkanen 2016). The people I encountered in my research had all been born in the former Soviet Union, but their countries of birth varied. There were also Ingrian Finns attending the meeting place, who belong to a specific historical category of Russian-speakers (Flink 2016). Whether the respondents of this research are discussed in terms of a diaspora, or a discursive diaspora (Davydova-Minguet 2014), or a Russophone community (Ryabov 2016), just to mention a few terms used in previous research, the key point in my research is that Russian language

(and age) is something that brings these people together in the meeting place. Acknowledging that not all the participants were Russian, in the next section I briefly describe the Russian influence in Finland as it relevant for the participants as a context where they migrate to, and how they are perceived in the Finnish state. The Russian influence in Finland is age-old, as there have been Russians living in Finland since the 18th century (Krivonos and Näre 2019). Finland's exceptionalism in terms of majority – minority relations for Russian speakers is often explained with reference to Finland's history of having been a part of the Russian Empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy during the years 1809-1917, on the one hand, and on the other having later waged two wars against the Soviet Union. The new 'Russian-speaking minority', which I also mainly focus on in this work, took shape in a context of adverse attitudes shaped by the wars between Finland and Russia (Leitzinger 2016), and Finnish national identity being partly built on 'not being Russian' (Puuronen 2011). Accordingly, being a Russian speaker in Finland is not to belong to a neutral category of migrants, as the intensity of prejudice has varied at different times, and in different social contexts. The empirical fieldwork for this research was conducted prior to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion in Ukraine and the border restrictions created by Russia's hybrid operations along its border with Finland (Lavikainen 2023). Given the geographical location of the Finnish capital region and its multiple connections to Russia, many of the research participants were able to be transnationally mobile to stay in contact with relatives and use services in Russia (Tiaynen-Qadir 2016; Wrede, Tiilikainen, and Vartiainen 2020), which held true during my fieldwork 2018–2019. The empirical basis for my research on the conditions of belonging does not cover the most recent turbulence in the form of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine. Instead, it focuses on longer-term phenomena of the entwinements of finding one's position in older age in the new destination country. However, as I am focusing on a category that is established based on a shared language, the current world political tensions are relevant as they contribute to the creation of (also overlapping) categories such as Russian, post-Soviet, or Russian-speaking in a particular setting.

1.2 Aim(s) of the Study

In this dissertation, I perform analytical work to investigate the lived experiences of belonging under various political practices, as they unfold within one setting for the people who gather there. Through Articles I, II, and III, I analyse how the conditional nature of their belonging (de Waal 2017; Yodovich 2021) becomes visible in the dynamics of a voluntarily organised meeting place, which had become an important setting for many of the attendees in their everyday lives. Even though voluntary activities are characterised as recreational, there are dynamics that illustrate racial boundaries, othering, and neo-liberal logics that take place in these

venues (Pyykkönen 2007). The dynamics are related, on the one hand, to how such places for older migrants are positioned in their own right as one type of political project of belonging, and on the other, to the influences and interpretations that these political projects have on the interactions in the meeting place. This particular meeting place offered an empirically fruitful entry point to the lives of these Russian-speaking older people, who were passing their time in these activities. This dissertation contributes to discussions on sociology of migration, and critical migration studies, with an empirical focus on voluntary activities organised for and by older migrants.

The overarching research problem –what Mason (2008) would refer to as an intellectual puzzle – the dissertation addresses is as follows: How do older Russian-speaking migrants as a heterogeneous category of people negotiate a sense of belonging in a particular place shared by other Russian speakers, and how do their negotiations link to various politics of belonging that become visible in this place? To address this research problem in this dissertation, I present more specific research questions in section 3.3. These research questions are answered by drawing from findings presented in Articles I, II, and III. Next, I move on to discuss the specifics of voluntary activities in Finland as a context for older migrants, and position my case in relation to previous research on older migrants' negotiations of belonging in these contexts.

2 Voluntary Activities as a Specific Context of Political Projects of Belonging for Older Migrants in Finland

I focus on a category generated by migration, which makes the ‘national question’ (Yuval-Davis 2011) relevant to my study. That is, images of nations, who belongs and who does not belong, and who is ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Anderson 2013), are relevant in the day-to-day lives of the research participants. Earlier research distinguishes older migrants from later-life migrants, using the first social term to refer to people who have aged as migrants in the destination country, whereas later-life migrants are people who migrate in old age (Torres 2006:1352; see also Warnes and Williams 2006). Migrating in later life puts the people in a potentially precarious situation due to the difficulties in acquiring a new language in older age (Burke and Shafto 2004), and finding oneself in a new environment to navigate (Da and Garcia 2015). However, migrating in later life should not only be seen as a potential source of precarity; it can also be a way to define one’s agency, such as finding new directions for one’s life after retirement in one’s home country (Lulle 2021). Whether the older migrants define their agency in new ways (ibid.) or are precarious due to being under triple jeopardy for age, migration status, and other situations, such as low socio-economic status (Norman 1985), depends on multiple factors that change temporally and spatially. Also, the ways in which older/later life migrants are positioned in research and in policy make a difference in how this category is socially constructed, which at worst can lead to othering and stereotypical assumptions (Torres 2006). Furthermore, previous research has noted how older migrants are often portrayed in policy as care receivers with no economic value (Da and Garcia 2015:215). It is also important to note that migration is a different kind of life event for people with different backgrounds (Torres 2006). These are some examples of how ageing is a different matter for people who are older migrants, or who have migrated in later life compared to local-born people. Acknowledging these issues, I use the term ‘older migrants’ as an umbrella term, and as a reference to people who are over 65 years of age and live

permanently in a country that is not their country of birth. However, as I will explore later in the empirical section, the participants of this place were not only old, but most had migrated to Finland at a later stage in their lives. Next, I will consider issues I consider relevant to research on older migrants attending voluntary activities, in connection with Finnish policy aims for voluntary activities for older people. I will point to the dominant ways in which voluntary activities are socially positioned for older people in general, and for older migrants specifically, which becomes visible in research as well as in policy.

2.1 The Finnish National Context as Central in Defining Ways of ‘Being Active’ in Voluntary Activities

What I refer to as the political projects of belonging can be discourses (Cederberg 2014; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002) or more concrete political projects (Yuval-Davis 2006) aimed at migrants. Crucially, these political projects operate not only at the level of official policies, but they have also come to be interpretations of the policies that various actors employ in their everyday interactions. Moreover, social institutions such as gender or family relations play a central role in justifying these policies (Kannabirān, Vieten, and Yuval-Davis 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006), therefore they are intersectional by nature and not only attached to the category of ‘migrants’. It is both the (changing) meanings and how these meanings are interpreted that mould the actions of people who become influenced by these specific policies (Häikiö and Leino 2014). Naturally, these political projects are different for different people in general, but also different for different categories of migrants. My focus is on older Russian-speaking migrants, and how they are making sense of, and negotiating, different politics of belonging aimed at them through a specific setting. Through this setting, it is possible to tap into what kinds of politics of belonging influence their everyday lives, and how they are constructing their sense of belonging vis-à-vis these ambivalent and at times discursive politics of belonging. In general, for older migrants, attachments to places can be a source of being culturally grounded (Lager, Van Hoven, and Meijering 2012), and participation in community organisations has multiple positive outcomes (Cook 2010). However, previous research has highlighted that there are societal differences in what purposes voluntary activities are expected to serve in different countries. For example, Brandhorst, Baldassar, and Wilding (2021) compared Germany and Australia as destination countries for older migrants, and found how migrant organisations were seen as either ‘segregation movements’ or part of a ‘multicultural endeavour’, respectively. In Finland, nationalism and multiculturalism are paradoxically intertwined, as the Finnish legal framework is multiculturalist, but the ‘mainstream’ understanding of the nation reproduces stagnant ideas of a homogeneous nation (Saukkonen 2013). In many European

countries, including Finland, the term ‘integration’ (or *kotoutuminen* and the now less used *kotouttaminen*) has become an umbrella term for migrant settlement and adaptation to the ‘mainstream’ society (Colak, Van Praag, and Nicaise 2021; Favell 2003). Previous research on Finnish policies aimed at migrants has had a strong emphasis on integration policies and their effects (Masoud, Holm, and Brunila 2021). In the Finnish integration regime, the idea of the ‘active citizen’ is central (Haapajärvi 2021); however, I suggest that the ways of being active in the voluntary sector for different categories of migrants is a different matter especially compared to non-migrants. The general trend in Finnish integration policies tends to be paternalistic in the sense that Finnish institutions and officials define what constitutes successful integration (Kurki 2018; Pyykkönen 2007). The older migrants who took part in this study will most probably never be fully seen as members of the Finnish society in the sense of being ‘fully integrated’ (Ghorashi and van Tilburg 2006; Rytter 2019), as in Finland ‘success’ in integration is measured by aspects such as language skills in Finnish or Swedish, employment, social interactions with mainstream Finns, and not being dependant on social security payments (Saukkonen 2013:285). For people who have migrated in later life, these can be difficult to establish. I will return to the aspect of integration later in this work, but at this stage I wish to highlight it as a central policy aim and a normatively dominant discourse that is unavoidable for certain categories of migrants, such as the older Russian-speakers I am studying. It is a discourse that imposes expectations and demands on migrants, and these expectations can be related to various sectors in their lives, such as language skills or care arrangements. Previous research has also shown (Cederberg 2014) how public discourses, such as that of integration, constrain how migrants narrate their experiences. Moreover, the issues connected to integration in general highlight the various demands, implicit and explicit, that are placed on migrants. In sum, I see integration as a hegemonic discourse that can be used in a wide array of topics related to migrants: as Rytter (2019) put it, it’s ‘loose on the streets’. Studying what political projects of belonging become relevant in voluntary activities, and by whom, shows how the societal discourses produce and re-produce expectations for these activities with different emphases for different kinds of people. The national context is therefore central to how voluntary organisations such as the one studied here are conceptualised, and what functions they are seen or expected to perform in society. One way to detect what functions the organisations are expected to perform and with what reasonings is to look at the funding mechanisms for such places.

2.1.1 The Ambivalent Nature of Funding Systems for Voluntary Activities

In Finland, the funds for civil society organisations have mainly been derived from gambling profits, which is a ‘government-mandated system’ that also incorporates characteristics of the ‘governmental-administered type’. This system aims at increasing welfare and the standard of living in Finnish society, beyond the basic responsibilities of the welfare state (Egerer, Kankainen, and Hellman 2018:210). Various activities are funded with this money, aimed also at migrants and people working with them, with varying approaches (Saksela-Bergholm 2009). Finnish associations are commonly interest-based and play representative roles in Finnish decision-making systems, but private foundations and charitable associations can have more paternalistic ways of supporting specific activities. The demand for ‘service provision’ from all kinds of voluntary associations, including associations working with migrant communities, has been increasing for many years (Pirkkalainen, Abdirizak, and Aaltio 2018). While voluntary actors are somewhat autonomous in their capacity as civil society organisations, when they seek state sponsorship for their activities and therefore accept ‘steering’ of some sort, they tend to become less independent and, at least to some extent, turn into vehicles for the state’s political aims (ibid.). Therefore, the voluntary sector actors need to balance their own defined goals and the goals of the (different) funders, while also seeking stability in a system that supports project-based funding, which by default is precarious (Rantala and Sulkunen 2007).

The main funding body for voluntary organisations in the field of health and wellbeing, where the meeting place was receiving funding during the time of my fieldwork, is STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations). The activities funded by this money should, as mentioned in the name, support wellbeing and health (STEA 2021), not for example ‘integration’, as this is in the state budget and earmarked for the work of municipalities. These funding systems can lead to complex situations where people in third sector organisations are trying to make sense of the goals of these funding bodies to receive funding, while maintaining their own definitions of their activities. At times, places can also have multiple funding sources to define their activities for. Ultimately, these tensions lead to balancing acts between different expectations and interpretations of these demands, which I suggest bleed into the everyday interactions of these activities.

The trend of hybridisation has been taking place for some time now, meaning more opportunities have been opened up for migrant organisations to work with authorities. Thus the organisations have the potential to become more established. The risk, however, is that the organisations become mere extensions of the official integration policies (Pirkkalainen, Abdirizak, and Aaltio 2018). As mentioned earlier, ‘integration policies’ are an umbrella term for how migrants adapt, and are expected to adapt to the society, and in practice can be interpreted in numerous

ways. In the everyday of the organisations for migrants, these developments influence how the places plan their activities, and how these activities are framed. Previous research has shown (Buchert et al. 2023) that e.g. in the case of digitalisation, the Finnish service system pushes the older migrants to seek help from third-sector organisations. Moreover, the general trend of making services ‘digital by default’ may place parts of the population, such as older migrants, in a precarious situation and hinder their use of public services (Safarov 2021). The dynamics of funding mechanisms and the various demands (imposed as well as interpreted) they represent for voluntary activities affect how these places are organised.

Next, I will discuss how I approach the idea of being ‘active’ in these places as different for Finnish-born people and people who have migrated to Finland. The voluntary activities suggest that some activities take place there, but the dynamics and assumptions of these activities can introduce various expectations for the people taking part in them. I suggest that ‘being active’ for the older migrants is being active in ways that are defined by ambivalent and normative interpretations of their positions in the Finnish society.

2.1.2 What Counts as Being Active in Voluntary Activities for Older Migrants?

One central arena where older migrants can find activity and social engagement is in voluntary organised activities. I suggest that looking more closely into how these activities are valued and defined for older people in general, or, for older migrants, how they work under inherently different conditions. Cao et al. (2021) point out how there is a rich body of literature in the U.S on the outcomes of volunteering among the ‘general population’, but this is not the case for culturally and linguistically diverse older people. Also, Van Den Bogaard, Henkens, and Kalmijn (2014:1185) concluded in their research on civic activities in retirement age that (non-migrant) retirees tend to take more part in various organisations, and that this social involvement benefits society at large. However, ‘benefitting the society at large’ is currently missing from the research on older migrants and voluntary activities (Torres and Serrat 2019). Previous research done by Carlsson, Pijpers, and Van Melik (2020) suggested that being active was not enough for older migrants, but one needed to be active in a specific way. They argued that this became evident in a multi-cultural day care activity, where the pressure to showcase the older migrants’ integration into Dutch society was detectable.

When researching how non-migrant people, such as Finnish youth, attend voluntary activities, it is often discussed how people take part and ‘integrate’ into the organisations that organise those activities (see e.g Laitinen 2018). I interpret this as it being seen as valuable in its own right that people find their place in such

activities. Naturally, there can be various demands regarding how people take part in the activities, but I suggest that different conditions for the participation of older migrants are in place. Torres and Serrat (2019:4) note how ‘policy makers are trying to encourage older people to engage actively with their communities’. I suggest that what this community means for older migrants has different nuances than it has for people without a migrant background. For the older migrants, this does not necessarily mean the community shared by the same language group, but the Finnish society as a whole, in which they should participate by going to such places. Furthermore, previous research has raised the issue of whether the third sector is more popular in general among more affluent populations, whereas more informal ways of volunteering (that can be titled the ‘fourth sector’) are more familiar to deprived segments of the population (Williams 2008). This raises the question of what voluntary activities and models are created by different funding, and who are given more stable positions and who are left out, under what logics. Therefore, it is both how people are expected to take part in various voluntary activities, as well as the conceptualisation and societal position in the forms of resources awarded to these activities, that matter.

In The National Programme on Ageing 2030 in Finland (Preparatory group for the programme on ageing 2020:23), volunteering is discussed as follows:

Volunteering is inherently gratuitous and voluntary... Volunteering is an important option that increases the participation of both pensioners and older people in need of help. Strengthening the social inclusion of older people requires identifying and compiling positive examples. Municipalities and non-governmental organisations engage in diverse work aiming to support and activate older people. Loneliness could be alleviated by identifying lonely older people through means such as outreach work targeting older people and by providing different support solutions or practical support, such as volunteers helping older people with using services or spending time outdoors with them. Different services, groups and forms of support must also be made available to everyone, also in digital environment.

On the policy level, it is presented as an intrinsic value to have various organised groups available in the form of volunteering to contribute to these activities, which aim at increasing older people’s participation and social engagement. Zontini (2015:338) has pointed out how feelings of belonging change over the life course, and new policies for ageing migrants should support their multiple connections. However, as I also demonstrate in this study, what these connections can be in practice is a dynamic and multifaceted issue. Drawing from these insights, I suggest that voluntary activities for migrants and non-migrants are often presented with different logics, creating different conditions for different categories of people. The central argument I have presented thus far is that activities in voluntary activities

in Finland have certain particularities that can influence the lived experiences of people taking part in them. Next, I move on to illustrate how I approach the category of ‘Russian speakers’ in the context of this study.

2.2 Situating the Empirical Case of ‘Older Russian-speaking Migrants’ in Finland Attending Voluntary Activities

Jurt and Sperisen (2020) suggest that there is a persistent idea in which older migrants are seen to only spend time with other people from the same language minorities or ‘ethnic contexts’, but structural factors play a big part in how the places that are available for them are limited. In my case, the people I studied were a part of the same language minority; however, precautions must be taken when discussing heterogeneous categories of people, such as ‘Russian-speakers’ in Finland, or ‘Russian-speaking older migrants’. I use here ‘Russian-speakers’ as a category, as they are often discussed as one category of migrants in the Finnish context, which is evident in statistics, research or policy papers. This means that, in the frame of Finnish political projects, they are often discussed as a single category, which is important to identify.

The category of ‘Russian speakers’ is also a heavily politicised one, not only in Finland but also in Europe more generally. Part of Russia’s foreign policy doctrine has been to support Russians in other countries, in line with the political interests of the Russian regime (Luukkanen 2016). This is evident in how Russians (or Russian-speakers) who live abroad are discussed in the Russian state media for the gains of the Russian state. In Finland this has been related to e.g. custody cases, and how Finnish authorities have been portrayed in the Russian state media as kidnapping Russian children (Davydova-Minguet 2016). Many of the participants of the meeting place followed Russian state media, and some also Finnish media, and their interpretations can influence the topics that can be discussed in the meeting place, as I will consider further in the analysis section. As noted earlier, not all the participants were from Russia, but also from other post-Soviet countries. However, they were attending a place where all the activities took place in Russian and used mainly Russian in their everyday lives. This suggests that they were to some extent connected to the language and potentially to a shared Soviet upbringing (Tiaynen-Qadir 2020).

Therefore, I use this category of ‘Russian speakers’ with caution. Being aware of the risk of tautologically producing groups and assigning advantages/disadvantages to them (Brubaker 2013), I use the category ‘Russian-speaking older migrants’ to limit the scope of this research. However, I approach them more as a category of practise than a category of analysis (ibid). This means that I emphasise how the research participants were mobilising this category of Russian-speakers, and what meanings

they were attaching to it, instead of approaching them with a set of pre-determined indicators of what and who ‘Russian-speakers’ are (for a similar approach about membership in Finnish society for Russian-speakers in basic service experiences, see Heino 2018; or lone motherhood May 2010). Research can be reflexive about the processes through which various categories come to be in society and in research. Such acts of naming people as ‘Russian-speakers’ can be viewed as part of the complex state practices through which the state ‘knows’ about people and governs them (Buchert 2015). Categories can produce new categories, meaning that when I recognise someone as a Russian speaker in my research, I do not make assumptions about what this affiliation means, nor do I assume that being a Russian speaker is a significant factor for them by default. However, the people who took part in this study were evidently all attendees of a place for ‘Russian speakers’, therefore Russian language played a central role in the construction of this category. The other obvious nominator defining this category was age, as the place was specifically organised for people 65+, which also brings up issues, e.g., of their positions of care receivers and givers (Ajrouch 2005; de Valk and Schans 2008), and what this means in the context of the Finnish welfare state. Furthermore, most of the attendees of this place were women, which is a general trend in attending voluntary activities for older people (Skinner 2014). Therefore, an intersectional approach is needed to understand which social categories matter and become visible and relevant to the experience of belonging in the place. Also, all the attendees shared the experience of growing up in the Soviet Union or living there at some point in their lives even though they were from different countries. These are ostensible similarities that the people attending the place shared, but in the analysis I aim to keep an open mind in describing what other categories emerge as meaningful, and how the attendees negotiate their sense of belonging to them. Heikkinen (2011) found in her research on older Russian speakers in Finland that for them participation in civic activities contributed to ‘a sense of belonging’. However, this finding does not illustrate how this happened on an interactional level. Furthermore, she notes that as they meet only other Russian-speaking people in these places, they are not ‘full members of society’, as they lack connections with Finnish elderly (ibid. 391). Tiaynen-Qadir (2020) also studied a club for Russian-speakers in Finland and suggested that such diasporic places make it possible for attendees to narrate their identities as ageing people from post-Soviet countries. I suggest that in order for the activities to become meaningful, some sense of belonging should be achieved in these places, and it is worth studying how this happens on an interactional level. Therefore, in my study, I use the concept of belonging to analyse how the attendees of the place create and engage with various meaningful social categories, in relation to which they construct their personal sense of belonging. I believe that this personal experience should be foregrounded when discussing how voluntary activities for older migrants become meaningful,

but also contested and renegotiated through various political projects. Analytically, belonging enables me to ask questions about belonging to what (Anthias 2016:117) and furthermore, for the purpose of this dissertation, it allows me to underpin issues of actual spaces and places to which people are accepted as members (ibid.), but also what abstract categories are negotiated in the context of the place.

de Waal (2020) argues that people with migration backgrounds have to earn their belonging in contrast to local-born people, for whom it is automatic. In the same vein as Benson (2016), I believe that belonging is a project for everyone, also for migrant coming from a privileged background, but there are different conditions for different categories of people. What I suggest should be paid more attention to is how the conditional nature of belonging becomes visible in recreational places, and how official policies aimed at migrants, such as those related to integration or other categorisations of migrants, bleed into such places and their interactions. Next, I move on to further ground my point on why I believe the concept of belonging is suitable for studying meanings that are constructed in voluntary activities for older migrants.

3 Theorising the Links between Belonging and Politics of Belonging

This research builds upon a social constructivist paradigm (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Hammersley 2014) and facet methodology (Mason 2011) as the underpinning approaches of inquiry about the social world. Accordingly, these ideas form an important foundation for the dissertation's theoretical framework, mainly pointing to the idea that various phenomena are constituted and sustained through interpretation and social interaction. The underpinning theorising of facet methodology 'assumes that the world and what we seek to understand about it is not only lived and experienced, but is multi-dimensional, contingent, relationally implicated and entwined' (Mason 2011:78). I have also been inspired by Kuurne and Vieno's (2022) concept of *belonging work*, which refers to 'actively shaping social relationships and their practices' and 'relationally negotiated ways of doing belonging'. Inspired by these starting points, I particularly wish to highlight the lived experiences of these entwinements and their dynamics as they unfold in the context of the meeting place. I approach the place as a specific site for manifestations and interpretations of politics of belonging, and as a potential place to find one's personal sense of belonging. In line with facet methodology, it thus constitutes a 'specifically defined social context', helping me to define the empirical scope of my inquiry. In the next section, I move on to further ground the approach of belonging and politics of belonging in the context of this doctoral dissertation and introduce the concept of conditional belonging as a theoretical tool to connect belonging and politics of belonging, and introduce the additional perspective it brings to my inquiry.

3.1 Theorising Voluntary Activities as a Context for Older Migrants' Sense of Belonging

Kuurne and Vieno (2022:293) suggest that one way to connect belonging to the politics of belonging is to study the everyday relational arenas where this belonging is made, maintained, and negotiated. To capture one perspective on the lives of older Russian-speaking migrants, I focus on one place that Fortier (2000) would

perhaps call a 'habitual space'. Habitual spaces are conceptualised in her work on 'migrant belongings' and are constructed by drawing from the past and nostalgia to create spaces that feel familiar (ibid.). Whereas Fortier talks mainly about familiarity, I argue that it is not only the familiar but also the new that becomes enmeshed in the experience of belonging created in these spaces. The meeting place where I collected my data was a contested site for reasons that are discussed in detail in the articles and in chapters 5 and 6. These dynamics influence how the older Russian-speaking migrants navigate their sense of belonging, under different politics of belonging that arise under inherent border-making practices that take place in the setting. Belonging is always relational, meaning that it is always belonging in relation to something outside the 'self' (Anthias 2016). Accordingly, the institutional context of social interaction matters for the social shaping of the politics of belonging. It is important to ask who has the right to make legitimate claims of belonging (May 2013:108) and what historical trajectories and current privileges are involved in the negotiations of these legitimate claims. These claims and their contestations can be related to racist histories (Ifekwunigwe 1999; Mahlatsi 2021), neoliberal expectations of 'good migrants' (Ghorashi and van Tilburg 2006), or how and to what degree they should be 'citizenised' (Nordberg 2015).

Palladino (2019) argues that it is worth looking at older migrants' identifications with various places, and the affective bonds that reveal different meanings in the context of migration. She continues to argue that these social aspects of different environments become central determinants for ageing migrants' sense of belonging. The meeting place that constitutes my empirical focus was a site of 'unfolding action', where the attendees had the potential capacity to mediate their sense of belonging. Previous research has shown how migrants' sources of belonging can be place-based, interpersonal relations, and other social functions, which however do not necessarily make up for limited access outside these places (Boese and Phillips 2017). In my case, many of the attendees of the meeting place also had limited access outside the meeting place due language barriers as well as limited financial means. This issue, however, is more complex, and I believe that the places can have effects that are not limited only within them (see e.g. Lager et al. 2012).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998:1012) suggest that there are 'times and places when actors are more oriented toward the past, more directive toward the future, or more evaluative of the present; actors may switch between (and reflexively transform) their orientations toward action, thereby changing their degrees of flexible, inventive, and critical response toward structuring contexts'. In my case, the actors, meaning the attendees, used various strategies to orient themselves in the place to make it meaningful, as well as having these responses to the structuring contexts around them. Such a perspective lays the basis for a richer and more dynamic

understanding of the capacity of the actors to mediate the structuring contexts within which action unfolds. In the next section, I move on to further discuss the outset of my argument on the conditional nature of belonging in the meeting place.

3.2 The Conditional Nature of Belonging

The concept of conditional belonging has been used in various contexts, not only in relation to migrants. In general, it has been used to study the experiences of those who are in some way considered ‘new’ to a group. This group can be migrants (de Waal 2020), diasporas (Sadeghi 2023), or science fiction fans (Yodovich 2021). Yodovich (2021:871) defines conditional belonging as ‘a liminal state in which new members are constructed as a threatening ‘other’ and are required to demonstrate conformity to the community’. Even though many of the respondents who took part in this study had lived in Finland for many years, and were not ‘new members’ as such, they were still people who had migrated to Finland and could not by default claim to belong, or if they did, this claim could be contested. For migrants in comparison to people without migration background, there is always the possibility that their position in society will be questioned, and their acts and ways of being understood in relation to their migration background (de Waal 2017:47).

What is conditional for the attendees’ sense of belonging in my work stems from various political projects of belonging (understood in a broad sense) that they need to interpret and take a stance towards in the interactions of the place. In the field of legal and political studies, de Waal (2017, 2020:239) has used the concept of conditional belonging to study the integration requirements of migrants. She notes how the idea that only persons with certain migration backgrounds must integrate lies at the core of citizenship entitlement. From a more legal-political studies perspective, she suggests that people who have a migrant background possess a conditional form of citizenship, which is reliant upon issues such as language skills or participation in the labour market (de Waal 2020:240). Belonging to certain categories is contingent upon meeting specific criteria, or fulfilling certain conditions (e.g., conforming to norms, sharing values), leading to a sense of conditional belonging. Individuals can (to a point) decide what places they want to negotiate this sense of belonging to. In my case, for the research participants, deciding the places in which to find this sense of belonging were limited due to their weak Finnish language skills and low income levels. Conditional belonging established in places such as the one studied here can influence the need for these negotiations. This means that people can decide not to visit a place or decide not to associate themselves with certain people, however, if the place/relationship is important, and one of the few places to find social activities, it can affect the dynamics of the place.

Conditional belonging is also used in Sadeghi's (2023) work, where she uses the concept to capture the experiences of the Iranian diaspora in the US and Germany. She discusses the conditionality of belonging between the interactions of the dominant group in the society, and in her case the group of the Iranian diaspora. What I suggest is that the dynamics are related not only to how the dominant group makes belonging conditional for other groups of people, but also to how the interpretations of these political projects come to make the belonging conditional on an interactional level and create systems of social membership in the place. In my work, the concept of conditional belonging brings together the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011) with the personal sense of belonging (May 2013) by focusing on how various categories become meaningful and accessible, but also conditional, in specific ways. The conditional nature of the sense of belonging for the older migrants becomes evident in various forms and levels of interaction within one setting. Again, belonging is conditional for everyone, but I argue that the conditions are different for this category of people than people born in Finland (especially white people, see Rastas and Poelman 2021). I suggest that the conditional nature of belonging for the attendees in the place ultimately comes from the need to understand the various political projects of belonging, as well as other demands in the place, and take a stance towards them. In doing so, the attendees construct their sense of belonging to different categories of belonging that become available in the place, leading to differential and unexpected results.

3.3 Specified Aims and Research Questions

To create a synthesis of Articles I, II, and III vis-à-vis the dissertation's approach as a whole, Mason's (2011) facet methodology is central. Each of the articles represents a facet for better understanding the conditional nature of belonging for older Russian-speaking migrants in Finland, as negotiated in the context of voluntary activities. I use the articles as different lenses through which I study the overall research problematic of how older Russian-speaking migrants, as a heterogeneous category of people, negotiate a sense of belonging in a particular place shared by other Russian-speakers, and how their negotiations link to various politics of belonging that become visible in this place. Through this doctoral dissertation, I contribute to discussions on the sociology of migration in the context of voluntary activities, and aim to enrich the literature on how these types of places are established and negotiated on an interactional level. By investigating these migration-related social practices, I aim for a nuanced analysis of the dynamics of the meeting place, and thereby raise theoretical issues related to the establishment of and entry to various social categories. I engage in analytical work to study the nature of belonging for the research participants in the place through two research questions:

1. What kinds of political projects of belonging rendered belonging conditional for the attendees in the interactions in the everyday of the meeting place?
2. How were the attendees interpreting and negotiating their sense of belonging vis-à-vis categories that arose from the interpretations of the political projects of belonging?

In the next chapter, I will introduce the data, data collection, analysis, and methodological issues that I view as central in the process to adhere to the epistemological and theoretical issues I have raised this far.

4 The Case Study Design, Data, and Methods

So far, I have situated my case in relation to previous studies on voluntary activities and made my case on how the concept of conditional belonging could be useful here, and suggested how the category of 'Russian-speakers' should be studied in this particular context. These approaches lay claims for certain conditions for the collection and analysis of the data, as well as ethical considerations that I will address in this chapter. The categorisations of 'Russian-speakers' and a sense of belonging in the voluntary activities should be reflected in how I have structured and carried out the data collection, from planning to analysis. This case study was conducted using qualitative methodologies underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm. This means that perceptions and cognitions are active processes, where all things 'given' are products of processes of construction, which are also socio-cultural in character. Crucially, multiple interpretations are generated and circulate within the same contexts (Hammersley 2014:35). In defining qualitative research, I follow Aspers and Corte (2019:155), who state that 'qualitative research is about questioning the pre-given (taken for granted) variables, but it is thus also about making new distinctions of any type of phenomenon, for example, by coining new concepts, including the identification of new variables. This process is carried out in relation to empirical material, previous research, and in relation to theory. Theory and previous research cannot be escaped or bracketed. According to hermeneutic principles all scientific work is grounded in the lifeworld, and as social scientists we can thus never fully bracket our pre-understanding'. The context of the meeting place was indeed a place of multiple interpretations, which highlights the need to approach it methodologically as such. Therefore, I focus on how phenomena come to be in the meeting place, in interactions and negotiations between various actors and institutions.

Case study research is typically conducted using diverse methodologies, methods, and data sources, such as participant observation (Gobo 2008), interviews, audiovisual materials, and various documents. A case study approach is appropriate when the essence of the inquiry is to highlight 'different patterns of constructing meaning within a specifically defined social context, without the presumption of universality'(Boyland 2019). In this study, I use the case of the older Russian-speaking migrants who gather in a specific place to illustrate how their personal

sense of belonging is made conditional by various actors, ultimately influencing their experiences of ageing and migration.

My research design is inspired by Mason's (2011) facet methodology. In facet methodology, the general approach is to research the 'multi-dimensionality of lived experience' (Mason 2011:75). Facet methodology is more of an orientation rather than a set of procedures on how the research should be carried out (Mason 2011:76). Mason discusses how the different facets also utilise different clusters of methods. In my case, the methods of analysis in the three articles were somewhat similar, mainly deploying means of qualitative content analysis and close reading. However, throughout the research process, I closely followed different aspects of this meeting place, therefore contributing to what Mason refers to as different ways of seeing (ibid.). This aim of different ways of seeing was reflected in how I considered multiple streams of data creatively. Even though the backbone of my fieldwork were interviews and observations, I also followed the meeting place online, spoke to experts in the field (working with older migrants, or in funding bodies for voluntary activities) and to the various funding instances supporting the meeting place, as well as using various documents produced by and of the meeting place. Therefore, when I discuss the multiple interpretations of the place, I believe that I made a true effort in my fieldwork to understand these multiple interpretations that influenced the dynamics under which the attendees ultimately negotiated their sense of belonging. These 'flashes of insight' into the overall problematic are aimed at revealing what makes the belonging for the research participants conditional in this particular setting. The facets are designed to produce insights rather than seeking 'maximum coverage' or 'all-round descriptive knowledge'. In line with these aims, I have designed the three facets in my study to provide inventive insights about the nature of belonging in the meeting place. As the facets are both methodological and substantive, in the next sections I carefully describe the data collection and how I built these different insights to be strategic in compiling telling knowledge of the overall enquiry into how older Russian-speaking migrants as a heterogeneous category of people negotiate a sense of belonging in a particular place.

4.1 Fieldwork and the Data Collected

I conducted the fieldwork over the course of one year from June 2018 to June 2019. The main body of data consists of participant observations in the meeting place (approximately 150 hours) and interviews with the attendees of the place (N=12), complemented by follow-up interviews (N=10), which were prompted by using interaction diaries (May and Muir 2015). I also conducted interviews with the organisers, as well as service advisors volunteering in the place. Furthermore, I carefully studied written documents produced by the organisers and the steering group of the meeting place. These documents included funding applications,

reports, and other written statements I found to be relevant in understanding how the place is rationalised to the funders. As noted earlier, ‘facets involve different lines of enquiry and different ways of seeing’, and during my data collection I aimed to ensure that I kept an open mind to what these facets can be. I was flexible during the data collection in the sense that if I noticed that some findings required going back to the field, I would organise follow-up interviews. For instance, for Article III I organised a focus group discussion for the participants on the topic of family responsibilities. This allowed me to bring the findings back to the field and present them to the participants for further discussion. This data was then used in Articles I, II, and III.

In addition to the main body of data, I conducted various background interviews with relevant stakeholders to better place the category of older Russian speaking migrants in Finnish society in a wider context. These interviews were not cited in the three articles. The main institutional actors I wanted to cover included a municipally-organised telephone service, where healthcare professionals assisted older people in Russian language. There, I interviewed two service advisors who were responsible for assisting people in the Russian language, as they were both Russian speakers, and it was natural for them to assist people who called in Russian and did not speak Finnish¹. From the main funding body responsible for supporting voluntary activities in the field of health and wellbeing in Finland, I interviewed two employees to better understand the reasonings for providing funding, as well as the logic of the reporting and measuring of different activities. I also interviewed a representative of an old Russian-speaking foundation, which had at one point supported the meeting place financially. Throughout the fieldwork, I followed the meeting place on Facebook. It is very active in social media, and especially during the pandemic it was good that I could keep in touch with the meeting place and follow its activities. During the pandemic it organised clubs on Zoom, and continued to do so even after the restrictions were lifted. All these different data contributed to the overall research problem of understanding how the older migrants who take part in these activities negotiate their sense of belonging in the setting, and what dynamics affect their negotiations. In the next section, I describe entering the field, and try to provide a ‘feel’ of what the place was like in its everyday.

¹ The municipalities do not offer this service in Russian. It was an ad hoc decision that they served the Russian-speakers who called for help.

4.1.1 Entering the Field

In June 2018 I was starting my fieldwork at the meeting place. I had visited the venue and met the organisers, and had an idea where I was going to be spending time in the forthcoming year. The place was situated in a building that had been erected when Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian empire, and the architecture of the place resembled buildings found in St. Petersburg. This is worth noting, as architectural aspects can also influence how people find meanings in different places (Leach 2002). Members of our research team had visited the place before me, discussed our ongoing research, and proposed that my fieldwork be carried out there. During previous visits, the organisers had made us feel welcome, and I felt that I was about to enter a field where my presence would be considered positively. The organisers had discussed with the attendees about me coming to the place to conduct observations and interviews. Their role in presenting our research in a positive light was very important in gaining access to the field. The place had a packed weekly schedule from Monday to Friday, which I had made myself familiar with before starting the observations. I chose to start the observations by attending a morning yoga class. The class was held in a sports hall that would later become familiar to me as a site of a myriad activities, lectures, lessons, and celebrations. I was expecting the class to be pseudo yoga for older people, but after the class, I wrote in the first entry of my field diary how it was ‘no granny yoga’. After the yoga class, I was invited to drink tea and play board games with the attendees, which I happily did. The older women whom I was playing with beat me in a board game, which required logical thinking and mathematic skills. The prejudice I had in my mind about working with older people and their being somehow ‘slow’ or ‘frail’ faded during that first visit. The next day, I had planned to attend a weekly group where the attendees read Finnish newspapers together to improve their Finnish language skills and keep up with current events. However, it was one of the attendee’s birthday, and everyone gathered round a big table for a celebration. The other attendees had brought food, cake, and very sweet chocolates available mainly in Russia, or ‘Russian’ stores in Helsinki. Even from the very beginning of the field work, it became clear to me that I had entered a site which was meaningful beyond merely being a site of hobbies and activities, and the people taking part in the activities were enjoying spending time there. From then onwards, I would visit the meeting place each week to take part in all the activities offered there. During this time, the place became important for me as well, and I felt privileged to be able to spend time in such hospitable and inspiring surroundings.

4.1.2 Participant Observations

Conducting participant observations over the course of one year enabled me to get close to the everyday of the attendees, and follow and be a part of the interactions

that took place there. In order to study the lived experiences of belonging for the older Russian-speakers, it was vital to actually take part in their everyday activities. Therefore, the participant observations were a key way to obtain insights into how the older migrants negotiated their sense of belonging in the place. Gobo (2008) lists the attributes of participant observations as follows:

the researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors; staying in their natural environment; with the purpose of observing and describing their behaviour; by interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonies and rituals, and; learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions.

In line with Gobo's (2008) definition of participant observations, I truly participated in the everyday life of the place. I painted with aquarelles with the attendees, sang with them, played board games, assisted in Finnish language courses by taking part in role play, and towards the end of the fieldwork I became a helping hand in various tasks, from booking a doctor's appointment to helping them with their pensions. I chose to not only observe the activities, but also take part in them and provide assistance if requested. I took part in their celebrations, baked pies, drank tea, and tried to assist them and give support when funding applications came back declined. When I entered the place, I was always greeted warmly, and I did not feel that my presence was troubling the attendees. While I was conducting the observations, I paid special attention to the interactions between different people. This interactional nature of the meeting place was what had drawn my attention in the beginning, how various topics were discussed and negotiated there in a way that the attendees could feel a sense of belonging, and what were these 'categories of belonging' they constructed while doing so. I was also interested in how the attendees commented or made sense of various expectations imposed upon them. These were mainly related to how they interpreted the topics related to their positions in Finnish society (being older, Russian-speaking women) and how they interpreted the different demands that came up with regard to the place (how to be active in Finnish society, what is it to be Russian-speaking in the place, how are the roles of grandmothers negotiated in the place). I was also inspired by Pink's (2012) ideas of sensory ethnography, which meant that when I was conducting the observations and writing them down in the field notes, I also paid attention to aspects of smell, touch, and taste.

I had a strategy where I would avoid writing field notes during the interactions, as I felt it would seem intrusive. I took part in the daily activities and, straight after I left the place, I would sit down and write the notes down by hand. The field notes yielded a field diary of 56 pages of text. I transferred these notes daily after the observations to an electronic format for analysis. During the fieldwork, I attended all the different activities that were on offer, except ones that were closed to the participants only, such as a psychological support group or the group for only men.

These closed clubs were, however, not that common in the weekly programme, and I had access to a myriad activities: language courses, painting, crafts, choir, dancing, exercise in different forms, various lectures, and other changing activities.

4.1.3 Interviews

In addition to the participant observations, I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews (Kvale 1996) with the attendees, and used an interaction diary (May and Muir 2015) for ten follow-up interviews with the same attendees. Naturally, the interview is a method in which the interviewee constructs and reconstructs their understandings, and the interview is a social situation as much as any other interaction (Mason 2002:64). These interviews were one method among others (participation observations and analysis of documents), and in my fieldwork I aimed at triangulating methods so as to make them complement each other (ibid. 33).

The themes of the first semi-structured interviews were centred around questions relating to their move to Finland, their experiences of ageing in Finland, experiences of Finnish services, questions about the meeting place, along with general background questions. After the first interview, I gave the interviewees an interaction diary, where I requested that they document their social interactions (understood in a broad sense, both face to face and virtual ones) over the course of one week. After the week, we arranged a second interview where we went through their diary and discussed the events. The aim of the interaction diary was to capture more mundane aspects of their lives that were not necessarily brought up in interviews. I also felt that in order to understand how the meeting place was positioned in their lives, I had to ask them to tell me about their activities outside the place as well. The markings in the interaction diary also worked as prompts to approach different aspects of their lives outside the place, and understand what role the place played in relation to these aspects. The second interviews enriched the data and revealed a more nuanced picture of their lives, not only within the context of the meeting place, but also outside it. It also helped me to analytically position the meeting place in their everyday lives as a whole and conceptualise its meaning to their sense of belonging better.

In the first interviews, the interviewees were given in writing a full description about the research project in Russian language, information on how their information would be handled and anonymised, and that they can withdraw their participation from the research at any point. At the beginning of each interview, I also introduced myself and told them a little about myself and asked if they had any questions. Each of the interviewees signed a consent form.

The interviewees somewhat reflect the composition of the attendees of the meeting place in general. Most of the attendees were women and had migrated to Finland in

later life after retiring in their home country. Table 1 presents their gender, age, age at the time of moving, years lived in Finland in 2018, and their reason for moving to Finland.

Table 1 Information about interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Age at the time of moving to Finland	Years lived in Finland in 2018	Reason for move to Finland
1	f	80–85	70–75	10–15	Work/family
2	f	70–75	45–50	20–25	Work
3	f	65–70	55–60	10–15	Returnee status
4	f	70–75	60–65	5–10	Marriage
5	f	70–75	55–60	15–20	Marriage
6	f	70–75	55–60	10–15	Marriage
7	f	70–75	50–55	20–25	Returnee status
8	m	70–75	60–65	10–15	Family relations
9	f	70–75	65–70	0–5	Family relations
10	f	65–70	55–60	10–15	Returnee status
11	f	65–70	50–55	15–20	Family relations
12	m	75–80	70–75	0–5	Family relations

There were two salaried organisers in the meeting place who were responsible for planning and coordinating the daily activities. They were also women and of similar age to the attendees. I conducted expert interviews (Aho et al. 2017) with them, in which the questions were structured around the aims of the meeting place, and the attendees. The organisers were positioned in the interviews as experts on the daily life of the meeting place, as they had both worked there from the very beginning and were interviewed as such. They were not so much interviewed about their own experiences of being Russian-speaking older women, although their own experiences also came up naturally in the interviews.

A third expert interview with a service advisor was conducted to get a better sense of the issues that the attendees seek assistance for. The questions were related to

her role as a service advisor, and what issues the attendees need assistance for. The service advisor was also an older Russian-speaking woman. These data were also used in articles I, II, and III.

In addition to the interviews used in the analysis, I conducted four additional interviews with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the topic of older Russian-speaking migrants and their attendance in voluntary activities from a wider perspective. The main instances I identified that would assist me in positioning the case of the meeting place and its attendees in a wider context were a city of Helsinki organised phone service for older people, the main funding body (STEA) from which the meeting place received its funding, and a representative of an old Russian foundation in Finland. These interviews were not analysed or cited in the articles, but were background information to better grasp the logic of the instances that fund these kinds of activities, as well as how the category of Russian-speaking older migrants is visible in the public services, and whether their needs are similar to those of people attending the meeting place. The interview with the representative of an old Russian organisation was conducted to understand how they decide to support or not support various activities for Russians or Russian-speakers in Finland, and with what reasonings. This particular organisation had funded the meeting place at one point in time but discontinued the support. These additional interviews, even though they were not used in the analysis, enriched the data and enabled me to better conceptualise the place and position of the social phenomena related to older Russian-speaking migrants. In the next section, I move on to describe the analysis methods and issues that need addressing when analysing multilingual data.

4.2 Analysing the Data: Practical and Theoretical Considerations on Analysing (Multilingual) Data

Since the beginning of the fieldwork, I had the theoretical concept of belonging as a starting point, which guided my focus to the mundane and relational aspects of the occurrences in the meeting place. As facets are designed in relation to existing theoretical and conceptual knowledge (Mason 2011:83), the concept of belonging guided me through the research, from the initial stages of planning the research, to data collection and analysis. The three articles were written with this conceptual approach at the back of my mind for the overall research puzzle of the sense of belonging for older Russian-speaking migrants in the meeting place. However, as the facets shape and change throughout the process when new insights emerge and become theoretically defined (Mason 2011:83), the sense of belonging as the thing I wanted to understand and explore also became understood in a more nuanced way through different concepts. Kuurne and Vieno (2022:292) suggest that when analysing the relational aspects of belonging, the researcher needs to investigate the

processes and practices through which groups and categories that matter are constructed and held together. This also holds true in my analysis, where I was interested in how the heterogeneous category of 'Russian-speakers' was constructed and held together in this particular setting. It also turned out that 'Russian-speakers' was not the only relevant category in the meeting place, as the categories of 'babushkas' and 'Finnish society' turned out to be relevant to the experiences of belonging. In the analysis process I was 'getting in contact with something, finding sources, becoming deeply familiar with a topic, and then distilling and communicating some of its essential features' (Aspers and Corte 2019:151). This was a dynamic process in which the theoretical knowledge I had acquired before the fieldwork started to find empirical points in my observations and these observations started to produce new ways of thinking theoretically about the observations.

When I began the data analysis, I uploaded all the interviews, the field diary, and other documents to the Atlas.ti analysis programme. First, I read through all the original texts multiple times in their original languages to get a feel for the data as a whole. After having established a sense of the central themes in the data, I started to do preliminary coding to organise the data in a manageable way. In the first stage, I used more manifest codes such as 'all comments about the meeting place', 'definitions of Russian-speakers', or 'statements about families'. There were many different topics and themes in the data, and after reading through it all I chose to discard some which I found to be of little relevance for this research, and keep my focus on the meeting place and its meaning in a broad sense.

In all three articles, I used analysis methods relating to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) with slightly different emphases and approaches. As I have suggested earlier, a person's sense of belonging is made up of different facets, and the three articles in this study represent three different analytical lenses or 'mini studies' with their own methods, theoretical approaches, and concepts. These three facets are used to illuminate the overall inquiry into how people who share the same language, similar age, and some kind of shared background can find belonging in a voluntarily organised place. In all the three articles, the analysis initially starts with a close reading (Watson and Wilcox 2000) of the data. Naturally, this reading does not arise from an objective place, as I collected all the data, and I already had various theoretical concepts in mind when starting the analysis. From this initial organising of the data, the process was different for each of the articles. In article I, I focused on the parts of the data where different aspects of groupness were elicited and how. The initial codes were 'Russian-speakers', 'what makes the place important' and 'distinctions with the place and outside'. I also used open coding to highlight quotes that I found interesting or surprising, but I could not yet grasp a code I could connect them to. The analysis was a dialogical process between pre-existing theoretical knowledge and inductive reading on the data,

building new concepts and connecting the findings to relevant literature. The analytical method was closely related to ideas of grounded theory and the use of sensitising concepts (Bowen 2006). For article II, I coded the data searching for various interpretations and negotiations of 'integration' or related terminology. In this analysis, I paid particular attention to who was talking about integration and how, and compared these different ways of interpreting integration. For article III, I focused on segments where issues related to families were discussed, and analysed different understandings of how the attendees interpreted their roles of givers and receivers of support. I concluded that they displayed their families in the meeting place, and this had an effect on the dynamics that unfolded in the setting, and their ways of attending the place. Ultimately, all these analyses contributed to the understanding of the different dynamics that make the belonging for the attendees conditional.

Pietilä (2010) describes how there are multiple issues to consider when the researcher and the research participant do not share the same mother tongue that relate to the interview situation, and all the way to the analysis and writing results. I gathered the data from the meeting place in both Finnish and Russian language. The interviews with the attendees and organisers were in Russian, with one exception. During the fieldwork, I wrote a field diary in Finnish. In addition, the two interviews with the service advisors working for the city of Helsinki were in Finnish. In the next section, I will unpack issues I consider important with regard to the language of the research.

My native language is Finnish, but I have studied Russian language and spent time during my studies in Russia and post-Soviet countries. This position brought practical and methodological issues to consider in the collection and analysis of the data. Due to Russian not being my native language, it was at times difficult to understand everything that was being said during the fieldwork and especially during the observations. However, not understanding all the words also drew my attention to more intangible aspects, such as movements, smells, expressions, in general the tacit interactions in the place. During the interviews, I asked for clarification from the interviewees if I did not understand something they were saying. This strategy potentially affected the situation in that the interviewees had to explicate certain topics and themes further that might have gone unnoticed otherwise. Furthermore, the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and I could go back to parts I was uncertain about. Due to my not being a native Russian speaker, it was a slow process to read through the data. However, this long process forced me to become deeply familiar with the data and its meanings. For the three articles, the data excerpts needed to be translated into English. These translations were done by me, albeit confirming some nuances and meaning from colleagues who are native Russian speakers.

Pietilä (2010:419) notes how, during his data collection in St. Petersburg, he was given an interesting position as ‘half-Russian’, speaking the language and being identified as somewhat sharing cultural understanding and some kind of ‘Russian soul’. I found something similar during my fieldwork, my ‘outsider insider’ position being portrayed in a positive manner. Being a Finnish-born researcher speaking Finnish as a mother tongue, who had made the effort to study Russian language, had lived in Russia, and had some understanding of Russian/post-Soviet history and culture made me a person who was interested in and respected the attendees’ culture and language, but I was also a link to understanding Finnish culture and institutions. I believe that this position enabled successful data collection, but also put me in a special position in the meeting place: as mentioned before, the link between the place (the Russian-speakers) and Finnish society. This position is further discussed in the research ethics section.

4.3 Wider Research Ethics: Positioning the Self in the Field

The research plan underwent ethical review by The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) and was given approval to be carried out, decision number 42/2018. All aspects of the research, including data collection, storage, and analysis were reported and approved. This ethical review was conducted to ensure that as I was working with a potentially vulnerable group of people, there would not be steps in the research process that would cause them potential harm.

Even though the interviews were quite general in terms of themes and topics, in nearly all of the interviews the respondent would experience strong emotions when describing various events. Many of them cried during the interviews while sharing painful memories or frustrations with various current affairs. This demanded an empathetic approach on my part when conducting the interviews and being sensitive in deciding on the spot which topics to pursue further and which seemed too delicate to ask follow-up questions about. It was always difficult to predict which topics would cause an emotional reaction: questions about the move to Finland, expectations of ageing, experiences with various services, or questions about the meeting place. In the interview material, which was given to the respondents, I also wrote down the number of a helpline service in Russian language, which one could call and seek assistance for mental health issues. This was done so that if difficult feelings were to arise after the interview, the respondents would have an idea of where to seek help from.

During the fieldwork, the research participants I met at the meeting place saw me as representing various positions. I was a researcher from the University of

Helsinki, who had come to study the meeting place and its attendees. In this position, I came across different expectations. I was posed questions such as whether the University of Helsinki could be mentioned as a collaborator in funding applications, or how my research would be published. It appeared that the organisers in particular were happy that they were able to collaborate with the University of Helsinki through me, and hoped that this could assist in securing funding for the place. I was also a lot younger than the people in the place, and this age gap might have influenced how the attendees and organisers treated me. In the interactions, I would always use the formal way of addressing people in Russian (ВЫ), while the attendees and organisers would use diminutive forms of my name, such as Nastia, or Nastinka. These ways of speaking highlighted the dynamics between me and the attendees and the organisers, where I showed them respect as older people and they used playful nicknames when addressing me.

One central ethical issue that arose during my fieldwork was when the attendees would ask me to help them on practical issues relating to their pensions or other personal issues that made me consider where I needed to draw the line with the research participants. To assist them, the attendees needed to trust me with their personal data and other private information. There were cases where, if I were not to help them, it could lead to delayed medical help (because they were struggling to book a doctor's appointment) or they would face more financial difficulties if they did not understand why they were being billed for something, discarded the bill, and it resulted in fines for late payment. These were issues I had to decide on the spot every day during the fieldwork so that I would not lose their trust, but also that I drew clear boundaries on how much I could help and in what situations. In nearly all situations, I chose to help as much as I could. However, I tried to make sure that they would not become dependent on my help, as my fieldwork was limited to one year.

After leaving the field, I made sure to follow the aspects related to safe data storage and pseudonymised the data so that the participants of this study would not be recognisable. I also made efforts to maintain the anonymity of the meeting place, although as it is a site which is not that common in the capital area of Finland, full anonymity is difficult to establish. However, the findings of this study speak of more general phenomena that the meeting place is an illustrative case of, rather than stating that what unfolds there is a manifestation of something unique. I also promised the organisers to send them the articles when they were published, which I have also done.

5 Conditional Belonging in the Meeting Place

In this chapter, I present findings on how the attendees were negotiating their personal sense of belonging in the meeting place, and what categories and political projects of belonging became relevant to these negotiations. I have highlighted throughout this work that I view everyone's sense of belonging as always conditional, migrant or non-migrant; however, we all have different political projects of belonging and the lived experiences of these politics of belonging that become relevant to our personal sense of belonging. For people with a migrant background, their belonging can be made conditional by referring to this background and using it as an explanation for various aspects of their lives. For example, the discourse of 'not being integrated enough' can be used as a frame to explain actions, in contrast to citizens without an immigration background, who cannot fall out of society in a comparable way (de Waal 2017:47). Furthermore, these integration discourses have an infantilising tendency towards migrants that is also connected to mundane conceptions of 'Finnish' everyday life (Sotkasiira 2018). Previous research has suggested that older migrants are portrayed as possessing 'ethnic compensation strategies' that refer to images of having more support available from their families than people without a migrant background (Palmberger 2017). These are a few examples of the normative discourses that can lead to conditions that also influence the participants of this study.

As I suggested earlier, the ways in which older migrants are expected to be active in voluntary activities differs from how non-migrant people are expected to be active. Furthermore, what makes the premise for their belonging conditional is also that the older migrants will never be seen as 'more integrated' into society than non-migrants, even if they were to e.g. have higher education or contribute more to society than 'average Finns' (Rytter 2019:681). It seemed that for the attendees 'merely' being active was made contested by different criteria for their participation, and the outcomes of that very participation. The conditional nature of belonging was rationalised and negotiated with the other attendees on topics such as how to create a comfortable atmosphere in the place or what statements of family responsibilities are normatively apt and what are deviant.

I suggest that these negotiations were crucially influenced by the Finnish political projects of belonging, such as how Russian speakers are grouped together, or what care arrangements are expected from the older migrants and their families. In the

interactions of the meeting place, these (also interpreted) political projects are discussed and rationalised, and while doing so, various categories emerge that can become meaningful for the attendees' sense of belonging, or hinder their belonging. In the following sections, I aim to do analytical work to unpack these dynamics in the meeting place to illuminate the main political projects of belonging as they became visible in the meeting place, and their manifestations and interpretations that became meaningful for the heterogeneous category of people who gather in the meeting place, ultimately influencing their sense of belonging.

5.1 Findings from Articles I, II, and III and the Category of 'Russian speakers' in the Meeting Place

The three articles address different aspects of the conditional nature of belonging in the place, and how this conditional nature was rationalised and negotiated by different actors. In short, in the articles I discuss how this category of migrants, which is constructed from the outside but is also negotiated in the place, creates and sustains a sense of groupness (Article I), how the particularly omnipresent political project of belonging, 'integration', becomes negotiated in the meeting place (Article II), and how in their interactions normatively charged situations concerning family relations influence how the attendees negotiate their images of older women (Article III). These articles are all 'mini investigations', which represent different ways of investigating something that is theoretically interesting or puzzling in relation to the overall enquiry (Mason 2011:79), which here is how the older migrants negotiate their sense of belonging in this voluntary activity.

As a summary, Table 2 presents the research questions, key concepts, methods, and main findings from the three articles that form the empirical and conceptual base for this dissertation. The three articles each have their own main concepts, but together they all come together to illuminate the overall research query.

Table 2 Articles

	Article I:	Article II:	Article III:
	The Role of Atmosphere in Negotiations of Groupness: A Study of a Meeting Place for Older Russian-speaking Migrants	A Voluntary-sector Meeting place as a Site for Interpreting and 'Doing' Integration: A Case of Later-life Russian-speaking Migrants	Older Migrant Women Balancing Family Responsibilities and Recreational Activities
Research question(s)	How is a sense of groupness negotiated in a meeting place organised for the heterogeneous category of 'Russian-speakers' aged 65 and over?	What activities do different actors associated with the meeting place (steering group, organisers, attendees) connect to integration? How are these activities performed in the everyday by the attendees as a way of 'doing integration'?	What meanings do family responsibilities gain in voluntary activities, and how do these responsibilities affect attending these places?
Keywords	Groupness; atmosphere; Russian-speaking; older migrants; third sector; Finland	Integration; doing integration; third sector; Russian-speaking	Older migrants; older women; Russian-speaking; family responsibilities
Methods	Close reading (Watson and Wilcox 2000), content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005)	Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005), comparative approach	Close reading (Watson & Wilcox 2000), Content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005)
Key Findings	Groupness in a setting can be built on the basis of a shared language, and by mobilising various aspects of culturality, but we must also pay attention to intangible dimensions such as atmosphere when theorising how groupness emerges. Through the negotiations of groupness, something new emerges in the setting that is a joint effort of all involved. While 'Russian-speakers' is merely a category, it still has the power to create something new in the context of the meeting place.	The meeting place for older migrants is a contested site where integration is interpreted in contradictory ways by various actors, but also performed in a playful manner by the attendees.	The family responsibilities for Russian-speaking older migrant women are renegotiated and lived outside the family sphere in places such as the meeting place. The normative expectation of strong family support can produce stigma for the attendees against seeking assistance from the meeting place.

I believe it is also important to discuss in this section who were the 65+ year old Russian-speakers who gathered in the place, and what I discovered about them after the fieldwork was done. What I found was that they were a specific category within the category of ‘Russian-speaking migrants’. Since the place was targeted at people over 65 years of age, they were naturally all older. As shown in Table 1, all the interviewees had migrated after the age of 50 years, which was the case for nearly all the attendees. Therefore it is important to note how they were ‘later-life’ migrants who had migrated as older adults rather than migrating young and ageing as migrants (Torres 2006).

Also, the gender balance in the meeting place was not equal, as most of the attendees were women. There were a few men among the attendees, but they were either fewer in number, or they would take part in a separate ‘men’s club’ that was organised in the place on a weekly basis. Therefore, the place was inhabited more by women, and their way of attending the place was also connected to their care-giving duties and roles as grandmothers; even if they do not have grandchildren, the image of ‘babushka’ applies to all older women (Tiaynen-Qadir 2020). The main characteristics that the attendees shared were Russian language and a background of growing up or living at some stage in life in the Soviet Union. Therefore, I found that in this context, being ‘Russian-speaking’ was connected more to age, language skills (or the lack thereof), personal histories, and memories of shared events, rather than the current Russian (or other post-Soviet) state. This relates to a point by Luukkanen (2016) that there have been no political movements or joint agendas of ‘Russian-speakers’ in Finland due to the heterogeneity of the category. It was quite the opposite: I found that the attendees refrained from discussing political topics, mainly the war in Ukraine, to maintain the atmosphere in the place where they feel comfortable. The majority of the attendees were in a financially precarious situation mainly due to migrating in later life, and the difference between the cost of living and average pensions between Finland and Russia. For most, the pensions they had accumulated in Russia were not sufficient even if they had had a well-paying profession in Russia. Even with a decent pension in Russia, if migration occurs at a later stage in life, there is not enough time to accumulate a pension that would cover their living costs in Finland, especially in the capital region where the cost of living is high. Therefore, most of the attendees were receiving social support from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland in the form of basic social assistance. The basic social assistance is a last resort type of assistance, given according to a needs-based assessment for a person to attain a minimum level of income. This placed the older migrants in a financially precarious situation, and many resorted to receiving help from various food banks. Furthermore, cost-free activities like the one studied here can be important for people with low incomes.

In the following sections, I move on to discuss the conditional nature of belonging for attendees of the meeting place in detail. I will do this through the two research questions posed in section 3.3: What kinds of political projects of belonging rendered belonging conditional for the attendees in the interactions in the everyday of the meeting place, and how were the attendees interpreting and negotiating their sense of belonging vis-à-vis categories that arose from the interpretations of the political projects of belonging.

5.2 Conditional Belonging to the Category of Russian-speakers Established in the Context of the Meeting Place

The main political projects of belonging I identified as especially relevant for the attendees in the everyday interactions in the meeting place were related to issues of groupness, integration, and family responsibilities, which I will unpack in the following sections. Furthermore, I will present findings on how these specific political projects were negotiated by various actors, and how these different levels of belonging were being worked out in relation to each other as a multilevel process, with differing results. I suggest that these political projects of belonging influenced the formation of different categories of belonging that became available to the attendees, enabling a sense of belonging, but rendering it conditional in specific ways.

First, I look at the conditional nature of belonging to the category of Russian-speakers established in the meeting place as a political project of belonging, as well as a negotiated category of belonging. In the case of Article I, the main political project of belonging was related to how a ‘group’ is constructed from the outside, but also negotiated within the place. The meeting place itself was constructed as a site for ‘Russian-speakers 65+’ as a political project that assumed certain common factors between the attendees. Yuval-Davis (2011:7) notes how social categories are constituted in different historical moments; therefore they rely on historical contexts that are shifting and contested. Even though not all of the attendees were of Russian background, all of them spoke Russian. In the interactions, the term ‘Russian-speaking’ (русскоязычные or русскоговорящие), was often used by the attendees themselves to talk about the attendees in general. One organiser defined whom the meeting place is for:

... in Russian language, in a Russian community, which is less Russian, which was created here. (Interview with the organiser 1_1)

She notes that the community is ‘created here’, which highlights the interactional nature of the creation of different categories in the place, the ‘Russian-speaking community’ being one of them. Often the assumption in policy is that people who share the same language and ‘culture’ will automatically form a ‘group’, being

especially true for assumptions about stigmatised groups of migrants (Vacca et al. 2022). However, the assumption of ‘culture’ as a stable entity should be scrutinised in research (Abdallah-Preteille 2006) and the ‘cultural stuff’ (Barth 1970) should be seen as something to draw meanings from, rather than assuming that a static form of culture presents itself when people with similar backgrounds come together. This relates to Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000:26) argument about how groupness should not be taken as a given, and how the categorisation from outside does not illustrate the lived experiences of these ethnic (see similar critique on ‘ethnic groups’ Ratcliffe 2013) or national (or in fact any) categories. Drawing from these insights, I also see groupness as an emergent property of a particular setting. Taking a processual understanding of how a sense of groupness is created by the category of Russian speakers nuances the understanding of what happens in such places for migrants who have some shared background, and who are positioned within a category from the outside, as ‘Russian-speakers’ is thus used in policy and in research.

What made belonging in the meeting place conditional through the lens of the construction of the category of Russian-speakers in the meeting place was how the attendees had to adhere to a set of conditions to maintain a pleasant atmosphere in the place. As Simmel and Hughes (1949) write about sociability, to achieve an ‘ideal’ social world requires artificiality to avoid friction. This maintenance of an affective atmosphere was done by avoiding certain topics, mainly related to politics and religion, which would disrupt what the category of Russian-speakers was in the meeting place. On an interactional level, this became evident when the attendees would, for example, read Finnish newspapers to learn Finnish: news about Ukraine would always be left out from the discussions. Also, the organisers explicitly stated that they ‘stop all discussions’ (Field diary 2019) related to politics and religion. A sense of groupness was also derived from highlighting similarities and differences, such as ‘what the Finns do’, or mobilising affective concepts such as *dusha* (meaning soul: for a more thorough description on the term see Pesmen 2000). If these conditions were not followed, there would be a risk of the category of Russian-speakers in the place breaking (see also Ryabov 2016).

As the meeting place had become important for the attendees, the organisers took on an active role in leaving out topics that would disrupt the category of who are Russian-speakers’ in the meeting place. I also found (Article I) that what made the place important was not only the shared language, but also the knowledge of using affective words, such as *dushevnyi* (soulful) and fully capturing their meanings.

The following quote also further illustrates this:

Q: For whom do you think this place is important?

R: For these Russian-speakers. For me it’s maybe not so important because I can also go to Finnish-speaking places, but for those who, and at this age

you cannot learn the language [Finnish] anymore. (Interview with attendee 7_1)

This respondent was an Ingrian Finn, for whom a sense of belonging is constructed with both Finnish and post-Soviet roots (Mähönen et al. 2015). Her comment also shows how there can be multiple categories in the meeting place that people can negotiate their belonging to. She points out how the category of Russian-speakers is not important for her in the place, but other categories I present later can be meaningful for her, as she was a regular visitor to the meeting place. Therefore, I suggest that for those lacking Finnish language skills, the maintenance of an atmosphere of groupness was even more important, as places such as this were less available for them. This finding also highlights a key aspect of conditional belonging. The direction of belonging, in this case the place, needs to be significant if people are willing to make concessions in order to negotiate and upkeep this belonging. In the meeting place for the attendees who did not speak any language besides Russian, on an interactional level this meant that they were willing to limit certain topics to have a place with an affective atmosphere. Importantly, not all the attendees need to find their personal sense of belonging in all the categories that are available in the setting, and necessarily take a stance on all political projects of belonging that become visible in the meeting place.

In Article I, I found that the place was also open to Finnish people aged 65+ who spoke Russian, and as the organiser noted:

... for our work, it does not matter who the person is by nationality. We even took [as attendees] Finns who spoke Russian. For some reason they did not stay ... We ask neither about religion nor their faith nor their origin because it does not affect the work. (Interview with the organiser 2_1)

I interpret this such that in order to create a sense of groupness that can foster a sense of belonging in the place, it can be difficult to cater to a sense of belonging for both the Russian-speaking older people, as well as the Finnish-born people.

The relational work of belonging becomes especially apparent in spheres of intimacy and close friendships, in which the burden of sustaining belonging is strong. When bonds are especially close, some distancing is at times needed. (Kuurne and Vieno 2022:288.) The fact that all these efforts at sustaining an affective atmosphere of groupness were present in the meeting place showed how it was a venue where the attendees wanted to have close friendship interactions.

In sum, the conditional nature of belonging to the category of 'Russian speakers' in the context of the meeting place was negotiated by leaving certain topics out of the interaction, and highlighting what was shared. 'Russian speakers' as a political project was related to the top-down creation of categories – meaning that the place itself was created for the category of 'Russian-speakers' with the assumption of shared communalities. This category was used as a way to build groupness in the everyday interactions, but this groupness was not automatic and demanded

negotiations on what this category of ‘Russian-speakers’ meant in the context of the meeting place. The conditionality of belonging to the category of ‘Russian-speakers’ in the place showed how this category as a ‘category of practice’ had significance in the place, as it was something many shared. However, as illustrated in the quote from a person who was an Ingrian Finn, not all the attendees felt that the category of Russian-speakers established in the place was relevant to them. Therefore, there should be other categories in the place that gave the different attendees meanings to belong to. In the next section, I focus on one of the main political projects of belonging and its manifestations in the meeting place, the political project of integration and how its interpretations can construct another type of category for belonging.

5.3 Interpreting the Integration Imperative – Belonging to the ‘Finnish Society’

In this section, drawing from findings in Article II, I discuss the conditional nature of belonging influenced by the political project of ‘integration’ as manifest and interpreted in the meeting place. The discourse of integration is arguably one of the main contemporary political projects of belonging aimed at migrants (Rytter 2019), and I also identified it as a central political project of belonging in the context of the meeting place. I view dynamics related to integration as one of the core multi-level issues of belonging and the politics of belonging in the context of migration. In line with other scholars (Favell 2003; Heckmann 2005; Rytter 2019), I see the term ‘integration’ as something we need to take a critical stance towards. As previous research has shown, certain categories of migrants would not be considered ‘integrated’ whatever they do (Ghorashi and van Tilburg 2006). My analytical interests lie in the manifestations of this terminology and the lived experiences of its interpretations, rather than attempting to measure how ‘successful’ migrants are in integrating. As belonging and the politics of belonging are deeply interlinked (Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006), this political project of integration also influences their sense of belonging in the place and beyond.

I suggest that one way in which the attendees negotiated a sense of belonging was by making sense of what the omnipresent demand for migrants to ‘integrate’ means for them. Therefore, one facet where their personal sense of belonging and the political projects of belonging came together was when the attendees negotiated their sense of belonging to the (imagined) Finnish society through the interpretations of integration, even in playful ways, as I have argued elsewhere (Asikainen 2023). In this section, I analyse how the multiple interpretations of the political project of integration made belonging for the attendees conditional but was also a way to create the category of ‘Finnish society’ as a resource for belonging.

During my fieldwork, I was drawn to how the ambivalent goal of integration was used in various, even contradictory, ways by different actors associated with the place. In the analysis (Article II), I compared different statements on integration and related terminology by various actors in the meeting place. These different actors were the steering group, the organisers, and the attendees of the place. The statements were either written accounts of the goals of the meeting place, which were found in funding applications or reports, or parts of interviews or observations where actors discussed 'integration' or closely related terminology. I made this comparison to tease out how the meeting place was a contested site where integration was interpreted in ambivalent ways, ultimately also influencing the experiences of belonging for the attendees. In Article II, I suggested that for older migrants a sense of 'doing integration' can be about finding belonging in the Finnish community of value (Anderson 2013), but what integration 'is', can be interpreted in different ways by different actors, even within a single setting. Ultimately, integration should be seen as a discourse of potential power at the disposal of the majority, which is used differently for different categories of migrants. In research, the traditions of approaching Western societies as monocultural and assuming the need for migrants to assimilate can be traced back to the early works of the Chicago School (Castles 2007:356). However, I suggest that it is possible for the migrants to find their own creative interpretations of what this demand means for them, and use them as positive resources for belonging to Finnish society.

A fundamental question in migration studies is how diversity and integration can fit together, as well as who has the right to be diverse, how, and where. In my data, I detected an underlying paternalistic attitude towards how the attendees were approached by the funders (see similar findings Sotkasiira 2018). These paternalistic attitudes were also acknowledged by the organisers:

"I understand that the Finns want [them to] adapt and assimilate [adaptirovat i assimilirovat], right? But this is an age category, it can no longer assimilate. They cannot, the young can, they cannot [Interview with organiser 2_1]."

As noted earlier, the meeting place was organised for the goal of supporting the health and wellbeing of the older migrants through a funding mechanism that is not meant to support integration. Still, in the applications for funding and annual reports the goal of integration was present. I see this as an illustrative case on how the societal discourse of integration is very dominant, as the goal of integration is mentioned even in applications where it can be counterproductive.

I suggest that one way that belonging for the older migrants was made conditional in the meeting place was that they had to interpret the different demands of integration and what they would mean for them. It was illustrated in interactions with various organising bodies that it was not seen as enough for the attendees to be active in the meeting place, but the place was seen as a medium to activate them

outside the place as well. As they put it, ‘hanging around’ was seen as problematic. In statements by the steering group, and other people involved in the place, it was made clear that e.g. the skills they learned in the place ‘they could teach to their Finnish neighbour’ (field diary 2019). This is a different approach compared to Finnish active ageing policies for Finnish-born people, where their activity is often presented in a different framework, for example alleviating loneliness, or promotion of health and resilience, or seeing their activity in voluntary activities having intrinsic value. For the Russian-speaking older people, their belonging was made conditional by the ways that they should attend in Finnish society, through attending the place. Therefore, the political project of integration could be interpreted as also being connected to issues of active ageing.

The topic of integration was extremely ambivalent in the place. The steering group, who mainly comprised ‘Finns’, brought the policy terminology to the meeting place through funding applications, but also in everyday interactions with the organisers and attendees. Even as I have argued that it is a discourse of control, it also paved the way for the organisers and the attendees to see some of the activities as related to ‘integration’ and frame them in their own way, making sense of these omnipresent demands. The role of the organisers was central in acting as a mediator in making certain activities into something that the attendees could see as ‘doing integration’. Having this sense of ‘doing integration’ could be a source of belonging to Finnish society for the attendees, as it gave them the opportunity to interpret what the unavoidable demand of integration could mean for them as a lived experience.

The sense of belonging for the Russian-speaking older migrants can be made conditional in their everyday, especially if they do not speak Finnish, or use Russian language in public spaces. However, if they are able to adopt creative strategies, such as here:

Sometimes someone would say in the back [of a bus] ‘speak Finnish in Finland’. So during the language course I asked the teacher to teach me the phrase ‘Finland is a European democratic country, many languages are spoken here.’ I said this a couple of times, [people] immediately fell silent. [Interview with attendee 10_1]

In sum, I suggest that the conditional nature of belonging came from the demand for the older migrants to first understand and acknowledge what the demands of integration meant for them as a category outside traditional integration measures, such as those aimed at labour market activity and language skills. However, these dynamics enabled them to bring ideas and interpretations of ‘the Finnish society’ to the place and, as I suggest, use it as one category to negotiate their belonging in relation to.

In the next section, I move on to discuss the findings of Article III, which relate to political projects of care and its interpretations. I suggest that through displays of

family responsibilities, another central facet of the conditional nature of belonging becomes visible, that is, how the normative aspects of care and its negotiations happen in the meeting place.

5.4 The Normative Nature of Family Responsibilities Influencing Belonging to other ‘Babushkas’ in the Place

Here I use findings from Article III to highlight how the conditional nature of the attendees’ belonging was related to how the attendees displayed their family responsibilities. The role of family responsibilities and normative aspects of care turned out to be one facet for understanding the lived experiences of politics of belonging that were manifest and negotiated in the meeting place. Politics of belonging encompass not only policies and discourses, but also the full range of human emotions (Yuval-Davis 2011:178). I identified the attendees’ positions as caregivers (mainly as grandmothers), as well as how they envisioned their future as care receivers due to their own ageing, as an important aspect to consider in this research. The political projects of belonging that influenced these interactions were connected to static images of the Russian grandmother – babushka – and made more complex by Finnish care policies. Originally, one of the primary aims for setting up the meeting place was that the attendees would become more familiar with the Finnish system of care/care provision as the responsibility of institutions, and the role of the family being less central in providing care than in, for example, Russia. Therefore, in the context of the meeting place, the political projects of belonging I identified were related to care arrangements and interpreted such that the attendees should be made less dependent on their families. The meeting place therefore functioned as a venue where the women were not only negotiating their own roles as providers of care for their families, but as receivers of care in the future. The negotiations of this care and its directions caused tensions among the attendees in their everyday interactions. I will go into greater detail about these tensions later in this section.

The issue of who is responsible for providing care and under what dynamics is very normative, and as previous research has shown, is (re)negotiated in the context of migration (Khvorostianov and Remennick 2015; de Valk and Schans 2008). I suggest that for the older migrant women, their perceptions and acts of care can be made easily contested by interpretations of Finnish political projects of care in the

meeting place, but also by other attendees who draw from normative ideals of care and family responsibilities.

In my interviews and especially through utilising the interaction diaries for data collection, I found that the women who attended the meeting place were doing an extensive amount of care work for their families, especially taking care of their grandchildren. Their positions as both caregivers and care receivers were under normative negotiations in the context of the meeting place, which affected their dynamics for receiving assistance from the place, as well as how they were able to attend different activities. As receivers of care, contradictory and ambivalent stereotypes were detectable on different levels that related to their care arrangements. On the Finnish policy level, in the National programme on ageing 2030, migrants (young and working age) are mentioned as a solution to the dependency ratio as labour force (Preparatory group for the programme on ageing 2020), and older migrants are often presented as problematic, e.g. t 'risk of not integrating'. In the meeting place, the attendees were presented in the applications for funding bodies as 'too dependent' on their families for support, or that they had 'unrealistic expectations of care towards their families'. In practice, however, the issue was more complex, and I suggest that the ways in which the attendees interpreted these demands in their everyday created different conditions for their belonging to the other 'babushkas' in the meeting place. I observed that the attendees expressed conflicting views on the topic of family responsibilities, and this caused tensions among the attendees at times. Some of the attendees expressed high expectations towards their families as providers of care, but many were open to using public care services. This became evident on an interactional level; some of the attendees would emphasise how they did not need to learn certain things, such as important mundane services e.g. internet banking, as their families used it on their behalf (Article III). Such statements could provide the attendees with a sense of pride, as they could show how they had a family that 'works well' (Finch and Mason 1993). It could be stigmatising for the attendees to ask for assistance in the place, as it contradicted the idea of showing that one has a well-functioning family. Their roles as receivers of assistance were made deviant by other people in the meeting place through stigmatising comments about requesting too much assistance from the place, as this would indicate that their families 'do not work'. Therefore, the attendees had to negotiate how to position themselves in relation to expectations that they might have themselves, which stemmed from growing up in the Soviet Union,

complicated by the Finnish policies of care and their own interpretations of these policies.

In addition to negotiating their own positions as care receivers, their roles as care givers were discussed in the place. The data showed how the attendees took part in care tasks for their families, especially in caring for their grandchildren. Previous research conducted in Russia has shown that the role of the grandmother is very normative in the sense that women are expected to do 'selfless caregiving' by dedicating time to their grandchildren (Utrata 2011). Where the applications for funding of the meeting place portrayed the older migrants as potentially 'too dependent' on their families, the support they gave to their families and the families' dependency on them was not visible in the ways in which the place was rationalised in the reports or funding. The care work that the attendees did for their families was not mentioned at the level of the applications nor reports. If their overburdened care responsibilities go unrecognised, it can have a negative effect on their sense of wellbeing, and on their experiences of ageing in Finland. The roles of grandmothers are not only about being overburdened with care work. As one attendee pointed out, it could also be 'burdening' when the grandchildren have grown up and do not need help from their grandmother, as she felt that it was important to be needed.

I found that stigmatising comments about asking too much assistance from the meeting place could hinder the attendees' sense of belonging to the place and to the category of 'babushkas'. This became evident in interviews with the service advisor and organiser, on how 'they come here with questions their children could solve', or how the service advisor noted that 'if grandmother were in trouble, the children should help'. The findings I have presented in the previous sections (5.2, 5.3, 5.4) are all related to what I see as a central issue in research on migration in the context of voluntary activities – how the attendees' 'activity' is understood through various political projects of belonging, and how by interpreting these political projects different categories of belonging become relevant in the context of the meeting place. The conditional nature of the attendees' belonging was related to which aspects were in need of 'correcting' with different political projects of belonging, which were ignored, and how the negotiations and understandings of these projects influenced the dynamics in the place. By paying attention to the types of subject that these different political projects aim to produce, it is possible to highlight the conditional nature of attending even voluntary activities. It was revealing to observe what topics in the place were ones to take a stance towards in a collective sense, such as leaving

out topics of politics or religion, or interpreting the integration narrative. In the case of family relations, discussing the topic would at times cause tensions. However, the response was not to collectively ban the topic; instead a closed group was set up where family relations could be discussed. This highlights the complex dynamics under which the attendee's sense of belonging in the place is negotiated, and the different conditions of finding this belonging.

In sum, the main political projects of belonging I found relevant to address in this research were related to constructions of the category of 'Russian-speakers', the political project of 'integration', and the interpretations of Finnish care policies, in dialogue with the image of the 'babushka'. The interpretations of these political projects in a dynamic process in the context of the meeting place led to the creation of different categories of belonging. These main categories of belonging were belonging to 'Russian-speakers', belonging to Finnish society, and belonging to other 'babushkas' in the place. In the discussion chapter I move on to present final concluding remarks on the conditional nature of belonging in the meeting place.

6 Discussion – The Dynamic Categories of Belonging

In this study, I set out to explore how a sense of belonging is constructed for older Russian-speaking migrants in the context of voluntary activities organised for them in the framework of promoting health and wellbeing. Through two research questions that aimed at identifying the political projects of belonging that were central in the interactions in the everyday of the meeting place, and the interpretations of these political projects of belonging, I presented my analysis of the ways in which a sense of belonging was constructed in the setting for different categories. This study has shown that the meeting place is a particular site where the attendees' sense of belonging, as a process of creating connections to cultures, people, places, and objects (May 2013:3), is done in dialogue with various political projects of belonging, of which I have presented a few here. I argue that observing the conditional nature of the processes that take place in voluntary activities enable research to ask more informed questions on the nature of such places, and the dynamics that unfold there. In this study, I have done analytical work to further our understanding of what they can be.

A sense of belonging is about interpersonal tensions and processes of inclusion and exclusion (Yodovich 2021), and in the context of the meeting place this became evident in how the attendees negotiated their sense of belonging to different categories in the place. I suggest that these categories came to be on an interactional level in the context of the meeting place as a result of interpreting different political projects of belonging. The main categories I identified as being meaningful in the place were the categories of 'Russian-speakers', Finnish society, and other 'babushkas'. The conditional nature of belonging to these categories was unfolding in the place in dialogue with interpreting these demands with other actors in the place on an interactional level.

One main way that belonging is made conditional for all, not only older migrants, is how new members are required to demonstrate conformity to the community (Yodovich 2021). What I aim to highlight in this study is that these communities, or what I refer to as categories, are multiple, overlapping, interpreted, and shifting even within a single setting. Therefore, relevant questions for studying the conditional nature of belonging are what communities or categories become

meaningful, what categories people (in my case the older migrants) should show conformity to, and how this conformity should be demonstrated. I suggest that the participants of this research have more communities they need to show conformity to than non-migrant older people, whose belonging to Finland is seen as automatic, and their ways of being active in voluntary activities are presented with a different logic. For the participants of this study, the act of ‘hanging around’ was something that could easily be made questionable. They cannot only be active here, or, that they have to be active in specific ways, when in reality they would also be active outside the place in ways not necessarily noted by the organising or funding bodies of the place, such as taking care of their grandchildren.

As people are often positioned between multiple settings of belonging, this can produce conflicting expectations (Kuurne and Vieno 2022:285). In my case, these conflicting expectations became evident in discussions about family responsibilities. For the attendees, finding common ground on these issues was at times difficult, as the idea of the grandmother and family responsibilities was normatively strong. This was the only topic for which a closed group was established to discuss issues of family responsibilities, which was not the case for politics or religion, for example. Therefore, with this I aim to demonstrate that the overlapping categories have some hierarchy regarding what topics are left out in a shared decision to enable the constructions of categories to belong to, such as leaving out politics and religion for a category of ‘Russian-speakers’ to be relevant in the place. In the case of ‘Finnish society’, the interpretations of the omnipresent integration discourses opened up a space to understand some of the activities in the place as ‘doing integration’, which I suggest can enable constructing belonging to Finnish society as a lived experience. As belonging is not a binary, but a spectrum (Yodovich 2021), the attendees could find ways to belong to the place through facets presented in this study, but still be questioned on some aspects of other categories of belonging.

If various political projects of belonging continue to ignore or misconstrue the positive attributes of places where older migrants can negotiate their ambivalent belonging (Erdal 2021), they risk creating situations where older migrants become unable to negotiate their sense of belonging and ultimately live a meaningful life in Finland. However, it is worth thinking about whether it is possible to recognise or even desirable to capture the full spectrum of a person’s experience in policies. For the participants of this research, interpretations of these policies were important in making the meeting place what it was, as well as having a place to make these interpretations together. To address the problems of misrecognition, Fraser (2000:115) suggests ‘replacing institutionalized value patterns that impede parity of participation with ones that enable or foster it’. What kind of work of replacing and who would need to do it seems to be an open question. As I have shown throughout this research, the dynamics of the intertwined nature of belonging and

politics of belonging, which are also ‘institutionalise[d] value patterns’, are complex and produce surprising outcomes. Interpretations of repressive discourses such as integration can produce categories of belonging, or discussions of family relations can produce non-belonging to the category of babushkas. Therefore, the categories of belonging are formed in a dynamic interactional process, where by default nothing produces belonging or non-belonging.

What I do suggest should be recognised on the policy level is that these places can carry significant meaning in the lives of their participants. As a political project on the side of the funders, the meeting place – ‘the project’ – should have clear measurable outcomes. These outcomes are related to teaching the older migrants language skills, teaching them how to ‘be active’ in Finnish society, which include e.g., knowledge of Finnish eldercare systems, and promoting active ageing, albeit with a different emphasis than it would be for Finnish-born older people. Many of these are important skills, but not all the outcomes of the place were easily measurable, as I have shown in this dissertation: only some ways in which the sense of belonging can be established, and what conditions it needs. There was a significant contradiction in how the meeting place was presented in a temporal sense from the division of belonging and politics of belonging. People show distress at breaking bonds (Baumeister and Leary 1995:502), which makes belonging to places, which are often organised as project-based (Rantala and Sulkunen 2007), precarious by default. Based on this research, it became clear that this place was not seen by the attendees as a project with a start and an end, but it represented a form of stability, routine, and ways of ‘putting down roots’ in Finland. In the case of the meeting place, there is at least a need for the funders of voluntary activities to better understand the dynamics of such places, and the types of belonging they have the potential to accumulate. Whether funders of voluntary activities are ready to fund activities for older migrants with the main aim of supporting their ageing and wellbeing in these activities without underlying expectations outside these places is an open question. As I have analysed throughout this work, these political projects of belonging, even when they have normatively repressive ideals behind them (such as in the case of ‘integration’) can in such contexts be negotiated so as to make sense of one’s personal sense of belonging. However, categories are always formed through interactional processes, and research should be sensitive to what these are, and what meanings they carry.

Kuurne and Vieno (2022:290) note how persons who are placed in stigmatised categories have to make efforts to fit in, and access value from a dominant hierarchical order. In their work, as also in the work of Sadeghi (2023), the focus is often on minority-majority relations. Here, I have aimed at doing analytical work to show how these engagements are also dynamics within the marginalised groups when they attempt to interpret the dynamics imposed by the dominant group. This highlights how the dominant discourses not only affect the individuals and their

own sense of belonging, but also how they influence the sense of belonging on an interactional level with others as well. This finding nuances the understanding of the conditional nature of the ways in which older migrants can attend places such as the one presented in this case. These sets of expectations and norms, which I have in this work titled political projects of belonging in line with Yuval-Davis (2011), are not only ones imposed by the host society, but there are also discourses and norms that the older migrants have grown up with and must negotiate a stance towards, such as the role of grandmother, and that are therefore transnational by nature.

Whether the migrants' homeland is politically stigmatised makes a difference, and in the case of Russian-speakers, the issue is even more diverse, as not all 'Russian-speakers' are Russians, but as I have shown here, are often lumped into one category in policy. While this dissertation was being written, the political situation in Europe has become even worse. If the positions of Russian speakers in Finland were contested before, it will likely become more so in the wake of Russia's full scale war on Ukraine. Sadeghi (2023) has also utilised the term 'conditional belonging' in studying how state policies in the US after 9/11 reflected onto the lives of the Iranian diaspora globally. The categories of belonging that are available to the attendees of the meeting place, or possible for them to negotiate belonging to, will doubtless experience a shift after Russia's further aggression towards Ukraine from 2022 onwards. This highlights the centrality of how the different 'things' that people negotiate their belonging in relation to also shift. These 'things' can be discourses, people, objects, policies, to name a few. In the context of the meeting place, this can mean that new categories of belonging to can open up, some categories can lose meaning and disappear, or the categories that were already established there can gain new meanings.

Sadeghi describes 9/11 as a 'pivotal event' for the Iranian diaspora, and in many ways this war can be something similar for the Russian-speakers living in Finland, as well as globally. The questions that this dissertation raises for future research are: who will make up the social category of 'older Russian-speaking migrants' in the future, and is this category even needed in research or in policy? Are there other categories that are more relevant in studying this segment of the population? Regarding voluntary activities for older migrants, I suggest it should be studied further with what logics these places are established and maintained, and what kinds of expectations of activity are placed on migrants in voluntary activities? In relation to the issue on the conditional nature of belonging, future research should continue to pay attention to the interactional aspects of how people negotiate their sense of belonging, and what subjects different instances, such as the voluntary sector under different political projects, are expected to produce and how.

The limitations of this research are related to how the data collection was conducted only within one setting. However, I have highlighted throughout the dissertation

how this is only one case, and one category of Russian speakers living in Finland who have the opportunity to attend such a place. For example, older people who have problems with mobility can be excluded from such activities and remain outside the scope of my enquiry. Furthermore, the research is gendered in the sense that most of the attendees, organisers, and members of the steering committee were women. This gender bias is however quite common among such voluntary activities and raises the question of where older Russian-speaking men find their social connections. However, these limitations are related to limiting the scope of research, to focus on one particular setting where belonging is negotiated, as it is always negotiated somewhere. The aim was not to provide a substantive argument on all voluntary activities for older migrants, but argue through the context of this place how the nature of belonging is a multifaceted phenomenon.

7 Concluding Remarks

As I finish writing this dissertation, the meeting place where I conducted my fieldwork continues to exist and be active, albeit in a very different form than it had when I was visiting it for participant observations and interviews. The funder STEA, which had granted them funding for the first years of their activities, no longer funds them. Furthermore, when this funding ended, the organisation that provided them the space for activities discontinued their contract, forcing them to relocate. Even with all these hardships and lack of institutional support, they continued their work. Soon after I had ended my fieldwork, the Covid-19 pandemic forced the meeting place actors, like the entire world, to rethink their activities. With the restrictions, they, like many others, went online. Still, to this date I follow their activities and keep in touch with the organisers. Also, to this day they still have many of their activities online, which was not the case before the pandemic. Due to Russia's continued aggression towards Ukraine, Russia's hybrid operations at the Finnish border and its political outcomes, the Finnish government's discussions on limiting dual citizenship for Russians, and the austerity measures that the Finnish government is introducing towards migrants and people with the lowest income, the attendees of the meeting place are experiencing turbulent times. In the future, the category of 'Russian-speakers' (as a political project of belonging and as a constructed category of belonging) will potentially be even more contested. Whether there will be ways to maintain their groupness, for example, or how the people in this category will negotiate its relevance, remain open questions.

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