

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Pirkkalainen, Päivi; Husu, Hanna-Mari

Title: Becoming Politically Active : Life Courses and the Formation of Capitals Among Young People of Migrant Origin in Finland

Year: 2020

Version: Published version

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s).

Rights: CC BY 4.0

Rights url: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Please cite the original version:

Pirkkalainen, P., & Husu, H.-M. (2020). Becoming Politically Active : Life Courses and the Formation of Capitals Among Young People of Migrant Origin in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(3), 41-55. <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.249>

RESEARCH

Becoming Politically Active: Life Courses and the Formation of Capitals Among Young People of Migrant Origin in Finland

Päivi Pirkkalainen and Hanna-Mari Husu

Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, FI
Corresponding author: Päivi Pirkkalainen (paivi.pirkkalainen@jyu.fi)

This article focuses on the life courses of young people of migrant origin who are active in civic and political fields in Finland. The aim is to analyse, from the micro-level life course perspective, the issues in their lives that have helped them to become active. The article draws on empirical data collected using participatory methods. Four young people of migrant origin participated in the research process and contributed to the data analysis. The theoretical framework consists of Bourdieusian concepts of political habitus and emotional, cultural and social capital. The article shows that participants gained strong emotional capital during their childhood, which laid the groundwork for the formation of their cultural capital—referring here to an ability to navigate between diverse cultures. This, in turn, helped them to network widely across ethnic and linguistic lines, not only in Finland but also transnationally. Different capitals have been significant in the formation of the young people’s political habitus, which is transnational in nature. Although they belong to a minority in Finnish society and face discrimination, they have made good use of the opportunities in Finland to become active in civic and political fields.

Keywords: Political habitus; Migrant youth; Emotional capital; Cultural capital; Social capital; Life course

1. Introduction

There has been extensive research on first-generation migrants’ political involvement in its varied forms in several locations (see, for instance, Bloemraad 2006; Fennema & Tillie 1999, 2001; Giugni & Morales 2011; Jacobs & Tillie 2004; Mezzetti 2008; Morales 2009; Morales & Pilati 2011; Pirkkalainen 2013; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad 2008). Many of these studies indicate several individual-, group- and context-level issues that contribute to migrants’ political involvement. At the individual level, education, knowledge of the language of the country of settlement, length of residence and citizenship have been found to be the main factors contributing to a higher level of political involvement among migrants (Giugni & Morales 2011). Group-level factors that influence migrants’ political involvement relate closely to migrants’ involvement in associations that produce social capital (Fennema & Tillie 1999). Social capital,

in short, implies social trust, 'which spills over into political trust and higher political participation' (Jacobs & Tillie 2004: 421). More recent studies have refined this finding by applying Putnam's (2000) definitions of bonding social capital (within a specific group) and bridging social capital (reaching out to different groups) and argue that migrants who engage in ethnic social structures are likelier to be active in politics related to their own ethnic group and to be less interested in mainstream political activities (Morales & Pilati 2011).

Past research on young migrants' political and civic involvement based on survey data and quantitative methods indicate that there is often no gap between second-generation migrants' and young natives' political participation at the general level (Heath *et al.* 2013; Pilati 2017; Quintelier 2009). Some studies that look at both civic and formal political involvement of young people with survey data in the European context have shown that, at times, young people of migrant origin are even more active than their native peers (Kim & Amnå 2015; Noack & Jugert 2015). Research based on qualitative data and methods indicate that younger and second-generation migrants are likelier to build 'multicultural' networks and identities that cross ethnic boundaries compared with their first-generation migrant parents (Toivanen 2014; Vierimaa 2017). These cross-ethnic relations thus contribute to the bridging social capital of young migrants. Research has also shown that migrant youth may be simultaneously engaged in ethnic community activities and multi-ethnic activities (Mansouri & Mikola 2014). Research carried out in the USA point out connections between political and civic participation by migrant youth and their parents. Research has found – for example – that politically active migrant youth try to encourage their politically inactive immigrant parents to participate in US politics (Terriquez & Kwon 2015); and that US-born children of unauthorised parents participate in civic and political activities despite the precarious situation of their parents (Bloemraad, Sarabia & Fillingim 2016).

However, most of the existing research lacks the *micro-level life course perspective* on young people's political agency. This article approaches the questions of civic and political participation of young people of migrant origin from a life course perspective applying a Bourdieusian framework, specifically the concepts of political habitus and capital. For Bourdieu (1986b: 241, 252–254), capital is something that can be taken advantage of through its conversion into different forms of capital. Hence, it becomes central in terms of trust-building and civic and political participation. Bourdieu's framework, with its focus on the conversion of different forms of capital, can explain in detail how bridging social capital (in Putnam's sense) is created.

2. Participatory research methods and biographic interviews of four participants

This article is based on empirical data collected by using a participatory method in which young people themselves are part of knowledge production (Cahill 2007; Ní Laoire 2016).¹ Much has been written in particular about participatory action research (PAR), which approaches people as subjects rather than objects. PAR's aim is to involve participants in some or all stages of the research process, with the ideal of bettering their lives (Breitbart 2003; Cahill 2007; Kesby, Kindon & Pain 2005; Pain 2004; Torre & Fine 2006). In this article, the PAR approach has been applied in a modified way so that the young people participating in the research are regarded as partners in knowledge production, particularly in the analysis phase. Moreover, issues of power between researchers and participants have been reflected on thoroughly. As for the 'action' and commitment to change, it is believed here that giving a voice to young people of migrant origin in research has the potential to contribute to a broader societal change to recognise such young people as capable actors with new visions for political and civic fields in Finland.

¹ First author of the article, Päivi Pirkkalainen, was responsible for the empirical data collection, referred in this section as 'Researcher 1'. Second author of the article, Hanna-Mari Husu, handled the major responsibility for developing the theoretical framework. Analysis and writing were done in collaboration.

As Cahill (2007: 299) notes, researchers should be careful when applying the broad term ‘participation’: it may present only ‘the illusion of consultation’, which in practice ends up reproducing unequal power relations (see also Cooke & Kothari 2001; Kesby 2005; Kothari 2001; Mohan 2001). This, she claims, may be a special danger if participation only involves certain techniques and is not ‘a political commitment’ (Cahill 2007: 299). For this reason, it is important here to describe in detail the process of data collection and to specify how young people of migrant origin participated.

In this research, there were four participants. The participants were selected on the basis of their activities in civic or political arenas in Finland, as well as on the basis of their age: all are young adults between 19 and 27 years of age. All of them are fairly visible actors on civic or political scenes in Finland and are widely networked. All of them have migrant backgrounds. Two participants are themselves migrants who moved to Finland when they were children (between ages of 6 and 12 years) and can thus be referred to as ‘1.5-generation migrants’ (see Rumbaut 2004). Two were born in Finland to migrant parents and can thus be referred to as ‘second-generation migrants’. All of them are Finnish citizens. They are all of Muslim background, although their religion has different meanings in their lives, and they range from a devout Muslim to an atheist. The initial idea was to choose participants who were different, first in terms of their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and, second, in terms of their political and civic activities. **Table 1** presents the main information about participants, which is relevant to explain their formation of political habitus.

The participants were initially contacted in October 2017 by an email that briefly introduced the research project and its purpose. All of the participants were first approached through a gatekeeper – either a colleague of the researcher or a young person of migrant origin. Hence, they were aware of the research before they were contacted by the researcher, which helped greatly in building trust. Trust is essential in any kind of research, but especially so in research with people who occupy minority positions in society (see also Tiilikainen 2003: 37). Reflecting on the issue of power and one’s position as a researcher is especially

Table 1: Participants’ backgrounds.

Participant	Origin	Family background	Year of birth	Education/occupation	Type(s) of political activity	Citizenship/length of residence in Finland
Zilan	Kurdish	Mother, father, siblings	1991	Nurse	Kurdish cultural association and transnational activism	Finnish/15 years
Pazilaiti	Uyghur	Mother, father, siblings	1998	Secondary school graduation	Party politics and association	Finnish/13 years
Mohamed ²	South Asian	Mother, father, brother	1992	Engineer	Association	Finnish/born in Finland
Brigita	Kosovo Albanian	Mother, father, brother	1992	Secondary school graduation/university student	Party politics and association	Finnish/born in Finland

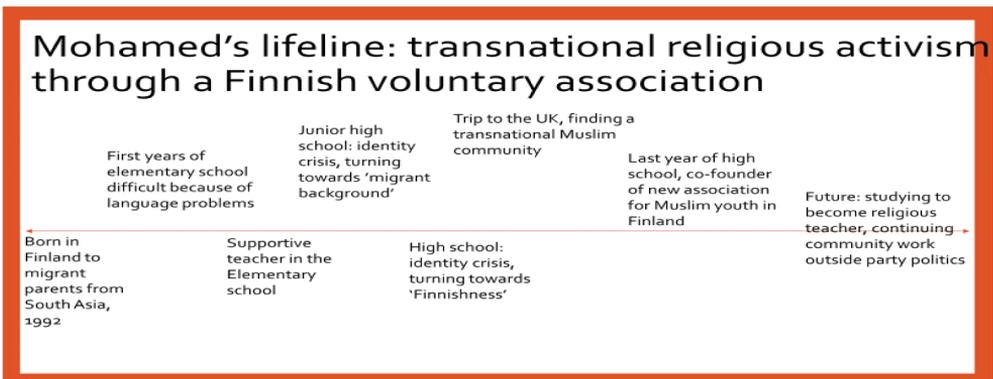
² This participant hoped that his name and other details are changed so that he will not be identified in this article. Other participants wished specifically to be presented in this article by their own names.

important when participants are not only part of a minority but also belong to different age groups relative to the researcher (Matthews 2001; Ní Laoire 2016). In this case, Researcher 1, responsible for the empirical data collection, was aware throughout the data collection and analysis of her privileged position as a white, adult female. In meetings, Researcher 1 encouraged participants to talk openly about their lives and the issues they considered relevant, and she tried to create dialogical conversations rather than fixed interviews. In all communications, Researcher 1 allowed plenty of time for participants to express their views in their own terms.

The first round of meetings was arranged between December 2017 and March 2018 in public cafes or restaurants. The interview method was the life course interview, although in reality, it was more of a discussion than a strict interview. The idea was for participants to tell their life story and talk about their engagements in civic and political scenes. Researcher 1 had a list of themes to guide the discussion, but in practice, the discussions also extended to other topics. In each interview situation, during the discussion, participants drew their 'lifeline', to which they added important events, phases and people in their lives, starting from childhood and ending with their visions of the future (see next section). They were given instructions on how to do this, but they were given time and space to think about their lifeline and mark it in the way they wanted. After they had drawn the lifeline, issues relating to it were discussed in more detail. At the end of each interview, participants were given time to raise any issues they felt were relevant or that they wanted to speak about, and all of the participants did so. Each of the four participants was met face-to-face, and the duration of interviews in the first round was between 90 and 150 minutes. All of the discussions were recorded with the participants' consent, and later the tapes were transcribed. After each meeting, it was agreed that Researcher 1 would contact them again, and that a second meeting/discussion would be agreed on where participant and Researcher 1 would analyse the life story together. After the first meeting, some of the participants sent the researcher additional material relating to their lives and political/civic activities. This additional material included newspaper articles and links to participants' social media posts.

The data analysis included co-analysis with the participants by going through their life story and narratives, which – according to Nind (2011) – is an informal and thus emancipatory way of doing participatory analysis. Data analysis here was based on a slightly informal discussion, with no training or other formalities. Instead of applying complicated participatory techniques, research participants can tell and interpret their own life stories and are arguably the best experts on the topic. This is in line with the idea that the participatory nature of the research lies not in techniques but in the political commitment to see participants both as possessing agency and as having the best knowledge about their own lives and the research issues that relate to them. After the first interview, Researcher 1 wrote a life story for each participant, based on the life course interview and the lifeline they had drawn. The purpose of this life story was to identify the participants' pathways towards political activity and to point out issues across the whole life cycle that had affected their political and civic activism. These stories were genuine repetitions of what each participant had told the researcher. The stories were sent to each participant by email. After the participants had read the story, another meeting or a WhatsApp/telephone conversation was arranged, in which the story was analysed together. The aim was to have a dialogue about the life story that would enable participants to find a thread in their own lives – especially concerning their civic and political activities – and to give sense to the events, people, etc. in their lives (see also Meininger 2006). They could also decide which issues they wanted to highlight and which they did not want to be published in detail. In other words, each life story was constructed together with participants. The duration of the second meeting or WhatsApp/telephone conversation was between 40 and 150 minutes, and similarly to the first discussion, the second round of discussions was recorded and later transcribed.

2.1. Life courses of the four participants



3. Context: migrant youth participation in Finland

In general, youth participation is enshrined in the law in Finland. The purpose of the Youth Act (2017) is to 'promote the social inclusion of young people and provide them with opportunities for exerting an influence and improve their skills and capabilities to function in society'. Moreover, young people's contribution to decision-making at the local level is enhanced by the Local Government Act (2015), which states that every municipality must have a youth council.

Youth political participation in Finland is low compared with that by older generations. According to the Youth Barometer (Myllyniemi 2013), which is based on a survey of 1,903 young people between 15 and 29 years of age, only 7% of respondents had engaged in politics (such as voting, campaigning for candidates or being involved in a youth council), but 31% had sought to influence societal issues that were relevant to their lives in some other way (Myllyniemi 2013: 19). The reasons for the generally low level of youth participation in politics are as follows: young people feel that they lack time for participation, that they have not been encouraged or asked to participate and that there is a lack of meaningful channels through which they might influence politics (Myllyniemi 2013: 23). Young people of migrant origin are even less active in formal political participation than native young people. In the 2017 municipal elections, only 17.9% of migrants in the age group of 18–24 years voted, compared with 35.9% of native Finns of the same age (Statistics Finland 2017). However, in order to gain a full picture of the level of political activity of youth in general, a broader definition of politics should be applied. Young people may not be interested in party politics and institutions, but at the same time, they may be very active regarding their everyday life and interested in societal issues (see for example Lepola & Kokko 2015; Rytioja & Kallio 2018). For the migrant youth, civic participation outside formal political forums is a more common way to participate, although measurement of this kind of informal participation is very difficult (Bhose, Yared & Lepola 2015: 4). Different kinds of migrant youth organisations exist in Finland, and some of them have become rather large, engaging in close collaboration with public officials (Pirkkalainen 2015; Pirkkalainen, Mohamed & Aaltio 2018). Migrant youth in Finland are also active in transnational activism (Toivanen 2014). According to the Youth Barometer (Myllyniemi 2013), there are indications that young people who belong to a minority (e.g. sexual or ethnic) are more active in influencing societal issues than those who do not belong to any minority. In order to gain a full picture of the political activities of young people of migrant origin, this article applies a broad definition of politics. This includes engagement in not only formal party politics but also civic activities, such as participation in associations, protests, social media activism and transnational activism.

Political and civic participation relates to broader issues of participation, as well as to one's general position in society. Ronkainen's (2009) doctoral study administered a survey to 16- to 26-year-old multiple citizenship holders who lived in Finland and had Finnish citizenship ($n=335$) in 2002. His findings indicate that political participation is related to one's level of education, rather than to one's ethnic or linguistic background as such. In Ronkainen's study, young dual citizens living in Finland who studied at high school or university were more interested in societal issues than those who studied at vocational school (Ronkainen 2009: 171). Indeed, low levels of education are an issue for migrant youth: in 2014, around 60% of 20- to 29-year-old foreign language speakers in Helsinki did not have any post-compulsory education (City of Helsinki 2016: 18).

4. Analysis: explaining the formation of political habitus among young people of migrant origin in Finland

4.1. Forming political habitus from a minority position

One of Bourdieu's best-known concepts, habitus refers to 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' which 'generate and organize practices and representations', functioning mostly

in a pre-reflexive manner (Bourdieu 1992: 53). This concept captures the process of early socialisation in which individuals adopt and internalise the practices, institutions, relations, values, norms and attitudes of society (or certain sections of society) into their bodies and their cognitive and emotional schemes. The concept of political habitus is used to explain how individuals acquire and adopt specific political positions, skills and competences (Mihai 2016; Swartz 2013: 106). Political habitus has been defined as 'the dispositions, thoughts and actions that influence the political choices of [an] actor and come to underlie the political ethos that a change-agent uses' (Tejada 2016: 98). All of the young people who participated in this research have a deep inner motivation for political/civic activity, which comes from their own life experience: a feeling about the unjust treatment meted out to the minority to which they feel they belong. They are all of migrant origin and belong to a Muslim minority. Not all of them are religious, nor do they all act on their religious identity, but their Muslim background is significant as a contextual issue. In Finland, Muslim youth in particular are often portrayed as problematic and seen through a security lens, and this further contributes to their marginalised position. This context is the starting point for the civic and political activities of all the participants in this research. In line with Crossley (2003: 56), these youth can be described as having 'radical habitus' as a form of political way of being. Radical habitus refers to a process of transformation in which individuals receive (through consciousness-raising) new reflexive schemes for exploring 'their action, perceptions, thoughts and feelings' and, as a consequence, change their practices partly through self-change.

According to previous research on migrants' political and civic engagement, the length of residence in the host country, knowledge of the host country's language, citizenship and education are necessary factors in migrants' political engagement (see for example Giugni & Morales 2011). All of the participants in our research met these criteria. Every possible channel would therefore be open to them for formal (party) politics as well as for civic activism, which we consider a form of political activity in this article. Although all of the participants have Finnish citizenship, only two – Brigita and Pazilaiti – are engaged in formal politics. Their engagement in Finnish party politics has not been a default option but is something over which both of them have deliberated a great deal. Both of them have had to look for a party that could somehow represent their interests and identities as young women from minority backgrounds. Pazilaiti found a newly formed feminist party that she felt represented racialised women; Brigita found a green party that was somewhat open to her own interest in anti-racism. Both Pazilaiti and Brigita are also involved in civic activities through association(s), and it was the networks they formed in those associations that partly directed them towards the political parties in which they are currently active. Pazilaiti and Brigita combine civic activism and party politics very fluently.

Mohamed and Zilan have considered party politics but have deliberately chosen to remain outside it, as they do not believe it would be the right channel to influence the issues they regard as important. They have decided to engage in civic activities through associations. Research participants' conscious decisions regarding types of political activity in Finland relate not only to their position in Finland but also to transnational issues. Zilan's main political activism revolves around the Kurdish cause and injustices related to the complex political situation of Kurds in Turkey. This has partly contributed to her decision not to engage in party politics because such an engagement might compromise her receipt of support from different political strands in Finland for her transnational cause. Mohamed's political cause and motivation relate to the uneasy and marginal position of Muslim youth in Finland, which led him to become active in the civic field for second-generation Muslim youth. Party politics are of no interest to him, as he thinks that becoming involved in a certain party or ideology limits a person's activities and viewpoints. For Pazilaiti, the main motivation for her political involvement comes from the injustices suffered by her minority group, Uyghurs, in China,

although she cannot engage in politics there because of their oppression by China. Instead, she has engaged in various forms of politics in Finland and is active both in formal politics and in civic forums that stand up for the rights of racialised women in particular. The unjust treatment meted out to refugees in Finland following the 2015 'refugee crisis' led Brigita to act, as she felt this situation strongly and personally because her parents had moved to Finland from Kosovo as Albanian refugees. She currently engages in anti-racist civic activities and is in a leadership position in the Green Youth League.

4.2. Concept of capital

The primary motivation for political and civic activism is derived from minority positions and felt injustices, both in Finland and transnationally, but this does not yet explain how young people of migrant origin are able – in practice – to mobilise in Finland and get their voices and causes heard. Previous research on political and civic involvement of migrant youth has explored the political socialisation of young people, claiming that in the case of second-generation youth, the traditional top-down socialisation model, which claims that parents' political involvement (or non-involvement) explains children's political engagement, does not always apply (Terriquez & Kwon 2015: 428). Keeping this finding in mind, here we aim to take a life course approach to analyse the process of how young people become politically active. We apply the concept of capital in analysing the process through which these young people have formed their political habitus. All of the participants share certain similarities in their backgrounds, even though they or their families come from different regions of the world (see **Table 1**): they all have stable and supportive families behind them; they have all been (well) educated in Finland; and all of them have Finnish citizenship and perfect command of the Finnish language.

Bourdieu describes capital as 'the set of actually usable resources and powers' (Bourdieu 1986a: 32). For Bourdieu, economic, cultural and social forms of capital, which can be possessed in varying quantities and compositions, tend to define the specific positions that individuals or groups occupy in social space or fields. Economic capital means money and ownership. Cultural capital, which many highlight as central to politics (Bourdieu 1986a; Husu 2013; Mihai 2016; Swartz 2013: 9), refers to individuals' cultural resources that can be incorporated (for example: taste; and abstract understanding and thinking), objectified (cultural goods owned by an individual) and institutionalised (such as educational qualifications) (Bourdieu 1986b). Social capital – the important networks that individuals have and of which they can take advantage in order to gain other capital – is central to political participation and social movements (Diani 1997; Morales and Giugni 2011). Access to political institutions and activities in the country of settlement requires broader networks that cross ethnic (and linguistic) lines, referring to bridging social capital (Putnam 2000). Large amounts of various forms of capital help individuals to successfully operate in different fields. For Bourdieu (1986b), one form of capital can be converted into another. Cultural capital (specific know-how, a common language, shared meanings, etc.) can be taken advantage of to create networks of people with similar interests but different backgrounds (i.e. bridging social capital in Putnam's sense); and conversely, social networks created in social movements or civil society provide young adults with new skills, knowledge and competences.

There has been growing interest in emotional capital (Cottingham 2016; Gillies 2006; Nowotny 1981; Reay 2005, 2015), a concept that is based on Bourdieu's theorisation of capital but is not actually found in Bourdieu's work. We suggest that the significant role of this particular form of capital is not fully acknowledged in research on political participation. Emotional capital draws attention to family relations and dynamics of interaction (Allatt

1993; Gillies 2006; Nowotny 1981; Reay 2000), and it is understood as a form of parents' – usually mothers' – emotional investment in their children, designating parents' care, love, attention and devotion to their children (Allatt 1993). In addition, emotional capital should not be seen as restricted to family relations, because peer relations, as well as supportive teachers, coaches, or other significant adults, can influence a child or young adult's acquisition of emotional capital (see for example Holt, Bowlby & Lea 2013).

We argue here that emotional capital can be useful for explaining why certain individuals with disadvantaged social backgrounds, not necessarily having direct example of political involvement from their parents, become politically engaged and motivated. In a similar manner to cultural capital, emotional capital 'treats emotions and their management as skills or habits that translate into social advantages' (Froyum 2010: 39). Emotional capital as emotion-based knowledge, management skill and feeling capacity can be a mediating force, explaining why certain individuals succeed in acquiring various forms of capital in different fields such as their childhood family, day care, school and hobbies (see for example Vuorisalo 2011). From these specific fields, they learn to adopt resources that they can further use, gain the emotional experience of 'the feel of the game' and feel competent to enter politics, believing that they can make a difference. All of the young people who participated in our research possess strong emotional capital, which is visible in their capacity for feeling and emotion-based knowledge; in other words, they all have individual-level strength. This strength is especially articulated in situations where they face serious hardship: their emotional capital has helped them to overcome those hardships. Many of our participants, such as Brigita, Mohamed and Zilan, were bullied at school, and all of them have experienced at least some form of racial discrimination in Finland, but none of them has given in to this kind of hardship. Another level of hardship for some, such as Zilan and Pazilaiti, has been the harsh political situation in their countries of origin and the continuous worry about their relatives' well-being in places where they live under oppression.

4.3. Acquisition of emotional capital

It is interesting to ask where individuals get their strength and emotional capital from. The role of parents, along with their 'emotional investments in their children', is important in the formation of emotional capital (Allatt 1993), as it entails 'the socialization of emotions' (Froyum 2010: 38). All the young people of migrant origin in this research described their relationships with one or both parents as good and close. Zilan was raised by her mother, who is caring and supportive; as a single mother for most of Zilan's life, she has been a strong female role model. Pazilaiti has very caring parents, and her mother has been especially important in supporting her, even if she has not always fully understood her daughter's multiple political and civic engagements. Brigita, similarly, has a very loving and caring family, and both her mother and father always stand behind and support her. Mohamed has close relationships with his parents, and his father has been a particular role model, engaging in community work throughout his life in Finland. These warm family relations, especially during childhood, can also be seen as a subtype of social capital that laid a strong foundation for the young people to form other meaningful social relationships later in their lives. In addition to their family relationships, all of our research participants also had other important relationships during childhood and youth, for example with teachers and peers, which further contributed to their emotional capital (see for example Holt, Bowlby & Lea 2013). Pazilaiti, Mohamed and Brigita had particularly good teachers at school, who supported them and so built their self-confidence, contributing to their emotional capital. Zilan has had relationships with peers and friends who have contributed to her emotional capital.

4.4. Emotional capital converges with cultural and social forms of capital

For all of our research participants, emotional capital has been a mediating mechanism through which they have gained other capitals, such as cultural and social capitals. Here, we explore how emotional capital – i.e. emotion-based knowledge, management skill and capacity for feeling – have helped Pazilaiti, Zilan, Brigita and Mohamed to accumulate other forms of capital. The amount of emotion-based knowledge, management skill and feeling capacity, which individuals are able to acquire from their childhood families and close environment, is related to the question of how capably and competently they learn to draw upon their inherited stock of capital. Brigita and Mohamed were born in Finland to migrant parents. Zilan and Pazilaiti moved to Finland at school age. As all of their parents were migrants, they spoke a language other than Finnish at home, and in all homes, to varying degrees, the families maintained the cultural habits of their country of origin. These young people describe their lives in terms of living for a long time ‘between’ two cultures and languages, and for some, this was a struggle at times during their childhood. Partly because of their strong emotional capital, Pazilaiti, Brigita, Zilan and Mohamed eventually managed to find a balance between cultures, learn two (or more) languages, and take in aspects from both cultures; in other words, they gained rich cultural capital.

All the young people who participated in this research are very capable and skilful in using their cultural capital in different contexts, with different people in different networks. They have all managed to build wide and strong networks, in Finland and abroad. Level of education is also important here and might help to explain their political participation (see also Pilati 2017; Ronkainen 2009). All of the participants have post-compulsory education and are currently either studying or preparing for entry exams or else are in work. After working for many years as a practical nurse (in Finnish *lähihoitaja*), Zilan is continuing her studies to become a qualified nurse (in Finnish *sairaanhoitaja*). Mohamed has a full-time job in the information technology (IT) sector. Pazilaiti recently graduated from high school and is now preparing for law school entry exams. Brigita is studying political science at the university level.

These young people’s access to different kinds of networks – in other words, the rich bridging kind of social capital (Putnam 2000) they possess – is one key point in the formation of their political habitus. These young people have all found in Finland different networks that have ‘channelled’ their motivation and causes into concrete political and/or civic action. Zilan is engaged in various political lobbying activities through the Kurdish cultural association in Finland, in which she has been active since her teenage years. In addition to this association, she also has wide networks with native Finns, bringing the Kurdish cause onto the human rights agenda in Finland. Pazilaiti started her multiple activities in school politics and went on to join the Union of Upper Secondary School Students, the Ruuti committee, the anarchist ‘A group’ and finally decided to join party politics by joining a newly established feminist party. Mohamed had wide networks among different Muslim communities, mosques and young peers, with whom he has established a Muslim youth organisation. Brigita started her political activities with Amnesty International, after which she engaged with the Green Youth League in Finland. They all describe the political/civic networks in which they are currently engaged as important communities where they feel ‘at home’.

In addition to networks in Finland, all of the young people of migrant origin in this research also possess transnational connections. Zilan, with her Kurdish activism, is a part of wide networks based in Kurdistan, in Turkey and Syria in particular, and all over Europe. Mohamed has networks with the Muslim community in the UK, which has influenced his activism for second-generation Muslim youth in Finland. Both Pazilaiti and Brigita are deeply concerned

about their 'own' minorities and human rights in their countries of origin, but at the moment, it is not possible to work directly for those causes. In addition to links with their 'home country', both of them are also part of transnational groups of other young people of migrant origin, who have influenced their thinking and political orientation in Finland.

5. Conclusions

We argue that to fully understand the multiple engagements, the 'true' motivations and the issues that influence the political habitus of young people of migrant origin, participatory methods that include life course interviews are most useful, as they enable an analysis that goes behind the statistics and general perceptions of migrant youth as marginalised, inactive and excluded.

As a result of our life course interviews and participatory data analysis, it is possible to grasp a wide variety of issues that have influenced the formation of political habitus across a life course. Emotional capital is important in the formation of political habitus, and the role of childhood family and experiences in the accumulation of emotional capital has been investigated here. We conclude that emotional capital lays a foundation for individuals to better accumulate the other forms of capital that are needed for political and civic engagement, namely cultural and social capitals. The possession of strong emotional capital can also explain the process by which youth who were raised and who lived between two cultures and languages struggle with them at times but eventually find a balance between the two. This strong possession of cultural capital has in turn helped the young people to form different networks with different circles of people: in Finland, with native Finns and other people of migrant origin; and transnationally, not only with people of their own ethnic origin, but more widely on the basis of general ideologies regarding human rights, religion, and gender and racial equality. Related to this, we conclude that in order to fully understand the political and civic participation of young people of migrant origin in Finland, a transnational lens is needed, which can reveal young people's multiple engagements and motivations to become politically active for different causes. These causes and motivations relate not only to their marginal position in Finland but also to their transnational links with their (parents') countries of origin and other networks based on more universal values and ideas, such as religion, feminism and human rights. Transnational connections provide young people with social capital, which – by empowering them – can strengthen their position, belonging and participation in Finland.

The theoretical conclusions of this article are twofold. First, our aim was to contribute to the wide literature on migrants' political participation with a micro-level view of how bridging social capital is formed during the life courses of young people of migrant origin. We argue that bridging social capital – i.e. wide networks with people of different origins – builds on other forms of capital, such as emotional and cultural capitals. Second, and related to the Bourdieusian framework, our aim was to highlight the importance of emotional capital in the formation of political habitus. Consequently, we argue that understanding emotions as resources that are unequally distributed among individuals can explain why even individuals in similarly marginalised societal positions can perceive and understand the available opportunities in different ways, which in turn generates different practices and leads to different outcomes in their life courses. This is an important supplement to Bourdieu's work, which has often been accused of determinism.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

References

- Allatt, P.** 1993. Becoming privileged: the role of family processes. In: Bates, I and Riseborough, G (eds.), *Youth and Inequality*. Buckingham: Open University Press. pp. 139–159.
- Bhose, K, Yared, M and Lepola, O.** 2015. *Active citizenship: enhancing political participation of migrant youth*. Helsinki: International Organization for Migration.
- Bloemraad, I.** 2006. Becoming a citizen in the United States and Canada: structured mobilization and immigrant political incorporation. *Social Forces*, 85: 667–695. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2007.0002>
- Bloemraad, I, Sarabia, H and Fillingim, AE.** 2016. 'Staying out of trouble' and doing what is 'right': citizenship acts, citizenship ideals, and the effects of legal status on second-generation youth. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 60(13): 1534–1552. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216664941>
- Bourdieu, P.** 1986a. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P.** 1986b. Forms of capital. In: Richardson, JF (ed.), *The handbook of theory research for sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press. pp. 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P.** 1992. *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Breitbart, M.** 2003. Participatory research. In: Clifford, N and Valentine, G (eds.), *Key methods in geography*. London: Sage. pp. 161–178.
- Cahill, C.** 2007. Doing research with young people: participatory research and the rituals of collective work. *Children's Geographies*, 5(3): 297–312. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280701445895>
- City of Helsinki.** 2016. Population with foreign background in Helsinki 2016, City of Helsinki, Urban Facts. Available from: https://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/17_01_16_Tilastoja_2_Hiekkavuo.pdf [Last accessed 10.8.2018].
- Cooke, B and Kothari, U.** (eds.). 2001. *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
- Cottingham, MD.** 2016. Theorizing emotional capital. *Theory and Society*, 45(5): 451–470. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-016-9278-7>
- Crossley, N.** 2003. From reproduction to transformation: social movement fields and radical habitus. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 20(6): 43–68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276403206003>
- Diani, M.** 1997. Social movements and social capital: a network perspective on movement outcome. *Mobilisation*, 2(2): 129–147.
- Fennema, M and Tillie, J.** 1999. Political participation and political trust in Amsterdam. Civic communities and ethnic networks. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 25: 703–726. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.1999.9976711>
- Fennema, M and Tillie, J.** 2001. Civic communities, political participation and political trust of ethnic groups. *Connections*, 24: 26–41. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-85129-1_9
- Froyum, CM.** 2010. The reproduction of inequalities through emotional capital: the case of socializing low-income black girls. *Qualitative Sociology*, 33(1): 37–54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-009-9141-5>
- Gillies, V.** 2006. Working class mothers and school life: exploring the role of emotional capital. *Gender and Education*, 18(3): 281–293. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250600667876>
- Giugni, M and Morales, L.** 2011. Conclusion: towards an integrated approach to the political inclusion of migrants. In: Morales, L and Giugni, M (eds.), *Social capital, political participation and migration in Europe: making multicultural democracy work?* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 262–274. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230302464_12

- Heath, AF, Fisher, SD, Rosenblatt, G, Sanders, D and Sobolewska, M.** 2013. *The political integration of ethnic minorities in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199656639.001.0001>
- Holt, L, Bowlby, S and Lea, J.** 2013. Emotions and the habitus: young people with socioemotional differences (re)producing social, emotional and cultural capital in family and leisure spacetimes. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 9(1): 33–41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2013.02.002>
- Husu, H-M.** 2013. Bourdieu and social movements: considering identity movements in terms of field, capital and habitus. *Social Movement Studies*, 12(3): 264–279. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.704174>
- Jacobs, D and Tillie, J.** 2004. Introduction: social capital and political integration of migrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30: 419–427. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830410001682016>
- Kesby, M.** 2005. Re-theorising empowerment-through-participation as a performance in space: beyond tyranny to transformation. *Signs: Journal of Feminist Theory*, 30(4): 2037–2065. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/428422>
- Kesby, M, Kindon, S and Pain, R.** 2005. Participatory approaches and diagramming techniques. In: Flowerdew, R and Martin, D (eds.), *Methods in human geography: a guide for students doing a research project*. London: Longman. pp. 144–166.
- Kim, Y and Amnå, E.** 2015. Civic engagement among migrant youths in Sweden: do parental norms of immigration generation matter? In: Barrett, M and Zani, B (eds.), *Political and civic engagement: multidisciplinary perspectives*. London: Routledge. pp. 248–267.
- Kothari, U.** 2001. Power, knowledge and social control in participatory development. In: Cooke, B and Kothari, U (eds.), *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books. pp. 139–152.
- Lepola, O and Kokko, V.** 2015. *Nuoret poliittisina toimijoina – äänestäminen ei riitä, näkökulma*, Nuorisotutkimusseura, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, no 5. Available from: http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/images/tiedostot/nakokulma05_nuoret_poliittisina_toimijoina.pdf [Last accessed 8.8.2018].
- Local Government Act.** 2015. Available from: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2015/en20150410.pdf> [Last accessed 10.2.2020].
- Mansouri, F and Mikola, M.** 2014. Crossing boundaries: acts of citizenship among migrant youth in Melbourne. *Social Inclusion*, 2(2): 28–37. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v2i2.164>
- Matthews, H.** 2001. Power games and moral territories: ethical dilemmas when working with children and young people. *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 4(2): 117–178. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668790124050>
- Meininger, HP.** 2006. Narrating, writing, reading: life story work as an aid to (self) advocacy. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 34(3): 181–188. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3156.2006.00416.x>
- Mezzetti, P.** 2008. *Migrants political and social participation: associative networks and dynamics of mobilization in a local context*. Milano: Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca.
- Mihai, M.** 2016. Theorizing change: between reflective judgment and the inertia of political habitus. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 15(1): 22–44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885114537634>
- Mohan, G.** 2001. Beyond participation: strategies for deeper empowerment. In: Cooke, B and Kothari, U (eds.), *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books. pp.153–167.
- Morales, L.** 2009. *Joining political organisations. Institutions, mobilisation and participation in Western democracies*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

- Morales, L and Giugni, M.** (eds.) 2011. *Social capital, political participation and migration in Europe: making multicultural democracy work?* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morales, L and Pilati, K.** 2011. The role of social capital in migrants engagement in local politics in European cities. In: Morales, L and Giugni, M (eds.), *Social capital, political participation and migration in Europe: making multicultural democracy work?* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 87–114. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230302464_5
- Myllyniemi, S.** 2013. *Vaikuttava osa: Nuorisobarometri 2013.* Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, Nuorisosaian neuvottelukunta. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto.
- Ní Laoire, C.** 2016. Making space for ambiguity: the value of multiple and participatory methods in researching diasporic youth identities. *Identities*, 23(4): 470–484. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2015.1024124>
- Nind, M.** 2011. Participatory data analysis: a step too far. *Qualitative Research*, 11(4): 349–363. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111404310>
- Noack, P and Jugert, P.** 2015. Participation and engagement of young people in Germany: findings on adolescents and young adults of German and Turkish family background. In: Barrett, M and Zani, B (eds.), *Political and civic engagement: multidisciplinary perspectives.* London: Routledge. pp. 232–247.
- Nowotny, H.** 1981. Women in public life in Austria. In: Epstein, CF and Coser, RL (eds.), *Access to power: cross national studies of women and elites.* London: Sage. pp. 147–156. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429423819-9>
- Pain, R.** 2004. Social geography: participatory research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(5): 1–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132504ph511pr>
- Pilati, K.** 2017. Gaps in protest activities between natives and individuals of migrant origin in Europe. *Acta Sociologica*, 61(2): 105–125. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699317710704>
- Pirkkalainen, P.** 2013. *Transnational responsibilities and multi-sited strategies: voluntary associations of Somali diaspora in Finland.* Jyväskylä Studies in Education. Jyväskylä: Psychology and Social Research.
- Pirkkalainen, P.** 2015. Maahanmuuttajajärjestöt kolmannen sektorin muutoksessa: vertaistuesta ja vapaaehtoisuudesta viranomaisyhteistyöhön. *Kansalaisyhteiskunta*, 6(1): 51–73.
- Pirkkalainen, P, Mohamed, A and Aaltio, I.** 2018. Third sector hybridization and migrant integration: cases of two migrant youth organizations in Finland. *Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organizational Studies*, 23(2): 24–33.
- Putnam, RD.** 2000. *Bowling alone. The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon and Schuster. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>
- Quintelier, E.** 2009. The political participation of immigrant youth in Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(6): 919–937. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830902957700>
- Ramakrishnan, SK and Bloemraad, I.** 2008. *Civic hopes and political realities. Immigrants, community organizations, and political engagement.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Reay, D.** 2000. A useful extension of Bourdieu's conceptual framework? Emotional capital as a way of understanding mothers' involvement in their children's education. *Sociological Review*, 48(4): 568–585. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.00233>
- Reay, D.** 2005. Beyond consciousness: the psychic landscape of social class. *Sociology*, 39(5): 911–928. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505058372>
- Reay, D.** 2015. Habitus and the psychosocial: Bourdieu with feelings. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(1–2): 9–23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.990420>

- Ronkainen, J.** 2009. *Väliiviivakansalaiset: Monikansalaisuus asemana ja käytäntönä*. Joensuu yliopisto. Joensuu: yhteiskunta- ja aluetieteiden tiedekunta.
- Rumbaut, R.** 2004. Ages, life stages, and generational cohorts: decomposing the immigrant first and second generations in the United States. *International Migration Review*, 38(3): 1160–1205. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00232.x>
- Rytioja, A** and **Kallio, KP.** 2018. Opittua käsitteistöä vai koettua yhteiskunnallisuutta? Pohdintoja kansalaisuudesta lasten ja nuorten näkökulmasta. *Sosiologia*, 55(1): 6–27.
- Statistics Finland.** 2017. *Ehdokkaiden ja valittujen tausta-analyysi, äänestäneet kuntavaaleissa 2017*. Helsinki: Tilastokeskus. Available from: http://www.stat.fi/til/kvaa/2017/05/kvaa_2017_05_2017-05-05_kat_001_fi.html [Last accessed 1.6.2018].
- Swartz, D.** 2013. *Symbolic power, politics and intellectuals: the political sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226925028.001.0001>
- Tejada, K.** 2016. Activist and philanthropists: understanding the political habitus of Salvadorans in the D.C. metro area. *Interface*, 8(1): 97–116.
- Terriquez, V** and **Kwon, H.** 2015. Intergenerational family relations, civic organisations, and the political socialisation of second-generation immigrant youth. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(3): 425–447. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.921567>
- Tiilikainen, M.** 2003. *Arjen Islam: Somalinaisten elämää Suomessa*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Toivanen, M.** 2014. *Negotiating home and belonging. Young Kurds in Finland*. Ph.D. thesis, Turun yliopiston julkaisuja, Turku, Sarja B, osa 389.
- Torre, ME** and **Fine, M.** 2006. Participatory action research (PAR) by youth. In: Sherrod, L (ed.), *Youth activism: an international encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. pp. 456–462.
- Vierimaa, S-M.** 2017. Transnational political activities of the Swedish Finn youth organization. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 7(1): 12–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/njmr-2017-0005>
- Vuorisalo, M.** 2011. Children's resources in action: the conversion of capital in the pre-school field. In: Alanen, L and Siisiäinen, M (eds.), *Fields and capital: constructing local life*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä. pp. 29–61.
- Youth Act.** 2017. Available from: <https://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/4276311/Youth+Act+2017/c9416321-15d7-4a32-b29a-314ce961bf06/Youth+Act+2017.pdf> [Last accessed 10.2.2020].

How to cite this article: Pirkkalainen, P and Husu, H-M. 2020. Becoming Politically Active: Life Courses and the Formation of Capitals Among Young People of Migrant Origin in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(3), pp. 41–55. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.249>

Submitted: 11 April 2020

Accepted: 11 April 2020

Published: 27 August 2020

Copyright: © 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.