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Education for Social Sustainability

Meaning Making of Belonging in Diverse Early Childhood Settings

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Summary

This study examines how early childhood education for social sustainability can be understood through children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging in kindergarten. 'Belonging' is conceptualised as relationally negotiated and practised, as well as an individual experiential state, and the study's epistemological and ontological premise is situated within social constructionism and cultural-historical theory. The data material consists of a literature review, and of participatory observations, field notes, photos, and video recordings from field works conducted in two urban multicultural kindergartens.

The study's findings reveal that as early childhood research on social sustainability has conceptualised children as citizens, problem-solvers, and agents of change, the situations for children with migrant background's appear as to be invisible in such a context. Further, the study disclose that even among two-year-old children in diverse early childhood settings, the negotiations of membership and being part are highly influenced by features in the peer culture, symbol systems and hierarchies. Another finding illustrates that semi-institutional environments such as local and global networks outside of the traditional institutions, home and kindergarten, can provide conditions for children's meaning making of belonging through the use of places and artefacts within the kindergarten. The study put forward that as the premises for socially sustainable societies' being shaped in early childhood, early childhood education for sustainability should move beyond the narrative of children as agents of change and solvers of problems made by adult generations. The study argues the necessity to take into consideration that future heterogeneous societies demand new understandings of how different ways of meaning making of belonging are ongoing in children's diverse communities already from their early years on, in order to safeguard inclusive kindergarten practices for sustainable societies to come.

Sammendrag

Denne studien undersøker hvordan utdanning for bærekraftig utvikling kan forstås gjennom barn med migrantbakgrunns meningsskaping av tilhørighet i barnehagen. Begrepet 'tilhørighet' er konseptualisert både som relasjonelt forhandlet og praktisert, så vel som en individuell opplevelsestilstand. Studiens epistemologiske og ontologiske premiss ligger innenfor sosial konstruksjonisme og kulturhistorisk teori. Datamaterialet består av en litteraturstudie, og av deltakende observasjoner, feltnotater, bilder og videoopptak fra feltarbeid i to urbane flerkulturelle barnehager. Studiens funn avdekker at ettersom forskning på bærekraftig utvikling i barnehage i stor grad har konseptualisert barn som medborgere, problemløsere og endringsagenter, synes situasjonen for barn med migrantbakgrunn å være neglisjert i en slik sammenheng. Videre viser studien at allerede blant to-åringer er forhandlingene om medlemskap og det å være en del av et fellesskap sterkt påvirket av trekk i jevnalderkulturen, symbolsystemer og hierarkier. Et annet funn illustrerer at semi-institusjonelle miljøer som lokale og globale nettverk utenfor hjem og barnehage, kan skape forutsetninger for barns meningsskaping av tilhørighet gjennom bruk av steder og artefakter i barnehagen. Studien fremhever at ettersom premissene for sosialt bærekraftige samfunn formes allerede i tidlig barndom, bør utdanning for bærekraftig utvikling i barnehage bevege seg utover narrativet om barn som endringsagenter og problemløsere. Studien argumenterer for at fremtidens heterogene og mangfoldige samfunn krever en ny forståelse for de ulike former for meningsskaping av tilhørighet som pågår i barns fellesskap allerede fra tidlig barndom av, for å sikre inkluderende barnehagepraksiser og bærekraftige samfunn.

List of publications

The thesis is based upon the following original publications:

Boldermo, S. & Ødegaard E. E. (2019) What about the migrant children? The state-of-the-art in research claiming social sustainability. *Sustainability* 2019, *11*(2), 459.

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Part 1: Extended Abstract

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Agenda and Background

This thesis develops new knowledge on early childhood education for social sustainability and children with migrant backgrounds'[1] meaning making of belonging in kindergarten. The UN convention on the Rights of the Child advocate every child's right to social security and to have his or her social needs met (UNICEF, 1989). Through the lens of education for social sustainability, the thesis explores children with migrant background's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten and proposes implications for the development of socially sustainable practices.

Over the last decades, the diversity in the European population has increased as a result of migration between countries and continents, from people seeking work or studies, or from people seeking protection from warfare and conflicts. The International Organization for Migration stated that over 82 million international migrants lived in Europe in 2019, which was an increase of nearly 10% since 2015 (*World Migration Report 2020*, 2019). According to The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2020), 672,935 new asylum seekers, 202,945 of which were children, were recorded in 12 European countries in 2019.

Norway's population is 14.7% immigrants from countries including Poland, Lithuania, Somalia, Sweden, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Germany, and the Philippines. Among children and youth under 18 years old in Norway, 75,500 are immigrants while 139,300 are Norwegian-born with immigrant parents. By the beginning of 2020, 25,400 more immigrants were registered than in 2019 (Statistics Norway, 2020).

These are societal features that may be reinforced in the future as climate change expectedly will generate the frequency of natural disasters, amplify existing risks, and create

[1] The use of the term 'children with migrant backgrounds' in this thesis refers to children with one or two parents that have moved to Norway from a country outside of the Nordic region. The Nordic region comprises Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, and also the three autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. I will use this term throughout the thesis except when referring to articles, white papers, and other sources that use another term, such as, e.g., 'migrant children'.

new risks for natural and human systems (IPCC, 2014). Atmosphere and oceans are warming, sea levels are rising, permafrost is thawing at higher latitudes, landslides and floods are occurring more frequently, and humans as well as animals, fish, and plants, are on the move. Thus, there is a need to expand the work on 'sustainability' in order to consider how communities, countries, and humanity can adapt to the coming challenges (Bendell, 2018; IPCC, 2014; Prytz, 2018). According to a 5th[2] synthesis report on climate change by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014, pp. 96–98), there is a high risk that people living in areas that are especially exposed to consequences of extreme weather conditions due to climate change will have to adapt to these changes (among others) through migration from the exposed areas. In addition to this, there is a robust link between climate change, uprising and conflict, and forced migration. Climate change can enhance the risk of war and hunger and contribute to the destabilisation of political, social, and economic conditions, which may act as reinforcing factors for human migration (Abel, Brottrager, Crespo Cuaresma, & Muttarak, 2019; Prytz, 2018; Wilkinson, Schipper, Simonet, & Kubik, 2016). The futures of young children are at the greatest stake of facing the consequences of climate change (Siraj-Blatchford, 2011); thus, the importance of early childhood education has been firmly established by the UN report *Shaping the Future We Want: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development; final report* (UNESCO, 2014). Early childhood researchers Eva Ärlemalm-Hagsèr and Sue Elliott (2020) stated that the present era of uncertainty and rapid change, resulting in environmental, economic, and social challenges, will impact the lives of children and youth around the globe.

Through signing the UN Human Rights Charter and the UN Refugee Convention, Norway is obliged to process applications from asylum seekers arriving at Norwegian borders (Prytz, 2018). Secondary effects of climate change, such as war and political instability, could have consequences that fall under these international obligations. Countries like Iraq, Vietnam, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Somalia, which are particularly vulnerable to climate change, have historical cultural ties to Norway through previous immigration. As a consequence, Norway may have a special responsibility towards immigrants from these countries, particularly because family reunification may be relevant as a result of pre-existing

[2] The IPCC's 6th synthesis report on climate change is expected to be released in 2022. Meanwhile, the IPCC has produced special reports on specific topics such as, e.g., global warming, ocean and cryosphere, etc., which will not be referred to in this study.

family relationships (Prytz, 2018). Thus, depending on a number of political and social factors, the Norwegian consequences of climate change can imply a growing socio-economic and sociocultural diversity in the population due to increased migration. These are phenomena of great social and cultural significance that will affect society on all levels: phenomena with the potential for social exclusion and boundaries due to issues of language, citizenship, social networks, and value conflicts, among others (Bass, 2018). Even if Norway and the Nordic societies are considered among the most equal in the world (Johansson, Emilson, & Puroila, 2018), the diversity in social and cultural backgrounds in early childhood education represented by educators, parents, and children entails that a variety of values, perceptions, and conceptualisations of belonging, inclusion, and exclusion are communicated in the children's everyday lives in kindergarten (Johansson et al., 2018). In the last 10 years, there have been almost twice as many children in Norwegian kindergartens defined as 'minority linguists',[3] 52,300 in 2019, which is an increase of 2.7% from 2018. By 2020, 19% of children in Norwegian kindergartens were defined as 'minority linguists' (*The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training*, 2020).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) stated that childhood is entitled to special care, and that children, in particular, should be protected and brought up in the spirit of tolerance, freedom, equity, and solidarity. Taking into consideration that the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *Transforming our World* (UN, 2015), has identified migrant and refugee children as vulnerable to the threats and challenges due to climate change in the double sense, being both children and migrants, issues of social sustainability such as children with migrant backgrounds' belonging and well-being should be highly topical on today's early childhood education agenda and in the national sustainability debate. In the next section, the situation concerning education for sustainability and issues of social sustainability in early childhood education in general and in Norway, in particular, is being outlined.

[3] The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training uses the term 'minority linguists' to define children with a different language and cultural background than Norwegian, with the exception of children who have Norwegian, Sami, Swedish, Danish, or English as their mother tongue. Both parents of the child must have a mother tongue other than Norwegian, Sami, English, Swedish, or Danish. As this thesis is studying children's conditions for meaning making, not their language in particular, this definition is not used further in the thesis.

1.2. The Context: Early Childhood Education for Sustainability

The thesis' first article is a literature review on topics and issues that correspond with the content in this chapter. Thus, this chapter is abbreviated to avoid unnecessary repetitions. See article I: Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019): *What About the Migrant Children? The State-of-the-Art in Research Claiming Social Sustainability*.

The 'Education for Sustainability' is aimed at influencing people's thinking and acting, and thereby, contributing to sustainable decisions being taken (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). The UN report *Our Common Future*[4] (Brundtland, 1987) was the first report on sustainable development. In the broadest sense, sustainable development is understood as a form of development where the current generation's needs are addressed without compromising the needs of future generations (Brundtland, 1987). During the three decades that have passed since the Brundtland Report, the global attention towards issues of climate change and its consequences has increased until being today's ubiquitous topic of tension and debate nationally and internationally. By the millennium, the UN member states adopted eight Millennium Development Goals to fight world poverty by 2015. These goals were considered as successful, and the UN member states adopted 17 common global goals for sustainability for the next 15 years, until 2030 (UN, 2015).

In 1992, the Agenda 21 chapter 36 (UN, 1993) identified that reorienting education towards sustainable development was a critical factor in the process of promoting sustainable development and improving people's capacity to address environmental and developmental issues. The first United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainability (UNESCO, 2014), established in 2005, aimed to support the creation of a more sustainable future through the mobilisation of educational resources. In 2008, the UNESCO report *The Contribution of Early Childhood to a Sustainable Society* edited by Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson and Yoshie Kaga (2008), emphasised the early childhood education as the foundation by which values, attitudes, behaviours, and skills for sustainability was made. The next year, a review on the research on environmental education and early childhood education conducted by Australian researcher Julie Davis (Davis, 2009) revealed a double 'gap' in the research literature,

[4] The UN report *Our Common Future* was prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development under the leadership of Norwegian politician and former prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report is also often referred to as 'the Brundtland Report'.

namely, that researchers in the field of early childhood education did not investigate topics related to sustainability, and researchers in the field of education for sustainability did not include the early childhood education in their research projects. In 2010, the European Panel for Sustainable Development published their fourth report, titled *Taking Children Seriously – How the EU Can Invest in Early Childhood Education for a Sustainable Future* (EPSD 2010; Siraj-Blatchford, 2011). The report stated that children are the ones at the greatest stake as citizens in a future of change, stating that young children have a right and a shared responsibility in achieving a sustainable future.

The United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainability contributed to an elaboration of four dimensions within sustainability: the natural environment, the social dimension, the economic dimension, and the political dimension. Traditionally, sustainability education has been situated within ecological, sociocultural, and economic 'pillars' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), and such an understanding has been subject for interpretation, critical examination, and discussion (Franck & Osbeck, 2017). A holistic perspective has been argued as necessary in order to acknowledge the integration of the environmental, economic, and sociocultural aspects within early childhood education for sustainability (Hedefalk, Almqvist, & Östman, 2015; Pramling Samuelsson & Park, 2017). Such a perspective should support children as competent actors being able to think and act critically (Hedefalk et al., 2015), safeguard their feeling of being at home in nature, and draw attention to values based on agency, diversity, democracy, and citizenship (Pramling Samuelsson & Park, 2017).

Parallel to and in the aftermath of Davis' pioneering review, several researchers have advocated that as a foundation for an understanding of sustainability is shaped already in childhood, education for sustainability should be emphasised in early childhood education (Davis & Elliott, 2014; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). The final report from the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainability, titled *Shaping the Future We Want: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development; final report* (UNESCO, 2014) contended that even if there was a growing movement of researchers around the world whose attention were drawn towards improving the knowledge base on education for sustainability in early childhood, this field of research was still under-researched and under-evaluated.

Since this last UN report, the focus on and interest in the early childhood education as a field of research and development on sustainability issues have increased, and several

additional literature reviews have been conducted, answering the call from Davis' (2009) review (Bascopé, Perasso, & Reiss, 2019; Hedefalk et al., 2015; Somerville & Williams, 2015). The research on education for sustainability in early childhood is now covering a whole range of topics, from children's nature play and outdoor-based activities (Haas & Ashman, 2014), food security and gardening (Reis & Ferreira, 2015), and relations between the human and the 'more-than-human' (Sjögren, Gyberg, & Henriksson, 2015; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Weldemariam, 2017) to research projects with student teachers (Hirst, 2019; Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2017) and pedagogical approaches to teaching children on environmental issues (Iskos & Karakosta, 2015; Liefländer, Fröhlich, Bogner, & Schultz, 2013). Sociocultural issues like equity and social justice have been further elaborated (Hammond, Hesterman, & Knaus, 2015), as have children's opportunities to engage in and disturb established ways of thinking (Grindheim et al., 2019) and children's experiences as local and global citizens (Twigg, Pendergast, & Twigg, 2015) and eco-citizens (Heggen et al., 2019). In addition, the concept of early childhood education for sustainability as part of a citizenship education has been suggested (Bascopé et al., 2019).

The use of the terms 'environmental education', 'education for sustainable development', and 'education for sustainability' are often used interchangeably. The terms have been debated in various ways, and the tensions between the use of the terms have been addressed by several researchers in the field (Jickling, 1992; Sageidet, 2014; Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Sundberg, 2016).[5] The concept of 'sustainable development' is regarded as logically inconsistent (Jickling, 1992) and as a political controversy due to its relation to liberal market economics and economic growth (Sageidet, 2014). As stated in the thesis' first article, I do not take a stand in this debate; however, I prefer to use the term 'education for sustainability'. By this, I agree with Swedish researchers Ärlemalm-Hagsèr and Bodil Sundberg (2016) that the term 'education for sustainability' to a larger extent than 'education for sustainable development' supports and answers to a holistic perspective that acknowledges humanity's dependence on nature. I will use the term 'education for sustainable development', though, when referring to or quoting authors, researchers, policy documents, curricula, and white papers where this term is used.

[5] The context and history of the terms and concepts regarding education for sustainability have been outlined in article I.

1.2.1. Early childhood education for sustainability in Norway

In the Norwegian context, as well as internationally, the education for sustainability in early childhood has historically been closely related to the environmental dimension at the expense of social and cultural aspects of sustainability (Eriksen, 2013; Hedefalk et al., 2015; Hägglund & Johansson, 2014). In Scandinavia, spending time in the forest and learning to appreciate nature are important parts of the national culture and tradition of using the outdoor areas as a resource for working with issues of sustainability (Heggen et al., 2019; Pramling Samuelsson & Park, 2017). In Norway especially, the Arne Næss deep ecology philosophy has played an important role (Sageidet, 2014, 2016). Arne Næss argued that the rescue of sustainable development depended on human beings' consciousness of their position as a small part of a greater diversity, and thus, their understanding of the dependency between humanity and the environment (Hausstätter & Sarromaa, 2009).

Being the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training has the responsibility for the early childhood education; the kindergartens[6], as well as the primary and secondary school, upper secondary education, and also the higher education sectors. The Norwegian 2012 Revised Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development: Knowledge for a Common Future 2012–2015, (*Kunnskap for en felles framtid. Revidert strategi for utdanning for bærekraftig utvikling 2012–2015*, 2012), emphasised early childhood education as an important arena for education for sustainable development. Such education should help strengthen the children's ability to critically reflect and increase awareness and provide for the development of necessary skills for sustainable development, as well as new methods and tools.

The Norwegian kindergartens are obliged to provide children under the compulsory school age at six with good opportunities for development and activity in a close understanding and collaboration with the children's homes. The Norwegian curriculum document for kindergartens was revised in 2017 (*Framework Plan for Kindergartens:*

[6] The term 'kindergarten', is in Norway directly translated to 'barnehage', which is the official Norwegian term. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, nine out of ten children aged one to five years old, attend kindergarten. By 2019, 275.804 children in Norway attended kindergarten; 92.2 % of all children aged 1-5, 84.4% of all children aged 1-2 (Statistics Norway, 2020).

Content and Tasks, 2017). The working group (Ødegaard et al., 2014) that was mandated by the Ministry of Education to research and develop a draft for the revision outlined several perspectives of particular importance: to clarify the Kindergarten Act, to strengthen the child's position and his or her conditions for a good childhood in kindergarten, to foreground the kindergarten teacher's knowledge-based practice, and to support the practical reality in the kindergartens. The working group proposed a holistic pedagogical model that highlighted the role of the teacher and expressed confidence in the judgement and choices made by the teachers and assistants, rather than supporting instrumental guidelines. Children's meaning making of important issues such as citizenship, democracy, agency, and belonging was emphasised. In addition, aspects of education for sustainability such as equity and solidarity were foregrounded. Further, the working group argued that the revised version of the framework plan should, to a greater extent than the previous one, clarify the importance of values, attitudes, and practices that promoted pedagogy for future sustainable communities (Ødegaard et al., 2014).

The final 2017 curriculum document outlined a holistic approach to children's development and stated core values such as respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of thought, compassion, forgiveness, equity, and solidarity. Further, the curriculum highlighted the kindergarten's obligation to safeguard children's need for care, security, belongingness, and respect and to promote values such as democracy, diversity, and sustainable development. These are values that coincide with education for sustainable development in the 21st century as described in *The Bonn Declaration* by values such as justice, equity, tolerance, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2009). A similar correspondence between the previous 2011 curriculum document and *The Bonn Declaration* was identified by Kristin Eriksen in 2013. Eriksen (2013, p. 109) stated that the Norwegian early childhood education's holistic process of development and learning, outlined in the 2011 curriculum document for kindergartens, corresponded with the holistic values and competencies within education for sustainability as described by *The Bonn Declaration* (UNESCO, 2009). The new 2017 Norwegian curriculum document thus maintained the holistic process of development as the previous and also strengthened the emphasis on sustainability issues.

The Norwegian white paper 6 (2019–2020) *Early Start and Inclusive Communities in Kindergarten and School and After School activity* [7] foregrounded inclusive education for all as important to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of eradicating poverty, preventing inequalities, and stopping climate change. Stating diversity in kindergarten as an enrichment, the white paper used the term 'minority linguists' and emphasised the development of inclusive communities in kindergartens as a foundation for the safeguarding of diversity and the development of democracy. Although the white paper 6 characterised diversity as a resource, children with migrant backgrounds were not explicitly mentioned in such a context. On the other hand, children with migrant backgrounds were referred to in the context of challenges and issues due to language barriers and the need for facilitation (Ministry of Education, 2019–2020. White paper 6. 2019–2020 *Tett på – tidlig innsats og inkluderende fellesskap i barnehage, skole og SFO*).

To conclude this section concerning early childhood education for sustainability in Norway, it is appropriate to refer to the new Norwegian international research centre on early childhood education that was established at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in 2018 and by which my study is associated: the *KINDknow – Kindergarten Knowledge Centre for Systemic Research on Diversity and Sustainable Futures.* On the basis that sustainability is a recognised, global core value, and also included in the Norwegian curriculum for kindergartens, the KINDknow centre stated that it is an aim towards developing systemic understandings and knowledge about Education for Diversity and Education for Sustainable Futures in kindergartens. The values of sustainable futures were expressed as increased equity, social justice, diversity as a resource, children's agency, cultural heritage, and belonging. These values coincided with aspects within the social dimension of education for sustainability as formulated by the UN, which is about ensuring that all people have a good and just foundation for a decent life and have the opportunity to influence their own lives and the communities in which they live (*United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,* 2016).

[7] My translation, as the document is not available in English by 01.08.20.

1.3. Positioning the Study in the Context of Education for Social Sustainability

'At the heart of the concept of sustainability is fairness and justice for all, including future generations' (Davis, 2014, p. 28). Davis (2014) called for a rethinking of the rights base of early childhood education and proposed an approach that recognised the fundamental rights of children as endorsed in the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) that acknowledge the rights of social groups and sub-groups within the society (Davis, 2014, p. 32).

Recognising the need for strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *Transforming Our World* (UN, 2015), has urged the enhancing of progress on sustainable development goals from social perspectives, revolving around inequalities and challenges to social inclusion. Although explicit research on education for social sustainability until now has been scarce in the national and international early childhood research context, a change in focus has been called for (Hedefalk et al., 2015; Sageidet, 2015). Social sustainability can be explained as a quality of society that especially safeguards conditions for human welfare for vulnerable groups (Hollander et al., 2016). Thus, the concept can embrace aspects such as social cohesion, inclusion, belonging (Boström, 2012), human rights, citizenship, and social justice (Hammond et al., 2015).

The previously mentioned UN report *Shaping the Future We Want: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development; final report* (UNESCO, 2014) highlighted the early years as the foundation for children's capacity for participation in a community, workplace, and society. Children's rights to participation are stated in the Norwegian curriculum for kindergartens, anchored in Sections 1 and 3 of the Kindergarten Act, Article 104 of the Norwegian Constitution, and Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The children's rights to participation assert that the kindergartens shall enable children's participation suited to their age, experience, individual circumstances, and needs and respond to every child's different behaviours and needs (*Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content and Tasks*, 2017, p. 27).

Together with the right to 'participation' (Kulset, 2016; Sadownik, 2018), concepts such as 'democracy' (Eriksen, 2018; Pettersvold, 2014) and 'belonging' (Helgesen, 2018;

Kalkman & Clark, 2017) are indeed well-known and researched within in the Norwegian early childhood education field of research. When researched in the Norwegian early childhood context, the concepts of 'participation', 'democracy', and 'belonging' are rarely outlined explicitly in the context of 'education for social sustainability'. Nonetheless, these concepts' correspondence to the progress on education for sustainability from social perspectives such as equity and social inclusion, as described by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *Transforming Our World* (UN, 2015), is obvious. Thus, it may be perceived as somewhat of a paradox claiming that the research on education for sustainability in the Norwegian early childhood context has emphasised environmental issues at the expense of social issues. I see the paradox and acknowledge that this may be a subject for questioning.

Still, it is my strong perception that in order to highlight the interdependence between todays children's individual and collective experiences with democracy, participation, inclusion and belonging in kindergarten, and the future sustainable society, this demands researching such concepts explicitly in the context of 'social sustainability'. A further argument on the matter is continued in the next section.

1.4. Social Sustainability in Children with Migrant Backgrounds' Belonging: Setting up the Research Question

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development *Transforming Our World* not only claimed migrants as vulnerable, but the declaration also recognised the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development in the countries they migrate to (UN, 2015, p. 29). Hannah Arendt's (Arendt, 1943) essay *We Refugees* problematised the use of the terms 'refugees' and 'immigrants' as she described how the term 'refugee' had changed from being associated with persons driven to seek refuge due to political opinions or acts committed to address people who had had the misfortune to arrive in new countries without means and were in need of help from the Refugee Committees. Immigrants, or 'newcomers', on the other hand, were ordinary people who had left their countries of their own free will (1943, p. 110). Implicitly, being an independent 'newcomer' or immigrant was perceived as preferable to being a refugee in need of help. As this particular essay was written by Arendt in exile during the second world war, the complexity of the conceptual use of terms such as 'refugee', 'immigrant', 'migrant', or 'asylum seeker' is still valid. So is the complexity in the

persons' – every man, woman, and child's – situations and rights in their new countries. The loss of national rights does not implicate the loss of human rights.

In her later book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1951) stated that when belonging to the communities in which one is born is no longer a matter of course, and not belonging not a matter of choice, something much more fundamental than freedom and justice is at stake, namely, a person's human rights. Arendt outlined this further as the rights to have rights to action, to opinion, and to belong to some kind of organised community (Arendt, 1951, p. 388). Drawing on Arendt, Norwegian professor Helgard Mahrdt (Mahrdt, 2015) highlighted the role of education in general in order to meet the ongoing refugee and migrant crises among other caused by the Syrian civil war. Mahrdt drew attention to the importance of encouraging young people to understand and take into account the perspectives of others, to include 'newcomers', and to recover solidarity (2015, p. 23).

The report *Migration in the 2030 Agenda,* published by the International Organization for Migration, explored the links between migration and the Sustainable Development Goals. The report used the term 'migrant children' and stated that there is no one homogenous profile of the 'migrant child' (*Migration in the 2013 Agenda*, 2017, p. 130). Although the report's chapter on migrant children's situations mainly focused on unaccompanied refugee children travelling alone, I perceive the report's highlighting of the role of the Sustainable Development Goals to improve migrant children's situations as relevant in the context of my study. Addressing questions of social inclusion and exclusion in the diverse Swedish social community, Magnus Dahlstedt et.al (2017) stated the issue of 'belonging' as one of the most pressing issues in today's increasingly diverse Europe (2017, p. 202). As expressed by Ärlemalm-Hagsèr and Sandberg (2011, p. 198), educators face a general dilemma in the challenge of not knowing what children need to know to be able to meet a future of change. However, history has repeatedly taught us that living in a democracy is not to be taken for granted. Even in Norway, with our stable society and solid democratic traditions, severe attacks on democracy have taken place in recent times. In 2011, and most recently in 2019, lives have been lost due to right-wing terrorists' desire to force through a non-democratic social order, claiming people with migrant and refugee backgrounds as 'non-belonging' to the Norwegian society. Social sustainability issues concerning children with migrant backgrounds' belonging to their new communities and societies has thus grown to be a pressing early childhood sustainability issue to research.

The UN agenda *Transforming Our World* (UN, 2015) as well as The World Organization of Early Childhood Education, OMEP (Declaration of the 68th OMEP World Assembly and Conference: Seoul, Korea, July 2016), has highlighted migrant and refugee children's vulnerability in the double sense, identifying social exclusion as a potential risk. Children with migrant backgrounds have only recently become visible within studies on migrants' situations (Hunner-Kreisel & Bohne, 2016, p. 4); however, they have both the right and the responsibility to contribute to the community in which they grow up (*Migration in the 2013 Agenda*, 2017).

In general, recent research on the complexity of children with migrant and refugee backgrounds' belonging (David & Kilderry, 2019; Kalkman & Clark, 2017; Mitchell & Bateman, 2018), well-being (Hunner-Kreisel & Bohne, 2016), participation (Picchio & Mayer, 2019; Sadownik, 2018), and experience with social struggles and exclusion (Kalkman, Hopperstad, & Valenta, 2017) is growing in the Norwegian as well as the Nordic and international early childhood research context. To the best of my knowledge, though, investigating children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of 'belonging' in kindergarten, as an aspect and research topic explicitly in the context of early childhood education for sustainability, has not been prioritised, neither in the Norwegian nor in the international early childhood research context (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019).

One of the conclusions that was drawn in the report *Migration in the 2030 agenda* was that the Sustainable Development Goals can contribute to the incorporation of migration in global and national policies. To illuminate children with migrant background's situations in such contexts would contribute to the fulfilment of their rights and abilities to contribute to their new communities (*Migration in the 2013 Agenda*, 2017). I perceive this in relation to children's rights in accordance with the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and in the context of Arendt's conceptualisations of the rights to have rights to action, to opinion, and, in particular, to belong[8] (Arendt, 1951). Although they are as different and individual as all children, children with migrant backgrounds' rights to have rights, and to

[8] I make a reservation that, by 'right to belong', I do not, in the context of this study, associate this with civic rights such as rights to citizenship, which according to James D. Ingram (Ingram, 2008) is a usual conceptualisation of this phrase of Arendt. The concept of belonging is outlined in chapter two, in which section 2.5, in particular, positions the concept of belonging in the study.

belonging in particular, cannot be overlooked in an era where ongoing consequences of climate change, international migration, and globalisation are evident.

Specifically, the study asks: *How can early childhood education for social sustainability be understood through children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging in kindergarten?*

1.5. Summing up the Articles, Presentation of Main Findings[9]

The study's main research question covers three sub-studies described in three articles that are being presented in the order by which they are written and published. The three articles are based on data material from one literature review, and two field works carried out in two different multicultural kindergartens. The first article is the literature review, written together with my supervisor Elin Eriksen Ødegaard, and published in the journal *Sustainability* (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019). The second article, which is based on the findings from the first field work, is published as a chapter in the book *Nordic Families, Children and Early Childhood Education* by Palgrave McMillan (Boldermo, 2019), and finally, the third article, based on the findings from the second field work, is published in the special issue Young Children on the Move in *International Journal of Early Years Education* (Boldermo, 2020).

Article I. What about the migrant children? The state-of-the-art in research claiming social sustainability

The main interest in this article was to scrutinise the research on social sustainability in early childhood education, investigate how social sustainability was conceptualised, and examine whether perspectives on migrant children's situations had been researched in the context of social sustainability.

Answering the research question: *What is the state-of-the-art in early childhood research on social sustainability and migrant children's situations?*, the findings revealed that

[9] This section also presents an illustrated overview of the articles and the study (figure 1). This overview is inspired by Anette Emilson (2008.p 63).

although researchers within the field of early childhood education for sustainability to a large extent applied a 'holistic' perspective on sustainability, a variety of conceptualisations of 'holistic' were identified. Social sustainability was conceptualised as issues of citizenship, social justice, social responsibility, and also as children as problem-solvers. Very few articles investigated diversity, multicultural perspectives, or belonging; however, some of the articles mentioned these terms in the context of social sustainability. None of the reviewed articles researched migrant children's situations in the context of social sustainability. As issues of citizenship, participation, and children as active citizens were well researched, we, the authors, perceived it an especially interesting finding that migrant children's situations seemed to be invisible in this context.

Article II. Practicing belonging in kindergarten: Children's use of places and artifacts

The main interest in the second article was to explore how children from different backgrounds and upbringings experienced, negotiated, and practised belonging in a multicultural kindergarten. The data material that formed the basis for this article stemmed from the PhD project's first field work that was carried out in a multicultural kindergarten. This particular field work was conducted in two periods: three weeks in autumn and five weeks the following spring. The strategy for collecting the data was initially inspired by Eva Gulløv and Susanne Højlund (2003). However, eventually, a strategy described by Sarah Powell and Margaret Somerville (2018) called 'Deep hanging out' was followed. The data material consisted of photos, video recordings, and field notes, and specifically, the research question for the article was *How can children's use of places and artefacts in kindergarten be understood as materially mediated practices of belonging?*

The findings concerned a boy with migrant background, in particular. The boy's meaning making of the football pitch as a place and the football as an artefact was analysed through a cultural-historical framework. Drawing on Ditte Winther-Lindqvist's (2011) research on how children's motive developments are connected to social identity processes, the boy's actions, his motivation in terms of his attitudes, and his change in attitude were interpreted from individual and societal perspectives. The findings revealed that even if no socially exclusionary patterns or practices were observed as directed towards this boy, he spent a lot of time on his own. Expressing to be alone without friends, his attitude was

characterised by disengagement. As a change in attitude from disengagement to enthusiasm was observed, the findings suggested that the boy's football, an artefact that he brought to the kindergarten on almost a daily basis, and the football pitch as a place that was part of the kindergarten's materiality, mediated new possibilities for the boy to negotiate belonging. Specifically, the findings suggested that through the use of the football and the football pitch, the boy negotiated a social identity as a future footballer and a proper supporter to both local and global football teams. Thus, he created spaces for practising his belonging to a wanted community.

Article III. Fleeting moments: Young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness

Based on the findings from the two previous articles, as well as a limited literature review on the current research on the concept of 'belonging' in early childhood, the main interest in the third article was to explore younger children's meaning making of belonging and togetherness in a multicultural kindergarten.

The article's research question*, What characterises young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness in a diverse peer group in kindergarten?* was examined through the findings from the second field work, also in a multicultural kindergarten. This field work involved a systematic approach to the collecting of data by observations of recurring activity settings, writing of extensive field notes, and taking photos of artefacts and surroundings, as well as of children. The analysis of the data material was conducted within a cultural-historical framework, focusing on institutional and individual perspectives on elements in children's sense of community, such as *membership* and *shared emotional connection*, as identified by David McMillan and Davis Chavis (1986) and developed by Merja Koivula and Maritta Hännikäinen (2017).

The findings that concerned a group of two-year-olds suggested that, highly influenced by features in the peer culture, the two-year-old children's everyday institutional lives were characterised by ongoing social manoeuvres in order to negotiate togetherness and shared joint experiences. There were observed no recurring patterns of exclusion among the children. Nonetheless, the children's negotiations of membership and being part included the application of social categories such as age and size, symbol systems such as having access to

particular artefacts or wearing particular colours on clothes, and rituals such as birthday invitations, in order to display membership, reinforcing one's place in the group, and drawing boundaries of being part – or not. Further, the findings revealed that the peer culture in this particular group of two-year olds were characterised by patterns of caring and sharing, togetherness and physical closeness, and emphasis on mutual bonds and experiences. Finally, the article concluded that as the features of the peer culture appeared to have a significant influence on the two-year-olds' negotiations of belonging and togetherness in the group, and thus the individual child's possibilities to practise and experience belonging, it was the institutional practices that laid the foundation for such features. Thus, the findings suggested an awareness among practitioners to be aware of such institutional practices in order to safeguard children's experiences of belonging and togetherness.

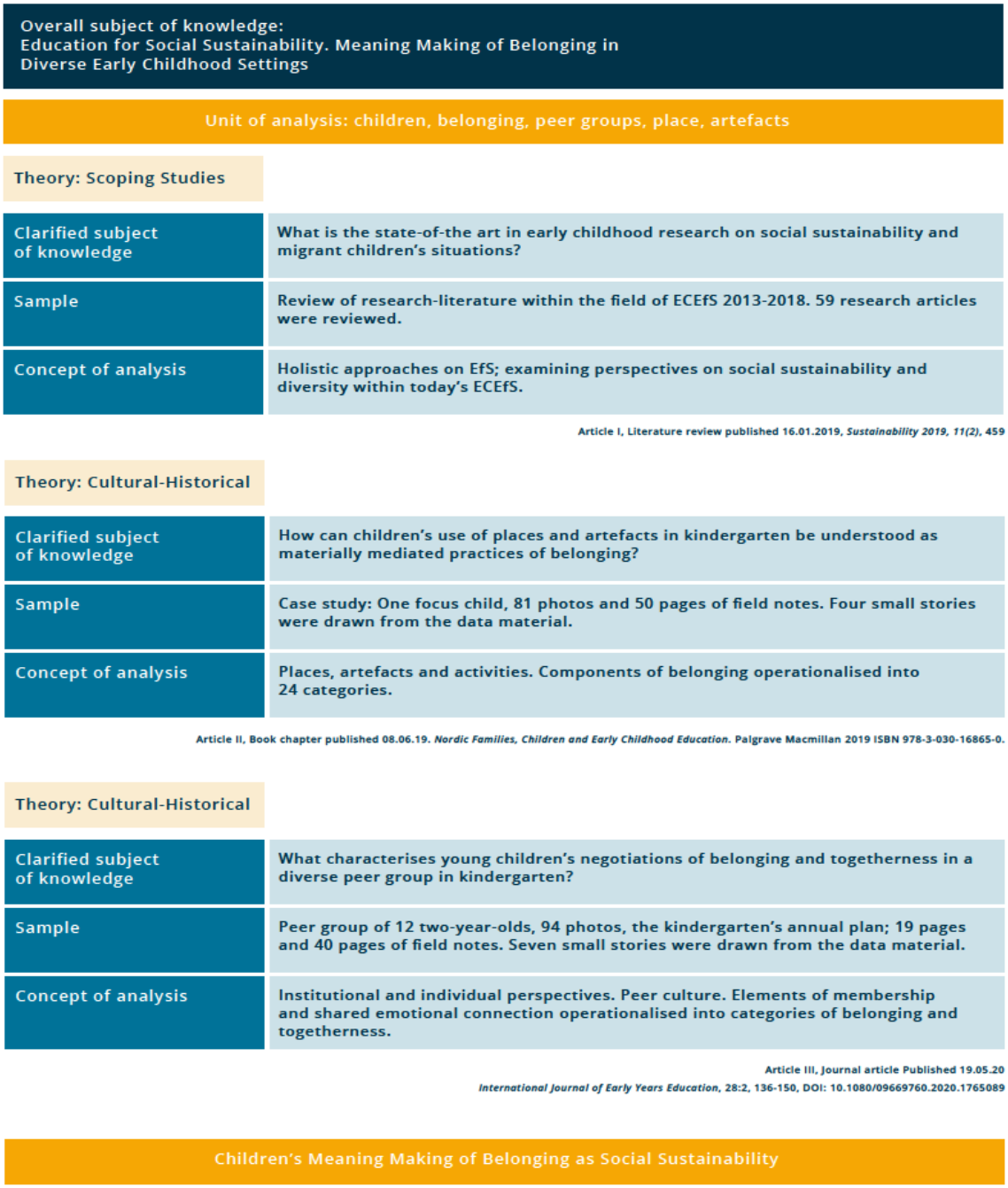

Figure 1 Overview

1.6. Outline of the Thesis

In addition to the three articles presented in section 1.5[10], the present thesis comprises an extended abstract consisting of six chapters, in addition to references and appendix.

As the current chapter is the introductory one, chapter two accounts for and refines the study's major concept – the concept of 'belonging'. Chapter three presents the theoretical perspectives and methodological framework that position the study within social constructionism and cultural-historical theory, followed by chapter four, which addresses the design of the study and the essential methodological considerations along the way of conducting research with children in diverse early childhood settings.

Chapter five describes the process of constructing and analysing the data material and bringing the data material to life through the use of small stories. This chapter also includes a section that evaluates the quality of the study. Finally, chapter six provides a concluding discussion and reflections in the wake of the findings concerning social sustainability in early childhood education.

[10] The three articles referenced are attached in full as the thesis' Part 2

2. Demarcating the Concept of Belonging

Studies framing the concept of 'belonging' in various fields and disciplines have increased during the last decades, decades which are characterised by globalisation, increased transnational mobility and migration, and people fleeing warfare and conflict around the world (Halse, 2018; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Nevertheless, despite of the increased focus, the concept of 'belonging' remains ambiguous, fluid, flexible, and fleeting – theorised and conceived in multiple ways (Antonsich, 2010; Gabi, 2013; Halse, 2018; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; May, 2013; Miller, 2003, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011). 'Belonging' has been explored and examined by researchers in disciplines such as philosophy (Miller, 2006), political science (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011), social geography (Antonsich, 2010), sociology (May, 2013; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011), and early childhood education (Gabi, 2013; Juutinen, 2018). Christine Halse (2018), professor of Intercultural Education at The Education University of Hong Kong, has pointed out how belonging might be theorised in the field of education and how it has received significantly less attention than in other fields of research.

This chapter outlines the contemporary research that has impacted the conceptualisations of belonging in the process of investigating social sustainability in early childhood education in this study. Two analytical approaches to the concept – relational and individual – are discussed in section 2.2. The knowledge base concerning the concept of belonging in early childhood education is outlined in section 2.3., while section 2.4. discusses questions revolving around children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging. Finally, section 2.5. positions the concept of belonging in this study.

2.1. The Fluid, Flexible, and Fleeting Concept of Belonging

The origin and meaning of the verb ‘to belong’, stems, according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (belong (v), 2020) from the Old English ‘langian’, which refers to ‘pertain to, to go along with’. A later meaning of the verb, which is to ‘be a property of’ and also to ‘be a member of’, is related to German: ‘belangen’. The plural of the verbal noun ‘belong’, ‘belongings’ is defined as ‘goods’, ‘effects’ and ‘possessions’. The *Oxford Lexico UK Dictionary* (belong, 2020) outlined three definitions of the verb ‘to belong’: first, to ‘be the property of’, second, ‘to be a member of’, and third, for a thing to ‘be rightly placed in a specified position’. The second definition, ‘to be a member of’, included two subdivisions of the definition for a person ‘to have an affinity for a specified place or situation’ and ‘to have the right personal or social qualities to be a member of a particular group.’

As a relatively new theoretical term in social sciences (Youkhana, 2015, p. 12), ‘belonging’ has often been used alongside or interchangeably with the term ‘identity’ (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; May, 2013; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011; Youkhana, 2015). Tuuli Lähdesmäki et al. (2016, p. 234) stated that ‘belonging’ has partly replaced the term ‘identity’ as an analytical tool for exploring social interactions and subjective experiences, which are difficult to examine using ‘identity’ as a theoretical concept. Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011, p. 4) suggested that while the concept of ‘identity’ highlighted homogeneity, ‘belonging’ emphasised commonness, however, not in the meaning of sameness. While ‘identity’ takes point of departure in the autonomous individual person, ‘belonging’ concerns the connection between people and between people and their surrounding world of places and materiality (May, 2013). The concept of belonging is also closely related to ‘community’, and the feeling of belonging to a community is assumed to be a crucial part of a person’s well-being (Miller, 2003; Ree, Alvestad, & Johansson, 2019; Roffey, 2013). Even so, belonging, in itself, is not a feeling of well-being, but a mode of being, that represents the ideal condition for human existence (Miller, 2006, p. 254). Belonging is, however, an ambiguous concept indeed, and a complex process that is forever changing without a clear beginning or end, depending on time, context, and culture (Gabi, 2013).

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the increase in global migration and children on the move makes the concept of belonging a highly topical issue of social sustainability. Vanessa May (2013) defined belonging as a process of creating a sense of connection to

cultures, people, places, and material objects, and she suggested that belonging could act as a barometer for social change in the way that significant changes in people's surroundings are reflected in an alternation in their sense of belonging. The experiences of belonging to a society and to social relations, to history with its past and traditions, and to local places are three kinds of experiences of belonging identified by Linn Miller (2003, 2006). People in general, wherever they are, are connected to the world by being anchored in a society, in their own history, and also in one or several places (Miller, 2006). Thus, one could say that all people 'belong', one way or another. Further, Miller (2006) stated that people search for belonging socially, historically, and locally related to places and environments because that is how they define themselves as who and as what they are, even though they are not necessarily aware of this themselves (Miller, 2006). Drawing on Miller (2003), May (2013) described 'belonging' as a relational concept and as a feeling that tells something about a person's connection to him- or herself and to the surrounding world of people, cultures, and places (May, 2013, p. 78).

2.1.1. Use and understandings of 'belonging' in contemporary research

The use and understandings of the concept of belonging in contemporary research have been interrogated by Lähdesmäki et al. (2016), who concluded that belonging should be understood as a context-specific entanglement of multiple and intersecting relations that are affective and material by nature. As a consequence, definitions and categorisations of belonging should be contextualised. Examining the various perceptions and framings of the concept, Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) identified several different topoi of meanings and uses of the concept. They contended, nonetheless, that the typical contemporary topoi in today's research on belonging are closely related to the modern phenomena of migration and globalisation. Studies of belonging in the context of increased mobility in the populations has led to discussions of various forms of belonging and of problematic issues such as discrimination, inequity, and tensions revolving around negotiations of belonging (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 241).

Introducing different angles of approaching and theorising 'belonging' for young people in schools, Halse (2018) stated that a consideration of the concept of belonging in terms of one's attachment to particular social groups, social solidarities, or social collectives could be a useful starting point. Halse contended that young people can participate in a

multitude of social groupings that are formed on the basis of shared values, cultures, and ways of thinking and of emotional attachments to places, spaces, and materiality as well as to humans and 'more-than-humans'. As a consequence of such, young people can be attached to a number of social groups and structures, including their close family, friendships, and peer groups, the institutions they attend such as schools or kindergartens, but also transnational global networks constructed by, for instance, social media, sports, and online games (Halse, 2018). Halse (2018, p. 13) suggested an acknowledgement of these multiple meanings and ways of belonging and to consider how belonging is felt, used, practised, and lived.

2.2. Studying Belonging as Relational Phenomena and as Individual Experiences

Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) has developed an analytical approach to studying belonging, which considers belonging and exclusion as relational rather than individual phenomena, and where the relations are not merely between humans, but are also material, cultural, and historical by nature (Juutinen, 2018; Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This approach, referred to as *the politics of belonging*, involves the dynamic construction, maintaining, and reproducing of boundaries, and it concerns societal issues of group membership and the inclusion and exclusion of particular people, social categories, and groupings (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 12). The politics of belonging analyses how belonging operates between people and their environments and can be viewed as situated both temporally, spatially, and intersectional in the way that people, even at the same time and place, are affected differently by specific politics of belonging. What social categories that apply for membership, or what boundaries that may cause exclusion, varies within different groups and at different times and places (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011; Yuval-Davis, Kannabirān, & Vieten, 2006). Negotiations and practices of belonging take place because the politics of belonging involves two diametrical sides: the side that declares the belonging, and the side that has the power of acknowledging the belonging (Antonsich, 2010, p. 13). Such contraries and drawing of boundaries thus imply issues of inclusion, exclusion, and citizenship (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011).

Marco Antonsich (2010, p. 7) suggested that, in addition to the analytical dimension of the politics of belonging, an analytical framework for researching belonging should also include studying belonging as an individual personal experience or sense of being 'at home'

and rooted ‘in place’. He referred to this individual personal experience of belonging as *place-belongingness* and described that the individual feelings of place-belongingness could be understood through different factors that could generate such feelings. Further, Antonsich highlighted that the absence of place-belongingness would not be exclusion, which he stated would be to confuse place-belongingness with the politics of belonging, but rather, a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and dis-placement (Antonsich, 2010, pp. 11–12).

The first factors that could generate individual feelings of place-belongingness described by Antonsich (2010) are the *autobiographical factors* such as a person’s history, personal experiences, and memories, attaching him or her to a given place, which could contribute to a feeling of belonging to that particular place. Second, Antonsich identified that *relational factors* such as personal and social ties, long-lasting, stable, significant, and positive relations, that would add positively to a person’s life in a given place, could generate a sense of group belonging and place-belongingness (2010). Antonsich (2010) pointed out that such personal and social ties that are considered as relational factors of place-belongingness are different from the emotional and close relations a person has for his or her family and dear friends. Further, these personal and social ties manifest through frequent physical interactions and could thus be everyday encounters or be part of the person’s everyday life (Antonsich, 2010, pp. 8–9). A third factor for understanding place-belongingness is *cultural factors*, in which language was highlighted by Antonsich (2010) as the most important. Language, not only verbalised but also in the form of codes, signs, and gestures that are shared by actors within the same semiotic universe, could be a way of defining both ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Such definitions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, which at the same time refer to the analytical dimension of *the politics of belonging*, can generate a sense of community between those familiar with such codes and signs. Similar senses of community could be evoked by other cultural factors such as traditions, food, and habits, which are related to the materiality of cultural practices (Antonsich, 2010). The fourth factor of place-belongingness, *economic factors*, plays a role in the individual person’s sense of belonging due to the possibility of creating a safe and stable material existence for the individual and his or her family. Finally, *legal factors* such as issues of citizenship revolve around the individual person’s experiences of and rights to participate and contribute to shape his or her environment. Such legal factors

form a formal structure of belonging and are related to individual feelings of safety and security (Antonsich, 2010, pp. 9–11).

Antonsich stated that future studies of the concept of belonging should consider both a relational as well as an individual approach, as described above, in order to avoid seeing 'belonging' as either, on the one hand, only a product of socialising discourses and practices or, on the other hand, merely individual and unconstrained of the social context (Antonsich, 2010, pp. 19–20). In line with Antonsich, I consider that the fleeting, multi-layered, and complex concept of belonging cannot be understood solely from one of those analytical dimensions, and thus, I consider both approaches as relevant in this study. Antonsich's (2010) suggestion of an analytical framework for researching belonging as an individual personal experience, through the described five factors that could generate individual feelings of place-belongingness, were proposed mainly in the context of adults, not in the context of children, or childhood. However, I consider the content of particularly the relational, the cultural and the legal factors as highly relevant in the context of studying children's belonging. A further explanation on the matter is presented in section 2.5.

2.3. Early Childhood Research on Belonging

As stated in the introductory chapter, the concept of 'belonging' is well-known in the Norwegian early childhood education context. The previous Norwegian 2011 kindergarten curriculum mentioned the concept of belonging in the chapters that outlined 'children's right to participate', 'social competence', 'kindergartens as cultural arenas', and 'art, culture and creativity'. In the new 2017 Norwegian curriculum, the emphasis on children's belonging was outlined under the headline of 'Core Values', and the curriculum also stated that experiences involving art and culture could evoke children's sense of belonging. In addition, and similar to the Australian curriculum's emphasis that 'children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community' (*Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, 2009, p. 7), the Norwegian 2017 curriculum highlighted the significance of children's belonging to the local community.

The researchers Jennifer Sumsion and Sandie Wong (2011) mapped the conceptual landscape of the concept of belonging within the Australian curriculum and identified 10 different dimensions of the concept. They defined these 10 dimensions as *emotional, social,*

cultural, spatial, temporal, physical, spiritual, moral/ethical, political, and *legal* dimensions of belonging. In addition to identifying these dimensions of belonging within the curriculum, Sumsion and Wong suggested three analytical axes of belonging: *resistance and desire, performativity,* and *categorisation* (2011, pp. 33–34). Sumsion and Wong stated that these analytical axes reflected their understanding of 'belonging' as always in process, and that the claims to or enactments of belonging were not, by rule, always valid or desirable (2011). Together with the politics of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011) as an analytical approach, the dimensions and analytical axes of belonging identified by Jennifer Sumsion and Wong (2011) have been described and researched by several researchers within the field of early childhood education (Boldermo, 2018; Juutinen, 2018; Mitchell & Bateman, 2018; Stratigos, 2015a, 2015b; Stratigos, 2016; Stratigos, Bradley, & Sumsion, 2014).

Children's perspectives on belonging in the early years settings have been examined by Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough (2009), Shelma Jo Wastell and Sheila Degotardi (2017), and also by Merja Koivula and Maritta Hännikäinen (2017). Nutbrown and Clough (2009) established that young children may have their own fluid views on the concept of belonging that could differ from those held by adults. The researchers discussed issues of belonging, inclusion, and citizenship as connected to each other and concluded that children's sense of belonging in early years settings could depend on the early childhood practitioners' ensuring the children of their safety and a sense of having a place in the peer community. As children are interested in *difference*, making *difference* positive rather than negative was, according to Nutbrown and Clough (2009), an important aim for early childhood practitioners in order to safeguard young children's sense of belonging. The findings of Wastell and Degotardi (2017) suggested that, in addition to the feeling of being secure and of being suitable, a new emphasis on the role of shared interests, belongings brought from home, emotional connection, and time emerged as an interest in further research on belonging, especially concerning younger children such as infants and toddlers in early years settings.

By taking as a starting point four key elements of sense of community identified by David McMillan and David Chavis (1986), Finnish researchers Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) examined how children in small groups in a day care centre built a sense of community. Drawing on a sociocultural approach, the researchers stated that the children's communities in day care centres were always socially constructed and thus constantly changing. Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) found that the four key elements, *membership,*

influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and *shared emotional connection* (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), could be applied as main analytic categories, corresponding to the codes and categories that had emerged from their analysis. Some of their findings, which I perceive as particularly interesting in the context of the concept of 'belonging', were that children's membership in the community was manifested in the feeling of belonging to the group necessitated by access to joint play, and thus, the opportunity to form friendship and construct togetherness. Further, they found that having a shared emotional connection would contribute to the children's development of togetherness on the personal, interpersonal, and institutional planes. The researchers identified that the children displayed togetherness among themselves through emphasis on mutual bonds, 'we-talk', physical proximity, and having fun together (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017, pp. 138–139).

As part of her PhD studies, Australian researcher Tina Stratigos (Stratigos et al., 2014) identified a research gap concerning infants' and toddlers' perspectives on and experiences of belonging. Thus, Stratigos et al. (2014) suggested the politics of belonging as a potential research focus on the matter, as it would move the attention away from subjective feelings that could be hard to research, towards processes of belonging operating in the group of children. This call for research was followed up by Stratigos herself through several research articles (Stratigos, 2015a, 2015b; Stratigos, 2016) based on the understandings of the politics of belonging by Yuval-Davis (2011) and the intersecting axes of belonging identified by Jennifer Sumsion and Wong (2011). With a point of departure in concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 1994, 2004), Stratigos (2015a) advocated the necessity of opening up for new ways of thinking of 'belonging' in early childhood. Further, she argued the importance of moving beyond, and disrupting romanticised notions about the inclusiveness of everyday early childhood practices, and to consider how belonging operates in groups of children in terms of the axes of resistance and desire as identified by Sumsion and Wong (2011) (Stratigos, 2015a).

Stratigos identified that material aspects and objects played a role in how social categories, such as age, size, ethnicity, skin colour, and gender, were constructed and performed and that the role of social categories in the politics of belonging were complex and dynamic (Stratigos, 2015b; Stratigos, 2016). Stratigos exemplified this by showing that *difference*, such as the social category of being 'a baby', a small child among elder children, could be perceived as a boundary that led to exclusion; however, in other situations, the same

difference could be the basis for being included in the group of elder children. She found that regarding the social category of gender; being the 'right' gender could appear more important, than being the right age (Stratigos, 2015b, p. 227). Thus, Stratigos argued the necessity of being aware that only looking at social categories when researching how belonging operates in groups of children would never tell the full story. She suggested further that being observant of situations in which the social categories no longer appeared to work might lead to new understandings about how belonging operates in early childhood settings (Stratigos, 2015b).

Drawing on Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011), Sumsion and Wong (2011), and Stratigos et al. (2014), Jaana Juutinen's (2018) doctoral thesis investigated how the politics of belonging was shaped in young children's diverse relations in a Finnish preschool context. Juutinen's findings revealed that exclusion and belonging co-existed in the children's daily lives, often by which one child was excluded by other children in the fleeting moments of daily life and when the educators were not present. Further, Juutinen identified that materiality played an active role in how belonging, inclusion, and exclusion operated among children in group settings and called for additional research on the relationship between belonging and materiality (Juutinen, 2018, p. 65).

The issue of materiality and belonging has also been brought to the fore by Sumsion, Harrison, and Stapleton (2018), who researched the materiality in infants' everyday lives and their ways of 'doing' belonging. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Sumsion et al. (2018) mapped the navigating movements of a baby girl in an early childhood setting. One of their reflections based on their analysis was whether relationality of the texture and spatial practices within early childhood infant settings could lead to romanticising belonging and overlooking manifestations of the politics of belonging such as power relations and exclusionary practices. Sumsion et al. (2018) described the sense or feeling of belonging as the *experience* of belonging, including acceptance, security, togetherness, and nurturing relationships. They associated *the politics of belonging* with children's active participation and practice, which included issues of diversity, power relations, agency, inclusion, and exclusion. Thus, Sumsion, Harrison, and Stapleton (2018, p. 113) contended that children's 'belonging' in early childhood education could be both *an experiential state* and *a practice*. I will continue with this in particular, in section 2.5, but before that, the questions revolving

children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging, in particular, must be addressed.

2.4. Approaching Children with Migrant Backgrounds' Belonging

A chapter titled 'Approaching Children with Migrant Backgrounds' Belonging' could indicate that there is something different or extraordinary with children with *migrant* backgrounds' meaning making of belonging, and thus, there is a need for such a social construction and category in this study. That is debatable. As the research interest in my study is characterised by an attention towards investigating belonging in the context of migration and social sustainability, my study is fitting into Lähdesmäki et al.'s (2016) description of a typical contemporary topoi. However, as stated by Birgitta Ljung Egeland (2015), there are no essential differences between children, with migrant backgrounds or not, when it comes to the need for belonging. Thus, following Stratigos' (2015b) call for awareness regarding the use of social categories, a construction of 'migrant backgrounds' as a social category, does not necessarily apply when researching how belonging operates among children.

There are, nevertheless, other reasons for having a specific chapter on the matter. One is to highlight that children's experiences of belonging to peer groups, communities, and places not only refer to how they experience the peer groups, communities, and places, but, equally important, how they experience *themselves* as members of the peer group and within the kindergarten as a community and as a place (Miller, 2006). As the politics of belonging is all about assessing whether or not other people are situated inside or outside the line of boundary, that is, whether they are 'us' or 'them' (Stratigos et al., 2014), children with migrant backgrounds can be aware of their own risk of being perceived as 'them' by their peers in the kindergarten community (Kalkman & Clark, 2017). Such an awareness, whether well-founded or not, can affect the migrant child's experience of being 'us' as being members of a desired peer community. As Nutbrown and Clough (2009) emphasised the practitioners' ensuring the children's safety and sense of having a place in the peer community, I perceive 'having a place' as a feeling of security and of 'being suitable', as outlined by Wastell and Degotardi (2017) and also described in particular in the context of children with migrant

backgrounds' negotiations of belonging by Jennifer Skattebol (Skattebol, 2006), Kris Kalkman, and Alison Clark (Kalkman & Clark, 2017)[11].

Taking into consideration that children with migrant backgrounds are perceived as 'vulnerable' in the double sense, being both migrants and children, a focus on 'migrant background' as a social category sheds light on the crucial and unpleasant side of belonging, namely, that belonging requires access and includes the risk of rejection and social exclusion (Kalkman, Hopperstad, & Valenta, 2017; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Stratigos et al., 2014).

2.5. Positioning the Concept of Belonging

As outlined, many researchers have conceptualised belonging by differing between individual feelings and senses of belonging, and collective constructions of belonging often referred to as the politics of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Juutinen, 2018; Stratigos, 2015a, 2015b; Stratigos, 2016; Stratigos et al., 2014; Sumsion et al., 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2006). As Stratigos et al. (2014) recommended the politics of belonging as a research focus for investigating how belonging operates in younger children's peer groups, there is a risk of a narrow scope solely on practices and discourses as warned by Antonsich (2010). Although the politics of belonging are more accessible and observable, I concur with the view that only examining such aspects may imply a risk that children's individual experiences are overlooked and that children's belonging as an experiential state, as suggested by Sumsion et al. (2018), remains un-explored. Antonsich (2010) asserted that even if the politics of belonging are 'granted', they do not necessarily generate the individual experience and sense of belonging. Also, Josie Gabi (2013) discussed the relationship between 'participation' and 'belonging' in early childhood education and questioned whether involvement or participation could be reckoned as an indication of belonging. Even if a child is included and recognised by other children as a member in the group and also appears to be an active participant, this does not guarantee that he or she feels that he or she belongs[12].

Drawing on Halse (2018), Antonsich (2010), and Sumsion et al. (2018), I acknowledge the importance of applying both a relational approach, that is, how belonging

[11] See article II, Boldermo (2019)

[12] See article II, Boldermo (2019)

operates and is being negotiated, practised, and produced between children within their peer groups, as well as considering how belonging is experienced – sensed and lived by the individual child. The relational approach, such as the politics of belonging, has been described and examined by several researchers in the field of early childhood education lately (Juutinen, 2018; Stratigos, 2015a, 2015b; Stratigos, 2016; Stratigos et al., 2014; Sumsion et al., 2018; Sumsion & Wong, 2011). I perceive Sumsion et al. (2018) suggestions of *belonging as a practice* as within such a relational approach to studying belonging.

In order to outline an individual approach to belonging that sheds light on how belonging is experienced by the individual child, I suggest that the relational, cultural, and legal factors of place-belongingness as described by Antonsich (2010) could be an entrance to explore children's belonging as an *individual experiential state* (Sumsion et al., 2018). The relational factors of place-belongingness were described by Antonsich (2010) as long-lasting, significant, and positive relations that are part of a person's everyday life through everyday encounters, *yet different from the emotional relations to family members*[13]. I perceive such relational factors, together with cultural factors such as codes, signs, and gestures that evoke senses of community, and legal factors in the safety and security of being ensured of 'having a place' (Antonsich, 2010; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009), as highly relevant when studying how belonging could be experienced and lived by the individual child.

Finally, to bring this section to a close before illustrating the conceptualisations of belonging that form basis for the later analysis (Tables I and II), I draw attention to the concept of *togetherness* as researched by Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017)[14] and identified by Sumsion et al. (2018) as an aspect of belonging as an experiential state and suggest that the displaying of togetherness among children in early childhood settings could be approached as an everyday, experiential state of belonging (Sumsion et al., 2018). In line with Juutinen (2018, p. 64), I have found that strictly differing between belonging as individually lived and experienced on the one hand, and relationally practised and negotiated on the other, is difficult when analysing children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten. The children's lives in kindergarten are going on in a fleeting everyday rhythm, predictable and

[13] I do not perceive children's experience of place-belongingness or their belonging as an experiential state in early childhood settings in the context of children's inborn biological needs for affiliation to his or her parents, as described by John Bowlby (Bowlby, 1997). Antonsich's (2010) distinction, as highlighted here, supports my perception.

[14] See article III, Boldermo (2020)

yet full of surprises and unexpected events, by which the children are active and creative participants and contributors, and their everyday negotiations and practices of belonging are entangled and intertwined with their individual feelings and experiences of belonging and being included. The children's ongoing drawing of boundaries to differentiate between 'us' and 'them', and thus safeguard their own membership, can create an individual feeling of security and being part for the child or children that are within the line of boundary, as it simultaneously works as an exclusionary practice affecting the child or children outside the line of boundary.

The following tables I and II, which illustrate how the concept of belonging is conceptualised in this study, must thus be understood as a theoretical exercise, that, when encountering the reality of everyday life in kindergarten, do not fully display the entanglements and complexities of belonging. Nevertheless, these tables are my contribution to how one can consider children's belonging in kindergarten both as an individually lived and experiential state, as well as a relationally negotiated practice.

Table I. Belonging in kindergarten as an individually lived and experiential state	
Factors	**Features in early childhood settings**
Relational factors	Stable, long-lasting ties, constituted through recurring everyday encounters, positive interactions and togetherness
Cultural factors	Mutual bonds and community, constituted through verbal communication as well as codes, signs and gestures
	Familiarity with the features of the peer culture
	Sharing of traditions and events, also related to materiality: places and artefacts
Legal factors	Experiencing safety and security
	Being ensured of having a place in the kindergarten community

Table 1 Belonging in kindergarten as an individually lived and experiential state

Table II. Belonging in kindergarten as a relationally negotiated practice	
Factors	**Features in early childhood settings**
Membership and participation	The drawing of boundaries and hierarchies
	Perception of being 'us' or 'them', diplayed by cultural factors such as language, signs, etc.
Social categories	Exploring differences and similarities by applying social categories of, e.g., age, size, gender, etc.
Power relations	Inclusion and exclusion: the power to acknowledge or reject others

Table 2 Belonging in kindergarten as a relationally negotiated practice

3. Scientific Positioning: Theoretical Perspective and Methodological Framework

This chapter positions the study scientifically by presenting the study's theoretical perspective and methodological framework. Section 3.1. outlines the social constructionism as the study's epistemological and ontological point of departure. Section 3.2. introduces the cultural-historical framework that has guided the methodology in the study, and finally, section 3.3. outlines the role of materiality in the study, more specifically, the role of places and artefacts.

3.1. Social Constructionism

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2000) characterised all research as interpretive as it is guided by a set of beliefs about the world and how it should be studied. The researcher's ontological and epistemological point of departure forms the basis for the scientific positioning of the study. My ontological and epistemological set of beliefs situates my study within social constructionism, a theoretical perspective by which I will explain further in the following paragraph, and thus, position my role as a researcher.

The social constructionism explores the negotiations and constructions of 'reality' that goes on in everyday life through people's interactions with each other and through various sets of discourses (James & James, 2008, p. 122; Schwandt, 2000). Within these constructions of 'reality', there is a historical and sociocultural dimension as the constructions do not happen in isolation but take place in the context of language, practices, and shared understandings (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Peter R. Berger and Thomas Luckman (1966, pp. 15, 27) introduced the term 'social constructionism' and stated that people's social construction of their reality concerned their knowledge of their own 'reality' in their everyday lives – but shared with others as members and participants in a society. The reality of a person's everyday life would present itself as an intersubjective world in which the shared knowledge constituted a reality that would be taken for granted as 'the reality' by the members of the society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 37).

Thomas A. Schwandt (2000) distinguished between *weak/moderate* and *strong* social constructionism. Outlining the difference between those two forms, Schwandt described that a *moderate* (*weak*) version of social constructionism would reject definitions of true knowledge of 'reality' but, nevertheless, distinguish between 'better' or 'worse' interpretations of a subject matter. A *strong* social constructionism, on the other hand, would take on a more radical point of view, rejecting any norms of interpretation, implying that any interpretation of 'reality' is as good as the next (Schwandt, 2000, p. 198). I understand such *strong* social constructionism in the context of *universal* constructionism as described and criticised by Ian Hacking (1999), namely, the notion that everything is socially constructed. However, I do not apply such a notion of a 'social constructionism of everything' (Hacking, 1999, p. 24), but rather, I apply a *moderate social constructionism*[15] as outlined in the following paragraph.

I assume a premise that knowledge and meaning making are constructed through social processes and interaction, rather than through individual cognitive processes. I take a point of departure that there exists a multitude of perceived 'realities' and that the 'reality' by which one assumes to be 'the reality' is based on social constructions of reality within cultural and historical contexts. Nonetheless, I strongly believe in the existence of indisputable realities, such as the existence of physical realities including stars and planets, atmospheres and climate, weather conditions and oceans, mountains and trees, buildings, artefacts, humans, birds and animals, etc. These realities exist independently of one's own meaning making or interpretation thereof.

Drawing on Vivien Burr's (2015) key assumptions on what may characterise social constructionism in research, I will outline my position as a researcher in the following paragraph. I support a notion that knowledge, meaning, and experience are created and sustained in and through social, cultural, and historical processes and practices within the society. In addition to supporting the notion of knowledge as socially created and sustained through people's everyday interactions, I concur with the view that 'reality' is not universal or objective, but rather, that our knowledge of the world is culturally and historically specific, and thus, culturally and historically relative. Burr (2015) stated language as a pre-condition for thought by which people's social and psychological worlds are constructed. People who share a historic period, a culture, and a language create concepts and categories that provide a

[15] In the further text, I will use the term 'social constructionism' within the meaning of 'moderate social constructionism'.

framework of meaning for them. Thus, language is created on the basis of people's perceptions of 'reality', and, at the same time, language has a constitutive function on this perception (Burr, 2015, pp. 4–5, 10). I find this meaningful in the context of studying children in their everyday lives in early childhood, during a historic period in their lives, and within the specific culture and context that exists within the frames of their everyday institutional lives in kindergarten.

As one of the first 'social constructionists' in psychology (Newman & Holzman, 1997, p. 25), the Soviet scientist Lev Vygotskij built a new methodology for the study of childhood, and he was one of the first to emphasise the importance of social situations in children's development. Vygotskij understood children's development as a process of interaction that takes place between the child and the culture in which the child lives (Veraksa & Sheridan, 2018), a process that, according to Vygotskij (1978), proceeds in a spiral that repeatedly advances to a higher level by passing through the same point (Vygotskij 1978, pp. 56–57). When explaining the child's internalisation of higher psychological functions, Vygotskij stated that this consisted of a series of transformations where *inter*personal processes were transformed into *intra*personal processes, first on the social level between the child and his or her social and cultural environment, and later on the individual level within the child (1978, p. 57). Further, Vygotskij (1978 p. 57) stated that this internalisation of socially rooted and historically developed activities was a distinguishing feature of the human psychology. To connect social and cultural practices with human knowledge and development and show that human cognition is social by nature and develops through social interaction, was one of Vygotskij's major principles (Säljö & Veraksa, 2018).

Vygotskij's theory of the cultural-historical development of higher mental functions and of consciousness has been one of his major contributions for the understanding of children's learning and development. His principles that the individual child's higher mental processes originate from the social processes by which the child participates and that these mental processes can be understood through the tools and signs that mediate them, form the core of his theoretical framework (Wertsch, 1988). By positioning my study within social constructionism, I apply a premise that children's meaning making of belonging is not to be found in the child's mind but in the processes that happen between children and between children and their environments – the culture, artefacts, practices, and language by which they live their everyday lives (Säljö & Veraksa, 2018).

3.2. A Cultural-Historical Framework for Studying Children's Belonging in Kindergarten

Drawing on Mariane Hedegaard's (2008a, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2019, 2020) development of Vygotskij's (1966) perspectives on human learning and development and play, Aleksej N. Leontiev's (1978) conceptualisations of *activity* and *motive,* and Daniil El'konin's (1999) theory of the significance of social practices for children's development, this section outlines the cultural-historical framework that has guided the methodology in the study.

Stating that children's lives are lived across institutions such as home, kindergarten, and school[16], Hedegaard developed a cultural-historical wholeness approach to studying children in institutional settings. This approach sheds light on how social, cultural, historical, and material conditions influence children's everyday lives and their ways of making sense of the world within the institutions they live (Hedegaard, 2008a, 2012a, 2020). Similar to Vygotskij, Hedegaard has taken interest in children's learning and development, topics that do not necessarily coincide precisely with the main interest in this study, which concerns children's *meaning making* of belonging in everyday life in kindergarten. Elin Eriksen Ødegaard (2020, p. 97) explained *meaning making* as a shared construct that aligns with cultural formation as persons or, as in this study, children – both draw meaning from and add meaning to what they experience and the activities in which they participate. Hedegaard's (2008a, 2012a) wholeness approach considers how institutional practices mediate societal priorities, implying that in order to understand children's meaning making in everyday life in kindergarten, one has to pay attention to the institutional practices in which the children are positioned (Edwards, Fleer, & Bøttcher, 2019).

An individual child's meaning making of belonging in his or her everyday life in kindergarten thus concerns how he or she draws from and adds meaning to his or her experiences of belonging. However, as already stated in section 3.1., children's meaning making does not happen in a vacuum, but it is a process happening between the child and his or her environment. As children are participants in the kindergarten's practices, the activities within these institutional practices frame the children's development and cultural formation.

[16] As this study researched children under school age, the term 'institutions' mainly refers to home and kindergarten.

At the same time, the children influence the activities, thus contributing to changes in the institutional practices (Ødegaard & Hedegaard, 2020).

Drawing on Vygotskij (Vygotskij, Rieber, Carton, & Bruner, 1998), Hedegaard (2020, p. 14) differed between what she denoted as 'everyday knowledge' and 'scientific knowledge' by describing the 'everyday knowledge' as connected to children's learning in everyday settings in, e.g., institutions like home and kindergarten, while 'scientific knowledge' refers to subject matter learning in school. Hedegaard (2020) continued by describing children's explorative activities that take place, e.g., through fantasy and role play, as the central activities in their processes of acquiring competences and values in their early years. As the explorative activity of role play is social in its origin and in content (El'konin, 1999, p. 19), children can explore different social roles and demands through role play and also directly through their participation and activities in everyday family and community settings at home and in kindergarten (Hedegaard, 2020).

Hedegaard (2008a) used the concept of *activity* to take the child's intentions and motives into consideration and conceptualise what is going on in an institutional practice from a child's perspective. The concept of activity was originally developed by Leontiev (1978), who stated that the processes that realise a person's actual life in the world by which he or she is surrounded are his or her *activity* (Leontiev, 1978, p. 6). Vygotskij (2004, pp. 7–9) distinguished between two basic types of activity: reproductive activity related to memory, which reproduces and repeats what already exists, and what he denoted as combinatorial, or creative activity. Creative activity, as described by Vygotskij (2004), is activity that instead of reproducing previously experienced impressions, creates new images or actions. Vygotskij continued that the human creative activity makes the human being able to create the future, thus, altering the present. The basis for all creative activity, Vygotskij stated, was *imagination* (Vygotskij, 2004). A child's imagination is central in play, as a child's play is not a reproductive activity, but a creative construction of a new reality, conforming to his or her wishes and desires (Vygotskij 2004, pp. 11–12). Children can use this kind of creative activity to orient themselves towards activities in which they do not yet participate, and explore, individually and collectively, otherwise impossible wishes and scenarios (Hedegaard, 2020, p. 15). Hedegaard (2012b, p. 12) distinguished between *activity* and *practice* in order to highlight the relation between a child's *activity* and the societal conditions mediated by the institutional *practices*. A further explanation concerning *activity* and *activity settings* is

continued in section 3.2.3. where the connection between the individual child's activities and motive orientation is outlined.

Hedegaard's wholeness approach visualised three different perspectives: the *societal* perspective, the *institutional* perspective, and the *individual* perspective, by which together characterise a child's developmental period, involving specific ways of exploration in the different settings he or she participates (Hedegaard, 2020). A conceptualisation of children's 'belonging' in kindergarten within this cultural-historical wholeness approach must thus take the societal, institutional, and individual perspectives into consideration. In the following section, these perspectives are described related to conceptualisations of children's meaning making of belonging.

3.2.1. Societal perspectives

As a macro perspective, the *societal perspective* includes national policies, laws and regulations, and societal conditions. Societal conditions that have particular influence on children's lives in society are that their lives are lived in, and across, several institutions at the same time, such as home and kindergarten (Edwards et al., 2019; Hedegaard, 2012a). To examine how issues of social sustainability in general and children's needs and conditions for belonging, in particular, are outlined and described in national policies and curriculum, as well as in the kindergartens' annual plans, is necessary in order to consider societal perspectives on children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten in the context of social sustainability. As outlined in the present study's introductory chapter, issues of social sustainability such as inequalities and challenges to social inclusion have been foregrounded by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *Transforming Our World* (UN, 2015). In the national context, the children's needs and conditions for belonging have been referred to in the policies such as the new white paper 6 (*Tett på – tidlig innsats og inkluderende fellesskap i barnehage, skole og SFO*, 2019–2020) and in the Norwegian curriculum for kindergartens (*Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content and Tasks*, 2017).

Studying children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten from a societal perspective takes into consideration the societal and culturally conditioned traditions and values that influence kindergarten practices and thus children's everyday lives, such as subject matters, areas, artefacts, and curriculum plans (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 131). Children in Western societies traditionally attend school or kindergarten at an early age, and thus, these

institutions are important cultural organisations of children's lives where the shaping of motives, tools, and symbols pass through generations (Hedegaard, 2019, p. 25). This kind of participation in institutional settings such as kindergarten, already from their early years, can form a basis for the development of strong, long-lasting emotional relationships where children share a history together (Winther-Lindqvist, 2011). Thus, societal conditions of attending kindergarten at an early age can lay a foundation for the development of children's individual experiences of membership and belonging within the peer group in the kindergarten they attend, through the possibility of developing long-lasting, stable, significant, and positive relations to peers through everyday encounters where shared experiences and history may form a basis for a feeling of group-belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Winther-Lindqvist, 2011).

The next section outlines more deeply how the local kindergarten's practices, traditions, and values can influence the everyday life of the individual child.

3.2.2. Institutional perspectives

Institutional perspectives on children's meaning making of belonging focus on the practices, traditions, and values within the institutions the child lives across, such as home and kindergarten. The practice traditions are expressed through material conditions available for children, through interaction patterns, and, e.g., time and space for children's activities. Such traditions may include different perceptions on what constitutes 'good practices', perceptions that may be compatible, or differ, in the institutions the child lives across, and even within the same institution, there may be different opinions of what constitutes 'good practices' (Hedegaard, 2008a). The kindergarten's ways of implementing their values, expressing their practice traditions, and facilitating or restricting the children's everyday lives in kindergarten are particularly relevant in the context of children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten. Niina Rutanen (2017) has examined how transitions between activity settings such as circle time, lunch meals, and naptime are lived through and constructed actively by the children themselves and by the teachers and assistants. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's spatial approach (Lefebvre, 1991), Rutanen identified institutional practices that, in various ways, were aimed at directing the children to their seats and places, restricting their movements, and constructing the children's transitions between the settings with the intention of curbing playfulness and movements defined as not suitable (Rutanen, 2017). Wastell and

Degotardi (2017)[17] have discussed how institutional practices of allowing children to bring private belongings such as toys, books, teddy bears, etc., from home to kindergarten is a matter that is often up for discussion in early childhood settings. As young children may have their own opinions on matters that concern them, bringing their private belongings is, in general, routinely restricted by institutional practices related to norms or rules (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). Finally, another institutional practice tradition particularly worth mentioning in the context of meaning making of belonging is practice traditions related to social categories (Stratigos, 2015b, 2016) such as e.g. gender. A study by Aud T. Meland and Elsa H. Kaltvedt (2019) on gender manifestations in Norwegian kindergartens revealed that as prevailing gender stereotypes concerning how young boys and girls should behave and dress were largely conformed by teachers and assistants in the kindergartens, the children themselves were innovative and challenged these kinds of stereotypes. Meland and Kaltvedt (2019) exemplified this by describing, on the one hand, how teachers and assistants considered that the children wore the "wrong" colour of clothes in regards to their gender. On the other hand, the authors illustrated how a young boy playing with beads and being confronted by another boy for being "girly" due to his preference of pink and purple beads simply responded that he found the particular colours lovely. To what extent the kindergarten's practices are flexible towards being influenced by the children's own perspectives on what constitutes 'good practices', even when the children's perspectives challenge the teacher's and assistant's perceptions on the matter, may be of particular importance regarding institutional perspectives on children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten.

In the context of this study, the institutional perspectives refer mainly to the kindergarten as an institution with an emphasis on the kindergarten's institutional practices. However, Pui Ling Wong (2015) has suggested a further development of Hedegaard's (2009) wholeness approach through an expansion of the concept of 'institutions' and 'institutional perspectives'. Wong argued that today's children, in addition to living across institutions like home and kindergarten or school, are also influenced by aspects that do not conform to such concepts of 'institutions', but rather are *semi-institutional environments* (Wong, 2015, p. 649). Such semi-institutional environments include peer groups and networks across institutions,

[17] See article III Boldermo (2020)

TV programmes and media, electronic games and online computer games, online platforms and video streaming services (such as YouTube), and global pop-culture as children's cultural capital (Sadownik, 2018), which provide opportunities for today's children to be in contact with and communicate with – and be influenced by – persons, groups, and communities outside their regular institutions such as home and kindergarten. Children can make use of their semi-institutional environmental experiences to influence the practices in home and kindergarten, to contribute to play and activities, to access desired communities (Sadownik, 2018), and to negotiate wanted social identities and practice belonging[18].

To what extent such semi-institutional environments can provide conditions for meaning making of belonging for those children that have access to them is uncertain. However, I find it interesting to elaborate on, drawing on Halse's (2018) emphasis of the importance of acknowledging global networks such as social media, sports, and online games, as social groups and structures that young children may attend and experience belonging to. Further, I perceive Alicja Sadownik's (2018) findings concerning children with Polish backgrounds' knowledge of global pop-culture as cultural capital in transitions to childcare settings in a new country as highly topical in the context of semi-institutional environments' relevance for children's meaning making of belonging. Cultural factors (Antonsich, 2010) such as codes, signs, and gestures that are shared by those who share a kind of 'membership' by their access to – and/or knowledge of – semi-institutional environments such as TV programmes online networks or computer games, may be of significance regarding questions of membership, exclusion, and belonging. If play, activities, codes, and artefacts related to semi-institutional environments, as well as regular institutional practices, are taken into consideration, studies on children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten within a cultural-historical framework must acknowledge that today's children can experience and practise belonging to both real and virtual realities. This supports the notion of 'belonging' as dynamic and constantly evolving (Gabi, 2013).

3.2.3. Individual perspectives

Finally, Hedegaard's wholeness approach (2008a, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2019, 2020) includes studying the *individual child's perspective.* In order to gain knowledge of children's meaning

[18] See article II, Boldermo (2019)

making and understandings of the world, the individual child's perspective must be taken into consideration, in addition to seeing him or her as a participant in societal collectives and living across institutions. Hedegaard (2019, p. 24) stated that a child's formation is related to his or her social situations, which changes through the course of life and depends on the institutional practices in which he or she is participating. Drawing on Vygotskij (1994) and Hedegaard (2009, 2012a, 2014), Marilyn Fleer (2019) discussed how the individual child's attitude towards a social situation will differ from that of others; the same environmental condition influences children differently based on the children's attitudes towards the situation (Vygotskij, 1994, p. 341). Vygotskij (1994) stated that the environment's influence on the child depends on the child's emotional experience and also his or her personal characteristics. However, as asserted by Hedegaard (2009, 2012b), this is not a static process, but rather, dynamic and relative, as the child is influenced not only by the environment, but he or she also contributes to and influences the same environment.

Hedegaard (2008a, 2012a, 2019) has illustrated the social situations in kindergartens as *activity settings*. The activity settings in which the child participates are his or her social situations that represent opportunities to acquire motives, social competence, and thinking and conceptual skills (Hedegaard, 2019). The activity settings in kindergartens are the everyday recurring events, such as e.g. breakfast time, lunch meals, and circle time. As the activity settings in kindergartens are social situations in which individual children's actions encounter the demands in the institutional practices (Edwards et al., 2019), the same activity setting provides different experiences and opportunities for meaning making among the different children participating in the setting (Hedegaard, 2008a, 2012b). Connecting a child's social situation in the activity settings within institutional practices proposes a twofold perspective on the child's activity: the perspective of the child's social situation and how he or she experiences the situation, and the perspective of the institution – how the activity happens in the recurring activity settings (Hedegaard, 2012b).

For a researcher to take the individual child's perspective when studying children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten, this involves following the individual child and trying to capture his or her motivated actions in the activity settings facilitated within the institutional practices (Edwards et al., 2019). Leontiev (1978, p. 99) stated that the concepts of activity and motive are connected, as activity does not exist without a motive, and further, that actions that realise a person's activity are caused by its motive but appear to be aimed towards

a goal. Drawing on Leontiev (1978), Hedegaard (2012a, 2012b) discussed how motive, from the individual child's perspective, reflects the child's social situation of development, which implies the child's position in the institutional practice (2012b). When a child participates in several different activity settings in a day, his or her social situation changes, depending on the different activity settings. His or her motive orientation thus relates to what goes on in the activities in the different settings, as well as to his or her own social situation of development (Hedegaard 2012a, p. 133). The child's motives are related to what is meaningful for him or her and can be seen as his or her orientation in the activity setting in which he or she participates. Further, his or her motive orientation is expressed in his or her intentional activities and wishes (Hedegaard, 2012a).

Ditte Winther-Lindqvist (2011) outlined how children's motive developments are connected to social identity processes and stated that children are motivated to achieve a sense of belonging and security within friendship groups. When an individual child starts to attend kindergarten, the child should find his or her own place in the social environment and experience belonging (Winther-Lindqvist, 2011). How the individual child can realise his or her motives to negotiate and even draw boundaries in order to achieve and safeguard membership to a desired group, as well as to feel ensured of being safe and be able to communicate mutual bonds and thus experience togetherness in the activity settings provided within the institutional practices, can thus tell something about his or her meaning making of belonging in the kindergarten as a practice and as an experiential state.

3.3. Considering Materiality: The Role of Places and Artefacts

As already outlined, using a cultural-historical approach to conceptualise children's meaning making of 'belonging' in kindergarten must take into consideration societal, institutional, and individual perspectives, as well as the children's relations to the surrounding world of social, material, cultural, and historical conditions in the kindergarten (May, 2013).

In this study, the concept of belonging is understood both as a relational phenomenon that is practised and negotiated between children and also as an individual experiential state. Both understandings include children's relations with the material environment and consider children's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten as processes that can happen in places and through the use of cultural artefacts. The significance of the material environment

cannot be overlooked, as the use of places and artefacts can help signify identity, mutual bonds, and togetherness (Juutinen, 2018; May, 2013). In contemporary research, the materiality of 'belonging' often refers to people's relationships to their physical surroundings and to how this contributes to their sense of belonging to a place or to a community (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016, p. 238). As children are embedded in their own local places, such as different 'places' in kindergarten, they can have their own theories and ideas about the places they inhabit (Somerville & Green, 2015). They can share local histories and events related to specific places in kindergarten, which can constitute an experience or sense of belonging to the place and to the kindergarten (Boldermo, 2018). Margaret Somerville and Monica Greene (2015, pp. 8–9) have showed that a specific place can provide a bridge between the local and global, and I suggest, drawing on Ødegaard and Hedegaard (2020), that also artefacts, which carry history and meaning from other places and times, can bring forth and inspire children's exploration and practices of belonging both locally and globally.

Drawing on Marx Wartofsky's (Wartofsky, 1979) classifications of artefacts into primary, secondary, and tertiary artefacts, researchers such as Signe Juhl Møller (2015) and Mike Cole (2019) have explored the concept of artefacts in education and research. As the primary dimension of an artefact is the tool, e.g., a spoon, made for a specific use such as eating soup or porridge, the secondary dimension would include the knowledge and mode of action[19] for the use of the tool. To illustrate it with the example of the spoon, the secondary dimension would be the transmission of skills or modes of action of using the spoon, for instance, when a child uses the spoon to eat soup (Wartofsky, 1979, p. 202). The tertiary dimension of an artefact, in which Cole (2019) has taken a specific interest, expands the domain for human action with a free construction of non-practical and imaginative ways of using the artefact – different from the rules and operations related to the primary and secondary dimensions (Wartofsky, 1979, pp. 208–209). Wartofsky compared this with the way the human imagination in dreams is transcending the worldly constraints and rules, no longer bound to them, but rather, is 'off-line' (1979, p. 208–209). To continue with the example of the spoon within the tertiary dimension, it could be that the child, instead of eating his or her soup, imagined the spoon as a plane and playfully started flying with it. Wartofsky

[19] Wartofsky used the term 'praxis' when referring to human 'action' (1979, p. 196). I prefer to use the term 'action' in order to avoid confusion with the use of the term 'practice' in this dissertation, which already refers both to 'institutional practices' in the cultural-historical context and also to children's practices related to negotiations of belonging.

(1979, p. 209) saw this as embodied alternative representations – embodied in the actual artefacts and expressed by this alternative perceptual mode of action. The activity of the imagination is therefore a mode of alternative perceptual action. Drawing on Wartofsky (1979), Juhl Møller investigated the primary, secondary, and tertiary classifications when researching children's toys as artefacts. Stating that materiality, and artefacts in particular, made up a central part of kindergartens' institutional practices, she intended to pursue the influence of variations of material conditions in experimental early childhood settings (Juhl Møller 2015, pp. 30–31). My study does not focus on children's use of toys in particular, but rather, it considers children's use of artefacts in general. However, I concur with the view that the kindergarten's artefacts, whether they are toys or children's belongings such as teddy bears, footballs, clothes, or shoes, constitute an important part of the institutional practices. Drawing on Wartofsky (1979), Cole (2019) argued the usefulness of the idea of the tertiary artefact as it plays a role in guiding and informing the human imagination. I agree with this perception and consider the tertiary artefact as relevant in order to explore how the participating children imagined and practised new possibilities of belonging, 'off-line', through the use of tertiary artefacts.

As the chapters two and three have accounted for the study's major concepts, theoretical perspectives, and methodological framework, I will now proceed to account for the study's research designs and methodological considerations along the way of approaching the field of research and collecting the data.

4. Designing the Study: Methodological Considerations

This is a qualitative study. Denzin and Lincoln (Denzin, 2000, p. 3) offer a generic definition of qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, which consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. The authors continued by stating that the qualitative researcher studies phenomena in their natural settings in an attempt to interpret and make sense of the phenomena under study in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The researcher sees the world in action and embeds his or her findings in it (2000, p. 10). There is a wide range of research strategies a qualitative researcher can apply in order to collect the empirical materials needed to explore the study's research questions, and there is a variety of methods to use. In order to explore how early childhood education for social sustainability could be understood through children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging in kindergarten, I had to spend time with children with migrant backgrounds and participate with them in their everyday lives in kindergarten.

To explore children's social worlds, ethnography has been perceived as a key research method, which requires that the researcher leave his or her own adult-centred understanding of a phenomenon and seek to understand the ways the children's social worlds are shaped by them. In order to do this, the researcher must get alongside the children in their environments (Emond, 2005, p. 124). Ethnographic traditions are characterised by common features such as commitment to first-hand experiences and exploration of the particular chosen social or cultural setting on the basis of participant observation (Atkinson, Delamont, Coffey, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001). Allison James (2001) outlined ethnography as a suitable research method in studying children and childhood and took as point of departure a definition originally developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), describing ethnography as the interpretive act of so-called 'thick description'. Thick descriptions of contexts and situations in the field of research, with plenty of details, enable the researcher to illustrate the complexity of the field and simultaneously give the readers the opportunity to gain their own notions or conclusions about the scene. James stated that 'doing' ethnography could encompass a variety of qualitative research techniques on a range from simple observations of the comings and goings of people in their everyday lives to full participation alongside people

in their daily lives (James, 2001, p. 247). Additional techniques could comprise the use of visual materials such as photos and video recordings (Atkinson et al., 2001, p. 5).

Field work is an overall concept related to various ethnographic methods in anthropological research (Rock, 2001; Gulløv & Højlund, 2003). Ton Otto (Otto, 2013, p. 66) illustrated that the term 'field work' in itself indicated an understanding dominated by spatial metaphors to access the 'field' in which in this study, the 'field' is the kindergarten. I perceive this spatial metaphor as particularly meaningful in the context that I, as the researcher, intended to leave my adult-centred understanding (Emond, 2005, p. 124) at the same time as I left my adult-centred 'world' at the university and accessed the 'field' by entering the children's environment – the kindergarten.

In the following section, I refer to the process of data collection in this study as field work. This study's field work comprised the following techniques for collecting data: participant observation, writing field notes, and taking photos and video recordings[20]. The data material that formed the basis for the thesis' three articles was gathered in three phases: The *first phase* was completed during the first year of the project (2016–2017) and included a total of eight weeks of field work in a kindergarten anonymously named 'Hamperokken'. The data material from this field work consisted of field notes, photos, and video recordings, which were gathered by a methodological approach called 'deep hanging out' (Powell & Somerville, 2018; Wogan, 2004). The findings from the first phase of the study formed the basis for the thesis' second article (Boldermo, 2019).

The *second phase* of data collection took place during the winter of 2018. In this phase, the data that eventually resulted in the thesis' first article (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019) was gathered through conducting a literature review using a procedure similar to the method of scoping studies (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This data material comprised a total of 59 articles selected from 20 different research journals, eventually reduced to 41 articles from 14 journals. Finally, the *third phase* of collecting data, which to some extent, did overlap the second phase, included seven weeks of field work in a kindergarten anonymously named 'Blåtind' during the winter and spring of 2018. The data material, which consisted of photos and detailed field notes, was gathered through systematic participatory observations in the

[20] These techniques, and how they were conducted, are outlined in chapter five.

recurring activity settings in the kindergarten. This formed the basis of the study's third article (Boldermo, 2020).

Further in this chapter, the methodological considerations that were made along the process and thus informed the three phases of data collection are outlined as follows: The crucial ethical considerations that were evident during the preparations for the field works, as well as when conducting the field works, are addressed in section 4.1., in which the issue of ethical complexity and children's consent are accounted for in sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Section 4.2. describes the conducting of the field works, while section 4.3. outlines the methodology for the conducting of the literature review in phase two of the study, drawing on Hilary Arksey's and Lisa O'Malley's (2005) descriptions of 'scoping studies' as method. Finally, section 4.4. offers a visualisation of the three phases of data collection.

4.1. Research Ethics

The research project was registered and approved by the Data Protection Official for Research in NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS[21], (NSD) by autumn 2016. This implies that the data collection and retention, as well as the participants' anonymity, were safeguarded in accordance with the applicable regulations. In order to obtain the parents' consent, two information letters were developed before conducting the field work in the first kindergarten in autumn and spring of 2016 and 2017. First, a letter to *all* parents in the kindergarten was developed in cooperation with the kindergarten's teachers and was handed out to the parents. The purpose of this letter was to inform the parents about the project, and that, I, as a researcher, in agreement with the teachers in the kindergarten, would spend some time there during some weeks in autumn 2016 in order to become acquainted. This letter assured the parents that I had already signed a declaration of confidentiality, like the rest of the teachers and assistants, and that I was not going to conduct any specific observations or child interviews during this period. Further, the letter encouraged the parents to contact me for any questions and comments about the project.

After spending a period of three weeks in the kindergarten, a new letter to the parents in the groups of children aged two through six was developed in line with the NSD's

[21] See Appendix

recommendations for information letters in order to inform them further about the project and to gain the parents' consent for letting their children participate in the study[22]. According to the guidelines of The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH; *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology*, 2016, p. 15), researchers are obliged to inform the subjects of the study and obtain their consent. It is crucial that the consent is freely given, informed, and in an explicit form. Research with children under the age of 15 implies that the consent must be obtained from their parents or guardians (NESH, 2016, p. 21). As Margaret Coady (2010) has emphasised the importance that participants are informed in a language that they understand, the new information letter, which explained the use of cameras and tablets for photos and video recordings, was written and translated into the following languages: English, Russian, Standard Arabic, Chinese, Czech, and Spanish. Based on information from the teachers, translations into Russian would be possible not only for the Russian parents but also for parents of children with Chechen backgrounds to read, as Russian and Chechen are the official languages of Chechnya.

The parents who did not speak Norwegian as their first language received the information letter in what was considered their first language, in addition to both a Norwegian and English version of the letter. This was done in order to ensure that *all* the parents who were asked could understand the content of the letter and what they actually agreed on (NESH, 2016, p. 15) and also so they could have the opportunity to discuss the content with others in their social circle, and with public authorities, if they wanted to do so.

Specific challenges can occur when researching cultural settings because notions of justice, beneficence, and respect can vary (Fossheim, 2013). This ethical complexity can thus occur when researching in diverse contexts such as multicultural kindergartens. Various agents, such as the researcher herself, the children, the teachers and assistants, and the parents, can have different understandings and practices on how respect and other kinds of ethical issues are expressed. As such, research ethics is not only a set of rules, but it must be seen as continuous considerations and judgements when dilemmas occur. As many of the parents in the kindergarten had upbringings and backgrounds from countries and cultures far different from the Norwegians, some of them also had a history of forced migration and had, by the

[22] See Appendix

time of the field work, not yet received a residence permit for staying in Norway[23]. Coady (2010) discussed cultural issues in ethical research and the risks of misunderstandings that can occur between the researcher and the participants as a result of both cultural and linguistic differences. As an example, she drew attention to the possibility that the participants, which, in my project, included the children's parents, could have an impression that potential benefits may depend on their participation in the research. Thus, even if the content is understood, there are issues that could be discussed regarding what it actually means that a consent is freely given. It implies that the consent is not given under *any* sort of pressure. According to the NESH guidelines (2016, p. 15), pressure may be mediated through persons in authority.

In the process of producing the information letter to the kindergarten for it to be distributed to the parents, I spent some time pondering on whether the letter should have the UiT university logo. On the one hand, I considered that it would illustrate the credibility of the project and visualise that a recognised academic institution was responsible. On the other hand, I realised that the same logo could be interpreted as displaying authority, and thus, be perceived as a kind of pressure from authorities towards people who may have been in a difficult situation. Thus, I ended up *not* using the UiT logo, but the letter informed of my contact details in case someone wanted further information. Beyond irregular, informal meetings that took place during the field work, I did not participate in any organised meetings with the parents. In informal conversations with the parents, I did not receive any particular questions or comments regarding the project other than comments on the importance of the topic and general questions on how the field work progressed. As it turned out, however, several of the parents had discussed the content of the letter and the project with the teachers and assistants in the kindergarten and sought their advice and explanations on what the project was about. Finally, the parents of 29 children in the group of children aged two through six gave their consent to let their children participate in the study.

In order not to collect more information than necessary regarding the study's theme and research question, the amount of personal information that was gathered concerning the

[23] As a rule, children of asylum seekers are not entitled to attend kindergarten until both a residence permit has been decided and the parents and children are permanently resident in a municipality. However, the municipality shall, as far as possible, provide for children who are asylum seekers to attend kindergarten from the age of four. The Asylum Reception where the family lives sends an application to the municipality on behalf of the child in question, and the UDI pays a subsidy for children aged four years or older.

participating children was minimised. Thus, neither the children's last names nor their dates of birth were registered, only their first names and their age at the time of the field work. As I had signed the kindergarten's declaration of privacy, I was informed orally by the teachers of the participating children's parents that were either students, labour immigrants, or refugees or asylum seekers from countries outside of the Nordic countries. This information was not recorded by me in any way.

In the process of obtaining the parents' consent for the field work in the next kindergarten in the winter and spring of 2018, I used the same information letter as in the first field work without the UiT logo. However, in this version of the letter, I removed the sentences concerning video recordings, as I had decided, based on the experiences from the first field work, only to take photos – not video recording – this time. Prior to this next field work, the new version of the information letter was translated into Somali, Spanish, Arabic, and English, and the same procedure as in the first kindergarten was followed by delivering both the Norwegian and English versions to all parents who did not have Norwegian as their first language, in addition to the version written in what was considered their first language. Among the group of children aged three through six, the parents of 13 children gave their consent, whereas, in the group of two-year-olds, the parents of all 12 children gave their consent to let their children participate in the study.

4.1.1. Ethical complexity in the role as researcher

The NESH guidelines (2016) stated that researchers involving children in their research have a particular responsibility to protect their participants. Research in which children constitute important sources of knowledge will face challenges that, at the same time, are similar to and different from those of research with adults, and it can involve an asymmetric relation that includes a construction of reality by which the child can appear as the weaker part in the relationship (Tiller, 2006). Pia Christensen and Alan Prout (2002) argued that the paradigmatic change of perspectives in the view of the child, involving seeing the child as a social actor, implied that new ethical issues in research with children had arisen. The authors referred to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and stated that all activities that involved children should acknowledge the child as a fellow human being with rights to be informed and consulted (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481). William Corsaro (1996, pp. 449–450) has described conducting field work with children as complicated, in the sense that

to enter into the children's world and gain their trust may include some challenges. Seeing children as social and competent actors, with obvious rights to be listened to and respected, implies that comprehensive ethical considerations are required. A view on children as *subjects*, rather than *objects* of inquiry, and as active and equal co-creators of knowledge, implies that doing research *about* children has changed into doing research *with* children (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Samuelsson & Pramling, 2009). To study children's practices and experiences of belonging and to explore how belonging operates between children in diverse contexts thus required ethical sensitivity and awareness. Therefore, and with an aim to prepare for the role as researcher, I conducted a limited literature review on topics concerning research ethics in research with children during the winter of 2016 and 2017. The main intention for conducting such a review was to find descriptions and discussions on the researcher's role that emphasised ethical issues not exclusively linked to the traditional formalities and guidelines, but which rather referred to the researcher's subjective experiences and ethical reflections. With this as a starting point, 10 different articles from four international journals were selected within a timeframe from 2007 to 2017.

The chosen journals were the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* (four articles), *Contemporary Issues of Early Childhood* (two articles), *International Journal of Early Childhood* (two articles), and *British Educational Research Journal* (two articles). The selection was done by simply reading the titles and keywords on all articles in the journals within the chosen timeframe and identifying those articles in which the title and/or keywords suggested that the subject concerned ethics in research with children. Through an additional search in the references in these first 10 articles, another eight articles were identified as being of particular interest related to the topic. These additional eight articles, published in various other journals within a time span between 1988 and 2012, were included in the small review.

Thus, a total of 18 articles concerning various ethical issues and dilemmas in research with children were examined. Quite a few of the articles discussed various issues of children's informed consent and assent (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2012; Einarsdottir, 2007; Graham, Powell, & Truscott, 2016; Harcourt & Conroy, 2005; Heath, Charles, Crow, & Wiles, 2007). Some articles problematised issues regarding the researcher's recognitions of children's dissent and of children's possibilities to opt in or out of participation in research (Dockett, Einarsdottir, et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2016). Obtaining children's consent as an ongoing process throughout the research was suggested in some of the articles (Dockett,

Perry, & Kearney, 2012; Harwood, 2010; Mayne & Howitt, 2014), and the need for reflexive researcher-child relationships and ethical 'symmetry' between the researcher and the children was advocated (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Mayne & Howitt, 2015). As several researchers argued the insufficiency of only following ethical guidelines and formalities when conducting research with children (Dockett, Perry, et al., 2012; Mayne & Howitt, 2014, 2015; Mortari & Harcourt, 2012), Luigina Mortari and Deborah Harcourt (2012) claimed that the codified approach to ethics and phrases in the context of ethical issues and consent formed a formalistic and bureaucratic approach to important and complex ethical issues regarding research with children. The authors discussed the differences between an ethic of justice and an ethic of care in such a context and stated that guidelines and rules, which can be referred to as ethics of justice, only provide the researcher with some useful reference points, whereas what is really required is the researcher's ability to interrogate his or her actions from an ethical point of view and regard him- or herself as an ethical tool (Mortari & Harcourt, 2012, pp. 239–240).

The findings from this small review on research ethics proved to be a useful point of departure for defining my own ethical framework as a new researcher. Several of the findings from the review were drawn upon in order to identify ethical challenges in the planned field works, especially concerning the children's consent to participate, which are elaborated in the following section.

4.1.2. Children's consent

As already stated, research with children under the age of 15 demands that the consent must be obtained from their parents or guardians (NESH, 2016, p. 21). However, as outlined in the introductory chapter section 1.3., the children's right to participation is an important issue in the Norwegian kindergartens according to the curriculum. The NESH guidelines (2016, p. 21) underlined that children under the age of seven who are able to form their own opinions on the matter should be provided with both the information and the opportunity to express their opinions. Further, the guidelines stated the necessity that the children themselves accepted participation in the research to the extent that they were able to do so. Obtaining consent from the children was therefore a crucial issue in the process of conducting the field works.

According to Sue Heath et al. (2007, p. 408), a key issue in obtaining informed consent in research with children is the children's competency to make up their own minds

when it comes to their potential involvement in the research, as well as their competency to understand the information about the study and methods that are being used. I intended to use photos and video recordings of children, which was something that could constitute ethical dilemmas in the way that even if both the child and the parents gave their consent to have the photos or video recordings published, the child could regret this decision when he or she got older (Coady, 2010). Sofia Cele (Cele, 2006, p. 80) problematised this issue of children's consent in her dissertation about children's experiences of place. Cele discussed whether a child actually had a realistic opportunity to decline participation, if the parents had agreed, and she questioned whether it was ethical to assume that the parents knew better than the child him- or herself if he or she wanted his or her photo to be published (Cele, 2006). To solve this issue in my project, I decided that if any photos should be published, they would only be photos of places and artefacts; the photos and video recordings of the children were *only* to be used in my analysis, not to be published in any of the articles or in the dissertation.

This decision alone did not solve the ethical issues when it came to obtain the children's free and informed consent. Mortari and Harcourt (2012, p. 238) argued that children, often being disciplined individuals, are used to doing what adults demand, even if the request comes from an outsider, such as a researcher. This is also pointed out by the NESH guidelines (2016, p. 20–21), which stated that children can perceive that they cannot object to participate, nor are they able to realise the consequences of their participation. Thus, even if the children in the kindergartens, to some extent, could be aware of their own rights to participation and to have their views heard in issues regarding themselves, I could not assume that their potential consent was sufficiently informed and freely given. Anne Graham et al. (2016), however, have argued that it could actually be easier for younger children, such as those in kindergarten, to exercise agency regarding their consent to participate in research because younger children could be less likely to be raised in traditional adult-child power relations, and more used to the allowance of moving in and out of activities.

In both kindergartens, I involved what has been denoted as a *process-consent* (Dockett, Einarsdottir, et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2016), which implied that the children's consent or dissent to participate was an ongoing process throughout the field work. The comfort and well-being of the children was thus prioritised above the collecting of data. As a result of this strategy, the number of real participants in both field works were limited, as the participants were the children who wanted to participate on a daily basis, or, as it turned out,

particularly with the two-year-olds – on a minute-by-minute basis (Harwood, 2010). This applied in both of the kindergartens where the field works were conducted. As I intended to take photos and video recordings in the first field work, I tried to engage the children in the research and provided them with the opportunity to take photos themselves of places and artefacts and of activities and situations if they wanted to. When it came to the question of taking photos of other children such as their friends, the children were instructed to ask first. As it happened, some photos that were taken by the children were of children who were not participants in the study by their parents' consent. This was an issue I was very attentive to, and I solved it by reviewing all the photos and deleting those from the camera before I left the kindergarten for the day.

All of the photos of children and video recordings in the first field work were taken exclusively with the children's active consent. In order to ensure the children's opportunities to opt in – and out – of the project, the children in the first field work were given the right to decide which of their photos that I could use as research-data and which should be deleted (Dockett, Kearney, & Perry, 2012). However, this was not as successful an activity as I had imagined it would be. The first couple of days, many of the participating children were eager to look through the photos and recordings together with me, but this interest did not last. Even if their main interest concerned the tablet and camera, some of the older children in both kindergartens were interested in the field notes I wrote, asking me if and what I wrote about them. In such situations, I would read for them what I had written, and if they told me to stop writing about them, I did. In the second field work, I used the camera and tablet only to take photos, not video recordings, but beyond this, my ethical reflections beforehand and along the way concerned much of the same issues as in the first field work. However, this time, I was better prepared. Because of this, and probably also because I did not spend time fiddling with video recordings, I was much more comfortable when dealing with the children's ongoing consent or dissent than in the first field work. This time, all photos were taken by me, and the majority of the photos were of artefacts and surroundings. The photos of children were taken with their active consent, but concerning the two-year-olds, with whom most of the time was spent, it was challenging to actually identify their active consent. Their active dissent, however, left no doubt.

During the second field work, I did not spend time ensuring that the children really understood who I was and what and why I was researching; rather, I made an effort to show

interest in the children and *their* experience of having me following them. This approach of not being so self-consumed was particularly necessary when spending time with the two-year-olds. As a 'day-to-day' consent (Dockett, Einarsdottir, et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2016) was an obvious approach, this was not sufficient with such young children. The two-year-olds' dissent was not to be mistaken, as their utterings, both verbal and more-than-verbal such as bodily as well as through gestures and facial expressions, left no doubt if my presence was unwanted. I thus experienced, several times, that if a child wanted me to follow him or her, sit beside them, and also play or look at books together, this did not mean that I could take a photo or assume that the next day would be similar. When it came to deciding whether to follow, or not follow, an individual child in the group of two-year-olds, this was based on interpreting the child's more-than-verbal expressions, as well as his or her verbal utterings as consent or dissent to participate. My sensitivity towards the young children's body language, facial expressions, and gestures thus had to be ongoing – not on a daily basis, but rather, minute by minute (Harwood, 2010).

4.2. Conducting the Field Works

The field works were conducted during autumn and spring of 2016 and 2017 and winter and spring of 2018. On the basis of their size and location, the two kindergartens 'Hamperokken' and 'Blåtind' were selected from the University of Tromsø's list of practice kindergartens associated with the Early Childhood Teacher Education. One of the kindergartens was a public kindergarten owned by the municipality; the other one was a private kindergarten owned by a kindergarten company. Both kindergartens were large urban kindergartens with approximately 60 to 80 children and 20 to 30 employees. As already outlined, each kindergarten had a relatively large proportion of children with parents with a history of migration to Norway for various reasons. The decision to conduct field works in two kindergartens instead of one was made on the basis of a perception that data from two different large and multicultural kindergartens could provide more varied insights in children with migrant background's meaning making of belonging in kindergarten.

As the material conditions within the kindergartens would mediate their institutional practices and ways of thinking, and thus constitute conditions for children's meaning making of belonging (May, 2013; Ødegaard & Hedegaard, 2020), the role of places and artefacts in

both the participating kindergartens was considered throughout the conducting of the field works. A point of departure concerning the role of places and artefacts in the children's meaning making of belonging was that meaning could be accumulated and deposited in specific places within the kindergartens or the kindergartens' surroundings[24] and in artefacts such as toys, books, children's clothes and belongings, and also semiotic artefacts such as pictures, signs, and symbols (Ridgway, 2010, p. 315). Thus, the main starting point for both field works was that places and artefacts could mediate, or form a basis for, the children's meaning making of belonging.

Although the kindergartens differed from each other through ownership, administration, organisation, and focus areas, both carried out institutional practices of allowing the children to bring their own belongings from home, such as toys and other artefacts. Thus, the children's own belongings brought from home formed a substantial part of the kindergartens' materiality. For me as a researcher, this was unexpected, as my previous experience as a kindergarten teacher was in line with the findings of Wastell and Degotardi (2017) that such bringing of private belongings was contested and controlled by unwritten rules and regulations. On the one hand, these institutional practices opened up for negotiations and practices of belonging to a desired community; however, on the other hand, the same practices could cause the risk of children perceiving themselves as on the outside of the peer community due to limited access to the desired artefacts. These findings from the field works illustrated that seemingly similar material conditions such as artefacts brought from home, mediated through institutional practices of allowing the children to bring their private belongings to kindergarten, could result in opposite outcomes in terms of children's conditions for experiencing, negotiating, and practising belonging. In the following section, the field works in each kindergarten are outlined.

4.2.1. The field work at Hamperokken

The field work in the first kindergarten, Hamperokken, was conducted during a period of eight weeks, two to three days a week during autumn of 2016 and spring of 2017. The 29 participating children were aged between two[25] to five years old. The first three weeks in Hamperokken were supposed to be a pre-study, and the aim was to become acquainted with

[24] This applied particularly in the first field work.

[25] The participating children who were two years old in this kindergarten turned three during the same year.

the new role as researcher and spend time in the kindergarten in order for the children and parents to be used to my presence. Prior to this, I met with the teachers and assistants and presented the project in order to discuss my ideas with the teachers and assistants. Based on their feedback, the decision was made that the field work primarily should comprise the group of children aged three to five.

Having had a long professional career as a kindergarten teacher, I felt unfamiliar with taking on the new role as a researcher within a field that I perceived as well-known to me. Being a former teacher for many years, I was aware that my personal practical knowledge from previous experiences would be anchored in my body and mind and affect all my actions in the new context and role as a researcher in kindergarten (Clandinin, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Before entering the kindergarten, I planned a research strategy inspired by Gulløv and Højlund (2003), which required me to follow the children as they moved between places and participated in activities. The field notes from the first three weeks of the field work were written in retrospect, after each visit in the kindergarten, assuming that it would be disruptive if the notes were taken openly and in consideration that it would not be a natural activity in the social environment by which I, as a new researcher, would try to gain entry into and become a part of (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996, p. 205). The initial intention during these three weeks was to explore whether it was possible to understand the children's meaning making of belonging through their use of places and artefacts in the kindergarten.

How to introduce the concept of belonging for the participating children was something I pondered quite a bit before starting the field work. Instead of assuming that the children would not be familiar with the term 'belonging', I actively used the term in conversations with the children, and based on their answers, I adjusted my use of words. Some of the children explained where they 'belonged' in the kindergarten, meaning which group of children and adults they 'belonged' to. Other children explained their knowledge of the concept of 'belonging' by telling me, e.g., which water bottle or teddy bear, or shelf in the dressing area[26], 'belonged' to them. I tried, with varied luck, to explore their experiences of belonging and what places they expressed some kind of belonging to by asking them if they had any best friends in the kindergarten, where their favourite places were, where they liked

[26] The use of the term 'dressing area' refer to the Norwegian term 'garderobe', which in the terminology of kindergartens is used when referring to the room where the children's clothes and personal belongings are kept, and where the children change their clothes before and after outdoor play.

best to be or to play, and also which artefacts or toys they preferred. However, I got the feeling that the topic actually did not seem to interest them so much, or more precisely, my way of presenting the topic, as I struggled to engage the children in conversations on the matter.

When I returned to Hamperokken the following spring, in order to continue the field work, I was better prepared. In addition to having conducted the review on research ethics, I had made a small review on the concept of 'belonging', and thus had some revelations on 'belonging' as relational as well as individual phenomena (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006) as outlined in chapter two. Being determined to investigate belonging as a relational phenomenon, I brought a camera and a tablet, and the main interest now was to obtain knowledge of how the children from different backgrounds and upbringings negotiated and practised their belonging in the kindergarten. Hedegaard (2019, p. 29) described that to examine children's perspectives, the researcher must enter the institutional practice where the children spend their daily lives, record their interactions with each other, and try to comprehend their intentions by interpreting the situations where they show opposition or conflict in order to understand what their motives are directed towards. In order to do this, I realised that writing field notes in retrospect would not be sufficient; thus, I brought my pen and paper, as well as camera and tablet into the kindergarten.

As this part of the field work progressed, it became obvious to me that I was not able to follow all the 29 participants, and also, not all of those children were interested in being subject for my investigation. As I drew on the insights from the review on research ethics, the real participants in Hamperokken were the children who were actually attending the kindergarten on the days of the data collection and who showed interest in participating on a day-to-day basis. The issues of dealing with children's consent or dissent and trying to safeguard some kind of ethical 'symmetry' between the researcher and the children (Christensen & Prout, 2002) led to my letting go of the initially planned strategy of following the children in their activities throughout the day, and even initiate activities, to take on another approach. Instead of actively seeking the children or specific activities, or initiating activities myself, I awaited what was going on from day to day. Being aware of keeping my distance to children that signalled discomfort, I took on a sensitive role by waiting to be invited by the children. Such an approach has been described by Powell and Somerville (2018) as 'deep hanging out' which involves being together with the children without

intruding, but rather wait for invitations and engaging with them at their level and interest. As indicated by Powell and Somerville (2018), such invitations could happen in a form of an offer to eat an invisible ice cream, or being asked to be a customer in a play-shop or to listen to hip-hop music together, to be invited into discussions about football players, or even just a friendly glance or look. The main idea was to await the children's initiative and engage in what was of interest for them.

This way of conducting the field work implied that the number of real participating children were naturally limited. Nevertheless, I spent time with the children that invited me in, while they were eating, drawing, laughing, quarrelling, having fun, and being bored, and I participated in everyday activities such as playing inside and outdoors, and in organised activities such as inside circle time and outdoor excursions, and other activities such as hide and seek, digging for worms, throwing snowballs and also bicycling. In conclusion, I followed, regularly, approximately 10 of the 29 children that were participants by their parents' consent, on the basis of their invitations and active consent to having me joining them.

4.2.2. The field work at Blåtind

The second field work was conducted at Blåtind, during five weeks in the winter and spring of 2018. I met twice with the manager and teachers in January and March of 2018 in order to present the research project and discuss ideas on how to proceed. This kindergarten had a large proportion of children of newly arrived refugees, and it was not suitable for me as a researcher to conduct the field work among this particular group of children. Instead, we agreed that the field work should be conducted in the groups of children more familiar with the everyday life in the kindergarten. As a consequence of the diversity in the group of children, the kindergarten's overall pedagogical approach aimed, according to the annual plan, particularly, towards safeguarding the children's experiences of belonging and being part of a community.

Initially, the field work was planned to be conducted two to three days a week in two different groups of children – one group of children aged three to five in which 13 were participants by their parents' consent, and the other group consisted of 12 two-year-olds, all participants by their parents' consent. However, due to practical reasons, and also because I had learned through the review on 'belonging' in recent early childhood research that a

research gap had been identified by Stratigos et al. (2014) concerning research on 'belonging' among younger children, the group of two-year-olds became of particular interest. Thus, the days and hours of the field work were mainly spent together with the two-year-olds. In retrospect after the first field work, I had been somewhat dissatisfied with my shifting strategy, and thus, I intended to engage a new and more strategic approach in the second. During the process of analysing the data material from the first field work, inspiration grew, drawing on Hedegaard (2012a), to construct the second field work more systematically towards investigating recurring activity settings as children's social situations provided within institutional practices. As I supposed that conducting systematic observations could give more comprehensive findings, I planned to focus on the children's social and material environment, as well as the kindergarten's activity settings, as societal traditions realised within institutional practices as concrete historical events (Hedegaard, 2012a). Taking into consideration that the activity settings are each individual child's social situation, and thus, different children within the same activity setting could experience different social situations, I sought to obtain knowledge on how the two-year-olds with different backgrounds seemed to make meaning of these recurring social situations.

The activity settings that were observed in the second field work were primarily circle time and lunch meals, as these were the recurring activity settings that the two-year-olds were supposed to participate in on a daily basis. In addition to this, the transitions between these activity settings were observed. The writing of field notes was conducted more systematically than in the first field work, and I also took the time to retire from the group when the two-year-olds had their naptime in order to develop detailed descriptions of contexts and situations (Tracy, 2010).

As described in article III (Boldermo, 2020), the circle time as a recurring activity setting was rarely carried out as planned in this period. Nonetheless, the two-year-olds spent approximately 10 to 20 minutes each day in the dressing area after they had been outdoors, waiting for lunch to be ready. This was the time of the day when the circle time was supposed to be carried out; however, due to various reasons, mainly practical and organisational, this was not done. All the same, these spaces of time proved to be of interest for participant observations, as they were recurring, happening at the same time and in the same place each day and involving more or less the entire group of two-year-olds. Thus, as researcher, I spent the time together with them, and during these spaces of time, my participation alternated

between observing, writing field notes, and helping the children if they asked for help with practical things or with resolving conflicts. As for the latter, I intervened only if the children explicitly asked me to do so or if I considered the situations so precarious that I had to intervene.

For my participation in the lunch meals, I started out with the intention of joining the children at the tables; however, it proved to be difficult both writing field notes at the same time as engaging with the children, and it was a practical issue as well. Thus, the observations of the lunch meals were conducted from a small distance – either I located myself on a chair by another table or on the sofa as an open invitation for the children to join me at looking at books or just chatting after they had finished their meal. The two-year-olds could leave the table by their own choice when they had finished eating and cleaned up their cups and plates. I therefore was regularly accompanied by some of children as a part of their routine, and this emerged as particularly good opportunities to get to know the children and to be able to achieve their trust and interest. As all 12 of the two-year-olds were participants in the research due to their parents' consent, eventually, 10 of them were considered as participants by me, on the basis of their active verbal and more-than-verbal expressions and utterings in my presence.

4.3. Scoping Studies

The constructing of the research material that was gathered in the second phase of the study is thoroughly outlined in article I (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019), which is a literature review. Hence, this will not be repeated here. However, the methodology that informed the data collection was not outlined specifically in the review article. Thus, this section describes this strategy, which was inspired by 'scoping studies' (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Arksey and O'Malley contended that rather than an 'ideal' type of procedures for conducting a literature review existing, all methods could offer relevant tools for conducting the review, which the researchers had to use appropriately (2005).

The main intention for conducting the literature review was to examine how research in the context of early childhood education for sustainability embraced social aspects. Particularly, aspects such as diversity and belonging in relation to the situation for children of migrants and refugees in early childhood settings were examined. By the time of the review,

two literature reviews concerning early childhood research on sustainability had recently been conducted by Margaret Somerville and Carolyn Williams (2015) and by Maria Hedefalk et.al. (2015). Both of these reviews aimed at following up and completing the already described review conducted by Davis (2009). As Somerville and Williams (2015) did not study issues concerning social sustainability in their review, Hedefalk et al.(2015) found that such social issues were rarely examined. However, this finding was not discussed further in their article. Therefore, it appeared as interesting to identify what kind of social issues were debated in articles on social sustainability, and what kind of research gaps concerning social issues would emerge. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) have suggested the method of scoping studies as useful when the aim was to identify research gaps in the existing literature and with the purpose of publishing research findings in a particular field of inquiry. The steps that were adopted when conducting the literature review are described in the following paragraph, drawing on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) suggestions for stages in scoping studies – however, with some repositioning and adjustments.

The first step of the literature review investigated 20 journals of which nine were Nordic journals and 11 were international, within the time span from 2013 to 2018 . These journals were examined through the searching of keywords in titles and abstracts. This first step is in line with Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) suggestions for a *second* stage in conducting a scoping study, identifying relevant studies within chosen terms of time span and language. In this step of the review, 59 articles were chosen for further examining, leading to step two, which is described as stage *three* in Arksey and O'Malley's suggestion for scoping studies, namely, 'study selection' (2005). In order to eliminate irrelevant studies that did not address the research questions, criteria for inclusion and exclusion were made. All 59 articles were read in full to consider whether they should be included in the review or not. This resulted in the exclusion of 18 of the 59 examined articles from six of the 20 chosen journals, which meant that eventually, 41 articles from 14 journals were included for steps three and four of the review.

Before shortly outlining the third and fourth steps of the review, the descriptions of the stages *four* and *five* in scoping studies by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) are briefly explained in the following paragraph. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) described stage four as 'charting the data', which involved a technique for interpreting and sorting qualitative data into a data charting form like, for instance, Excel, which recorded information such as authors, years,

methodology, etc. Further, the authors explained stage five as involving the process of summarising and reporting the results. As the literature review only comprised four steps, steps three and four in the review correspond with stage four in the scoping studies as suggested by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The 41 articles were organised, not in Excel sheets, but in feature maps using Nvivo[27], which visualised the articles' research questions, methodology, theoretical backgrounds, and also how they related to the review's research questions. Even if the review did not include a step five in particular, it is obvious that the review was conducted with an aim to report and to publish the results.

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) emphasised the strength of conducting literature reviews as scoping studies, as such a method seeks to present an overview of all of the material that has been reviewed and examined and does not aim to assess the quality of evidence or determine whether the examined studies provide findings that are robust or could be generalised (2005, p. 27). In order to safeguard transparency, the tables that were developed in steps two and three of the literature review were published as supplementary materials together the list of the 41 articles that eventually were included in the review, as well as an overview of the same articles categorised by methodology. As these tables also visualised all 20 *journals* that were originally part of the review in step one, and thus also showed which six of them were excluded in step two, the 18 *articles* that were excluded are not visualised. In retrospect, these excluded articles should also have been listed as supplementary materials in order to ensure the transparency and possibilities of others to follow up the findings.

[27] A computer program for text and qualitative data analysis

4.4. Visualisation: Data Material Gathered in Three Phases

Table III. Phase one, field work autumn 2016/spring 2017	
'Hamperokken', children aged 2–5	
Participants by parents' consent	29 children
'Real' participants by their own consent on a day-to-day basis	10 children
Meetings with the manager and teachers	August 2016 and February 2017
Visiting weeks/days/estimated hours	8 weeks/18 days/ 45 hours
Field notes	50 pages
Video observations	80 minutes
Photos	A total of 308
Written small stories	13 by August 2019

Table 3 Data material phase one

Table IV. Phase two, literature review winter 2018		
STEP 1	Identify relevant studies within chosen terms of time span, language and key words	Reading and examining 59 articles in 20 journals of which 9 were Nordic and 11 international
STEP 2	Study selection	Selecting articles from the examined journals based on explicit criteria[1] - 41 articles from 20 journals were selected
STEP 3	Organising 41 selected articles in feature maps in Nvivo	Visualising the articles' authors,years, research questions, applied theory, methodology and findings
STEP 4	Re-organising the feature maps in Nvivo	Interrogating how the 41 articles related to or answered the review's four research questions

[1]These criteria are outlined in detail in article I, see Boldermo & Ødegaard (2019)

Table 4 Data material phase two

Table V. Phase three, field work winter/spring 2018

The field work at Blåtind 2018, children aged 2–5	
Participants by parents' consent	25 children[2]
'Real' participants by their own consent on a day-to-day basis	18 children[3]
Meetings with the manager and teachers	January and March 2018
Visiting weeks/days/estimated hours	7 weeks/16 days/ 45 hours
Field notes	55 pages[4]
Photos	A total of 149
Written small stories	12 by January 2020

[2] This number includes the children in both groups; the 12 two-year-olds and 13 children in the group of children aged 3–5

[3] This number includes the 10 children in the group of 12 two-year-olds and eight children in the group of children aged 3–5

[4] This number is an estimate that refers both to the transcribed typewritten field notes, as well as the remaining approximately 30% of handwritten field notes that currently have not been transcribed

Table 5 Data material phase three

5. Collecting and Constructing the Data Material

A key assumption concerning ethnography as a suitable method in qualitative research has been that the first-hand interactions with people in their everyday lives could provide more insights into the participants' motivations and behaviours than other methods (Tedlock, 2000, p. 470). Issues of credibility as one (of several) important criterion for quality in qualitative research have been outlined by Sarah J. Tracy (Tracy, 2010). By quoting Laurel Richardson (Richardson, 2000), Tracy stated that good ethnography could express a reality that seemed truthful, and that could give a trustworthy account of a cultural, social, individual, and shared sense of the 'real' (Tracy 2010, p. 842). In this chapter, the process of choosing and using the techniques for collecting the data in the field works is accounted for and discussed in section 5.1. Section 5.2 addresses the process of analysing the data and creating the cases that formed the basis for articles II and III, while section 5.3 gives an explanation and rationale for the use of small stories to illustrate and brings the findings to life. Finally, section 5.4 evaluates the quality of the study.

5.1. Field Notes, Photos, and Video Recordings

When conducting an ethnographic field work, a core activity it participant observation. This implies the production of written accounts and descriptions that are suitable to bring the versions of the participants' worlds to others (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Given that children in multicultural kindergartens represented a diversity of 'worlds', my initial perceptions were that the tools for collecting the data should be at least as diverse and varied. Tracy (2010) contended that crystallisation, rather than triangulation, inspires researchers to gather different kinds of data using different methods in order to open up for more complex understandings of the issues under study. Writing field notes, collecting and writing the children's stories and narratives, as well as taking photos and video recordings were considered by me as appropriate techniques in order to capture the diversity in the fields I was about to enter. I assumed that a combination of photos, video recordings, and detailed field notes would contribute to a richness in data sources and would also provide me – as a researcher – the ability *to show* what was going on in the field, rather than *tell*, and thus give

the reader the opportunity to make his or her own interpretations (Tracy 2010, pp. 843–844; Peters et al., 2020).

Further, I had the idea that taking photos and recording videos would allow for the opportunity to discuss the content together with the participating children and thus gain access to their meaning making of belonging. 'Member reflections' and 'multivocality' have been discussed by Tracy (2010) as entrances to allow for the participants' voices to be heard and to dialogue with them about the findings. Particularly, multivocality, which includes getting multiple and varied voices in the analyses, provides opportunities for a diversity of meaning making.

Drawing on Dylan Yamada-Rice (Yamada-Rice, 2017), I assumed that the children would be familiar with the use of different visual media, and thus, this kind of approach would fit in naturally within the kindergartens' settings. The procedure for taking the photos and recording the videos was influenced by my epistemological point of departure – social constructionism and cultural-historical theory. Thus, my camera lens was initially aimed to be directed towards the children's expressions and interactions with each other, as well as how they engaged with places and artefacts. As accounted for in section 4.1.2., my attempts to engage the children in taking photos as well as recording videos did not work out as I had imagined beforehand. Perhaps there was another side of 'being familiar with visual media' that I was not aware of at the time. Particularly in the first kindergarten, the kindergarten's own devices for taking photos were used frequently by the teachers and assistants; the children's everyday lives in kindergarten were emphatically documented, and several of the children seemed to be very familiar with taking photos – and being photographed. After the first days of curiosity, my camera and tablet were simply not that interesting to the majority of the children. Another equally relevant explanation is that it was my first attempt to use visual media in research; thus, I did not have the adequate experience that perhaps could have contributed to a better outcome concerning these matters.

As my camera lens was supposed to capture the children's social interactions, the ethical issues of day-by-day and minute-by-minute consent (Graham et.al., 2016; Dockett, Einardottir, & Perry, 2012; Harwood, 2010) as addressed in section 4.1.2. disturbed my initial ideas of capturing children's meaning making of belonging through the lens. Specifically, when it came to using video recordings as a tool for research, I experienced challenges. As

outlined by Michael Peters et.al (2020), this required cautious consideration and navigation. My idea of having the children look through, approve, and comment on the recordings, in retrospect, eventually seemed to bore them. When conducting the recordings, I struggled with technical issues of how to avoid capturing children who were not participants by their parents' consent when, for instance, video recording a couple of children playing soccer at the small football pitch, and suddenly, they invited several others to join in. A more experienced researcher within visual methodology would be able to solve such issues technically; however, for me, it was either to stop the video immediately, or, rather, being too slow to stop recording, having to delete the whole video. A number of recordings were thus deleted due to ethical concerns; others were useless simply because of poor craftsmanship such as a finger in front of the lens and similar.

The writing of thick and detailed descriptions is stated by Tracy (2010) as an important means to achieve credibility in qualitative research. Emerson et al. (2001) described the writing of field notes as a way of reducing the recently observed persons, places, and happenings into written accounts that can re-constitute the world of persons, places, and happenings in a preserved form, available to be studied over and over again (2001, p. 353). My field notes included observations, written with the use of abbreviations, keywords, and codes, and also small drawings and illustrations – quickly scribbled down of the situations observed. The style and form of the field notes changed as the field works progressed, reflecting the preliminary and transitory quality compared to the transcribed texts that were written in retrospect at my office (Emerson et al., 2001). Starting out the first field work, I wrote the field notes as some kind of report, trying to be objective and downplay my own role as a narrator. This strategy, however, did not last, as it became impossible not to write down my own subjective reflections as comments along the way. As some of the field notes were messy and incoherent, characterised by short abbreviations and codes, others were detailed descriptions and in shape more like narratives than notes. I tried to describe the persons and happenings in as much detail as possible, and when it came to describing places and artefacts, I used the camera, as well as drawing illustrations of places. As I assumed that the children's own narratives and stories could provide me insights in their meaning making of belonging, I encouraged the children by taking a distinctly attentive and listening attitude when they took the initiative to share stories with me. Thus, I spent quite some time listening to and writing the children's stories that they shared with me and the stories they shared with each other. In

this process, I adopted an approach drawing on Sveinung Sandberg (Sandberg, 2010, p. 447) that whether the children were telling 'true' stories was not essential when it came to the stories' significance and meaning to the individual child, and in the context and relation to others.

The field notes that were written during the lunch observations in the second field work were characterised by a more systematic approach than the other field notes as I was located on the sofa, observing the meals from a small distance, listening to the children's, teachers', and assistants' conversations without engaging or taking part with them. I illustrated how the children and teachers and assistants were located around the tables and drew lines between them as to visualise their interactions, supplemented with notes, comments, and my own analytic reflections on what was going on. As I wrote field notes, both in retrospect and simultaneously as participating with the children, I also wrote a field diary (Emond, 2005) in parallel. This digital field diary was written in retrospect when I had returned to my office, and to a larger extent than the field notes that were written in the kindergartens, the diary included methodological reflections and theoretical interpretations of my experiences in the field.

5.2. Analysing the Data and Creating Cases

Sarah Pink (2013) stated that the boundaries between the research and the analysis are complicated when using visual media in ethnographic research. The analysis cannot be perceived as just a matter of interpreting the visual content in the photos or in the recordings but also how different viewers or readers give their own different meanings of the content. Obviously, when children are seen as active subjects and equal co-creators of knowledge together with the researcher, their opinions and interpretations of the content must be given great importance by the researcher granting them a position as 'experts' (Emond, 2005). This was the part that I perceived as particularly challenging, as I found it difficult to engage the children in my project. However, in the process of analysing the data material from the first field work, drawing on Hedegaard's (2008b) principles for interpreting research protocols, I realised, to my frustration, that the opportunities had been there all along. Thus, this insight that emerged through the process of analysing the data material from the first field work influenced the preparations for the second field work that was planned to be conducted in

another kindergarten. As a consequence, and already outlined in section 4.2, the second field work was conducted quite differently than the first.

Hedegaard's (2008b) principles for interpreting research protocols inspired the analysis of the data material from both field works. These principles were developed based on a premise that any research implying interaction could thus imply communication where meaning making happens between the researcher and the participants in the social situations. The researcher's meaning making, created through the interaction, is the data, regardless of whether the researcher is actively participating or passively observing (Hedegaard 2008b, p. 49). The processes of analysis in both field works thus took a point in departure using the common-sense interpretation as a first step of analysis: reading the field notes and searching through photos and recordings, figuring out what was going on, on a common-sense level of interpretation. The next step included situated practice interpretations based on theoretical conceptualisations of the children's intentional orientations and of the patterns of interaction between them. Further, this step included interpretations of the children's competences and motives in their social situations (the activity settings), and also interpretations of potential conflicts between the children's intentions, and what was going on in the activities (Hedegaard 2008b, p. 58).

The final step of analysis included an interpretation of the data material on a thematic level (Hedegaard, 2008b), which was connected to the operationalisation that I had made of the preliminary research questions for the study at the time[28]. These operationalisations sought to explore if social and material manifestations of belonging could be understood through the children's interactions with each other and through their use of places and artefacts. This step of thematic analysis also included drawing small stories from the data material[29]. In this process, I considered the children's more-than-verbal expressions and stories told within the kindergarten, as related to the social circumstances and the physical frameworks that the everyday life in the kindergarten constituted (Riessman, 2017). In the following section, the further process of analysing the data material from the two field works, which specifically formed the basis for the cases in articles II and III, is accounted for and discussed.

[28] As these preliminary research questions were prepared during 2016, the study's final overall research question has been developed since then.

[29] The process of drawing small stories from the data material is outlined in section 5.3.

5.2.1. The case of Mike

Reflexivity concerning the relationship between the researcher's experiences from the field, the theoretical concepts, and the analysis is of great importance. How the researcher and the children make meaning of photos and recordings at different stages in the research and how these meanings relate to other research materials, such as the field notes, may constitute a continuous part of the analysis (Pink 2013, pp. 142–143). Mike, a boy with a migrant background (Boldermo, 2019)[30], whom I met in the first field work, was interested in using the camera and tablet that I brought to the kindergarten. However, he did not engage particularly in looking through photos or video recordings, neither those taken by himself or other children, nor those taken by me. Instead, his interest in these devices appeared to be more aimed at exploring and discussing technical details and uses. Unfortunately, this particular interest of his was not followed up by me in other ways other than that I let him borrow and use both devices at his request. Likewise, I did not perceive his interest in football – being a proper player and supporter, devoted to the local football team, and his eagerness to discuss football teams and matches, as some kind of meaning making of belonging. Rather, I related to this as an entrance for me as a researcher to engage in conversations with him, share some interests, and get to know him better. In retrospect, I realised that I had been somewhat self-consumed by my own perceptions of 'belonging'.

It wasn't until the following autumn, after the field work had ended, and while searching through the photos related to the six children that I had spent most of my time in the field work together with, that Mike and his football, football clothes and cool attitude emerged from the material. I had analysed the material on a common sense level as well as a situated practice level and identified conceptual patterns of interactions, motives, and competence related to the six children. Trying to formulate some kind of thematic interpretations of the children's use of places and artefacts, and drawing on Wastell and Degotardi's (2017) components of belonging as a point of departure for categorisation, the component of 'being suitable' stayed in my mind as I lingered at a photo of Mike. The photo showed him wearing his cool brand beanie, his football shorts, and white Real Madrid home jersey for kids – the number 7 on his back. Mike ruled the football pitch and talked about players, teams, and matches with confidence, often referring to what his older brothers had

[30] See article II

said. As I lingered at the photo, a taxi driver that I had spoken to just a couple of weeks ago came to my mind. He was a young man who told me happily during the drive that after living three years in Norway, he finally had received a permanent residence permit, and this evening, he was going to celebrate it by going to the big football match that was about to start, cheering for the local team. He told me he played football himself and explained that playing football and being a supporter, knowing the game and the rules – one could always be a part, wherever one is located in the world. Examining the rest of the photos of Mike and re-reading my notes from the first steps of analysis, including my narrated reproductions of his stories about himself, I realised the truthfulness in the young taxi driver's words. I started wondering if Mike's motivation for playing football and being a supporter could be understood as his negotiations of belonging.

As a child can create new realities in play, and thus explore wishes for future possibilities (Vygotskij, 2004; Hedegaard, 2020), I did not perceive Mike's cool attitude and movements on the football pitch, his way of dressing, and his display of being a football supporter as *playing* the role of football player and supporter. Rather, I perceived Mike's activity, realised by his creative actions of embodiment, as motivated by his narrative of being a future player on the local football team, using his imagination and his knowledge of football in order to frame himself as a genuine footballer – adjusting the present and creating an image of the future and of a wanted social identity (Leontiev, 1978; Vygotskij, 2004; Winther Lindqvist, 2011). The kindergarten's materiality; the football as a secondary artefact (Wartofsky, 1979) that mediated Mike's skills, and the football pitch as a place that provided a bridge to imagined, yet real, local and global football communities (Somerville & Green, 2015) were thus his tools to practise the role and identity as a football player.

The way Mike preferred to dress, arguing to have his football shorts above his rain trousers outdoors, wearing caps or beanies indoors as well as outdoors, and his movements, which include dap-greetings[31] with a young male assistant, could be understood as his using

[31] Dap-greetings are friendly ways of greeting that originated from African American communities and have been popular in Western societies for some decades. The greeting includes fist-bumping, slapping of palms, and other hand gestures in a special order (Hamilton, 2014; Dap, 2020).

cultural factors such as codes, signs, and gestures (Antonsich, 2010) to signal membership to a desired exclusive community, drawing boundaries of 'us' and 'them' by which he defined himself as within the line of boundary of being 'us'. However, I am not sure that these boundaries were taken notice of by the other children, as Mike was the only one dressing and acting like he did. Playing on the football pitch, he *was* a football player, while his peers rather seemed to be *playing* football players. Thus, when the male assistant, by whom he sometimes performed dap-greetings in the mornings, had the time to play football together with him on the pitch, Mike would be happy to join – just the two of them playing.

As I could not claim with certainty that Mike did not experience exclusionary power relations in the kindergarten, I did not make any such observations during my time there. When I entered the kindergarten the first week of the field work and had my first conversations with him, I asked how he liked being in kindergarten, what he liked to do, and if he had any favourite places there. He replied to me that he did not have any friends there, and the impression I got was that he was spending a lot of time by himself. I did not observe many attempts from him to join the other children, neither did I observe that he was actively excluded by other children, as was the case with some of the other children in the group of study. As described in article II (Boldermo, 2019), his attitude towards engaging in activity settings provided within the institutional practices seemed to have changed from disengagement to enthusiasm (Winther-Lindqvist, 2011) when I returned to the kindergarten months later to conduct the second part of the field work. But even if Mike now were observed having fun and playing with his peers, taking on roles in role play, and even using his own football as a tertiary artefact (Wartofsky, 1979), playfully putting it under his sweater claiming to be pregnant and giving birth, his mode and attitudes towards the social situations differed from that of others, as described above. Thus, it is fair to assume, that even if Mike's belonging to the kindergarten was 'granted' (Antonsich, 2010), meaning that he was not experiencing exclusionary power relations or being socially categorised (see Table II) as 'them' due to some kind of 'difference' such as age, gender, colour, ethnicity, language, behaviour, or ability (Stratigos, 2015b), this did not necessarily mean that Mike himself experienced belonging to the kindergarten.

Finally, before closing this section, I will follow the line of thoughts above and draw on Wong's (2015) suggestions of *semi-institutional environments* as outlined in section 3.3.2. In such a context, I suggest that Mike's skills and knowledge of football and football teams

was his cultural capital (Sadownik, 2018) that he used to signal membership to a desired social identity, group, and network (Halse, 2018). Through the use of cultural factors[32] such as language (Antonsich, 2010), using football terms related to rules in the game, even if the rule did not apply (like 'offside'), as well as signs such as movements on the football pitch, inspired by the famous Brazilian forward Neymar's fluid movements and playmaking skills, Mike displayed his cultural capital and thus framed himself as 'us' – a member within the line of boundary in the community to which he wanted to belong. The fact that this was a community *outside* of the kindergarten supports the concept of semi-institutional environments, outside of home and kindergarten (Wong, 2015), as a relevant and innovative development of the institutional perspectives originally developed by Hedegaard (2008, 2012).

As the analysis from the field work at 'Hamperokken' crystallised Mike as a particular child of interest for further analysis, the analysis from the field work at 'Blåtind' led me in the direction of the features of the peer culture that were evident among the group of two-year-olds during the time I followed them.

5.2.2. The case of the two-year-olds

The data material from the second field work, concerning the peer group of two-year-olds, was analysed drawing on key elements in the development of sense of community originally developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and further explored in the context of early childhood education children by Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017). The field notes included analytic reflections on how the young children's interactions seemed to be characterised by frequent but short-lived, fleeting moments rather than the more long-lasting stable relationships that I observed with older children in the first field work. As negotiations of membership and being part were ongoing and recognisable, I felt that I lacked the suitable terms that could describe the recurring, fleeting moments of kindness, caring and sharing that were happening between the children in their social situations (the activity settings). Re-reading the article of Stratigos (2014), my attention was caught at her problematisation of how to overcome the challenges in researching young children's and infants' subjective senses of belonging, and I realised that I needed to explore alternative conceptualisations.

[32] See Table II

Thus, the concept of 'togetherness' emerged as of relevance, as I discovered the research and findings of Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017), as outlined in section 2.3. Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) stated that the concept of 'togetherness', rather than including friendship, could be understood in the context of children's experiences of emotional closeness in certain activities (2017, p. 127). I perceived this as corresponding to 'meaning making' as a shared construct in the way that children drew and added meaning to what they experienced in the activities they shared (Ødegaard, 2020). The following reading of Koivula and Hännikäinen's (2017) and McMillan and Chavis' (1986) research on four key elements in the development of sense of community thus formed the basis for the thematic analysis of the data material, by which two of the key elements, *membership* and *shared emotional connection*, formed the basis for the analysis that eventually resulted in the findings that are described in article III (Boldermo, 2020).

Corsaro (2009, pp. 301–302) stated that children collectively produce their own peer culture, accentuating two consistently appearing themes – the attempts to gain control and to share control. This became a meaningful overall point of departure for thematically theorising the ongoing negotiations of membership between the children as features of a collectively produced peer culture where particular symbols as social reference points were evident (Kalkman & Clark, 2017). The two-year-olds' negotiations to gain access included using signs, symbols, and rituals to draw boundaries and express hierarchies, as well as to emphasise togetherness and mutual bonds. Colours, in particular, the colour pink, on clothes, shoes, and teddy bears appeared as symbols in the two-year-olds' negotiations of boundaries, hierarchies, differences, and similarities, as were the social categories of *age* and *size*[33] (Stratigos, 2015b). However, age and size were by far the only social categories that were observed and interpreted as related to the children's meaning making of belonging by negotiating differences and similarities and drawing boundaries. As the boundary of age and size were observed being drawn by and between the children and also between children and adults, like when Jack identified the teacher as on the outside of the boundary of whom were part of the 'sleeping' group[34], I would have expected that *gender* as a social category would be observable in the children's meaning making of membership and being part. However, I

[33] See article III

[34] Article III, introductory small story

did not observe this social category operating among the children, but for one explicit exception:

> Live, at the lunch table pointing to the milk carton for lactose intolerant people, says that 'this one is for me and (the teacher) because we are girls'.
>
> The teacher quickly dismissed her by saying that 'no, this one is for us because you and I are both lactose intolerant!'
>
> Live then argued, 'But it is pink!'
> (Excerpt: field note from 'Blåtind', April 2018)

Live's argument unified the social category of gender, together with the colour pink, as a symbol for being a girl, the latter a well-known gender-stereotype among kindergarten teachers and assistants and also observed among children (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). However, as this was my sole observation of children connecting the colour pink to gender, and drawing on the findings of Meland and Kaltvedt (2019) concerning children challenging gender-stereotypes, and Stratigos' (2015b) statement of being aware of situations where the social categories no longer appear to be valid, I do not perceive the popularity of the colour pink in the studied group of two-year-olds as necessarily related to gender-stereotypes. Although this colour was of particular importance among a group of three girls, issues of having or not having access to 'pink' were brought up by other two-year-olds as well, regardless of gender. During lunch table conversations concerning the impending naptime, issues concerning who was going to sleep under which blankets was a matter of discussion, as the blankets available were either pink or blue[35] – the pink blankets were explicitly preferred by all, whether they were boys or girls. Another observation of Jack confirmed the role of the colour pink in the feature of the peer culture. Being allowed to borrow Maya's pink trousers after his own trousers were wet from outdoor play, he ran around in the dressing area with a happy facial expression, telling the other children that now *he also* was wearing pink.

I interpreted Jack's actions as him displaying his familiarity with the applying features of the peer culture. This supports the findings of Meland and Kaltvedt (2019) on gender stereotypes concerning colours being pushed. Further, as a feature of the peer culture that was

[35] They were the same type of blankets in terms of texture and quality, only the colour separated them

produced in this particular group of two-year-olds, the colour pink functioned as a cultural factor (Antonsich, 2010) – a sign or symbol to communicate and emphasise mutual bonds, as well as to negotiate membership and being part, and to draw boundaries across social categories such as gender.

As the features of the peer culture were produced by the children, the institutional practices worked to facilitate for such features. Wastell and Degotardi (2017, pp. 43–44) stated that the children themselves may have their own opinions about matters that concern them, challenging the institutional practices. In this group, the teachers and assistants adopted very flexible institutional practices, allowing the children to influence different possibilities (Hedegaard, 2008a, 2012b) among other during the lunch meals. Unlike what is a regular practice in kindergartens (Rutanen, 2017), the two-year-olds in this group were *not* assigned to sit on designated seats; rather, they could actually choose which of the two lunch tables they preferred and at which seat. The children were allowed to talk, laugh, hug each other, play with their food, sing, and have fun without the teachers or assistants intervening, or even risk being removed from their seats (Rutanen, 2017). Further, the children were allowed to leave the table at their own will when they had finished eating – he or she did not have to wait until everyone was finished with the meal if he or she preferred not to. This institutional practice was thus based on values related to the individual child's autonomy and social, emotional, and physical well-being[36], rather than values related to control or to defined frameworks of behaviour, structure, and uniformity. This did not cause, as perhaps would be expected with such young children, trouble in the form of noise, unrest, conflicts, or children not eating. Rather, the meals lasted for quite a long time and were characterised by the active presence of teachers and assistants, plenty of time to enjoy the food, and a calm and warm atmosphere that worked to safeguard the individual child's place in the community as well as the childrens possibilities to show kindness and compassion towards each other. I conclude that this recurring institutional practice, in particular, laid a foundation for several factors of *place-belongingness* identified by Antonsich (2010): relational factors of individually experienced belonging through everyday encounters characterised by togetherness and

[36] As well as being in line with the children's statutory right to participation as outlined in section 1.3.

positive interactions, cultural factors of sharing traditions, as well as legal factors safeguarding each individual child his or her place in the community[37].

5.3. Making the Data Come to Life: Creating Small Stories

Catherine Kohler Riessman (2017, pp. 244–245) has outlined that in narrative research with children, the researcher's interests are directed not only towards how the child collects and merges events and uses the language to communicate a particular content but also *why* the child chooses this exact story, to what purpose, and how the story affects the listener. I did not conduct any narrative inquiry or research during the research project, neither have I engaged in narrative analysis. However, since the beginning of the project, my approach towards the data collection and the writing of field texts has been inspired by narrative researchers such as Riessman (1993, 2017) and Jean Clandinin (2013).

In addition to writing the children's stories, I aimed to use my field notes to narrate my own observations and reflections on the children's meaning making of belonging. I pondered on my ability to *show* rather than *tell* what was going on in the participants' everyday lives and what possibilities I had to convey my contextualised perceptions on their meaning making (Emerson et al., 2014; Tracy, 2010). In the process of designing the information letter to the parents in the kindergartens, I had stated that any photos or recordings of children would be for analytical use only, not to be shared or published in any way. This meant that *showing* by the use of visual media was already out of the question. Thus, the idea of writing short stories emerged as useful, both in the process of narrating and analysing the data, and as a way of illustrating the children's worlds to others through a narrative structure (Simons, 2014).

In the process of narrating the stories, I discovered the concept of 'small stories' that was being referred to by several researchers such as Juutinen (2018), Anna-Maija Puroila and Eila Estola (2014), and Alexandra Georgakopoulou (Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2015). Georgakopoulou (2015) explained that small stories are everywhere, as they include narrating the ordinary, everyday events – world-making rather than world-disruption. Further, they involve a co-construction of the point, events, and characters between the narrator and the readers (2015, pp. 260–261). Puroila and Estola (2014) conceptualised small stories as co-

[37] See Table I.

constructed by the researchers, unique and context-based related to children's social and cultural context, and not representing the child's authentic voice.

Particularly, the emphasis on small stories as connected to the ordinary, everyday life became meaningful to me. Although I did not conduct narrative analysis, Riessman's (2017) statement that narrative analysis requires examination of the contexts surrounding the stories being told – the physical frameworks, the social circumstances, and how the researcher influenced the situation – became a point of departure for constructing and creating the small stories. When drawing small stories from the field notes and photos of the two-year-olds, I considered the children's more-than-verbal expressions, as well as their short sentences and abrupt utterances, as stories by which meaningful realities were constructed within a framework of intersubjective experiences (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015). The creation of the small stories was carried out as part of the third step – the thematic analysis of the data material. Finally, a total of 25 small stories were written, 11 of which were presented in the articles II and III.

5.4. Evaluating the Study

To make an evaluation of the study, I will draw upon some of Tracy's (2010) identifications of criteria for excellent qualitative research and Jane Lewis' and Jane Ritchie's (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003) identifications concerning issues of inferential generalisation from qualitative research.[38] According to Bente Halkier (2011, p. 788), generalisation on the basis of qualitative studies has to be specific and context bound rather than universal. She claimed that such generalisation should strive to represent the ambivalences and complexities in the different contexts and consider the processes of knowledge-production within these contexts. Inferential generalisation is used if the findings from the study can be generalised to other settings and contexts, for example, if it is reasonable to presume that the findings from a field work in a kindergarten can be inferred to children in other kindergartens or children in other educational settings (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, pp. 264–265). In order for this to be possible, there must be a certain extent of similarities between the context in which the research was conducted and the context to be applied. Here, Lewis and Ritchie (2003) describe 'thick descriptions' as a way to provide a sufficient amount of details and descriptions of both the research context and the findings or phenomena in order to give room for other readers or researchers to make the comparison and transfer to other settings and contexts.

This leads me to the fourth criteria suggested by Tracy (2010), namely, 'credibility'. I have tried to adopt transparency by being explicit and detailed in the descriptions and have applied the use of thick descriptions and photos in the analysis, thus, trying to communicate my interpretations of the children's worlds by *showing* rather than *telling* through the use of small stories. As for the results from the first field work, which concerned one particular child, I do believe that some of the findings could be inferentially generalised, that is, that Mike's attempts to practise belonging to a desired semi-institutional environment, by the use of material conditions such as artefacts and places in the kindergarten, could be observed among children in other settings as well. Concerning the findings from the second field work on how the features of the peer culture influenced the use of symbols, systems, and rituals, and to some extent social categories, in the negotiations of membership and boundaries in the

[38] As for the literature review in article I, I consider that the process of data collection and analysis is fully transparent and thus possible for other researchers to repeat and come to the same conclusions, however, with the reservations suggested in section 4.3.

group of two-year-olds, I perceive as likely to be transferred to other similar settings. The significance of social categories of age and size in young children's negotiations, I suppose, are possible to generalise; however, the specific features and symbols that were evident in this particular group are not necessarily identically transferable to other similar settings.

Tracy's (2010) second criteria, 'rich rigor', includes an adequate amount of data, time spent in the field, the use of appropriate procedures and practices when it comes to data collection and analysis, the coherence between the context or sample, and the goals by which the study aims. When considering the quality of the field works, I have been pondering upon whether I have spent a sufficient amount of time in the field. A total of 15 weeks, resulting in 90 hours, could have been prolonged. Considering my capacity to receive and handle the amount of impressions, thoughts, and reflections that I made through participating together with the children in their everyday lives, spending up to three hours each time was more than enough. However, seen in retrospect, I could have carried out the field works over several more weeks, in particular, regarding the field work at Blåtind. I could have followed up some of my findings regarding the two-year-olds after the summer vacation when many of them were about to turn three years, in order to observe whether social categories such as gender, skin colour, or other categories would emerge in their negotiations of membership and boundaries. Regarding the case of Mike, from the first field work at Hamperokken, it would not have been possible for me to follow up the findings, as his time in kindergarten came to an end at the same time the field work ended, and his whereabouts after, I do not know.

Another aspect of 'rich rigor' brought to the fore by Tracy (2010) is considering the theoretical perspective. I have perceived the cultural-historical wholeness approach as particularly suitable throughout the study, as it has provided the possibility to approach the children's conditions for meaning making of belonging in the studied kindergartens from three different perspectives. The concept of belonging, as outlined in chapter two, is ambiguous and multi-layered, and thus it could be, and certainly has been, researched from different theoretical approaches such as narrative inquiry (Juutinen, 2018; Ljung Egeland, 2019), sociocultural approaches (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017; Kalkman & Clark, 2017), and postmodern perspectives (Stratigos, 2015a and b). As for cultural-historical approaches to 'belonging', I am only familiar with the research of Winther-Lindqvist (2011) besides my own. A timely comment is that as the individual and institutional perspectives have been in focus in the process of analysing the findings in this study related to the research question, the

societal perspectives are still to be considered.[39] Finally, rich rigor includes coherence between the research context and the chosen cases and the goals of the study. This is an aspect that is difficult for me to consider, still lingering in the process of writing the thesis and thus having an 'insider' perspective. For me, the coherence is clear; nonetheless, another question is whether I have been able to visualise and substantiate it.

Finally, Tracy's (2010) first criteria for excellent qualitative research is to consider whether the research is timely and interesting, characterised by relevance and significance. It is impossible for me to take an 'outsider' view upon this, in particular. I am indeed embedded in my perception that the interdependence between the conditions for children with migrant background's individual and collective meaning making of belonging, and the future social sustainable society, has become even more significant and crucial during the years and happenings that have passed since the project began. This will be further outlined in the thesis' next, and last chapter.

[39] Societal perspectives are considered in chapter six.

6. Reflections and Implications in the Wake of the Findings: Social Sustainability in Early Childhood Education

The overall perspective and motivation for researching children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging was political as a matter of social sustainability. Throughout the thesis, belonging as the leading concept has been outlined, explained, and discussed in several ways, and various conceptualisations have been created. Now, it is the time to return to the main political intention and the issue of social sustainability. This chapter gives a discussion of the findings in the context of the thesis' overall research question and an outline of the study's relevance and contribution to the development of knowledge within the field of early childhood education for social sustainability.

To illustrate the before-mentioned question of timeliness and thus relevance, I draw attention to the recently concluded lawsuit in Norway in June 2020, where a Norwegian right-wing extremist was given the most severe legal punishment because of his attack on a religious community and property and his deliberate and racially motivated murder of his young adoptive sister claiming that her race and background were a threat to the Norwegian society. Internationally, the situation for African American citizens in the United States and their substantial risk of being killed by police officers have raised protests and demonstrations around the globe. Issues of racism and the situation for people with migrant backgrounds have emerged as one of our time's most debated and challenging issues. As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which, at the present time is believed to come from bats and transmitted to humans (NIPH, 2020) – has made humanity aware of our dependence on each other, it has, for a short period of time, somewhat displaced the urgent issues of sustainability. Yet, these issues are even more crucial. The bleak reality of the pandemic has revealed that when a warned and predicted disaster of such a dimension hits one country, this is not a local problem but an immediate global concern. The findings from the IPCC report (IPCC, 2014) are still valid. An increasing number of animal carriers of diseases are changing their behaviour and migrating to new areas due to climate change and habitat loss, and frequent consequences of rising sea levels, droughts, and floods are causing humans to be on the move (de Wit, 2020; Prytz, 2018). This affects us all, and children on the move in particular, as their situation is an ongoing issue of concern because of their double

vulnerability and risk of social exclusion in their new societies. By taking as a starting point the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), the study aimed to explore children with migrant background's meaning making of belonging in the context of education for social sustainability and thereby propose pedagogical implications for the development of socially sustainable practices. Specifically, the study asked:

> *How can early childhood education for social sustainability be understood through children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging in kindergarten?*

The findings from the literature review on education for social sustainability, which were published as the study's first article, put forward that the prevailing early childhood narrative of children as problem-solvers and agents of change for sustainability needs to be re-negotiated. As holistic approaches to early childhood education for sustainability were revealed to comprise a whole number of conceptualisations, there were few conceptualisations of diversity or multicultural perspectives, and none highlighting or problematising the situation for children with migrant backgrounds in the context of social sustainability in early childhood education. Thus, the findings disclosed that how the creating of future socially sustainable societies for *all* could be developed through early childhood educational research and practice is yet to be examined.

The findings from the first field work, published as the second article in the study, disclosed that even if politics of belonging such as exclusionary power relations are not observed, a child's belonging in kindergarten as an individually lived and experiential state does not necessarily apply. The role of materiality in relation to conceptualisations of belonging as a relationally negotiated practice has been illuminated through the findings concerning an individual child with migrant background's use of a football and a football pitch as tools for meaning making of belonging. However, as the findings highlighted the significance of materiality, in line with Juutinen's (2018) findings, this particular sub-study findings did not concern materiality in terms of power relations or search for membership and belonging *within* the kindergarten. Rather, the findings shed light on the role of materiality in practising belonging to communities *outside* of the kindergarten. This is of particular significance when it comes to examine and develop new and nuanced perspectives on children with migrant background's meaning making of, and conditions for, belonging in early childhood education, as they may have knowledge and competence about social and cultural

reference points that are outside the practitioners' scope of knowledge and assumptions. These findings thus support and highlight how children with migrant backgrounds' knowledge of *semi-institutional environments* could be understood as cultural capital, allowing them to relate to, and initiate, play and practices in kindergarten (Sadownik, 2018). Children with migrant backgrounds', in particular, perceptions of themselves as 'being suitable', in the context of looking or dressing suitably, speaking suitably, or even playing suitably, being familiar with social and cultural reference points in order to fit in into the peer group they attend, have been associated with their feelings of belonging (Kalkman & Clark, 2017). However, as the findings of the second field work, with two-year-olds, supported such a conceptualisation, the findings from the first field work rather foregrounded the relevance of Wong's (2015) development of semi-institutional environments as an innovative approach to studying children with migrant backgrounds' meaning making of belonging in institutional settings. Thus, these findings illuminate how today's children's access to and knowledge of communities outside of home and kindergarten, such as global networks and sports (Halse, 2018), offer new possibilities to make meaning of belonging, even already in early childhood.

The findings from the second field work, published as the study's third article, discovered that negotiations of membership within the line of boundaries of 'us' and 'them', were present through the use of social categories, rituals, and symbol systems already among children as young as two-year-olds. An important finding in this context was that it was the features of the peer culture that directed the content of the negotiations – what kind of rituals, symbols, and social categories that applied for membership. Further, and equally important, as the sub-study disclosed that the peer culture was collectively produced by the children, it was the kindergarten's institutional practices that laid the foundation for the features of the peer culture. The findings thus accentuate the role and importance of well founded, socially sustainable, institutional practices.

Elliott, Ärlemalm-Hagsèr, and Davis (2020) highlighted the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals' approaches to address all dimensions of sustainability, including social justice and global inequities, and stated that the challenges lay in informing change at national and local levels. This statement is indeed relevant when considering the formulations in the new Norwegian white paper 6, (2019–2020): *Early Start and Inclusive Communities in Kindergarten and School and After School Activity*. Even if this white paper foregrounded inclusive education for all as important to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and

mentioned diversity in kindergarten in positive ways, emphasising the development of inclusive communities in kindergartens as a foundation for the development of democracy, children with migrant backgrounds were referred to in particular, mainly in the context of challenges and the need for facilitation. This reveals a lack of a consistency and clear direction for how socially sustainable, inclusive practices could be approached in early childhood. It also displays a problem-oriented perception on children with migrant backgrounds' that has not been supported by the findings in this study.

To understand the education for social sustainability in early childhood in the wake of the findings of the study, I will, again, return to Davis' (2014) call for a rethinking of the rights base of early childhood education, and the need for acknowledging the fundamental rights of social groups and sub-groups within the society as stated by the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Davis' statement that fairness and justice for all, including future generations is the heart of education for sustainability, highlights the very core of social sustainability. However, drawing on Arendt (1951), what goes beyond freedom and justice for marginalised social groups such as migrants and refugees, and *children* with migrant backgrounds in particular, are their human rights, which can never be lost. But when belonging is not a matter of course or choice, the individual child's human rights are at stake (Arendt, 1951). Children with migrant backgrounds' opportunities to make meaning of belonging in kindergarten must be understood as no less than an issue of fundamental human rights.

Through this study, I have accentuated the situation for children with migrant backgrounds in the context of early childhood education for social sustainability. I have identified how a cornerstone for socially sustainable, inclusive practices in kindergarten can be developed through opening up for children's relationally negotiated practices, as a matter of choice, which position the children with migrant backgrounds as 'us' within the line of boundary of 'us' and 'them', and which provide possibilities for their negotiations of wanted social identities and memberships to desired communities. Additionally, I have illuminated the importance of reckognizing children's knowledge of - and experience with - semi-institutional environments, and thereby their possibility to influence the kindergarten practices. For children of the digital, diverse, and globalised future, this may perhaps eventually prove to be almost as relevant as their knowledge of the social and cultural reference points within the kindergarten. This should, necessarily, impact future pedagogical

practices in order to fulfil the children with migrant background's rights and abilities to contribute to their new communities.

Further, I have suggested an entrance to the question of how to conceptualise children's belonging as an individually lived and experiential state in research, by drawing on factors of place-belongingness as identified by Antonsich (2010) and developed in the context of early childhood education, as illustrated in Table I. Finally, I have identified how a socially sustainable kindergarten community can support the individual child with migrant background's possibility to belong in kindergarten as a lived and experiential state. This, by which must be a matter of course, is established through unequivocal institutional practices of safety and security for every child being ensured of his or her indisputable place in the community. The possibility to belong as a lived and experiential state in kindergarten can further be established through securing the children with migrant backgrounds', in particular, familiarity with - and ability and opportunity to - co-produce the features of the peer culture, and through the safeguarding of their opportunity to develop stable, long-lasting ties, constituted through recurring everyday encounters and shared joint experiences that lay the foundation for togetherness. To establish and sustain such institutional practices imposes a great responsibility on the kindergarten teacher, in particular, and demands extensive insights of the significance of socially sustainable practices in early childhood for creating inclusive early childhood communities in the present – and inclusive, socially sustainable societies for the future.

The early childhood education for *environmental* sustainability foregrounds the child as a future agent for change and encourages the child to develop sustainable attitudes that, perhaps, will contribute to a change in how future societies will assume the urgent responsibility by which today's societies are unable to do. An early childhood education for *social* sustainability intervenes directly into the present, improving the everyday life in kindergarten for the individual child, as well as, hopefully, contributing to a positive change in future prospects of people with migrant backgrounds' opportunities to, in the words of Hannah Arendt (1951): to action, to opinion, and to belong.

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Appendix

Sidsel Boldermo

Institutt for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk UiT Norges arktiske universitet

9006 TROMSØ

Vår dato: 11.01.2017 Vår ref: 51359 / 3 / STM Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 29.11.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

51359	*Utdanning for bærekraftig utvikling i barnehage. Vilkår og erfaringer med tilhørighet i den heterogene barnehagen*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*UiT Norges arktiske universitet, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Sidsel Boldermo*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2022, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt Siri Tenden Myklebust

Kontaktperson: Siri Tenden Myklebust tlf: 55 58 22 68

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS Harald Hårfagres gate 29 Tel: +47-55 58 21 17 nsd@nsd.no Org.nr. 985 321 884
NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data NO-5007 Bergen, NORWAY Faks: +47-55 58 96 50 www.nsd.no

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 51359

Forskningsprosjektet skal gjennomføres i to barnehager. Personvernombudet legger til grunn at ledelsen i barnehagene godkjenner prosjektet.

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet til foreldrene er godt utformet. Vi legger til grunn at også de ansatte mottar informasjon om prosjektet, og informasjon om hva deltakelse vil innebære. Informasjonen kan gis skriftlig eller muntlig.

Data innsamles og registreres ved hjelp av lyd- og videoopptak. Personvernombudet minner om at deltakelse er frivillig og at det legges til rette for at det kun registreres personopplysninger (inkl. ansikt og stemmer) om barn og voksne som har samtykket til å delta. Det anbefales videre at barn som ikke skal delta i prosjektet gis et reelt alternativ, ved at de for eksempel får alternative aktiviteter i perioden opptakene foregår.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger UiT Norges arktiske universitet sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet.

Senest forventet prosjektslutt er 31.12.2022, jf. informasjonsskrivet. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:
- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger somf.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn) - slette digitale lyd-/bilde- og videoopptak

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet «Barns vilkår for - og erfaringer med tilhørighet i barnehagen»

Bakgrunn og formål

Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke barns vilkår for - og erfaringer med - å oppleve tilhørighet i barnehagen. Prosjektet er tenkt å gjennomføres i to ulike barnehager i Tromsø.

*Tilhørighe*t er et begrep som man kan legge ulikt innhold inn i; man kan blant annet oppleve tilhørighet til naturen, til venner og til steder. Barnehagen er for mange barn et nytt sted i tilværelsen, og det jeg ønsker å utforske nærmere, er hvordan barn gir uttrykk for opplevelsen av å høre til i barnehagen.

Prosjektet er en del av et doktorgradsarbeid, i regi av Universitetet i Tromsø. Barnehagene som deltar rekrutteres gjennom universitetets praksisbarnehager.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Deltakelse i denne studien innebærer at jeg som forsker vil samtale med barn og ansatte om barnehagen og om barnas opplevelse av å høre til i barnehagen. Jeg skal ikke foreta intervju, men vil tilbringe tid i barnehagen og snakke med barna om temaet der det er naturlig. Jeg vil bruke kamera for å ta bilder og video-opptak/lydopptak, og barna som deltar vil også få mulighet til å ta bilder, for eksempel av sine favorittsteder og favorittleker i barnehagen. Jeg vil kun registrere barna med fornavn og alder.

Barnas deltakelse er frivillig - dette innebærer at hvis barna gir utrykk for at de ikke ønsker å delta, så vil dette respekteres, samt hvis barn som har deltatt ønsker å trekke seg underveis, så benyttes ikke datamateriale som omhandler disse barna.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Det er kun jeg som forsker som vil ha tilgang til datamaterialet. Det vil ikke lagres personopplysninger som etternavn eller fødselsdato eller lignende. Datainnsamlingen innebærer bruk av foto og video- og lydopptak, og barna som deltar vil på den måten være gjenkjennelige. Dette materialet vil oppbevares digitalt på en server i Universitetet i Tromsø sitt nettverk. Tilgang til datamaterialet er beskyttet med mitt personlige brukernavn og passord, og er ikke tilgjengelig for andre enn meg.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes innen 31.07.2020. Alt av datamateriale vil oppbevares frem til 31.12.2022, og vil deretter destrueres. Grunnen til at datamaterialet oppbevares opptil to år etter at prosjektet etter planen skal være ferdig, er for å ta høyde for eventuelle forsinkelser underveis.

Deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonene.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Sidsel Boldermo på telefon 77644761 eller mobil 48108667.

Studien er registrert og godkjent av Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å la mitt/mine barn …….

(fornavn på barnet/barna) delta i undersøkelsen

---------- (Dato

og signatur fra foreldre/foresatte)

Request for participation in the research-project:

" Children's experiences of belonging in the Kindergarten"

The project's background and purpose

This project aims to investigate how children experience belonging in the Kindergarten. The project is intended to be carried out in two different kindergartens in Tromsø.

The term 'belonging' can be understood in many different ways; for instance as a notion of belonging to nature, to friends, and to *places*. For many children, the Kindergarten can represent a new *place* in their life; and my interest is to explore how children express their experiences of belonging in the Kindergarten.

The project is part of a doctoral thesis, associated with the University of Tromsø. The participating kindergartens are recruited through the list of the University's practice-kindergartens.

What does participation in the study imply?

Participation in this study implies that as a researcher, I will talk with the participating children about being in the Kindergarten, and about their experiences of belonging in the Kindergarten. I will not make any interviews, but will spend some time in the Kindergarten and talk with the children about this topic when it comes natural. I will use a digital camera to take pictures, and I will use video recording / audio recording of the children's play, and of their interaction-sequences both indoors and outdoors. The children who participate will also get the opportunity to take pictures with the camera, for instance of their favorite places and their favorite toys and books in the Kindergarten. I will register the children only with their first names and their approximate age.

It is voluntary to participate - this means that if the children express that they do not wish to participate, this will be respected, and if the children who have participated want to withdraw along the way, it will also be respected and I will not use any data-material concerning these children.

What happens with the information about the participants?

All personal information will be processed highly confidential. It will only be me as researcher who have access to the data. I will not store any personal data as surname or date of birth. The name of the Kindergarten will not be referred to anywhere. The data collection involves the use of photography and video -and audio recordings, and the children who participate can thus be recognizable on these recordings. This material will be stored digitally on a server at the University of Tromsø's network. Access to this data will be protected by my personal username and password, and it is not available to anyone but me.

The project is scheduled to end by 31.12.2020. All data-material will be stored until 31/12/2022, and then it will be deleted. The reason why the data will be stored up to two years after the project is finished, is to allow for any delays en route. The Kindergarten, the staff and children who participate will be anonymised so that they can not be recognized in any publications.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the study, and you can at any time withdraw your consent without giving any reason.

If you have questions about the study, please contact Sidsel Boldermo on email sidsel.boldermo@uit.no, alternatively office phone 77644761 or mobile 48108667

The study is registered and approved by the Data Protection Official for Research in NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS.

Consent for participation in the study

I have received information about the study, and I am willing to allow my child / my children

..... participate in the survey

(First name of child / children)

---------- ---------- ----------

Date and signature of parents/guardians

Part 2: The Articles

Paper 1

sustainability

MDPI

Review

What about the Migrant Children? The State-Of-The-Art in Research Claiming Social Sustainability

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate research articles that relate to education for sustainability, primarily in early childhood, in order to describe to what extent a holistic perspective on education for sustainability has been applied, and how the social dimension is conceptualized. The review comprised research articles in Nordic Journals of Education, International Journals of Early Childhood Education, and International Journals of Education/Environmental/Sustainability education. The findings disclosed that researchers within the field of education for sustainability acknowledged, to a large extent, environmental, economic, and social aspects, and thus applied a holistic perspective. This review shows, however, that even if the social dimension were conceptualized as strongly related to topics such as social justice, citizenship, and the building of stable societies, few articles have investigated diversity, multicultural perspectives, or migrant children's situations in the context of early childhood education for sustainability. This review discloses that the concept of belonging is rarely used in connection to migrants and refugees in research on early childhood education for sustainability. A further argument encourages the inclusion of these aspects in further research which claims social sustainability.

Keywords: education for social sustainability; early childhood; migrant children; belonging

1. Introduction

As a demographic change is seen in many parts of the world, the issue of migrant children's experiences of belonging is a topic that needs to be addressed on the early childhood education agenda for sustainability. It is an urgent matter that the world community respect the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights [1], as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child [2]. Societies have the duty to protect and restore every child's right to live and to develop to his/her full potential. To create optimal conditions for migrant children, we believe that a holistic education is of the utmost importance in the most formative years, as also stated by the World Organization of Early Childhood Education, OMEP 2016 [3].

In this article, we understand education for sustainability as a process of social and cultural learning and, fundamentally, a value-based approach for developing new understandings and practices that give better conditions for *all children.* By sustaining equity, future generations' ability to live together in diverse societies will be nourished.

Crucial to our understanding is that we understand young children in light of their local cultural-historical heritage as well as understand that their childhood is happening now, as we speak. Future global and local work with sustainability will need to boost early childhood education for the simple reason that children spend their most formative years there. In early childhood educational institutions, families have tight bonds with their children and, therefore, most of them follow children's institutional lives with emotional interest. Research is evident when it comes to the crucial impact that a community has for children. It is indicated that being a part of a group of children in a new setting is of a great importance for children with an historical background of migration; however, children with an immigrant background can encounter challenges in experiencing belonging and positioning themselves within the kindergarten community [4,5].

As outlined by Siraj-Blatchford [6], social sustainability concerns social, cultural and political issues affecting people's lives within and between nations. However, as just and inclusive societies are characterized, among other factors, by participation and solidarity, today's societies may have a way to go in developing such inclusive societies for all, as young children's self-understanding and future expectations are influenced by 'racial' equality and social class [6]. Substantive aspects such as social cohesion, inclusion, belonging and identity are central in defining social sustainability [7]. At the opposite end of the spectrum, social exclusion can be an impediment to social cohesion and social sustainability. As identified by OMEP 2016 [3], social exclusion constitutes a potential high-risk situation for migrant, refugee and asylum seeking children and their families, and it also weakens the common sense of belonging and identity that characterizes social cohesion [8].

By investigating what today's research in early childhood says about multicultural perspectives, diversity and belonging in the context of education for social sustainability, our study aims to contribute to new knowledge that can strengthen the perspective on social sustainability and support the situation for migrant and refugee children in early childhood institutions.

1.1. Background: Education for Sustainability in Early Childhood

Throughout the 1980s, the term *Environmental Education* was the international term used in debates on a growing concern for environmental issues that had occurred in the course of the 1960s and 1970s [9]. The Belgrade Charter (1975) [9] and The Tbilisi Declaration (1977) [10] aimed at the education of people, sought to pay attention to and work towards solutions of environmental problems and prevent new ones [10]. The Rio turning point and Agenda 21 in 1992 suggested a balance between the needs of the environment and the needs of humankind, and the Agenda 21 chapter 36 [11] also introduced and identified the *Education for Sustainable Development* as critical in order to promote sustainable development.

The terms Environmental Education, Education for Sustainable Development and Education for Sustainability are sometimes used interchangeably, and there are differences and tensions in how the terms are perceived. It has been argued that the turn from a focus on purely environmental issues within Environmental Education, towards more anthropocentric and pluralistic interpretations within Education for Sustainable Development, facilitates typically human needs such as human rights, democracy, and social issues at the expense of environmental issues [12]. Other researchers have claimed that Education for Sustainability, to a larger extent than Education for Sustainable Development, answers to the holistic perspective that acknowledges humanity's dependence on nature [13]. In this review, we do not take a stand on that particular issue; we prefer to use the term Education for Sustainability, and apply the UNESCO 2012 [14] meaning of the concept of Education for Sustainable Development—education for social transformation and with the goal of creating sustainable societies.

Education for sustainability aims to influence people's thinking and actions, and thereby contribute to sustainable decisions being taken. The UNESCO report, *The contribution of early childhood to a sustainable society* (2008) [15], concluded, among other conclusions, that early childhood education for sustainability is crucial as values, behavior and skills that are established in childhood may impact on choices and attitudes later in life. Further, the report pointed out that sustainability challenges us to move towards inclusive rather than segregated societies, and that a call for conceptualizations that strengthens interdependence, solidarity and justice was needed. The report *Taking children seriously—how the EU can invest in early childhood education for a sustainable future* (2011) [16], stated that even very young children are capable of advanced thinking in the context of social and

environmental issues. Several researchers have thus advocated that, as a foundation for an understanding of sustainability is shaped in childhood, education for sustainable development should be emphasized in early childhood education [15,17–19].

After Julie Davis's [20] pioneering review on early childhood education for sustainability revealed that researchers within the context of education for sustainability generally did not include early childhood education in their research, and researchers within the field of early childhood generally did not investigate sustainability issues, two additional early childhood reviews on the subject have been conducted. Somerville and Williams [19] investigated whether there had been a change in focus on sustainable development in early childhood education research after Davis's (2009) review, and whether the research effort had increased. Somerville and Williams [19] did not investigate the social dimension in their study; however, the review from Hedefalk et al. [21] conceptualized the social dimension as involving justice, equality and a democratic approach [21]. Hedefalk et al.'s [21] review identified two different definitions of education for sustainability in early childhood education, i.e., it could be perceived as a threefold approach to education 'about', 'for' and 'in' the environment, and it included three interrelated dimensions—economic, social, and environmental. The authors pointed out that although both economic and social issues could cause unsustainable practices, they did not find any articles focusing on larger social issues related to sustainability. Hedefalk et al. thus questioned whether the social dimension was overlooked on the grounds that the focus on the environmental dimension overshadowed it [21].

1.2. Research Topic and Aim: The Unexplored Field of Education for Social Sustainability

In political as well as educational debates, a turn is seen in how sustainability is perceived, and an awareness of the differences in perceptions of the relationship between nature and society is crucial in the ongoing sustainability debate [22]. Traditionally, the understanding of sustainability and sustainability education is embedded within a three-pillar model where environmental, economic, and social aspects are interwoven [17,23]. As each aspect within the three-pillar model has developed independently, the interdependence and relationship between the three aspects, or dimensions, has not been sufficiently formulated, and one aspect in particular, the aspect of social sustainability, seems to lack a clear and coherent definition [23].

While issues such as global warming have been the dominant idea for a long time in the general worldwide sustainability debate and research, research into documenting the practice of environmental education has been the dominant area within early childhood sustainability research [24]. The field of early childhood educational research is currently focused on expanding the knowledge-base, elaborating upon what sustainability empirically means in early childhood education, and what it

could look like in practice. This new research covers many aspects and dimensions of sustainability; nevertheless, it is often stated that the social dimensions of education for sustainability, which comprise questions regarding social justice and human rights, are less researched, compared to, for example, the ecological dimensions [25,26]. As elaborated, this is a fact also reflected through the findings in the review by Hedefalk et al. [21].

The social dimension of Education for Sustainability, as formulated by the UN, is about ensuring that all people have a good and just foundation for a decent life and have the opportunity to influence their own lives and the communities in which they live [27]. Social sustainability requires ethos of compassion and equality [6,28], and can embrace a wide range of aspects, from the most general such as social justice and optimizing quality of life and well-being for future generations, to more specific goals such as enhancing people's democratic right to participate, take action, and influence their own lives in all institutions they are a part of.

Eizenberg and Jabareen [23] approach social sustainability, among other approaches, within the concept of equity and diversity, where *all* members of a society, regardless of origin, race, ethnicity, gender, or color are permitted to participate in the society as peers. As social inclusion and the sense of community and belonging constitute social sustainability, different social or ethnic groups may be exposed to a lack of recognition and opportunities to participate in the society as equal citizens [23]. The concept of 'belonging' is introduced by Hägglund and Johansson [26] and grouped with the concept of 'values', and as an important concept within early childhood education for sustainability. Children's 'belonging' is related to their right to be involved, and linked to an identity as citizens, both in the local and the global context as world citizens. In children's peer cultures, the children's membership to the group is being continuously produced and re-produced [29], and the premises for social inclusion and belonging can be subject to negotiations, where characteristics such as age and gender can be used to legitimize exclusion [26,30]. Previous research has shown that migrant children and youth can be especially exposed to such experiences of outside-hood [4,31–33]. As children with the same social and cultural background often can share some kind of knowledge on how the world works [32], migrant children may be aware of the risk of being perceived as on the outside of a community to which they do not belong [4].

In the context of early education for sustainability, the issue of 'citizenship' is a value that is frequently emphasized [19,26]. In kindergarten, the children's experiences of 'citizenship' and of being included in the community can be related to their experience of belonging, regardless of race, ethnicity or origin [34,35]. As the demographic change in the European population is a fact, the issue of migrant children's experiences of citizenship and belonging is a topic that should be placed highly on the agenda in early childhood education for sustainability. In this review of the research literature in the field of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability, we seek to answer the call for additional

research and conceptualization of social sustainability, and examine the concept of "belonging" within this context. Four research questions guided our study:

1. To what extent is a holistic and social perspective on sustainability applied/reflected in research articles regarding Early Childhood Education for Sustainability?
2. How is the social dimension of Education for Sustainability conceptualized by researchers in Early Childhood Education?
3. What does research say about diversity/multicultural perspectives and migrant children as related to the social dimension of Education for Sustainability?
4. What does research say about 'belonging' (and related concepts) in the context of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability?

Although our study investigated several of the same journals as the two aforementioned reviews by Somerville and Williams [19] and Hedefalk et al. [21], our review differs from those by our explicit focus on social sustainability, belonging and diversity. Our study's main conclusions revealed a lack of research on diversity, multicultural perspectives and migrant children's situations within the context of early childhood education for social sustainability. Additionally, although 'holistic' approaches were applied within the research articles, new questions were raised concerning what such approaches within the context of education for sustainability actually imply, as the content contained in the term 'holistic' varied.

2. Materials and Methods

In this literature review, only articles published in educational research journals were included, which means that books and book chapters have been excluded. Although the study primarily intended to focus on research within early childhood education, the review initially included other education journals as well. This was based on a wish to also include Nordic education journals in the review, and the number of Nordic journals that mainly focused on early childhood education was limited.

Being aware of that, two other literature reviews on the issue of education for sustainability in early childhood education were conducted in 2015 [19,21]. These two reviews were included as research articles within the review in addition to being read as preparation before conducting this review. Since these two reviews have been conducted quite recently, the time span for this review was set as quite short, between 2013 and 2017/2018.

As both of the above mentioned reviews included the same research journals as Davis's [20] often-cited review, this review's first step comprised 12 of the same journals (both Nordic and international) included in Hedefalk et al.'s [21] work, with an additional 8 journals, of which 4 were Nordic. In other

words, the total of 20 journals that were investigated within the timespan, comprised 9 Nordic journals and 11 international journals.

2.1. Keywords and Selection of Articles

The 20 journals were investigated by searching for keywords in the articles' titles, keywords, and/or abstracts. As the concept of 'belonging' is complex, dynamic, and multidimensional [30,36–38], we found it necessary to include terms that we considered related to (or elements of) 'belonging' within Education for Sustainability, such as 'citizenship' and 'agency'.

The keywords used in the search were sustainability, sustainable/environmental development, social sustainability, social dimension, belonging, citizenship, democracy, and agency. In the Nordic journals, the search was supplied with the same words in Norwegian and Swedish, in order to include articles written in those languages. Four of the journals of education had the term 'sustainable/sustainability or environmental' in their title, and, as a consequence, it was not essential that these terms should also be reflected in the article's titles, abstracts, or keywords. The search within these journals was, therefore, conducted in such a way that all titles and abstracts within the timeframe were read. Articles that only focused on nature/environment and, in addition, focused on children/youth above the age of 10, were excluded, while articles focusing on early childhood were included. Considering that one of the research questions was about finding out how social sustainability was conceptualized in research, almost all articles that conceptualized social sustainability were read and included, even if they were aimed towards youth/young adults.

A growing body of research that investigated children's voices and children's right to participation meant that several articles were found by searching the terms 'belonging', 'citizenship', and/or 'agency' in titles, keywords, or abstracts. These articles were read thoroughly in the first step of the review, in order to decide whether the articles mentioned or were aimed towards Education for Sustainability or Environmental Education, or whether the authors related the concepts to issues of sustainability, climate change, living in the Anthropocene, etc. If they did not comprise any such topics, they were excluded from the review.

2.2. Procedure for Conducting the Review

The review was conducted in four steps. The first step investigated the 20 journals as described above, resulting in a total of 59 articles that were relevant for further investigation. In the first step, the results disclosed that, in two of the chosen 20 journals—*Journal of Early Childhood Research* and *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*—no relevant articles were found for the review within the chosen timeframe.

In step two, the 59 articles were read in order to decide whether the content was relevant for the review or not. Even if the review started with a very broad focus regarding the age group that the research articles investigated, choices had to be made along the way in order to both limit and expand the search towards answering the research questions. The first research question sought to determine to what extent a holistic approach was applied in research articles in *early childhood*. As a consequence, research articles that only focused on the environmental dimension and children above the age of 10 were excluded from the review. On the other hand, regarding the next research question which explored how the social dimension was conceptualized in *early childhood research*, we had to make some concessions as there was little research on this topic. As such, research articles that actually outlined or even investigated social sustainability were included, even if the age group in focus was above the aforementioned age or young adults, for example, Reis and Ferreira [39] and Miedema and Bertam-Troost [40]. As a result of reading and re-reading the articles, the final number of journals included was limited (See Table S1) and a total of 41 articles were considered relevant and were included in the final steps of the review (See Supplementary Materials—List of 41 articles included in the review).

After finishing step 2, the 41 articles were then read again and investigated thoroughly. As a third step, the articles were organized in feature maps [41] that highlighted the articles' main goals, research questions, applied theory, method, sample size, and conclusions. Articles that had been found in step 1 by using keywords such as 'belonging', 'citizenship', ''democracy', or 'agency' (in English, Norwegian, or Swedish) also obtained an additional column in the feature map which specified how and to what extent the content of the article was linked to issues related to Education for Sustainability.

As a fourth and final step of the review, new feature maps were developed, this time in order to reveal how the content of the chosen articles related to the four research questions that guided the review. In this step, topics such as 'holistic' approach, social sustainability, diversity, multicultural perspectives, and migrant children were investigated. To establish an adequate overview on the feature maps in the third and fourth steps of the review, and in order to summarize and analyze the findings, a computer program for text analysis, Nvivo, was used. By creating and using nodes with keywords that reflected the content of the research questions, the computer program proved to be a useful tool to identify similarities and inequalities in the research material. The same method was also used to create an overview of the different methods used in the research articles.

3. Results

3.1. Research in Education for Sustainability between 2013 and 2017/2018

The 41 articles from the 14 journals investigated topics in a range from the teacher's competencies and interpretations regarding Education for Sustainability, the teacher's understandings of sustainability and the teacher's as well as the children's role in supporting social change and solving challenges of local and global patterns of unsustainable lifestyles, whether that be the issue of poverty and food security within the context of Education for Sustainability, nature play and children's lived experiences as global citizens, or explorations of educators conceptual understandings and pedagogical practices related to early childhood education for sustainability.

An interesting finding is the 'more-than-human' as a subject for investigation related to Education for Sustainability. Perspectives that focused on connectedness with nature, human–animal relations, common worlds, and relations with the more-than-human or non-human were found in Nordic and international articles alike [42–46]. Some articles even argued that the hegemonic way of understanding the relationship between the human and the more-than-human or non-human should be challenged in order to secure a global and holistic change for sustainability [45,47–49].

Another important finding worth noting is that the issue of children's agency was recurring in many of the articles, and children as agents for change and the need to listen to children's voices was described both in relation to environmental aspects as well as social aspects of sustainability [47–58].

3.2. Application of a Holistic Perspective in Education for Sustainability

A holistic perspective in Education for Sustainability was more or less applied in an overwhelming majority of the articles (36 of 41). At least three interdependent dimensions—environmental, economic, and social—were described in almost all of the articles, implicitly or explicitly, and, while some of them mainly related their research, findings, and discussions to the environmental dimension [59,60], a large proportion of the articles explicitly supported a socially critical and holistic informed perspective on Education for Sustainability [21,40,48–52,54,56,57,61–66].

Five of the articles (all from one North American journal), mainly used the term 'environmental education', but, as Iskos and Karakosta [67] described, the environment is perceived holistically with the inclusion of the natural, the artificial, the structured, the socio-economic, and the historical dimensions. Children's rights and children's voices were discussed as important issues related to environmental education [55], and Nugent and Beames [68] claimed that outdoor play could be a method for fostering socio-culturally responsive ways of thinking and caring. Reis and Ferreira [39]

explored empowerment, participation, and children as responsible citizens as well as inclusion and social ties within communities. However, these articles applied an approach which revolved around nature- or outdoor-based activities with children in order to include children in environmental research, to achieve pro-environmental behaviors, children's awareness and care for the natural environment, or to strengthen their environmental identity and their sense of comfort and trust in nature.

Several of the articles argued that education for sustainability in early childhood was often being (mis)interpreted into a narrow focus on nature and outdoor play. The authors contended that there was much work to be done to extend the thinking and practice related to the education for sustainability beyond the environmental dimension, in order to embrace a more holistic perspective that also incorporates the social and cultural dimension. A greater focus on sociocultural issues like equality and justice and the negotiation of new approaches to link democratic values to issues of sustainability within education was called for [49,50,52,58,61,69,70].

3.3. Conceptualizations of the Social Dimension, Multicultural Perspectives, and Belonging

The social dimension of Education for Sustainability was, to some extent, present in the vast majority of the articles, very often described within the explanation of the three interdependent dimensions of sustainability and conceptualized or emphasized in various ways. Recurring topics related to the understandings of the social dimension in the articles were democracy and democratic values, children's rights, citizenship, children as active citizens, and as participating agents of change [49,50,52–54,61,62,66,70,71]. Other topics described as related to the social dimension were social participation, diversity, social and economic justice, human rights, equality, responsibility, and tolerance [40,51,62,63].

Although various conceptualizations of the social dimension of Education for Sustainability were found in most of the investigated articles, only a few of them had an *explicit and outspoken* focus throughout the article with aims directed explicitly towards the social dimension, investigating children as agents of change for social sustainability and their agency as global citizens to affect social justice. Hammond et al. [51] adopted the term "social sustainability" in investigating children's perspectives on poverty, and they argued that working with children with Education for Sustainability and sustainable futures should involve working with social issues such as global citizenship, social justice, and human rights. Additionally, the articles of Reunamo and Suomela [62] and Miedema and Bertram-Troost [40] both conceptualized the social dimension of Education for Sustainability as related to global citizenship. Reunamo and Suomela [62] argued that the fundamental experiences of belonging, understanding, and agency are rooted in early childhood, and that the more warmth and

concern children encounter, the more concretely they can feel their belonging within a shared, even global, society [62]. Miedema and Bertram-Troost [40] applied an explicit perspective on social sustainability when investigating challenges of global citizenship for a worldview education. Exemplifying the current global climate, they discussed the necessity to think and act more globally in both religious education and worldview education in order to prevent the development of narrow-minded or radicalized children and young people.

Issues of Education for Sustainability related to migrant children, multicultural aspects, or diversity were neither investigated nor outlined; however, the subject was identified as relevant in some of the articles [39,40,50,56,61,62,66,70,72]. Pramling Samuelsson and Park [50] considered that the diversity of cultural contexts in children's lives could be what sustainability might be all about. Sageidet [56] stated that Education for Sustainability as a pedagogical approach promoted a solidarity as well as a global perspective and could contribute to children's multicultural belonging. With reference to Dewey's pragmatist view, Miedema and Bertram-Troost [40] argued that there is a need for children to be confronted by and acquainted with other children's religious, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Reis and Ferreira [39] included diversity and multicultural perspectives in their discussions revolving around inclusiveness and social ties within communities, and they also claimed that the sharing of experiences through social occasions, celebrations, and growing food could also help build a sense of belonging.

3.4. Overview of the Methods Used in the Research Articles between 2013 and 2017/2018

In the review, 15 of the 41 articles turned out to be based on literature studies and/or document analysis (See Tables S2 and S3 for overview of methods). Of these, 5 articles were empirically based on questionnaires or surveys sent to a large number of teachers, student teachers, and/or teacher educators, while an additional 3 articles were based on projects or workshops with teachers and/or student teachers, or teacher educators. Six articles were empirically based on data from interviews or focus group interviews with teachers, student teachers, and/or teacher educators. A total of 12 out of the 41 articles based their findings on research that included children: case studies/fieldwork together with children (4), larger workshops/projects with children as participants (5), interviews or dialogues with children (1), and observations (photo and video observations) of children (2). Of the 12 articles that included children in their research, 4 had an outspoken focus towards issues related to social sustainability.

4. Discussion

4.1. The 'What' in 'Holistic'—What does 'Holistic' Actually Mean?

The findings in this review reveal that the call for more holistic approaches towards Education for Sustainability has resulted in a growing body of research about such approaches, perhaps especially within the early childhood research context, where the majority of the articles in the review were incorporated within a holistic approach. Although the most regular way of applying a 'holistic' approach proved to be the inclusion of the three interdependent dimensions (environmental, social, and economic), our findings indicate that the 'holistic approach' implies different understandings of what 'holistic' in the context of education for sustainability might actually mean. While some articles claimed to advocate a holistic approach by including the three-pillar model and especially mentioned the social dimension, other articles mentioned artificial and historical dimensions. Several articles argued that a 'holistic approach' to education for sustainability should include the interdependence between humans and nature, the 'more-than-human' or nature as a co-constructor, and thus challenge the anthropocentric worldview. Such arguments can be understood in relation with the criticism of the transformation of the term Environmental Education into the term Education for Sustainable Development which, it has been argued, could be viewed as a product and carrier of globalizing forces [73] and as an anthropocentric turn that facilitates typically human needs at the expense of environmental issues [12]. Also, Seghezzo [22], who acknowledged the interdependence between humans, and between humans and nature, as a strong political tool, has criticized the common three-dimensional notion of sustainability, arguing that such a triangle formed by People (social), Planet (environment), and Profit/Prosperity (economy), forms an anthropocentric framework that comprises neither the interaction nor the interdependence between human aspects, space and time, and thus needs a re-examination.

4.2. Diversity and Migrant Children's Situations within Education for Social Sustainability

Even if diversity and multicultural aspects were, to a certain extent, subject for investigation in some of the articles, our review revealed that topics revolving around migrant children's situations and their experiences of belonging to communities or society have neither been particularly investigated nor discussed in the context of Early Childhood Education for Social Sustainability. Considering that the review has identified a growing body of research that discusses the importance of citizenship and children as active citizens, it is remarkable that migrant children's situations related to such citizenship through the experiences of social inclusion and belonging, have not been addressed.

4.3. Children's Role in Research in Education for Social Sustainability

More than a third of the articles included in the review proved to be based on literature studies and/or document analysis. Methodology was not a subject or category during the selection of articles, and this was, therefore, a random discovery. Somerville and Williams's [19] review criticized that studies within global discourses of children's rights tend to be characterized by advocacy rather than research that provides evidence for practice. The findings from our review provide a basis for additional critique, as a relatively small number of the articles included data from research with children. Rather, the research focus in the articles that were not based on literature studies tended to aim towards investigating teachers and educators' notions and experiences on how to work with education for sustainability with children. Thus, relatively few articles actually explored what education for sustainability with children might be.

The articles that researched aspects of *social* sustainability with children investigated children's theorizing of social justice, fairness, poverty, and social responsibility. This corresponded with the growing body of research that focuses on children as problem solvers, global citizens, and agents of change for sustainability. One article, however, posed a different, critical perspective on the reality of children's possibilities. Hedefalk [57] investigated children's interpretations in discussions of rules during play. Based on her findings, she questioned and problematized children's opportunities to critically discuss and evaluate, and, by that, actually be 'agents of change for sustainability'. She concluded that children, by and large, follow the rules set by the teacher, without questioning, and, therefore, have rather limited opportunities to evaluate whether the rules are reasonable or not. These are important reservations, which challenges the concept of children as problem solvers and agents of change for sustainability.

5. Conclusions

As a result of significant growth in research on Education for Sustainability within Early Childhood Education, it is clear that the call for holistic approaches has been met, as the majority of research articles incorporated or advocated such approaches to various extents. However, these findings formed the basis for additional questioning—what does a holistic approach within the context of education for sustainability actually mean? As this review started out with a perception of a holistic approach, implying that the social and economic dimensions are included together with the environmental dimensions, the findings proved that holistic approaches to education for sustainability could include many more aspects such as the interdependency between species, between humanity and the more-than-human, between humans and animals, between local and global issues, and between the individual and the society. These findings add to the ongoing debate on the content within 'education

for sustainability' and correspond with Seghezzo's [22] call for alternative and expanded frameworks for the understanding of sustainability that include the interdependency between humans and between humans and nature. Additionally, Eizenberg and Jabareen's [23] suggestions of a new conceptual framework for social sustainability should be explored further within the context of education for sustainability in early childhood.

The literature review disclosed that a dominant route into social sustainability considers children as problem solvers. This is an optimistic, future-oriented perspective and reveals a view of the child as a competent child. However, we question whether this is too optimistic and gives too much credit to the child's competence. Such a view of the child also gives too much responsibility to children to solve problems of unsustainability. The politics of unsustainability is also governed by a community of adults, and responsibility to solve problems cannot be for children to bear on their own. As we see it, taking up issues of social sustainability should be a generational issue.

The most important finding in this review, as we perceive it, is the lack of particular and targeted research on migrant children's situations within the context of early childhood education for social sustainability. Through the analysis and discussion above, we have opened up an argument about critical engagement with the concept of diversity and multicultural aspects in research that connects to sustainability and early childhood. Furthermore, the findings create a greater awareness of the crucial importance of migrant children's experiences of belonging for future sustainable societies.
As this state-of-the-art literature reveals, alternative perceptions of what a holistic framework for Early Childhood Education for Sustainability might be create room for new understandings of how it should evolve in order to comprise migrant children's situations and perspectives, and their experiences of belonging to the local and the global society. Further research on education for social sustainability within the field of early childhood education is needed—in particular, research realizing the Convention on the Rights of the Child [2], encouraging practice-oriented research where human dignity and education for life, within the most formative years of a child, is a motivating driving force.

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Paper 2

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Practicing Belonging in Kindergarten: Children's use of Places and Artefacts.

Sidsel Boldermo

Introduction and background

This chapter investigates belonging as a concept within the social dimension of education for sustainability in Norwegian early childhood education. During the last decades, the Education for Sustainability, which is situated within environmental, social, cultural and economic contexts, has become a global movement (Davis & Elliott, 2014). There is consensus among todays researchers within the sustainability field, that in order to acknowledge all aspects of sustainability, the research and educational attention must expand from just focusing on nature and the environment towards a holistic perspective on sustainability that incorporates social, cultural and economic issues, and which encourages children's experiences related to international understanding, citizenship and social justice (Davis & Elliott, 2014; Eriksen, 2013; Hägglund & Johansson, 2014; Pramling Samuelsson & Park, 2017; Sageidet, 2015; Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Elliott, 2017).

Although international research within the field of education for sustainability has developed and increased during the last years, early childhood education as context for social aspects such as social justice and human rights, has received little attention (Hägglund & Johansson, 2014). In the Norwegian early childhood education context, the values and competencies related to education for sustainability as described by UNESCO, correspond well to the holistic process of development and learning outlined in the 2011[40] Norwegian curriculum document for kindergartens. Despite this, the social and cultural aspects of education for sustainability have not been recognised in the Norwegian research and education context (Eriksen, 2013, pp. 108-109). In Norway, as in Nordic and international research contexts, the research on education for sustainability in early childhood has been closely related to issues surrounding the environmental dimension, with an emphasis on the need to

[40] In the new 2017 Norwegian curriculum document for Kindergarten, the holistic process of development and learning has been continued, and the focus on sustainability has increased.

educate children to be environmentally responsible and to live sustainable lives (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019; Pramling Samuelsson & Park, 2017; Sageidet, 2014).

The social dimension of education for sustainability includes human rights, citizenship, social justice and equality, social participation and inclusion, and the building of stable and dynamic societies where basic human needs are fulfilled (Dyment et al., 2013; Hammond, Hesterman, & Knaus, 2015; Hägglund & Johansson, 2014; Sageidet, 2015; Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Sundberg, 2016). In the space of the last decades, the diversity in the Norwegian as well as the Nordic and European population has increased as a result of globalization, increased mobility and forced migration. Within five years, from 2011 to 2016, the percentage of refugees residing in Europe has increased from 16% to 31% as result of an ongoing refugee crisis because of warfare in several parts of the world (Kraly & Abbasi Shavazi, 2018, p. 305). This makes immigration and diversity a global matter of sustainability which places issues of belonging highly on the agenda, as migrants' experiences of citizenship in their new communities may be related to their experiences of social identity and belonging to the new society (Craith, 2012; Dahlstedt, 2017). The importance of such experiences of belonging and of being socially included in a community, is becoming greater in an increasingly diverse society (Juutinen, 2018; Ødegaard E & Pramling Samuelsson, 2016).

As 'citizenship' is a concept that is frequently emphasized in todays context of education for sustainability (Reunamo & Suomela, 2013; Somerville & Williams, 2015; Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Davis, 2014), 'belonging' is closely related to the experiences of such citizenship (Juutinen, 2018; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). However, migrant children may encounter challenges in experiencing belonging in early childhood education contexts, due to language differences, differences in interaction-patterns, and also different sociocultural values between home and kindergarten (Stratigos, Bradley, & Sumsion, 2014, p. 175). Children and youth with an immigrant background can long for belonging to a socially accepted and desired social identity, and they can strive to be accepted or included in peer groups of the majority culture
(Kalkman & Clark, 2017; Skattebol, 2006; Steen-Olsen, 2013). Consciously or subconsciously, the migrant child can be aware of the risk of being stigmatised as the 'outsider' looking into a community to which they do not belong (Kalkman & Clark, 2017, p. 310). Such experiencing exclusion may lead to marginalisation and create foundation for inequality. To maintain a social sustainable society for all, migrant children's experiences of belonging is becoming increasingly important and thus needs to be investigated further (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019; Juutinen, 2018, pp. 17-25).

On these premises, and in order to explore how children from different backgrounds and upbringings experience, negotiate and practice belonging in kindergarten, the following research question was formulated: How can children's use of places and artefacts in kindergarten, be understood as

materially mediated manifestations of belonging? In order to answer this research question, a fieldwork in a multicultural kindergarten was conducted, and the findings were analyzed within a cultural-historical framework.

Theoretical framework

Research in early childhood education often focus strongly on children's social relations, but also the children's relations to materiality; artefacts, toys and places, could be investigated in order to widen the perspective on children`s negotiations and practices of belonging in kindergarten (Juutinen, 2018, p. 40). In this study, the operationalizations of the concept of belonging imply that belonging is regarded as a process that happens in places, and through the use of cultural artefacts. Place is conceptualised as relational and in constant motion, constituted through stories and narratives, and thus alternative narratives of who we are in our places can emerge (Duhn, 2012; Massey, 2005; Somerville, 2010).

The term artefact refers to cultural resources such as objects and tools, that are created and taken into use by humans, and by that is related to human activity and meaning making. The artefacts that are made available for the children in the kindergarten thus facilitates their cultural formation (Ødegaard E, 2012, pp. 94-95). The children's narratives and stories are in this study regarded as 'social artefacts' that tell as much about the society and culture, as they do about the individual child (Riessman, 2017, p. 256). A theoretical framework that corresponds with such a holistic and relational approach can be found in the cultural-historical framework as it takes social interaction, cultural and material conditions and historical development into consideration. Research with children within such a framework includes the children as individuals and as participants in societal collectives. To understand children's perspectives, the focus must be on their activities in their everyday lives, and as researcher one must separate between the various institutional activity settings in which the activities take place (Hedegaard, 2008a). The data constructions in this study were developed drawing on Mariane Hedegaard's interpretations and development of Vygotskij's perspectives on human development (Hedegaard, 2008a, 2009, 2011, 2012), Ditte Winther-Lindqvist's (2011) conceptualisations of motive development related to children's social identity and belonging in peer groups, and Seth Chaiklin's (2011) holistic perspectives on the relationships among motives, development, action and societal practice.

Method and analysis

The basis for the study is eight weeks of fieldwork conducted during two periods, autumn and spring, in a large Norwegian multicultural kindergarten with 70-80 children and 20-22 employees; teachers and assistants. Many of the children in the kindergarten had parents with a history of migration for various reasons. The use of the term 'migrant child/children' in this study, implicates that one or both of the child's/children's parents were born and raised outside of Norway.

Initially, the researcher applied a strategy inspired by Gulløv and Højlund (2003), which implicated to follow the children as they moved between places and activity settings, and participated in various activities. Based on an understanding that children's activities always have a societal dimension (Chaiklin, 2011), the intention was to identify which places and artefacts that was actively taken into use by the children, and to interpret the use and the activity from a relational perspective within a societal dimension.

The research project was registered and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data[41]. Children in Norwegian kindergartens have the right to participate according to their ages and abilities, and their views and proposals shall be recognised according to their age and maturity level (*Framework Plan for Kindergartens. Content and Tasks.*, 2017). This applies also when research is being conducted in kindergartens. As 29 children, aged between
2-5 years old, were registred as participants due to their parents' concent, the real participants in the study were the children who in addition to this, were attending the kindergarten on the days of the data collection, and who themselves wanted to participate on a day to day basis. In practice, this was accomplished by that the researcher only followed children that verbally or by body language or gestures invited her in, and by that photos and recordings of children were taken exclusively with their consent. Such strategy is associated with the approach called "Deep hanging out" (Powell & Somerville, 2018), which includes that the researcher in addition to being open and curious, is patiently awaiting something interesting to emerge. Following such approach, the researcher should know when to be involved and when to keep distance, to wait to be invited, and to know when she has been included or excluded by the children (Powell & Somerville, 2018, p. 12). As a consequense of conducting the fieldwork within such approach, the number of participating children, and photos and recordings of children, were limited.

[41] This means that the data collection and retention, as well as the participants' anonymity, have been safeguarded in accordance with the applicable regulations. The Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology (*Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology*, 2016) states that researchers who involve children in their research have a particular responsibility to protect the participants in the study.

The fieldwork were conducted two or three days a week, inside and outdoors, during children's free play, or during the children's participation in activity settings and activities, lead by the educators, or initiated by the children themselves. Such activities varied from nature excursions, digging for worms, carpentring, football-playing and bicycle-riding outdoors, to inside circle-time, physics experiments, seasonal projects, playing hide and seek, drawing, listening and dancing to music, and storytelling. The collected amount of data comprised photographs, videorecordings and the researcher's handwritten fieldnotes which included unstructured observations, children's utterances and stories, and the researcher's own common sense interpretations (Hedegaard, 2008b).

The analysis was conducted in steps. First, the photos and recordings were reviewed and systematisized and the content were interpreted on a common sense level. Secondly, the handwritten fieldnotes were re-written as documents on the computer. In the third step, in order to interprete the data on a situated practice level, the photos and recordings and the approximately 50 pages of re-written fieldnotes were explored, with an aim to search for conceptual patterns (Hedegaard, 2008b, pp. 58-60). In order to try to recognize the children's motives, descriptions of how the children approached and participated in the activity settings, and their attitudes like engagement, disengagement, enthusiasm or resentment were especially looked into (Winther-Lindqvist, 2011). The reading of Skattebol (2006)'s descriptions of children's embodiment into roles, and Winther-Lindqvist (2011); (2013)'s theorising of how children's wanting for belonging can be expressed in group settings influenced the interpretations in this step of the analysis.

Over 300 photos were taken during the fieldwork. A large proportion were of places and artefacts. As it turned out, six children appeared more often on the photos, and were referred to in the fieldnotes, than other children. These were children that had showed great interest in spending time together with the researcher during the fieldwork. As a forth step of the analysis, the fieldnotes and the photos[42] that included these six children and also their places, activity settings and artefacts, were analyzed by using Nvivo, a computer program for analyzing qualitative data. To capture manifestations of belonging, 24 different categories were compiled, inspired by Wastell and Degotardi (2017, pp. 42-44)'s components of belonging. The 24 categories included among other 'inclusion' and 'exclusion', 'being suitable', 'shared interests', children's relationships with peers and educators, and children's places, artefacts and belongings. A total of 81 photos were analyzed, together with the fieldnotes.

Four of the six children often seemed to be on the outside of the peer community, in various ways. One girl seemed to actively choose to play by herself, while another girl were more openly excluded by her desired playmates. Three of these four children had migrant background, including a young boy

[42] The video recordings were not analyzed in Nvivo, due to technical issues

‘Mike’, whose real name is not disclosed. ‘Mike’ caught the researcher’s interest already during the first days of the fieldwork. He was new in the kindergarten, and the researcher interpreted his claim of not having any friends there, as an expression of not experiencing belonging there. Perhaps as a consequense of this, ‘Mike’ seemed interested to spending time together with the researcher. During the data analysis, it turned out that the amount of data related to ‘Mike’ was more consistent over both periods of the fieldwork, than the data related to the other five children, probably because he spent more time together with the researcher. Because of his background as new in the kindergarten and in Norway, his case and his voice was perceived as especially interesting in order to investigate the project’s research question.

When describing an individual child as a single case, the researcher’s focus is directed on the aspects of the child that are relevant to the research questions posed in the study (Yin, 2014). Garvis, Ødegaard, and Lemon (2015, pp. 22-24) referred to a ‘narrative way of knowing’, which is about the researcher trying to capture the variety of local practices and experiences, and contextualize the situations in which the children live and their identities are shaped.
Drawing on Garvis et al. (2015) and such a ‘narrative way of knowing’, the case ‘Mike’ was created within a narrative approach. In order to re-tell the content of the data concerning
‘Mike’, the researcher narrated selected parts of it into written small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006). The small stories were created on the basis of the photos, and of the fieldnotes which included unstructured observations, dialogues, and ‘Mike’s utterances and stories. His stories were perceived as shared cultural tools rather than just originated from within himself (May, 2013, pp. 101-102), and when analyzing them, the researcher focused on interpreting the content and the intra- and interpersonal function of the story (Engel, 2005, pp. 213-214). Such kind of narrativization of the data, which is the researcher’s way to construct and thus bring the data come to life, assumes some point of view, and the interpretations of the data material depend on the researcher who are interpreting it (Juutinen, 2018; Riessman, 1993). The narrativization of the data in this study are thus the researcher’s voice, based on the selection of parts of the data that appeared as especially relevant in order to create ‘Mike’s case, and to answer the research question.

Mike

> *Mike comes to the kindergarten together with his mother, and he does not want her to go. After he has spent a long time on his mother’s lap in the wardrobe, a teacher helps him to say goodbye to his mother and let her leave.*
> *Mike tells me that he has no friends in the kindergarten. Inside the music room, he plays hip hop music on the CD player and begins to jump and dance to the rhythm, all by himself.*

Mike was quite new to the kindergarten. As the youngest in his family, with two older brothers, he was born on the run, fleeing from acts of war and conflict in South Asia. The researcher's observations during the first period of the fieldwork confirmed the content Mike's utterance: the kindergarten seemed to be a place in which Mike did not have any friends. Even if there were no observations of Mike being actively excluded, Mike was often observed being by himself. He wandered from one activity setting to another with a nonsmiling, almost sad facial expression. Occasionally, he would be busy with some kind of toy or artefact just briefly. The one thing by which Mike seemed to be motivated during the first period of the fieldwork was the CD player in the music room. He often asked to listen to hip hop music, and he would dance and jump to the rhythm.

On one occasion while he was listening and dancing to the music, several other children came in and started to dance as well, demanding different songs. Mike stopped his dancing and began to operate the CD-player, changing the music, finding new songs to play and adjusting the sound level, however he did not join the other children in their dancing and laughing around.

In the next period of the fieldwork some months later, the situation seemed to have changed.

Although Mike still occasionally wandered around alone between activity settings, his reluctance to attend the kindergarten seemed to have subsided. He was no longer sitting on his mother's lap in the mornings, and when his parents left, everything seemed to go smoothly. On several occasions, he was observed participating enthusiastically together with his peers in the activities that were provided within the kindergarten's practices such as circle time, playing hide-and-seek, or carpentering with hammer and nails. On other occasions, he played alone by himself, constructing with bricks or taking a role as "shop owner" writing receipts and lists. Outdoors, Mike spent a lot of time on the football pitch. The children in the kindergarten often brought their own belongings to the kindergarten, such as stuffed animals, books or toys. Mike brought his football.

> *Mike often brings his football to the kindergarten. He is familiar with the names of several famous football players. Ronaldo is not the best, Neymar is, according to Mike, and he tells me with shiny eyes that he has seen both Manchester United and Arsenal in real life. When he gets a bit older, Mike explains, he will start playing football for the local football team, which plays in the elite series and of which he is a big fan.*

Mike gave the impression of being very motivated to play football and to talk about football playing and football players. He strongly disagreed with the researcher favouring Ronaldo as the world's best football player. If someone was playing football at the pitch, he would be there, especially if some of the teachers or assistants were participating. He often asked whether he could wear his football shorts not only when he was inside, but also when he was outdoors. He was happy to be allowed to wear them over his pants and even over his rain trousers or winter clothes if it was raining or cold outside.

Mike played football in a manner that was a bit different from that of the other children, he was initiative and he seemed to have talent as well. He was fast on the pitch, and he tried to dribble and trick with the ball. He somewhat embodied the role of 'football player' in the way he moved and turned quickly, dribbled and tricked, and gesticulated on the pitch.

In conversations, Mike often spoke about his brothers. They were older than him and had already started school, and Mike would often refere to what they had said or done, or about their football aspirations and what kind of mobile phones or camera they had. When Mike was explaining his knowledge of football and football-playing, or other things, e.g., technical details related to the use of the CD player, the tablet or the action camera, or arguing about something about which he knew the facts, he would often emphasize his knowledge using his brothers as truth witnesses.

> *Mike and Lea are discussing what it might be like to be in prison. Mike tells Lea that according to his older brother, a person could get a real beating in prison. Mike illustrates it to Lea by holding his hands in front of his throat with a dramatic expression on his face. Lea gives him a sceptical glance, saying that she does not believe it. But Mike argues eagerly and definitely that this is true because it is what his big brother told him. He further said that if someone were really unlucky, that person could end up in prison for the rest of his life.*

Mike showed great interest in the researcher's action camera and tablet that were used in the fieldwork. He often asked to use or to borrow the action camera in particular, which he favoured. He liked to take photographs, but he was not that interested in discussing the content of the photographs: neither the ones he himself had taken nor those made by the researcher. What was noticeable in an analysis of the photographs after the fieldwork had ended was Mike's clothing. The outfits he wore most often seemed to include caps or other headgear regardless of whether he was inside or outdoors. He also frequently wore football shorts and T-shirts or sweaters with football logos or the surnames or numbers of well-known football players.

> *One of the last days of the fieldwork, Mike passes me in the wardrobe, running barefoot and wearing T-shirt and football shorts. As he passes me he smiles over his shoulder, saying: Look! Ronaldo!*
> *Before I can ask what he means, he runs towards the play rooms and out of my sight. It doesn`t hit me until weeks later, as I explore the photos from this day and realize that the T-shirt he was wearing had number 7 on his back; Cristiano Ronaldo's number.*

Discussion

Drawing on Riessman (2017), Mike's claim during the first period of the fieldwork that he did not have any friends in the kindergarten is understood as an utterance that expressed his current (at the

time) experience of not belonging in the kindergarten (pp. 256-257). When children start to attend institutions like kindergarten, this can be their first experience of
'living across institutions' and of being part of a community outside their families

(Hedegaard, 2009, p. 77). Starting such 'living across institutions', an important task for many children is to find their place in the new social environment, and to belong to a social group (Winther-Lindqvist, 2011, p. 128). The social circumstances of Mike's being 'new' in kindergarten and his seeming lack of motivation with respect to the material and physical surroundings as he wandered alone between places and activity settings confirmed the researcher's impression that he had not found his place in the social environment, and he did not belong.

One major development in Mike's everyday life in the kindergarten that was changed between the first and the second period of the fieldwork, was his way of attending the kindergarten. Children's motivation can be identified through their attitudes such as enthusiasm, engagement, resentment and disengagement when approaching and participating in activities (Winther-Lindqvist, 2011, p. 121). Mike's attitudes during the first period of the fieldwork is described as being characterised by disengagement because of his reluctance to be left in the kindergarten, his frequent wandering alone between activity settings instead of participating actively, and his sad facial expression. His motivation for participating in the activities facilitated by the kindergarten seemed changed in the next period of the fieldwork, when his attitude to a larger extent was characterised by enthusiasm and engagement as he came up with suggestions and ideas in playing, in carpentring with hammer and nails, and on the football pitch. How his social relationships with the other children in the kindergarten had developed between the first and second periods of the fieldwork was difficult to discern though. He still wandered alone between activity settings, or played shop alone as "shopowner". However he was also observed laughing and running and being together with the other children both inside and outdoors, and his initiative and engagement on the football pitch was something that was different from the earlier period.

When 'living across institutions' like home and kindergarten, the child not only adjusts to the possibilities and demands of the institutions (home and kindergarten) but he also contributes to and influences the same possibilities and demands (Hedegaard, 2011, p. 132). Mike's motives for playing football, his embodiment of a football player through his clothing and movements on the football pitch, and his frequent references to his older brothers could be understood as related to his competencies and experiences, and to the possibilities for his realising his motives, thus influencing the frame of institutional practices in the kindergarten.

Mike's stories of having seen both Manchester United and Arsenal 'in real life', and about being a future football player on the local football team, could be explained as related to the social and cultural

context he was embedded in at that time (May, 2013, p. 103). In Norway, football playing and discussions and predictions about how the local football teams will perform in the elite series permeate the local culture discourse during spring and summer, perhaps especially in communities in which football teams are located and matches are played. The fact that the kindergarten's outdoor materiality included a football pitch, seemed to motivate Mike, in particular, to the activity of playing football. The football pitch, here perceived as Mike's place, is interpreted as important to his stories of being a future football player, thus who he could be, on that particular place.

The use of material artefacts, like Mike's football, and also his football clothes, can help signify an identity (May, 2013, pp. 145-146). Allowing the children to bring their own belongings, the kindergarten's materiality included Mike's football, and his action of bringing the football to the kindergarten is understood as part of a meaningful practice and as an activity within a societal dimension (Chaiklin, 2011, p. 215). From a societal perspective, the football is an artefact that conveys relation and access to a local as well as a global community of football players and supporters. Mike's bringing the football and the initiating of football playing, his way of dressing and his techniques of embodiment on the football pitch can be perceived as his tools for practicing belonging and framing himself as being suitable and compatible within the local identity discourse. Such issues of embodiment and performance related to negotiations of belonging and being suitable have been discussed both in the Australian early childhood context by Skattebol (2006), who showed how a migrant boy, 'Kyle', used techniques of embodiment as tools to negotiate belonging to a specific desired community, and also in the Norwegian early childhood context by Kalkman and Clark (2017), who has actualized the issue of migrant children's awareness of being unsuitable because of appearance, clothes and ways of behaving. Mike's practice of framing himself as a proper football player and supporter through his stories, his football and football clothes, and his embodiment on the football pitch, is interpreted as him being motivated by a wanting for a specific social identity and a making of claim for belonging to a local and global football community.

Concluding remarks

In this study, belonging as a relational phenomenon was investigated in order to explore and widen the perspective on how children's use of places and artefacts in kindergarten, could be understood as materially mediated manifestations of belonging within the context of early childhood education for sustainability. Through analysis and discussion, the migrant child Mike's use of the football and the football pitch was interpreted as being his tools to negotiate a desired social identity as a proper football player and supporter, and thus to practice his claim for belonging to a local and global football community.

The chapter was introduced by emphasizing the importance of developing new knowledge related to the social dimension of education for sustainability in early childhood education, and migrant children's experiences of social identity and belonging. As outlined in the introduction, experiencing belonging is closely related to concepts that are emphasized in todays context of education for social sustainability, namely 'citizenship' and 'global citizenship'. In order to perceive oneself as a significant member and citizen in the kindergarten community, or in the local society, or even in the global society worldwide, the experience of belonging and of being socially included is crucial.

The process of researching children's use of places and cultural artefacts has shown that there is a need for more knowledge of migrant children's social and cultural belonging. Answering the research question, the chapter aims to contribute to a body of research within early childhood education for sustainability that acknowledges how migrant children's wanting for social identity and belonging can be facilitated in early childhood education. As children's social worlds can be made sustainable through the experiences of having significance in social communities (Ødegaard E & Pramling Samuelsson, 2016, p. 60) children's practices of belonging and negotiations to be suitable and compatible within the majority culture, are important issues to be further investigated within the frame of education for sustainability.

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Paper 3

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Fleeting moments: young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness

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Fleeting moments: young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness

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ABSTRACT

With the aim of developing new knowledge on inclusive practices for young children in early childhood education, the following research questionwas explored: what characterises young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness in a diverse peer group in kindergarten? Data from field work in a young children's; group in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway formed basis for belonging; togetherness the present study's analysis, which was conducted within a culturalhistorical framework. The findings revealed that the two-year-olds' everyday institutional lives were influenced by features in the peer culture and characterised by fleeting moments of caring and sharing, shared joint experiences and ongoing negotiations of mutual bonds, hierarchies and group boundaries. Although the findings did not reveal any differences along ethnic or cultural lines when it came to the two-year-olds' negotiations of belonging and togetherness, the fact that the peer culture already at this age included the application of hierarchies and symbol systems, calls for kindergarten teachers' awareness in order to secure inclusive practices for young children.

Introduction

> A group of children are seated at the lunch table, and two-year-old Jack reckons the names of those who are going to have a nap after they have finished eating.
> 'Everyone [is] going to sleep!', he says.
> He reckons their names, one by one, and they confirm by shouting 'yes!', as they smile and clap their hands together.
> Jack turn to the teacher and points at her [saying] 'You, you not sleep! Only, we, children sleep!'

The aim of the present article is to explore how young children's belonging and togetherness can be understood through their negotiations of membership and shared emotional connection in peer groups. As illustrated by the small story above, the drawing of boundaries can be observed in peer groups from early years onwards.

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The World Organization of Early Childhood Education has identified social exclusion as a potential high-risk situation for migrant and refugee children ('Declaration of the 68th OMEP', 2016). Research on belonging and togetherness is a growing field in the international early childhood research context (Juutinen 2018; Koivula and Hännikäinen 2017; Nutbrown and Clough 2009; Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014; Wastell and Degotardi 2017), and, in the last decade, early childhood research on belonging among migrant and refugee children has expanded (Guo and Dalli 2016; Kalkman and Clark 2017; Kernan 2010; Ljung Egeland 2019; Mitchell and Bateman 2018; Singer and de Haan 2010).

Singer and de Haan (2010) investigated children's friendships and conflicts in Dutch multicultural childcare centres; among children under four years old, the researchers did not find any notable differences in friendships or conflicts along ethnic or cultural lines. However, several researchers have pointed out that experiencing belonging may be challenging for 'different' children, regardless of whether the 'differences' are due to language, ability, age or size, ethnicity, skin colour, or cultural beliefs (Kernan 2010, 202; Ljung Egeland 2015, 153–154; Mitchell and Bateman 2018, 380; Stratigos 2015, 51;

Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014, 175). As Ljung Egeland (2015, 13) stated, there are no differences between children—migrant background or not—when it comes to the need to belong. There is a need for more research concerning children under the age of three and their negotiations of belonging in diverse early childhood settings (Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014; Wastell and Degotardi 2017).

In their research on diversity in early childhood, Löfdahl and Hägglund (2012, 124) stated that diversity concerned how social, cultural and ethnic differences were dealt with in everyday institutional practices, adding that children's processes of meaning making of differences within peer groups were closely related to social hierarchies, friendships and popularity. Corsaro (2009, 301) differentiated peer groups from peer culture, noting that, while children are members of peer groups due to age, they create their own peer cultures within these groups. The peer cultures in early childhood settings have been explained as stable sets of activities, values and artefacts, produced and shared by children, which are unique in time and place but have a common feature in the way that the children try to make their everyday lives understandable (Corsaro 2009; Löfdahl and Hägglund 2012). As the first step into a society outside their family, kindergarten may be young children's first experience of diversity and opportunity to meet children who are 'different' from them; thus, kindergarten is the site of their first experiences of 'difference', and of being included or excluded in peer groups or communities (Nutbrown and Clough 2009; Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014).

In order to contribute to the development of new knowledge on diversity and inclusive practices for young children in early childhood education, the following research question was explored: what characterises young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness in a diverse peer group in kindergarten?

The research question was examined through an exploratory case study (Simons 2014; Yin 2014), and the unit of analysis was a young children's group in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway. Drawing on McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017), the concepts of membership and shared emotional connection, as elements in children's sense of community, formed the basis for exploring children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness in kindergarten. The analysis was conducted within a cultural-historical framework, inspired by Hedegaard's (2012) wholeness approach for researching children's participation and meaning making in institutional practices.

Membership and shared emotional connection as elements in children's sense of community

Based on McMillan and Chavis's (1986) research on societal dynamics in developing a sense of community, Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) explored four key elements in the development of a sense of community among children: membership, influence, integration or fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. Based on their findings, Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) recommended exploring each of these elements individually to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of children's sense of community in early childhood education. For the present study, the elements of membership and shared emotional connection were considered especially suitable in the context of young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness, as outlined below.

In addition to referring to belonging to a group, the element of membership includes finding one's own place in the group; consolidating friendships; and negotiating boundaries, hierarchies, inclusion and exclusion (Koivula and Hännikäinen 2017). McMillan and Chavis (1986) described membership as a feeling of belonging and of being a part of something and argued that membership also implies boundaries; for someone to belong, there must be someone who does not belong. One characteristic of membership is the use of a common symbol system, such as rituals or clothes, to create social distance between members and non-members. In order to maintain group boundaries and reinforce their membership in the group, children can create rituals, discourses and specific activities (Koivula and Hännikäinen 2017; McMillan and Chavis 1986).

The element of shared emotional connection refers to having a feeling of togetherness based on mutual bonds, engaging in frequent and positive interactions, participating in shared activities, having fun together, engaging in joint play and having a shared or similar history or experiences (Koivula and

Hännikäinen 2017; McMillan and Chavis 1986). McMillan and Chavis (1986) pointed out that sharing a history did not necessitate that all group members had participated in the shared history but that they identified with it.

Materials and methods

The present study was designed as a case study (Yin 2014), and the unit of analysis was a young children's group in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway. The data collection was conducted during seven weeks of fieldwork in the winter and spring of 2018. In total, 12 two-year-olds attended the group at that time, and all of them registered as participants in the research with their parents' consent.[1] Yin (2014, 13) defined a case study as a comprehensive research strategy, which is suitable when investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and which benefits from a prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

The fieldwork and analysis was carried out in a systematic manner, inspired by Hedegaard's (2012) cultural-historical wholeness approach which visualises three perspectives: the societal perspective, the institutional perspective and the individual child's perspective. As a macro perspective, the societal perspective includes societal conditions and culturally conditioned traditions and values that influence kindergarten practices and thus children's everyday lives, such as subject matters, areas and curriculum plans and time and spaces (Hedegaard 2012, 131).

The fieldwork was comprised of participatory observations, which involved writing fieldnotes, drawing illustrations and taking photos. Hedegaard (2008a) used the concept of activity to describe an individual child's participation within an institutional practice and the concept of activity settings to describe children's social situations within the institutional practices. Each individual child's participation in an activity setting, such as the lunch meal, provides a different experience and opportunity for meaning making among the children participating in the setting (Hedegaard 2008a, 2012). The relation between activity settings and children's social situations has further been explained by Hedegaard (2012, 131), who noted that activity settings are recurring events, where both materiality and ways of interaction reflect the traditions within the institutional practices. Following Hedegaard (2008a, 2012), the present observations focused on the children's social interactions and peer relationships in the everyday activity settings provided within the institutional practice.

In this young children's group, the relevant everyday activity settings were circle time and lunch meals. In addition, the transitions before, between and after these settings were included in the observations. This meant spending time in the young children's group between approximately 10:00

and 13:00. The intention was to be a participant observer, following the children closely in the activity settings and transitions, but it proved to be difficult to make observations and simultaneously be available to the children during lunch meals. The children's social interactions during lunch meals were, therefore, systematically observed from a small distance. The children's positions at the table were registered to see if a pattern of preferred positions emerged.

The data from the young children's group consisted of 94 photos and 40 pages of fieldnotes. In addition, the kindergarten's 19-page annual plan was included in the data as a historical document that shed light on the institutional policies and perspectives that underpinned the practices in the young children's group at the time of the study (Simons 2014).

Research ethics

The research project was registered and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. The collection and retention of the data was safeguarded in accordance with the applicable regulations. However, merely following ethical formalities is insufficient when conducting research with children (Enochsson and Löfdahl Hultman 2019; Mortari and Harcourt 2012). As the participants were young children, issues of children's informed consent and dissent (Dockett, Einarsdottir, and Perry 2012) were taken into consideration, and the researcher's sensitivity towards the children's needs and wishes were perceived as crucial (Enochsson and Löfdahl Hultman 2019). Thus, the researcher employed process consent (Graham, Powell, and Truscott 2016, 84), which implies that children's consent or dissent is an ongoing process on a day-to-day basis. The children's age, body language and facial expressions were considered as much as their verbal consent. This meant that the researcher withdrew and refrained from taking photos or engaging in activities with children who signalled discomfort through their body language or facial expressions (Enochsson and Löfdahl Hultman 2019; Koivula and Hännikäinen 2017).

The participants[2]

Comprising four groups, the kindergarten under study received many children of migrants and refugees. The children were allocated into the groups based on their age; there was one group of two-year-olds, and three mixed aged groups. Two of the mixed aged groups welcomed children of newly arrived refugees. As newly arrived families were perceived as particularly vulnerable, it was not justifiable to carry out the fieldwork in those groups. Thus, the fieldwork was conducted in two of the other groups; the group of two-year-olds and a group of mixed aged children. The present study refer to the group of two-year-olds.

Of the 12 two-year-olds in the studied group, four of them had at least one parent from a country outside of the Nordic countries. All of these four children were born in Norway. Izzy's father was Norwegian, her mother had migrated from a country on the African continent. Jack's parents were refugees from another country on the African continent. Leah's mother was Norwegian, her father had migrated to Norway from a European country some years ago. As Hamid was born in Norway, his older siblings, who also attended the kindergarten, but in a mixed age group for children over three years old, were born in a country in South East Asia, from which their parents had fled.

The decision to only engage in situations where the children's body language and verbal utterances left no room for doubt as to whether the researcher's presence was accepted meant spending more time with some children than others. Primarily, Jack, Tina, Maya, Olivia, Leah and Adrian seemed to be comfortable with the researcher's presence on a daily basis. John, Live and Izzy's familiarity with the researcher varied a bit from day to day. Among the remaining children in the group, two of them seemed restrained in the presence of the researcher. Thus, they were considered participants only due to their parents' consent and were excluded from the study. The final child, Hamid, seemed comfortable and sought contact with the researcher. Unfortunately, he caught whooping cough a couple of weeks into the fieldwork and thus stayed home for a long time. This was also the case for Adrian and Live, who caught whooping cough during the fieldwork period.

As opposed to the other groups in the kindergarten, where older children attended, the studied group was not characterised by verbal diversity. The kindergarten had a strong focus on language development; however, due to economic constraints, the resources needed to engage with migrant children in their mother tongue were scarce. During the fieldwork period, the verbal communication heard in the young children's group was almost exclusively in Norwegian. An exception was when Hamid's older siblings came by; the older children spoke their mother tongue, and Hamid seemed to understand what was said and contribute to the conversations.

Analysis

As noted above, the data analysis for the present study was conducted using the culturalhistorical wholeness approach; the societal, institutional and individual children's perspectives were explored in order to understand the two-year-olds' social situations within the institutional practices (Hedegaard 2008b). In this context, the kindergarten's annual plan represented the societal perspective. The daily implementation of the content described in the plan, as it was observed, represented the institutional perspective.

The first two data analysis steps included a common sense analysis of the photos, the written and illustrated observations, and the annual plan, as well as an overall search for conceptual patterns in the data, while considering the societal and institutional perspectives (Hedegaard 2008c, 58–59). The third step involved a thematic and conceptual interpretation (Hedegaard 2008c, 61–62), which was connected to the research question and focused on the young children's social interactions in the peer community.

Overall conceptual patterns: circle time

Circle time was highlighted in the annual plan as an institutional practice anchored in the values of the kindergarten and as a suitable arena for safeguarding the young children's experience of belonging. During the fieldwork period, circle time, as described in the annual plan, was rarely carried out. Instead, the staff were occupied with routine tasks, making arrangements for lunch and taking care of the children's clothes, while the children were told to stay in the wardrobe and wait for lunch to be ready. This took approximately 15–20 min. Usually, a teacher or assistant was with them, going back and forth between the wardrobe and the main room and often tidying, folding clothes, entertaining the children by singing songs and helping them resolving conflicts.

In this recurring activity setting, available artefacts appeared to play a role in the children's social interactions. The available artefacts in the wardrobe were the belongings that the children brought from home, namely, their clothes, bags, shoes and toys. The institutional practice of allowing children to bring private belongings such as toys to the kindergarten, was explained by the teacher; since the two-year-olds had strong affiliations to these artefacts, bringing them to the kindergarten could support them in transitional situations and safeguard their feelings of safety and belonging.

Overall conceptual patterns: lunch meals

The annual plan highlighted meals as especially suitable for safeguarding children's participation and experiences of friendships. In addition, the plan described the importance of safeguarding children's experiences of belonging and being part of a community through the arranging of daily joint events. In the young children's group, the lunch meals constituted such joint events. Each lunch meal was prepared by the staff, and sometimes one or two children participated in the preparation as a kitchen aide for the day. Lunch was served at about the same time each day, which was after the children played outdoors and before nap time. It was served on two tables, and the two-year-olds could choose for themselves at which of the tables they wanted to sit and for how long they would stay and eat. When it was not possible for a child to sit exactly where he or she wanted, the teachers or assistants made efforts to organise a place near at least one of his or her favoured peers. The lunch meals were

characterised by a calm atmosphere with sufficient time to eat and have conversations. The institutional practice concerning the lunch meals was explained by the teacher as a result of the kindergarten's work on the concept of belonging, as well as a means of safeguarding the children's statutory right to participate, as stated in the Norwegian curriculum for kindergartens (2017).

Overall conceptual patterns: transitions

Transitions were not a subject in the annual plan; however, the observed transitions between activity settings accounted for a substantial proportion of the two-year-olds' everyday life in kindergarten. The observed transitions were from outside play to indoor circle time and waiting in the wardrobe, between this waiting, to go to the lunch meal, and between the lunch meal and nap time. The length of each transition varied per child. One child could choose to be seated at the lunch meal until he or she could go straight to the bathroom and have his or her diaper changed and then go to the bedroom for nap time. Another child could finish the lunch meal quickly and then play, engage with other children or look at books on the sofa while the rest of the children finished the lunch meal and the bedroom was readied.

Thematic and conceptual interpretations of young children as part of a peer community

In this step of the analysis, the activity settings -the lunch meal and circle time- as well as the transitions between these settings, were understood as the two-year-olds' social and cultural meeting places. The individual children's perspectives were tentatively captured through photos and observations of their social interactions in the activity settings, and analysed by drawing on the descriptions of the elements of membership and shared emotional connection (Koivula and Hännikäinen 2017; McMillan and Chavis 1986). As previously outlined, these elements were perceived as closely related to the concepts of belonging and togetherness in this study.

Regarding the element of membership, the thematic analysis involved searching for patterns of the two-year-olds trying to gain access and find their place in the group, consolidate friendships and negotiate boundaries and hierarchies. In addition, a search for the children's use of symbols and rituals to create social closeness or distance was conducted. When analysing the observations and photos in relation to the element of shared emotional connection, the focus was on exploring patterns of the children's emphasis on mutual bonds, expressions of shared or similar history or experiences, engagement in shared activities, frequent positive interactions and physical closeness.

An intuitive process for interpreting the data in the third analysis step was adopted, which included writing small stories to illustrate some of the findings. The process of drawing small stories from the data can be a way to think using stories and to shed light on everyday interactions between small children (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008).

Results

The findings from the analysis are presented below according to the elements of membership and shared emotional connection.

Patterns of negotiating membership

Gaining access to or reinforcing one's place in the community by drawing boundaries or hierarchies was a recurring pattern identified in the analysis. The threat of not being invited to a birthday or the promise of the opposite was a topic for discussion by the children regardless of whether a birthday was imminent or not.

> Tina points her finger at Izzy and Olivia: 'Only Maya [can] come [to] my, my birthday—not the two of you!'
> Izzy, with a sad facial expression, walks close up to Tina and searches for eye contact. 'I come?', Izzy [says as she] points at herself.
> With a loud voice and firm facial expression, Tina replies: 'No!'

Such birthday discussions happened both at the lunch meal and while waiting in the wardrobe, as well as in the transitions between activity settings. Thus, birthday invitations appeared to be a ritual to negotiate or strengthen a friendship or to place oneself in a hierarchy and safeguard one's own membership. In particular, Tina, Izzy, Leah and Live used the birthday reference in negotiations, however in general, if one child initiated such arguments, very often the other children would follow up.

Having the right equipment appeared to be a kind of symbol system, although not an explicitly expressed one, for accessing a desired community or denying someone access to the community. An observation and photo sequence from a transition between the lunch meal and nap time showed John putting on his rucksack to try to access a particular group of so-called 'school children'. Specifically, after they finished their lunch, Maya, Olivia and Tina had dressed up with rucksacks on their backs, pink caps and sunglasses, telling the rest of the group still at the lunch meal, that they, being 'school children', would now head to 'school'. John, who followed them, was told by Tina that he was not a 'school child', so he ran to the wardrobe, pulled out his cap and sunglasses and made a second attempt. Tina lifted John up, explaining that he was 'too small' and just 'a baby' and carried him back to his seat despite John's persistent protests that he was not 'a baby'. Thus, applying the correct symbols in this case, namely, the rucksacks, sunglasses and caps, was clearly not sufficient to exceed the frequently observed boundaries of size and age; being 'small' and a 'baby'.

The negotiations of boundaries were sometimes characterised by struggles, ending with physical confrontations or solutions, as in the previous example where Tina physically removed John from the

group. The children's belongings brought from home often played a role in these negotiations. Rucksacks, bags, sunglasses, caps, shoes, teddy bears and other stuffed animals seemed to be important symbols in the drawing of boundaries of membership in this peer group, as illustrated in the small story below:

> Maya has brought her new bag; she calls it her 'kitty-bag'.
> It is pink and furry with a picture of a kitten.
> Izzy, Olivia and Tina gather around her and gently stroke and comment on the 'kitty-bag'. Expressing verbally and through gestures that he too wants to take a look at the bag and stroke the fur, Adrian makes several attempts to approach the girls.
> Tina repeatedly pushes Adrian away, using both of her hands, claiming that only she, Izzy and Olivia are allowed to touch Maya's 'kitty-bag'.

In this small story, Tina's actions are interpreted as a way of safeguarding her own access to the group of girls through the drawing of boundaries of who can join by being allowed to 'touch the kitty-bag', thereby excluding Adrian.

A familiar activity setting, which was part of the daily institutional practice, was the nap time after the lunch meal. As this article's introductory small story illustrated, the question of membership in the sleeping group was an opportunity for displaying boundaries, and Jack would often make a point of declaring which children would be part of the sleeping group and which would not. As the observations revealed, an important feature of the peer culture in the group was bringing a teddy bear or other stuffed animal to nap time.

Maya:	'I brought my teddy bear to the library, and back to kindergarten!'
Jack, with a sad facial expression:	'Oh, oh teddy bear!'.
Maya:	'For nap time!'
Jack:	'Me, me borrow, [the] teddy bear?'
Maya:	'Not mine, no!'
	Jack is silent for some time with a sad facial expression.
Jack:	'Home, I too sleep [with a] teddy bear!'

For Jack, in particular, this feature of the peer culture appeared to be a matter of great concern. The observations revealed that the teddy bear was a recurring subject for negotiation, and, as Jack himself never brought a teddy bear to kindergarten, he repeatedly asked his peers to borrow their teddy bears or other stuffed animals. Why Jack wanted so strongly to have a teddy bear is not easy to say with certainty. However, as the teddy bear was a recurring subject among the children during the lunch meal and the transition to nap time and Jack stated more than once that he too slept with a teddy bear at home, it is reasonable to assume that Jack perceived possession of a teddy bear as a symbol of membership within the peer community.

Patterns of shared emotional connection

The transitions between outdoor play and waiting in the wardrobe before lunch appeared to be arenas where the two-year-olds showed affection and care and offered to help each other. Izzy, Adrian, Jack and Hamid, before he was taken ill, seemed particularly eager to help the other children in these situations. Jack offered to help John, among others, to remove his wet pants and socks. John, however, was not eager to be helped, expressing that he could manage on his own. John was not the youngest child in the group, but he was a bit smaller than many of the other children, and they sometimes referred to him as a baby, to which he objected.

Being best friends or not, was articulated among the children in the transition from outdoor play and the subsequent waiting period in the wardrobe. Being best friends was expressed through verbal repetitions followed by touches, hugs, smiles and eye contact between the declared best friends. In contrast, being declared 'not best friends' was pronounced, quite abruptly, as a statement. Colours on clothes, bags and shoes were referenced in this context, and wearing the right colour, preferably pink, seemed to bring about positive interactions and brief moments of physical closeness among the two-year-olds, especially among Izzy, Maya and Olivia.

> Izzy, Maya and Olivia are seated close together in the wardrobe. Claiming to be 'best friends', they comment and compare the colour pink on each other's clothes and shoes.
> They hug each other and exchange gazes and smiles.
> Wearing black and blue without any hint of pink, Tina sits quietly next to them, listening to their conversation.
> Suddenly she grabs one of Maya's pink shoes and hides it behind her back.

This small story illustrates a recurring pattern of emphasis of the mutual bonds between Izzy and her designated best friends, Maya and Olivia. While being best friends or not in the peer group in general varied over time and did not seem to last long, the best friend relationship between Izzy, Maya and Olivia appeared to be of a more stable character. The three of them showed much affection for each other, and they would hug, help and comfort each other. It did not seem as if they actively excluded Tina, and both Izzy and Olivia were observed in positive interactions with her. However, when all four of them were together, it became obvious that Tina was not included to the same extent. Tina's actions in the small story above are thus interpreted as attempt to access their community of best friends. On another occasion, Tina borrowed Olivia's pink summer hat, and she repeatedly stated that she was 'also wearing pink', pointing at the hat. Thus, it can be assumed that Tina had an awareness of the significance of that particular colour as a means of entry into a mutual bond and, perhaps, even identified it with a shared history or experience.

During lunch meals, observations showed that, although the children could leave the table at their own will, the two-year-olds would stay seated until their side mate or desired friend was also ready to leave. However, there did not appear to be a specific pattern of preferred seating at lunch. Rather, if some of the children had shared a positive joint experience outdoors that day, they would sometimes choose to sit at the same table. These observations were, however, mainly based on the children's own comments on their outdoor experiences.

While seated at the lunch table, the two-year-olds were in constant motion and in physical contact as they stroked, squeezed and touched each other. Jack, in particular, would frequently initiate contact with his peers, regardless of which child was his side mate. He often offered to help others and interacted through physical closeness, as well as friendly facial expressions, searches for eye contact and playful suggestions.

> Jack places his cup back on the table, and he turns towards his side mate, Leah.
> He smiles at her and strokes gently on her ponytail.
> Leah, giggling, points down at something on Jack's foot, and then Jack points at Leah's foot. Then they pull their heads close together, foreheads touching, whispering and giggling.

The children were eager to help each other, and during lunch meals this was particularly observed. On one occasion, Izzy overturned her glass of water, and began to cry, expressing that she was getting wet. Before anyone of the staff responded, Jack left his place, picked up paper towels to dry up, and comforting Izzy by making compassionate sounds and gestures.

The two-year-olds' conversations during the lunch meal revolved around sharing past events and joint experiences, such as outdoor play, bus rides to the library, or birthday invitations. When taking part in such conversations, Jack was eager to include himself, as well as his side mate. If he and Leah were seated together, as illustrated in the small story above, the two of them seemed to really enjoy each other's company. Their interactions were characterised by physical closeness and joy, as well as expressions of care signalled by stroking the other's cheek or hair in a comforting way and making compassionate sounds and expressions if the other was sad.

Some children seemed to be tired during the lunch meal after playing outdoors. This was sometimes the case for Izzy and John. However, even if Izzy did not say much during the lunch meal, she would often interact with her side mates by inviting them to have fun, making bubbles with her milk and playing with her food. When she initiated such interactions, the side mates usually followed her initiative, leading to shared moments of fun and joy around the lunch table.

Table 1. Systematisation of characteristics in the two-year-old's negotiations of belonging and togetherness.

Belonging/Membership	Togetherness/Shared emotional connection
Drawing boundaries by applying symbols and rituals	Emphasising mutual bonds
Displaying membership by applying symbols	Frequently engaging in positive interactions and helpfulness
Reinforcing one's own place in the group by expressing hierarchies through the use of symbols and rituals	Sharing joint experiences and past events
	Sharing moments of joy and fun
	Displaying compassion and care through physical closeness, facial, verbal and bodily expressions and gestures

After lunch, John would often head for the sofa in order to look at books while waiting for naptime, an interest he shared with Jack. As noted previously, Jack was eager to interact with John, but John was not that eager to engage in interactions with Jack.

Jack and John have found a picture book with text in Arabic and English. Together on the sofa, they turned to the pictures of cars and vehicles.

Jack points at a racing car:	*'Look, look! I drove, drove that car'.*
John:	*'I drove the tractor'.*
Jack, pointing at the racing car:	*'You drove that one?'*
John frowns and points again at the tractor:	*'No, that one!'*
Jack:	*'But, you and I, we drove, the racing car!'* He smiles and claps his hands. John frowns again and shakes his head firmly.
Jack continues to engage with John, with an insisting tone and tries to get eye contact:	*'Me, me and you, we drove the racing car?'*

The interaction illustrated in this small story is interpreted as Jack suggesting a mutual or similar bond and trying to engage John in a shared experience or history: the driving of the same car. John, meanwhile, used verbal, facial and bodily expressions to reject Jack's suggestions.

Summary of the findings

The conceptualisations of membership and shared emotional connection proved to be relevant points of departure for exploring the two-year-olds' negotiations of belonging and togetherness. As outlined previously, membership is understood as closely related to the concept of belonging, and shared emotional connection is perceived as related to the concept of togetherness. This understanding, drawing on Koivula and Hännikäinen (2017) and McMillan and Chavis (1986), is the basis for the systematization of the findings [Table 1] and the subsequent discussion.

Discussion

Nowadays, young children's lives are, to a large extent, lived within peer groups in kindergartens, and peers have a large influence on children from early years onwards (Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014, 181). The findings revealed that the two-year-olds' negotiations of belonging and togetherness were fleeting and ongoing, occurring as childinitiated parallel activities within the activity settings facilitated by the institutional practices. A finding that stood out, beyond the operationalisations of membership and shared emotional connection, was the amount of affection and helpfulness the children displayed towards each other. Fleeting moments of caring and sharing (Koivula and Hännikäinen 2017) characterised the social interactions between the two-year-olds.

The fundamental need to belong can result in the rejection and exclusion of others (Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014). Exclusion was not a major focus in this study; however, issues of how exclusion operates between two-year-olds emerged as highly topical for further research. Struggles of boundaries, and negotiations of being part, were observed as being ongoing. The observed boundaries were linked to patterns of age and size, and of being best friends or not. Symbols such as having a teddy bear or wearing a certain colour on clothes or shoes, and rituals such as inviting to birthday or threatening not to invite, were evident in the two-year-olds' negotiations of membership and hierarchies. Löfdahl and Hägglund (2012) stated that children's meaning making in peer groups was related to social hierarchies, friendships and popularity. Such features applied already among the very young children in this study, as some of the two-yearolds' negotiations revolved around finding a place in a hierarchy, displaying membership and drawing boundaries, while others negotiated togetherness by emphasising mutual bonds and sharing joint experiences.

The young children's negotiations of belonging and togetherness were influenced by the peer culture within the group. Bringing belongings from home to kindergarten is a topic for debate in early childhood settings and is often strictly controlled by norms or rules (Wastell and Degotardi 2017, 44). However, the staff in this young children's group allowed the two-year-olds to bring belongings from home, and this constituted an important feature of the peer culture during the study period. Although this institutional practice was a recognition of the significance of such belongings for each individual child (Wastell and Degotardi 2017), it appeared that, for the individual child who did not bring such belongings, this feature of the peer culture was a recurring source of frustration and perhaps a perception of being unable to apply the right symbol to access the desired community. In line with the findings of Singer and de Haan (2010), this study did not reveal any differences along ethnic or cultural lines in the two-year-old's behaviour, when it came to their negotiations of belonging and togetherness. However, the findings indicated that what distinguished the two-year-old's negotiations, depended on

the features of the peer culture, which included the application of hierarchies and symbol systems. This calls for awareness among kindergarten teachers in order to secure inclusive practices for young children in diverse early childhood settings. Nutbrown and Clough (2009) have emphasised young children's interest in 'difference', and the importance of practitioners making 'difference' positive, in order to ensure children's sense of having a place in the peer community. The findings in the present study suggest that an awareness of differences when it comes to young children's opportunities to be able to apply the 'right' symbols to negotiate membership to a desired community, may be especially important among very young children in diverse early childhood settings. Differences in parental situations, sociocultural aspects or economy could influence the kinds of belongings that are brought to kindergarten and impact the young children's individual perceptions of being part of the community.

Furthermore, just as certain specific symbols such as teddy bears and colour on clothes, and rituals such as inviting, or threatening not to invite to birthday celebrations, were features in the peer culture in this particular young children's group, other features would characterise the peer culture in other two-year-old peer groups. What appears crucial, is recognising the power and importance that such peer culture features hold for each individual child already at a very young age, when it comes to negotiations of belonging and togetherness in diverse peer groups.

Notes

1. Issues of children's consent and dissent are discussed in the research ethics section.
2. To safeguard the children's privacy, this information has been anonymised and modified so that they are not recognisable.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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