



# Striking roots: Place attachment of international migrants, internal migrants and local natives in three Norwegian rural municipalities

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## ABSTRACT

Based on responses to a survey of international migrants and Norway-born residents in three rural municipalities, this article analyses place attachment at various levels of scale. It compares international migrants to Norwegian-born internal migrants and local natives. Three questions are addressed: 1) Are there differences in the three resident categories' levels of place attachment at different levels of scale?; 2) What are the predictors of place attachment, and is being a migrant a predictor in its own right? and 3) Are the predictors of place attachment the same for international migrants, internal migrants and local natives, and for different levels of scale? After controlling for other factors, the study found that all three categories have similar place attachment levels to the local scales. However, place attachment predictors differ, and predictors of place attachment have different relevance on different scales for the three categories. Institutional trust, usually not addressed in the research tradition, predicts place attachment for all categories.

## 1. Introduction

In the past two decades, there was a strong increase in international migration to rural places in Norway and other European countries, especially due to a diversification of labour migrants' settlement patterns after the 2004 EU enlargement (Østby et al. 2013; Rye 2017; Woods 2016). The demographic changes have been accompanied by growing research attention (for edited volumes and research overviews see e.g. Kordel et al. 2018, Jentsch and Simard 2009, Rye and O'Reilly, 2020, Hedberg and do Carmo 2012, McAreavey 2017, McAreavey and Argent 2018, Rye and Scott, 2018, Rye and Holm Slettebak, 2020).

Some central topics researchers have addressed are policy-related (e.g. Jones 2019); macro-level explanations for the increased in-migration (see e.g. Dufty-Jones 2014; Jentsch and Simard 2009); the impact of the in-migration on rural regeneration and regional development (e.g. Stockdale 2006; Woods 2016); the experiences of international migrants (Woods 2016; Rye 2017; Stachowski 2020) and longstanding locals' attitudes towards the new residents (Zahl-Thanem and Haugen, 2019; Moore, 2021; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Sole et al. 2014). This article contributes to this growing research by addressing a relatively underexplored issue, namely the place attachment of international migrants who live in rural areas. We do this based on survey research

findings from three rural Norwegian municipalities. The place attachment of international migrants is compared with that of internal migrants and local natives (i.e., people who have grown up locally). We address three major research questions in the article:

- 1) Are there differences in the three resident categories' levels of place attachment at different levels of scale?
- 2) What are the predictors of place attachment, and is being a migrant a predictor in its own right?

Are the predictors of place attachment the same for international migrants, internal migrants and local natives, and for different levels of scale? In addition to the article's contribution to research on immigration to rural areas, it contributes to two other research traditions, namely place attachment research and migration studies. Concerning place attachment, we add to the relatively few studies that investigate the same individuals' place attachment to more than one scale (e.g. Hummon 1992; Lewicka 2011a). Additionally, we bring international migrants into the picture, as most place attachment studies concerns internal migration (often within the same city) and recreational mobility (Lewicka 2011b). In doing so, the article simultaneously adds to migration research, where there have been calls for a closer integration

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**Table 1**  
Key characteristics and survey information about the three municipalities.

	Population (rounded)	International migrant share (%)	Main industries	Total respondents	International migrants	Internal migrants	Natives	Largest migrant backgrounds
North	10 000	14.9	Public services	441	238	131	72	Russia Finland Estonia
West Coast	9000	15.2	Maritime industry	416	216	120	79	Poland Germany Thailand
Inland	6000	15.4	Tourism	340	139	136	63	Poland Denmark Sweden

Sources: Statistics Norway and Immigrants to Rural Areas survey.

of research on internal and international migration (see King and Skeldon 2010, Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003). We contribute both empirically and theoretically to such an integration. Empirically, we include both internal and international migrants in the respondent sample. Theoretically, we apply the place attachment framework to also analyse international migrants' post-migration processes. The place attachment framework is useful for analysing both internal and international migrants belonging processes. However, quite few empirical studies on international migrants explicitly use the framework (exceptions include Trąbka, 2019, Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska 2018; Glorius et al., 2020; Kohlbacher et al. 2015; Peters et al. 2016). Finally, we add to international migration research through this study's implicit attention to why people stay in a locality, as place attachment is associated with a likelihood of staying (Lewicka 2011b; Hernández et al., 2007). International migration research generally gives more attention to why people migrate than why they stay even though migrating is the anomaly (e.g. King 2012; Hammar and Tamas 1997). This focus is also seen in research on post-migration issues. An extensive research body exists on return migration, but comparatively less attention has been directed towards why migrants stay in their new places of residence.

## 2. Data and methods

The analysis is based on data from a survey that was carried out in three Norwegian rural municipalities during the months of September and October 2014. The sample was drawn and the survey carried out by the professional pollster Respons Analyse. A total of 593 international migrant respondents and 604 Norwegian-born respondents participated in the survey. To reach as many international migrants as possible, all permanent residents with this background received an introduction letter and a questionnaire which they could fill out on paper and return by post or fill out via the Internet. Norwegian-born respondents were interviewed by phone. Many efforts were made to increase response rates, which varied between 22 per cent and 25 per cent in the three municipalities, something we consider to be acceptable given the often hard-to-reach category of respondents approached (Reichel and Morales 2017). While we operated with respondent quotas based on sex and age for the Norwegian-born respondents, we could not control who responded for the international migrant category. Thus, we ended up with some underrepresentation of respondents in the younger age group. Furthermore, we cannot exclude some systematic underrepresentation of certain groups, such as migrants with weak Norwegian language skills, who are less likely to respond to a survey invitation. However, respondents could fill out the questionnaires in Norwegian, English and the most spoken languages of international migrants in the three localities: Polish, Somali and Russian. For a detailed report on the survey methodology and implementation, including an analysis of drop-outs, see Respons (2019).

It should also be noted that many migrants with longer residence times who participated in the study probably have stayed exactly due to strong place attachment, and that some migrants with weaker place

attachments could not be reached since they had already left. Furthermore, it may also be that both natives and migrants with stronger local attachment were more interested in participating in the survey, as the attachment may reflect in a closer involvement of what goes locally.

The rural municipalities had been selected to represent different parts of Norway (West Coast, Far North, Eastern Inland). Furthermore, for comparative purposes we wanted municipalities with similar, and rather substantial proportions of international migrants. Another selection criterion was that the municipalities should have comparable population sizes. Meanwhile, we included municipalities that represented variation in terms of main industries and international migrant backgrounds. Table 1

The local reception atmosphere influences migrants' belonging/place attachment processes (Hickman and Mai 2015, cf. Ralph and Staeheli 2011, 523–524, Castañeda 2018) and hence is important contextual information. As a broad pattern, the survey and other sub studies of the larger research project found that longstanding locals did not tend to be hostile or negative to international labour migrants. On the contrary, many expressed positive views on international labour migrants, at least if they contributed in locally valorised ways to the local labour market and civil society. Meanwhile, longstanding locals' attitudes to refugees were somewhat less positive (Søholt et al. 2018; Berg-Nordlie, 2018; Lynnebakke 2020a).

The Norwegian-born categories of local natives and internal migrants are derived from a survey question on the respondents' connection to the municipality, where respondents who are born in and have lived in the municipality all of their lives are considered natives, whereas people who have moved to the municipality for the first time or have previously lived there before moving back are considered internal migrants. For international migrants, in some of the analyses we differentiate between refugees (12%), labour migrants (34%), family migrants (35%) and others/unknown (19%).<sup>1</sup>

Descriptive results (bivariate analysis) pinpoint similarities and differences between different categories of respondents in the three municipalities. This is followed by linear regression analysis that enables us to study the effects of each of the variables in the models after controlling for other variables that may have an effect on people's place attachment. Finally, a second linear regression analysis looks into possible differences between the international migrant categories. Descriptive statistics for all independent variables used in the regression analyses can be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>1</sup> Though these categories are broad and may hide considerable internal variation (e.g., a refugee joining her family or a Swede marrying a native both belong to the 'family migrants' category), the number of respondents is too small to refine the categories further.

### 3. Place attachment

#### 3.1. Predictors of place attachment

In this section, we outline previous relevant place attachment research, focusing on predictors of place attachment, mobility and scale.

Place attachment has been defined as ‘bonds between people and place based on affection (emotion, feeling), cognition (thought, knowledge, belief) and practice (action, behaviour), as variable at different scales, and enhanced through time’ (Gustafson (2006: 19), quoted in Barcus and Brunn 2010, 283). Studies have identified many predictors of place attachment, which can interact. In a review of 40 years of research, Lewicka (2011b) organises predictors of place attachment into socio-demographic, social, and physical-environmental factors. Some central *sociodemographic* predictors include length of residence, gender, age, mobility and class. Length of residence has been found to be an especially strong predictor of place attachment (Lewicka 2011b). Studies show that length of residence can be mediated by several factors, including local social ties, home ownership and safety (Hernández et al., 2007, 311).

Regarding *social predictors*, local social ties (sometimes referred to as local social capital) has been particularly studied, and ‘consistently found to positively predict place attachment’ (Lewicka 2011b, 217), as has also been the case for the predictor sense of security (Lewicka 2011b). Concerning *physical factors*, quiet areas and pleasant-looking buildings and green areas have been connected to place attachment on the neighbourhood level (Lewicka 2011b). Physical factors can influence place attachment both due to an appreciation of the physical factors as such, or because physical factors can act as mediators for social ties, for example as meeting places (Lewicka 2011b; Stedman 2003).

#### 3.2. Place attachment and mobility

There have been extensive theoretical discussions within the social sciences concerning how mobility affects place attachment. The topic has been addressed to a much lesser extent empirically. Gustafson (2009, 2013) argues that an underlying assumption in a lot of research is that there is a contradiction between mobility and place attachment, and that more mobile persons are more weakly attached to places. However, thus far, studies have found that highly mobile people can be strongly attached to places. This goes against common expectations of social theorist such as Manuel Castells and Zygmunt Bauman (Gustafson 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that new residents may develop place attachment after a relatively short time (Gustafson 2009; Savage et al. 2005).

Gustafson underscores that the effects of mobility on place attachment may differ for different types of mobility and on different scales. Furthermore, frequency, distance and the duration of the mobility likely matters for how mobility affects place attachment (Gustafson 2009). Studies on internal and international migration show how mobility can lead to attachment to several places (e.g. Samers and Collyer 2017; Vertovec 2004; Pollini 2005). In regards to how mobility affects bonds to one particular place, studies (on internal residential migration) have had less conclusive findings (Lewicka 2011b), and there is a need for more research.

Gustafson (2013) underscores that people can attach to places for different reasons and through different processes. He points to several overlapping typologies launched by researchers to account for different paths to place attachment. These typologies differentiate between place attachment based on active involvement, where the attachment is a more conscious choice, versus place attachment marked by a more taken-for-granted attitude. For example, Hummon (1992) has differentiated between *ideological* and *everyday rootedness*.<sup>2</sup> His qualitative

research showed that whilst both forms of attachment are strong, ideological rootedness results from a conscious choice. In Hummon’s findings, the two forms of attachment/rootedness were associated with different mobility experiences: whereas ‘everyday rootedness characterized people who took their residence place for granted, were little mobile and thus had scarce opportunities to compare their city with other places, ideological rootedness meant a self-conscious decision to live in a place and to take active interest in the place’s goings-on’ (Lewicka 2011a, 677). In a large survey from Poland, Lewicka (2011a) relabelled Hummon’s typology from everyday and ideological rootedness to, respectively, *traditional* and *active place attachment*, and found that actively attached did more active place-making and discovery of their local surroundings. Furthermore, traditionally and actively attached differed in their socioeconomic background, age, cultural capital and values. Whereas respondents with both types of attachment had a high level of attachment to the local levels, actively attached reported a higher degree of place attachment also to the European scale and to non-territorial identities (profession, generation, interests). For both traditionally and actively attached, length of residence and social ties were important predictors of place attachment. Whereas there were small differences in the two categories’ bonding capital, actively attached had a higher level of networking social capital.

Outside the place attachment tradition, Savage and colleagues (2010, 2005) also found support for that active involvement in one’s place of residence can lead to place attachment. They coined the term *elective belonging*, based on research on how middle-class new residents in Manchester attach to certain neighbourhoods. Elective belonging entails that people attach selectively to certain aspects of a locality – often physical and aesthetic qualities. Savage et al. argue that the attachment type is an expression of these residents’ identity, and it goes hand in hand with having a privileged position (Savage et al., 2010). Savage et al. (2010) contrast elective belonging to *dwelling*, which denotes a form of place attachment for ‘less mobile [...] and often less privileged’ people (Gustafson 2013, 39). For these residents, attachment to family and neighbours plays an important role for their belonging (Savage et al., 2010). In this respect, Savage et al.’s findings mirror those of Lewicka (2011a), where traditionally attached had more bonding social capital.

Gustafson’s own typology are the ideal types *roots* and *routes*. Based on qualitative research findings (2001), Gustafson has proposed that ‘*place as roots*’ is about bonds to a home place ‘based on long-time residence, strong community bonds and local knowledge’ (Gustafson, 2013: 98) and where continuity and knowing the place and its people are often important. In the roots stance, there can be a strong association between the place and the people living there and its local traditions and organisations. Meanwhile, in ‘*place as routes*’, the focus is on mobility, experiencing new places and different ways of life, and places’ meaning can relate to what they represent in an individual’s identity and trajectory. Gustafson underscores that roots and routes are ideal types and that the same people can experience both stances.

Based on his own and others’ research, Gustafson (2013) has proposed that people with different mobility levels have qualitatively different types of attachment to places. Lewicka’s (2011a) survey findings go against this proposition, as she found that length of residence was an important predictor of place attachment for both actively and traditionally attached. On the other hand, it seems fair to say that recent migrants’ conditions often necessitate taking an active approach for developing place attachment. Here, both social ties and local experiences can contribute to attachment. New residents need to rebuild their local social ties, a common predictor of place attachment. Moreover, they do not have the same amounts of embodied local experiences as natives. Place attachment can be fostered through active place making, (Duff 2010; Lynnebakke 2020b; Lewicka 2014, Riemsdijk, 2014), and such activities may, thus, ‘speed up’ an attachment process despite short residence time.

<sup>2</sup> Hummon’s typology comprises five different ways people relate to places. Here, we focus on the two forms of place attachment within this typology.

**Table 2**

Level of attachment at different levels of scale by respondent category. Mean score on a scale from 1 (no attachment) to 5 (strong attachment).

	Neighbourhood	Village/town	Municipality	Norway	Country of origin
Local natives	3.85	4.25	4.12	4.62	
Internal migrant	3.71	4.00	3.85	4.69	
International labour migrant	3.17	3.37	3.16	3.74	3.92
Refugee	2.97	3.69	3.81	4.34	3.77
International family migrant	3.16	3.63	3.38	4.06	4.05
Other international migrant	3.29	3.47	3.36	3.90	3.79
International migrant total	3.16	3.51	3.34	3.94	3.93

### 3.3. Scale

Most studies on place attachment have been done on the neighbourhood, local community and city levels. Few studies compare the same individuals' place attachment on different scales (Lewicka 2011b). Among the studies that *have* addressed the topic, several studies show a correlation between individuals' attachment to home territories on different scales but also that 'the strength of attachment may differ substantially between places of different size' (Gustafson 2013, 43). For example, several studies have found attachment to be larger to cities than to neighbourhoods (see Lewicka 2011a).

Some studies indicate that people are attached to places on different scales for different reasons; in other words, the predictors of place attachment can differ. For example, a study by Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) found that whereas social predictors were most important for place attachment on all the studied scales, physical predictors were particularly relevant predictors on the city level. Similarly, in a study on three American smalltown communities, Cuba and Hummon (1993) found that 'attachment to dwelling (apartment/house) was mostly predicted by demographic variables, attachment to neighbourhood by participation in local community, and attachment to region of residence by intercommunity spatial activity' (Lewicka 2010, 36). However, another study (Brown et al. 2003) did *not* find different place attachment predictors on different scales. Hence, with the few studies and inconsistent findings there is a need for more research (Lewicka 2010).

### 3.4. Studies on migrants and place attachment

A few studies have compared the place attachment of international migrants and natives and found different patterns for these respondent categories. In a study on residents' place attachment to three neighbourhoods in Vienna, Kohlbacher et al. (2015) found that close local social ties was an important predictor of place attachment for both national natives and international migrants. For international migrants, however, weak ties – i.e., opportunities for small talk (with both natives and migrants) – was also a predictor. Especially interethnic weak ties were important, which Kohlbacher et al. explain with migrants' need to rebuild the social lives they lost during migration. Meanwhile, a study (Toruńczyk-Ruiz 2013) on the place attachment of residents in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in four European cities found that international migrants were more attached to their neighbourhoods than national natives, whereas natives were more attached to the city than migrants.

Outside the place attachment tradition, belonging studies from European cities have found that hostility to migrants or minorities on a city level may contribute to some migrants' preferences for multiethnic neighbourhoods (e.g., Ehrkamp 2005, Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen, 2011). In a very different context, Guangzhou in China, Wu et al. (2019) found that natives' place attachment to the neighbourhood was stronger than that of rural-urban migrants. However, also that study's findings pointed to the distinct meaning of social contacts for migrants, as social contact and social trust predicted place attachment more for migrants than for natives. Their social ties were crucial in a practical sense

because of these migrants' marginalised position.<sup>3</sup> The findings aligned with several other place attachment studies from China, which found that '[m]igrants who belong to a relatively lower socioeconomic status and live in a more unacquainted environment may lay more weight on their social capital than locals' (Wu et al., 2019, 189).

Summing up, several of these studies point to that the emotional and practical meaning of local social ties can be related to 'the migration experience'. Studies indicate that especially in settings of hostility and precarious conditions for migrants, certain localities can be experienced as a safe zone that promote place attachment.

Finally, findings from a study from Israel (Shamai and Ilatov 2005) indicates the relevance of both migration history and post-migration conditions for migrants' place attachment processes. That study found that length of residence was not a predictor for former Soviet Union migrants' place attachment, but that length of residence did predict internal migrants' place attachment. This could be related to migration reason, post-migration experiences (related to war experiences and religion) and that many of these migrants had stayed for instrumental reasons.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Local natives have the strongest place attachment (RQ1)

Our first research question asks whether differences can be observed in levels of place attachment between different categories of respondents, and at different levels of scale. To find an answer, we used a battery of questions in the questionnaire on place attachment at five different levels of scale. We asked about attachment to the neighbourhood, village/town, municipality and to Norway as a whole.<sup>4</sup> For international migrants, we also asked about attachment to their country of origin. Responses range from 1 (no attachment) to 5 (very strong attachment). Mean results of different categories of respondents are presented in Table 2.

Let us first look at levels of attachment to places at different levels of scale *within* Norway. For all categories, the highest levels of attachment are expressed towards the country itself, followed by the village or town, then the municipality, while somewhat lower levels of attachment are expressed towards the neighbourhood.

The highest levels of place attachment on the local levels are experienced by local natives Norwegians, followed by internal migrants. International migrants express somewhat lower levels of attachments than Norwegian-born locals. There are also notable differences between international migrants of different backgrounds. Refugees have the lowest attachment levels on the neighbourhood level, but stronger attachment levels than the other international migrant categories on all higher levels of scale. Except for neighbourhood attachment, labour

<sup>3</sup> In the Chinese residence status system Hukou, rural to urban migrants face exclusion in Chinese cities, involving restricted access to social spaces, no access to social welfare and no political rights (Wu et al., 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The wording of the questions was as follows: "We will now ask some questions about your attachment to different places. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is no attachment and 5 is a very strong attachment, how strong is your attachment to ....?"



**Table 3**

Level of attachment at different levels of scale by respondent category (Norwegian-born vs. international migrants) and survey area. Mean score on a scale from 1 (no attachment) to 5 (strong attachment).

	Neighbourhood		Village/town		Municipality		Norway	
	Norw.	Int.mig.	Norw.	Int.mig.	Norw.	Int.mig.	Norw.	Int.mig.
Inland	3.75	3.28	4.12	3.70	4.05	3.51	4.68	4.05
West Coast	3.87	3.30	4.07	3.55	3.76	3.30	4.67	3.92
North	3.66	3.03	3.66	3.40	4.02	3.31	4.65	3.94

migrants express the least degree of attachment to different places at different scale levels.

We also checked for geographical differences. Table 3 shows the levels of place attachment expressed by Norway-born (natives and internal migrants) and international migrant respondents in the three surveyed municipalities (no further refinement was possible due to small categories for certain groups).

The table confirms the trends described above. Differences between Norwegian-born and international migrant respondents are marked for all surveyed municipalities. Likewise, attachment to Norway is highest for all categories of respondents, while attachment to the neighbourhood level is lowest (in North shared with village/town for Norwegian-born respondents). There are some small nuances in place attachment levels when comparing the different municipalities. For example, respondents in the North express lower attachment levels to their village or town than what is the case in the other two municipalities. Differences are nevertheless rather small, and only a few differences are statistically significant.

As shown above, other studies have found that attachment to home territories of different scales often are positively correlated (Gustafson 2013: 43). Our data confirms that those who express a high level of place attachment on one scale are more likely to also express a high level of place attachment to places at other levels of scale. This is the case for all three respondent categories.

For all international migrant categories except labour migrants, the expressed attachment to the country of origin is weaker than to Norway (see Table 2.). Furthermore, we do not find a negative relationship between attachment to the country of origin and the current place of residence on any of the scale levels in Norway. If anything, a weak positive correlation is observed between attachment to the country of origin and to the village/town level.

4.2. Migrant status does not predict place attachment (RQ2)

We have seen that local natives have the strongest place attachment at the local levels, followed by internal migrants, while international migrants express somewhat weaker attachment. However, we cannot

**Table 4**

List of independent variables in regression models.

Category:	Natives, internal migrants, international migrants (categorical)
Socio-demographic:	Sex Age Educational level Employment status Subjective economic resources (scale 1–4)
Length of residence:	Whole life, more than half life, less than half life, past 5 years (4-point scale)
Social attachments:	Presence of good friends in the place (yes or no) Friendships across country backgrounds (yes or no) Agreement with statement ‘difficult to get to know people here’ (scale 1–5) Organisational memberships (yes, no)
Physical/environmental factors:	Satisfaction with dwelling (scale) Agreement with statement ‘climate is a problem’ (scale)
Security/safety:	Agreement with statement ‘I feel safe here’ (scale)
Trust:	Institutional trust (additive index) Interpersonal (agreement with statement ‘Most people can be trusted’) (scale)
Context:	Inland; WestCoast; North (categorical)

rule out that this could be explained by other factors than migrant status, for example length of stay in the municipality, social ties, physical and environmental factors, etc. Therefore, our second research question asks what the strongest predictors of place attachment in the three studied rural municipalities are, and whether migrant background (internal or international) is of importance also after controlling for other factors that have been associated with place attachment in previous studies. We also aim to find out whether the predictors of place attachment are the same for places at different levels of scale. To do so, we tested four multiple linear regression models with level of attachment to places at different levels of scale as dependent variables. The independent variables were mostly derived from the above presentation of predictors of place attachment discussed in the literature, including socio-demographic background variables. Table 4 presents the list of independent variables.

The regression analyses (Table 5) reveal some key findings about place attachment among migrants and natives in rural areas. After controlling for other variables in the model, it turns out that there is no statistically significant difference between international migrants’ and natives’ degree of place attachment on the local levels (neighbourhood,

**Table 5**

Multiple linear regression analysis. Place attachment at different levels of scale. Standard coefficients.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Neighbourhood	Village/town	Municipality	Norway
Internal migrant (vs native)	0.10 <sup>b</sup>	0.08	0.05	0.08
International migrant (vs. native)	0.05	0.02	−0.05	−0.28 <sup>a</sup>
Women (vs. men)	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.05 <sup>b</sup>
Age (years)	0.05	0.02	0.04	−0.02
Educational level (1–3)	0.01	−0.03	−0.06 <sup>b</sup>	−0.01
Fulltime employment (vs not)	0.01	−0.05	−0.04	−0.03
Length of living in municipality (1–4)	0.22 <sup>a</sup>	0.26 <sup>a</sup>	0.22 <sup>a</sup>	0.07
Good friends locally (vs not)	0.15 <sup>a</sup>	0.13 <sup>a</sup>	0.13 <sup>a</sup>	0.05 <sup>b</sup>
Ethnically mixed friendships (vs not)	0.08 <sup>a</sup>	0.12 <sup>a</sup>	0.11 <sup>a</sup>	0.06 <sup>b</sup>
‘Hard to get new friends here’ (1–5)	−0.07 <sup>b</sup>	−0.09 <sup>a</sup>	−0.05 <sup>b</sup>	−0.03
Organisational memberships (count)	0.11 <sup>a</sup>	0.11 <sup>a</sup>	0.09 <sup>a</sup>	0.08 <sup>a</sup>
Institutional trust (index)	0.09 <sup>a</sup>	0.08 <sup>a</sup>	0.19 <sup>a</sup>	0.22 <sup>a</sup>
Interpersonal trust (1–5)	0.08 <sup>a</sup>	0.05	0.01	−0.01
Feeling of safety (1–5)	0.030	0.11 <sup>a</sup>	0.08 <sup>a</sup>	0.08 <sup>a</sup>
Climate is a problem (1–5)	−0.05	−0.06 <sup>b</sup>	−0.01	0.01
Satisfaction with dwelling (1–5)	0.14 <sup>a</sup>	0.09 <sup>a</sup>	0.08 <sup>a</sup>	0.05
West Coast (vs Inland)	0.05	−0.02	−0.08 <sup>a</sup>	−0.01
North (vs Inland)	−.05	−0.06	−0.03	−0.02
Adjusted R square	0.26	0.28	0.28	0.28

<sup>a</sup> Significant at 0.01 level.

<sup>b</sup> Significant at 0.05 level.

village/town and municipality), while internal migrants display slightly stronger place attachment than natives at the neighbourhood level. The considerable difference in the above bivariate analyses is for the most part explained by different scores of migrants and Norwegian-born on other variables in the model. However, when it comes to attachment to the country Norway, differences between international migrants and Norwegian-born residents are still marked.

The four models are all quite strong, shown by the Adjusted R square that indicates that more than a quarter of the variation on the dependent variables is explained by the score on the independent variables in the models.

Moreover, place attachment at different levels of scale is strongly associated with social community variables. In our findings, ethnically mixed friendships (in this survey defined as friendships between native Norwegians and immigrants) also have an effect on place attachment, particularly at the village/town and municipality levels. Most of the social community variables are much less likely to predict attachment to Norway than to places at lower levels of scale. The exception is organisational memberships, which predicts attachment to Norway.

As found in the literature, physical and environmental aspects matter. In particular, satisfaction with the dwelling has a positive effect on place attachment at the neighbourhood level. However, climate considerations are less important predictors of place attachment.

A sense of security is an important predictor of place attachment to the village/town, municipality and Norway, but not at the neighbourhood level.

One understudied aspect that is positively associated with place attachment is institutional trust. The more a person trusts societal institutions, the more he or she is likely to express a strong attachment to places at all levels of scale. The effect is particularly strong for attachment to the municipality and Norway, where people can have an impact through elections (provided they have a right to vote<sup>5</sup>). Interpersonal trust, on the other hand, matters only at the neighbourhood level, where people are involved in everyday informal interactions. It is somewhat surprising that interpersonal trust did not matter on the village/town level, since the studied municipalities have relatively small towns and villages (a few thousand inhabitants at the most) and socially transparent.

In line with other research, length of stay in the municipality has a strong and positive effect on the likelihood to express strong place attachments at the local levels. For attachment to Norway, length of stay is, in contrast, of little importance. Except for length of residence, socio-demographic variables have very limited effects on place attachment at all scale levels. Except for some minor and scattered effects of sex and education, these variables, including age and employment status, do not display statistically significant effects.

Finally, the findings suggest almost no differences in place attachment in the three studied municipalities when other variables in the model have been controlled for. With one exception (weaker attachment towards the municipality for the West Coast case), no statistically significant differences between the three municipalities can be discerned.

#### 4.3. Predictors of place attachment vary between natives, internal and international migrants (R3)

Our main finding, that migrant status does not have an independent effect on place attachment at local levels, does not imply, however, that the predictors of place attachment are the same for migrants and natives alike. In this section, we will test Gustafsons (2013) assumption that

<sup>5</sup> Citizens of other Nordic countries who have been registered as residents in Norway no later than 30 June in the election year have the right to vote in municipal and county council elections. Other foreign citizens who have reached 18 years of age by the end of the election year, and who have been registered as a resident in Norway continuously for the three years before the election date, also have the right to vote.

predictors of place attachment may differ for different groups depending on their mobility levels.

In order to address our third research question, we ran separate regressions for each of the categories with the same independent variables as in the models in the previous section. Table 6 summarises the findings.<sup>6</sup> While the pattern is complex, three major findings that have importance for our research questions can be identified.

Firstly, it is striking that the strength of the models varies significantly between the three categories of respondents. Migrants are much more likely to be affected by the scores on the independent variables in the model than are respondents born in the municipality, and this is especially the case at the neighbourhood and the village/district levels. Internal migrants especially stand out in that their place attachment on these levels are strongly affected by their scores on the independent variables in the model. For the municipality and country levels, their place attachment is much less affected. The scores of local natives are moderately affected by their scores on the independent variables at the municipal and country levels, but hardly at all at the neighbourhood and village/town levels.

Secondly, the table shows that the place attachment of the three respondent categories is affected by many of the same independent variables, but also that there are some prominent differences. Length of residence in the municipality has a large effect on place attachment for migrants, especially, internal migrants, with some variation between different levels of scale. A similar pattern is found for having good friends locally. However, ethnically mixed friendships is only important for international migrants' place attachment.

Institutional trust is of much greater importance for international migrants' than internal migrants' place attachment, especially at the village/town and municipality levels. It is worth reiterating however, that institutional trust is one of the few independent variables that is associated with natives' place attachment at various levels of scale (except at the village/town level). Feelings of safety matters for different categories of respondents at different levels of scale: for internal migrants at the neighbourhood scale, for international migrants at the two intermediary scales, while for natives at the country level.

Thirdly, differences between the three rural municipalities are for the most part small or moderate and only in a few cases reach a level of statistical significance. The negative effect of having a West Coast residency on municipal attachment, observed in Table 6, is characteristic only for internal migrants and natives, and much less for international migrants.

## 5. Discussion

In this study, we asked three research questions, which could all be answered by the analysis of responses to our survey. Initially, in bivariate analyses – comparing place attachment of different respondent categories and at different levels of scale – we found relatively marked differences in the responses of the three categories of respondents, with local natives reporting the strongest place attachment on the local levels, followed by internal migrants, whereas international migrants had the weakest attachment. However, these differences for the most part disappear when controlling for a number of background factors such as length of residence, presence of friends locally, quality of dwelling, etc. Thus, it seems that these factors, and not migrant status, explain the observed differences. The main exception is attachment to Norway, which is stronger for Norwegian-born respondents (whether local natives or internal migrant) than for international migrants also after controlling for other variables.

<sup>6</sup> One remark on significance levels should be taken into account when analysing the results. Since the sample sizes are considerably smaller for natives and internal migrants than for international migrants, the coefficients need to be larger for them to be statistically significant.

**Table 6**

Linear regression analysis. Place attachment at different levels of scale for international migrants, internal migrants and natives. Standardised coefficients (Beta).

		Neighbourhood	Village/town	Municipality	Norway
Strength of model (adjusted R square)	Internat. migrant	0.27	0.29	0.29	0.17
	Internal migrant	0.21	0.21	0.20	0.06
	Native	0.03	-0.01	0.09	0.11
Women (vs men)	Internat. migrant	-0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
	Internal migrant	0.04	0.06	0.06	<b>0.14<sup>a</sup></b>
	Native	0.02	-0.03	0.04	<b>0.17<sup>b</sup></b>
Age (years)	Internat. migrant	<b>0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	0.03	0.04	-0.04
	Internal migrant	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.02
	Native	-0.06	0.03	0.02	0.06
Educational level (1–3)	Internat. Migrant	-0.01	-0.07	<b>-0.10<sup>a</sup></b>	0.02
	Internal migrant	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.01
	Native	0.02	0.01	-0.05	-0.04
In full employment (vs. not)	Internat. Migrant	0.02	-0.05	-0.07	<b>-0.09<sup>b</sup></b>
	Internal migrant	-0.05	-0.05	0.01	0.05
	Native	-0.04	-0.10	-0.02	0.08
Length of living in municipality	Internat. Migrant	<b>0.13<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.12<sup>a</sup></b>	0.07	<b>0.10<sup>b</sup></b>
	Internal migrant	<b>0.15<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.25<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.26<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.07
	Native	NA	NA	NA	NA
Good friends locally (vs not)	Internat. Migrant	<b>0.15<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>0.14<sup>a</sup></b>	0.02
	Internal migrant	<b>0.21<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.19<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.17<sup>a</sup></b>	0.07
	Native	0.07	0.03	-0.03	0.09
Ethnically mixed friendships (vs not)	Internat. Migrant	<b>0.10<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>0.19<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.16<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.15<sup>a</sup></b>
	Internal migrant	0.07	0.08	0.07	-0.05
	Native	-0.01	0.07	-0.10	-0.02
'Hard to get new friends here' (1–5)	Internat. Migrant	<b>-0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>-0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	-0.07	-0.06
	Internal migrant	-0.05	<b>-0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	-0.06	-0.02
	Native	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	-0.07
Organisational memberships (count)	Internat. Migrant	0.07	<b>0.12<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.11<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.09<sup>b</sup></b>
	Internal migrant	0.06	0.07	0.05	-0.00
	Native	<b>0.19<sup>a</sup></b>	0.12	0.05	0.08
Institutional trust (index)	Internat. Migrant	<b>0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>0.17<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.24<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.26<sup>a</sup></b>
	Internal migrant	0.02	-0.06	0.07	<b>0.19<sup>a</sup></b>
	Native	<b>0.20<sup>a</sup></b>	0.04	<b>0.27<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.18<sup>b</sup></b>
Interpersonal trust (1–5)	Internat. Migrant	<b>0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	0.01	-0.09	-0.00
	Internal migrant	0.06	0.09	0.02	-0.01
	Native	0.04	0.03	0.02	-0.13
Feeling of safety (1–5)	Internat. Migrant	0.04	<b>0.15<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.12<sup>a</sup></b>	0.08
	Internal migrant	<b>0.16<sup>a</sup></b>	0.09	0.06	0.10
	Native	-0.11	0.03	0.01	<b>0.21<sup>a</sup></b>
Climate is a problem (1–5)	Internat. Migrant	<b>-0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	-0.07	0.03	0.05
	Internal migrant	-0.02	<b>-0.09<sup>b</sup></b>	-0.09	-0.07
	Native	0.03	0.01	0.03	-0.05
Satisfaction with dwelling (1–5)	Internat. Migrant	<b>0.17<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.11<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.12<sup>a</sup></b>	0.07
	Internal migrant	<b>0.14<sup>a</sup></b>	0.03	0.04	-0.04
	Native	0.04	0.09	0.03	0.04
West Coast (vs Inland)	Internat. Migrant	0.05	0.00	-0.05	-0.04
	Internal migrant	0.07	<b>-0.11<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>-0.14<sup>b</sup></b>	0.05
	Native	-0.02	0.05	<b>-0.17<sup>b</sup></b>	0.03
North (vs Inland)	Internat. Migrant	-0.08	<b>-0.11<sup>b</sup></b>	-0.08	-0.05
	Internal migrant	0.02	-0.08	0.00	-0.05
	Native	-0.09	0.10	0.04	0.05

<sup>a</sup> Significant at 0.01 level.

<sup>b</sup> Significant at 0.05 level.

That migrants and natives did not have different levels of place attachment goes against the discussed theoretical proposition that mobility decreases place attachment. Instead, the findings support previous place attachment research that suggests that new residents can attach to new places just as strongly as native locals. It is, however, important to reiterate that there may be certain selection effects in the sample, as it may be that it is exactly strong place attachment (and not only instrumental reasons) that has led many migrants to stay, while those with weaker attachment have left the place.

The findings indicate how migrants strike roots. They show that both natives' and migrants' place attachment was predicted by several of the same factors, such as social ties and institutional trust. At the same time, the findings also suggest aspects that seem to distinctly shape place attachment for migrants, as their attachment to a much greater extent was predicted by the independent variables. This supports Gustafson's (2013) proposition that different degrees of mobility – here, in the form of migration – can produce different forms of place attachment. Another

central finding concerns the importance of researching scale, as the study found a correlation between place attachment on different scales. Furthermore, for the three respondent categories, different predictors were of relevance on different scales. This underscores the need for attention to both scale and mobility, alone and in combination. We now highlight some of the central findings in more detail.

### 5.1. Predictors of place attachment

#### 5.1.1. Length of residence

As in many previous studies, length of residence in the municipality has a strong and positive effect on the likelihood to express strong place attachment at the local levels. However, for attachment to Norway, length of stay is of little importance. International migrants' increased attachment over time thus seems based on increased embedment in the local context. Qualitative studies could bring forward the reasons behind why place attachment is connected to length of residence on the local,

but not national levels. Research on international migration often takes the national level as the main unit of analysis, also in studies from local contexts. FitzGerald (2012) has cautioned against analyses making unsubstantiated leaps from findings from local contexts to the national level, a caution that our findings support. Our findings suggest that explicit attention should be paid to how local conditions and experiences shape migrants' belonging processes. Such local factors, by extension, influence migrants' staying aspirations.

### 5.1.2. Social ties

As in many previous studies, the findings showed the importance of social ties for place attachment. We operationalised social community variables to friendships, organisational involvement and how easy/difficult it was to get to know people. For migrants, having friends was a predictor of place attachment, whereas for local natives a significant connection was not found. This may suggest that natives have a more taken-for-granted form of place attachment where social ties are an inherent part of their place attachment, as in Gustafson's (2001) roots stance to places and in the Savage et al.'s (2010) dwelling form of belonging.

We also saw that friendships between Norwegian-born residents and international migrants only mattered for international migrants' place attachment and not for Norwegian-born respondents. Our findings partly align with Kohlbacher et al.'s (2015) urban study (see section 3), which found that for international migrants, weak ties (not tested in our study) and interethnic ties in particular predicted place attachment for migrants, but not for national natives. Our findings also align with previous research from Norwegian rural settings which found that having a Norwegian-born friend is important for international migrants' local well-being (Soholt et al., 2012). Since the rural localities in the latter study and our study are small, the opportunities for ethnic community formation is small for many country backgrounds. Therefore, contact with the national majority may be especially important as this may indicate one's social integration into a larger group in the localities. Friendships with Norwegian-born locals may partly promote place attachment because these friendships provide social capital that ease access into central local arenas. Additionally, these friendships may increase international migrants' knowledge about Norwegian society, which makes it easier to navigate locally. Whereas the finding on length of residence above suggests that the national scale is of less importance for migrants' place attachment, this finding indicates the relevance of both the national and local scales for international migrants' place attachment and demonstrates the complex interplay of scales that can co-exist in belonging processes (see Strømsø 2019).

Our study found that organisational memberships predicted natives' attachment to the neighbourhood and municipality levels, and international migrants' attachment to the village/town, municipality and Norway. This was the only social predictor of place attachment to Norway in the findings. In Norway, leisure organisations are an important arena for social networks and can be a central entry point for new locals. Moreover, organisations are often highly valorised in Norway (cf. Bendixsen et al. 2017). Hence, the significance of organisational memberships for international migrants' attachment to Norway may reflect both these migrants' cultural and social integration in Norway.

### 5.1.3. Institutional trust

An important contribution to the place attachment tradition is the finding on the importance of institutional trust as a predictor of place attachment for all three respondent categories. Whereas interpersonal trust has been addressed in place attachment research (Lewicka 2011b), little research exists on the connections between place attachment and institutional trust.

Whereas institutional trust matters for all respondent categories, it is not to the same extent. The variable is of much greater importance for international migrants' than internal migrants' place attachment, especially at the village/town and municipality levels. A possible

explanation is that many immigrants – and refugees in particular – have a lot of contact with municipal workers in their early stages of settlement. Norway is characterized by a high level of social and institutional trust compared to many other countries; hence, Norwegian-born internal migrants may take trust of local institutions more for granted and also expect this due to their implicit knowledge that the reliability of local municipal services do not tend to vary across different Norwegian localities. In contrast, the findings suggest that some international migrants deem the trustworthiness of local institutions as a local, and not, national characteristic.

International migration research supports the relevance of institutional trust, as studies have shown that corruption can influence migrants' aspirations to migrate from their countries and defer them from returning to their country of origin (Carling et al. 2015; Lapshyna 2014). Taken together with our findings, these findings suggest that research on institutional trust should be further considered in research on people's place attachment and migrants' staying and return aspirations.

### 5.1.4. Physical factors

The study found that climate considerations are less important for explaining place attachment. For migrants, this result could reflect migrants' processes of adaptation to the local climate (Lynnebakke 2020b) and/or because those who are discontented with the local climate decide to move from the locality. Semi-structured interviews conducted within the same larger research project found that some refugees who had been resettled (through state policy) in the Northern municipality decided to relocate to Southern Norway after some time because of the dark period and often harsh winters in the North. Other research from Scandinavia (Herslund and Paulgaard 2021; Soholt et al., 2012) affirms the relevance of climate for resettled refugees' local well-being.

Furthermore, we saw that satisfaction with dwelling predicted place attachment for internal and international migrants, but not for natives. This could, again, reflect that natives tend to have a more taken-for-granted place attachment, but could possibly also reflect that natives overall have better living conditions with smaller differences within the category than migrants do. In other words, natives may take good local living conditions for granted, implicitly comparing themselves with other natives.

## 5.2. Different forms of place attachment?

As stated, that migrants are much more likely to be affected by the scores on the independent variables is in line with Gustafson's proposition that individuals with different mobility patterns may have qualitatively different types of attachment to place. It may indicate that natives' place attachment is more often taken-for-granted. This resembles Lewicka's traditional form of attachment and Savage et al.'s dwelling form of belonging (Gustafson, 2013). We also saw that Hummon (1992) found that individuals with everyday rootedness, which was associated with taking one's residence more for granted, were less mobile.

In addition to the findings on migrant-native differences, the findings revealed some different predictors for internal and international migrants, as we found that internal migrants' place attachment at the neighbourhood and village/town levels is much more affected by their scores on the independent variables. Due to the number of respondents, subcategories of international migrants were not compared in the multivariate analyses in this article. Further research can compare migrants with different migration histories (e.g., refugees vs. labour migrants), to investigate whether different migration histories and post-migration conditions influence place attachment differently.

## 5.3. Scale and place attachment

As shown in section 3, other studies have found that attachment to home territories of different scales often are positively correlated



(Gustafson 2013: 43). Our data confirms that those who express a high level of one kind of place attachment are more likely also to express a high level of place attachment to other levels of scale. This is the case for all respondent categories.

Hence, our study gives evidence to the importance of including different levels of scale when studying place attachment. It is also worth noting that respondents tend to express a stronger level of attachment towards the village/town and the country of residence than towards the much more commonly studied neighbourhood level. This may reflect lower levels of neighbourhood interactions in (rural) Norway in recent years (Villa and Haugen, 2005). However, this finding may also reflect that neighbourhoods in rural Norway are often geographically small and/or comprise few households, which should also be kept in mind when considering the transferability of these findings to urban contexts.

#### 5.4. Small differences between three rural municipalities

There are no clear indications in our results that geographical location plays a major role in explaining different levels of place attachment. One factor that may have contributed to similar levels of place attachment is that the local labour market is good in all three localities in the sense of low unemployment levels. Additionally, the similar levels of place attachment may partly reflect that there is a high degree of similarity between local municipal services in different rural contexts in Norway. Moreover all three localities have a similar level of leisure opportunities for children and adults. We deem this degree of leisure options to be representative across many rural Norwegian localities. However, a larger number of municipalities would need to be included to check if the similarity found in our study holds for rural Norway as a whole.

### 6. Concluding comments

In short, our findings contribute to the place attachment tradition in several ways. First, the study addresses mobility in the form of migration. The findings suggest that these mobility patterns do not decrease local place attachment and indicate distinct ways that migrants' and natives' attachment is formed. Second, the study shows the importance of researching scale. Third, inclusion of institutional trust in the

regression analyses shows this variable's importance in predicting levels of place attachment, which suggests it should be included and tested also in other place attachment and belonging studies.

The article contributes to a closer integration of internal/international migration research empirically and theoretically and supports that the two fields can cross-fertilize to a greater extent (King and Skeldon 2010; Nestorowicz and Anacka 2019). As Nestorowicz and Anacka (2019) put it, there is a tendency of internal and international migrant researchers to stand on different giants' shoulders. The thematically related yet often separate research fields of place attachment, staying/return aspirations and belonging are examples of topics where a closer integration of internal/international migration research is fruitful. Within international migration research, it is a common theoretical proposition and empirical observation that length of residence makes return less likely (cf. de Haas and Fokkema, 2011), but there is a need for increased empirically based understanding of the reasons for this. The place attachment lens provides a useful tool to gain increased knowledge into the processes involved in this phenomenon. Using the place attachment framework and including both internal and international migrants within our sample has allowed us to look into similarities and differences in these categories' place attachment. Conceptually, building on insights from many decades of place attachment research can be put into dialogue with more recent discussions and findings in (often qualitative) international migration research on migrants' embedment (Ryan 2018), staying/settlement intentions and return aspirations (e.g. Drinkwater and Garapich 2015; de Vroome and van Tubergen 2014, Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015; Erdal and Ezzati 2015; Friberg 2012; Snel et al. 2015). Combining these fields opens up for theoretical cross-fertilization and multi-method designs that build on years of research insights from both fields.

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## Appendix 1

Descriptive statistics.

	Norway-born		International migrants			
	Native	Inmover	Labour	Refugee	Family	Other
% women	43.5	57.9	46	45.5	75.8	55.8
Mean age	54	53	42	40	42	48
% higher education	30.4	60.9	57.3	23.4	53.5	54.8
% in full employment	47.7	56.8	80.0	34.8	51.1	54.7
% arrived past 5 years		12.9	50.2	59.4	36.3	37.4
% lived more than half their life in municipality		59.9	8.2	7.8	8.9	23.1
% report good friends locally	95.3	91.2	84.4	92.3	89.6	93.3
% report ethnically mixed friendships	30.4	32.6	63.7	60.6	67.9	70.5
'Hard to get to know people', % agree fully or partly	20.1	26.0	39.9	32.8	32.8	36.3
Mean number organisational memberships	1.31	1.38	0.87	0.74	0.87	0.98
Institutional trust (mean score, scale 1–5)	3.80	3.83	3.68	4.21	3.80	3.75
Interpersonal trust (mean score, scale 1–5)	4.05	4.01	3.65	3.76	3.70	3.83
'I feel safe here', % agree fully or partly	96.3	96.1	89.6	87.7	90.9	90.4
'Climate here is a problem', % agree fully or partly	17.0	18.5	26.9	59.1	36.4	35.1
Satisfaction with dwelling (mean score, scale 1–5)	4.53	4.47	4.05	4.22	4.33	4.31

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