

**Stressors and Coping Strategies in Acculturation Experiences of Non-EU/EEA
International Students in a Public University in Bergen, Norway**

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Abstract

Education programs to study abroad are being offered as the world becomes more globalized. In Bergen, Norway many programs are taught in English, and every semester universities welcome international students from outside the EU/EEA. These students face particular challenges and reach to different resources as they find ways to adapt to this new environment, academic system and culture. The main objective for this study was to explore the acculturation process of non-EU/EEA international students in a public university in Bergen, Norway". In order to achieve this, two sub objectives were established. First one was to explore the existence of stressors or main challenges international students from outside the EU/EEA encounter during their mobility experience in Bergen. And second, explore how non-EU/EEA international students in a public university in Bergen, Norway are coping with potential stressors. This research was a qualitative work that followed a narrative design. Six in depth semi-structured interviews to international students were carried out. The data was coded in NVIVO 12 and reflexive thematic analysis was conducted guided by the integrative framework of acculturation and salutogenesis. The study found that the main stressors the international students faced revolved around lack of social support, change in diet, the practice of new languages, the lack of sunlight, among others. While the coping strategies included finding new social networks, adapting their diets, adapting their dress codes, learning new languages, self care practices, among others. The study reveals how despite the uniqueness of each student's experiences, certain challenges were similar and how the way they confronted the stressors reveals problem-focused strategies, as well as emotion-focused strategies. However, the data also illuminated a third category that goes beyond the model and established and works as combined behavior-emotion strategies. The findings provide a starting point to guide the efforts of academic institutions when it comes to offering a welcoming, health promoting, supportive environment for international students to thrive in their study programs and get the most out of their experiences abroad.

Keywords: International Students, Salutogenesis, Culture, Acculturation stress, Sense of Coherence, General Resistance resources, Specific Resistance Resources, Education, Mobility programs

Chapter 1: Introduction

Globalization is a multidimensional concept that covers a range of economic, technological, cultural, educational, social, and political forces and processes (Gaulee et al., 2020; Yeates, 2001). This concept refers to the connections that transcend geographical borders and instead brings closer distant localities around the world that otherwise would not interact (Yeates, 2001). Higher education is an aspect of society that has been transformed by globalization. Advancements in travel, technology and social media have propelled the search for jobs and further education across the globe (Gaulee et al., 2020).

While these changes have brought some increased access to educational opportunities, student mobility can also bring challenges as these experiences may highlight fundamental cultural differences found between education systems in the Global North and the Global South (Gaulee, 2020).

1.1 Background

In Norway, over 200 master's degrees are available in English, and as of 2021 the number of foreigners enrolled at Norwegian institutions of higher education was around 15,000 (Life in Norway, 2021). Some are studying in full-time master's degree programmes (typically two years), while others are taking part in established exchange programmes such as the Erasmus programme (Life in Norway, 2021).

In Bergen, around 10% of the city's population are students who live in the city for at least the academic year. Only in the University of Bergen (UiB, 2023c), the number is around 17,500 students which also includes people from all over the world.

Recognizing that international study can be challenging and that these students may experience, the University of Bergen, works to support these students by providing information on its website, and staffing an International Center offering both online (before arrival) and the in-person office support (during their arrival and stay in Norway) (UiB, 2023c). The online resources offer information for these students on topics like accommodation, UDI registration,

Taxes, Bank account, Mandatory Tuberculosis tests for people coming from certain countries, transportation, language courses, health services, among others (UIB, 2023a & UIB, 2023d).

The University of Bergen also hosts a welcome week where more experienced students organize activities, known as the “Fadderuke” and take on the role of facilitating socializing and showing new students the city and all it has to offer to students (UiB, 2023b). International students are also assigned mentors, who have a wider area of responsibility that focus on everyday study and support throughout the first year (UiB, 2023b).

The university provides this support to all international students to help mitigate the stresses associated with acculturating to student-life in a new country.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to better understand the acculturation process as experienced by non-EU/EEA international students enrolled at the University of Bergen.

Existing research suggests there is a distinction between the experiences of students coming from closer cultural backgrounds versus the ones coming from further away culturally (Yan & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Gaulee et al. (2020) also points out that there are fundamental cultural differences in the education systems from a Global North and Global South learning institution that represent a challenge for student mobility.

Challenges considered in this study related to topics of globalization, student mobility and acculturation can all be examined in connection with the United Nations sustainable development goals [SDGs]. More specifically, *SDG 3 Good health and well-being*, *SDG4 Quality Education*, and *SDG 17 partnership for the goals* (United Nations [UN], 2015). SD3 has an indicator that considers the promotion of mental health for people of all ages, and these elements come hand in hand with the well-being of specific populations (UN, 2015). The Mental Health Action Plan by the World Health Organization [WHO] (2013) aims to achieve universal health coverage and stresses the importance of prevention and promotion as it relates to mental health. Moreover, the WHO is focused on the provision of comprehensive, integrated mental health and social care services in community-based settings and strengthened information systems (WHO, 2013).

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This research project also relates to SDG4 as the intent is to reach students from developing countries and ensure the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UN, 2013). Finally, SDG17 is linked as there is a need for different institutions (educational and governmental) to collaborate and integrate their resources in partnership to allow all other SDG's to align in contexts like student mobilization.

Understanding the acculturation experience of non-EU/EEA students at the University of Bergen is relevant to health promotion specifically as their experiences are directly relevant to the key action areas: create supportive environments, strengthen community actions and develop personal skills (World Health Organization, 1986a; World Health Organization, 1986b). As WHO (1986) states in the "Create supportive environments" action area, there is an inextricable link between people and their environment. Changes, like moving abroad to pursue higher education in a different education system, can have a big impact on health (WHO, 1986b). "Strengthen community actions" supports community empowerment and development by using existing human and material resources in the community to enhance self-help and social support, in order to control their own endeavors and destinies which requires full and continuous access to information (WHO, 1986b). Finally, the "Develop personal skills" action area highlights the role access to information information, education for health, and the enhancement of life skills play when aiding people to exercise more control over their own health and environments and to make choices conducive to health (WHO, 1986b). In the case of international students, better understanding of the student experience of acculturation can illuminate ways

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of acculturation international students from outside the EU/EEA have when arriving to Berge, Specifically through elements of the theory of acculturation and Salutogenesis and linked to the Health promotion areas mentioned above. In this way, it is possible to better understand what resources are already available for them and which areas may need to be reinforced to facilitate their adaptation process.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective for this study is to explore the acculturation process of non-EU/EEA international students in a public university in Bergen, Norway. In order to achieve this, the following sub-objectives have been established:

1. Explore the existence of stressors or main challenges international students from outside EU/EEA encounter during their mobility experience in Bergen
2. Explore how non-EU/EEA international students in a public university in Bergen, Norway are coping with potential stressors?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of the literature on acculturation as experienced by international students. The review was conducted through an online search of several academic databases using relevant keywords to explore the topic of acculturation stress and salutogenesis. The aim was to review papers that had studied acculturation processes in student populations in universities or other educational settings. However, to the limited number of studies found, the search was broadened to include research on international mobility in general, including in some cases, studies examining the experiences of immigrants and refugees. As for literature that describes acculturation among international students—the studies identified were largely undertaken in U.S. academic settings, which may not reflect the experience of international student life in Norway. For example, in regard to specific challenges that were faced by students, such as cultural shock, behavioral change, psychological impact, among others.

2.1 Empirical and Theoretical Literature Review

The literature exploring the educational and cultural exchange experience of international students describes a range of potential stressors they may face from navigating the change in setting, different cultural values, language, academic preparation, study habits, and the disruption of social support networks, among others (Yan & Cardinal, 2013).

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In a research paper by Yan & Fitzpatrick (2016) the process of acculturation and its effects on health behavior was studied in international students in the U.S. Some of their relevant findings included the distinction between experiences from students coming from similar cultural backgrounds versus the ones coming from further away culturally.

Another study by Yan & Cardinal (2013), shared the experiences of 20 Chinese female students who were interviewed to understand their lack of participation in physical activities in their US higher education institutions. The research found that the main barriers included a lack of time, low self-efficacy, limited social support, cultural barriers, and a lack of "how-to" information. Thus, universities were encouraged to expand accessibility to information, increase awareness of cultural differences on campus, and incorporate more cross-cultural content into their curricula and fitness programs to promote greater participation in physical activity for this international student population.

Similarly, Hale et al. (2020), Rivas et al. (2019) and (Pacheco, 2020) all state how the perception of belonging is mediated by diverse factors such as perception of inclusion/exclusion, campus support, previous exposure to the receiving culture through media, among others. However, this observation in the literature is very particular due to the studies taking place in the US, which is a country with heavy media influence through shows, music, films, etc. Norwegian culture is not as present and so students that come to study here from abroad may not have many references or realistic ones about the culture which could make them more propense to cultural shock. Therefore, I find it even more valuable to carry on a study with the population of international students in Bergen, Norway.

Additionally, Hale et al. (2020) also highlights the role of key figures like professors and academic institutions, as they have the chance to support the adaptation process of these students by being aware of these elements and considering them through the mobility programs they offer.

As mentioned previously, the literature examining acculturation among immigrant and refugee populations also bears relevance to the present study, especially since many of the studies reviewed examine the theory of salutogenesis (specifically sense of coherence [SoC]) and its relevance to acculturation. For this reason, these studies were better able to understand how acculturation experiences are connected to mental health and the need for a supporting system.

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Additionally, this theory and the attempt to understand the particular experiences of minority groups (such as immigrants or international students) are a tool to understand positive adaptation. As Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer (2020) explain, adaptation is a result of coping resources and strategies, including acculturation strategies, and needs to also consider the contribution of the environment in addition to the internal resources and characteristics of the individuals in question.

For example, Jibeen & Khalid (2010) studied risks and resource factors on mental health outcomes in over 300 pakistani immigrants residing in Toronto. They considered constructs such as acculturative stress and SoC and found that perceived social support emerged as significant predictors of positive well-being. Furthermore, authors like Ying et al. (1997) and Sundquist et al. (2000), both consider low levels of SoC itself as a key variable that explains negative effects in their participants respectively. For Ying et al. (1997) low SoC mediated resistance deficits and resources on psychological dysfunction, demoralization and happiness in Southeast Asian refugees immigrants in California. Meanwhile, in the study done by Sundquist et al. (2000) low SoC was a crucial explanatory variable for psychological distress in men and women from 5 ethnic groups who immigrated to Sweden.

Wellbeing is affected by the environments in which individuals interact. For immigrants and international students, this is especially important since they are transitioning from living in a place they know to a new one which offers different opportunities to interact with the environment, nature, weather, etc. The Handbook of Salutogenesis remarks on the role of nature and outdoor environments. Von Lindern et al., (2016, as cited in Mittelmark et al., 2017) explains how there are psychological benefits to being in contact with nature such as lowering anxiety and sadness levels.

It becomes clear through the literature research that mobility, whether it is student mobility, immigration, refugee status, among others; is an extremely complex phenomenon that comes with several challenges that can be addressed. Therefore, there is a gap yet to explore with more specific populations where transcultural and transnational concepts play a role, such as culture shock, culture learning theory, and acculturative stress (Gaulee, 2020). This research can be beneficial to reflect on well-being and positive mental health as academics investigate the

needs, potential stressors, and coping mechanisms that affect these populations to, for example, enrich ways of providing resources to support international students (Gaulee et al., 2020).

2.2 Gap and Learning Contribution

The literature reviewed supports the relevance of using qualitative methods to better understand the life experiences of international students studying in Norway. In the tradition of health promotion, a study following this approach has the potential to be a first step towards strengthening a supportive and healthy environment for these students. Furthermore, the contribution of a study like this goes beyond. A coping behavior adopted in college and/or university may influence coping behavior into the future (Yan & Fitzpatrick, 2016).

The aim of the present study is to learn about the stressors and coping strategies of the international student population in Bergen to provide an insight and information to guide further health promotion action in university and higher education institutes to better support their challenges. Furthermore, by using salutogenesis and sense of coherence to guide the design of this project, the study will focus specifically on the existing resources that are working and the ones that may be missing.

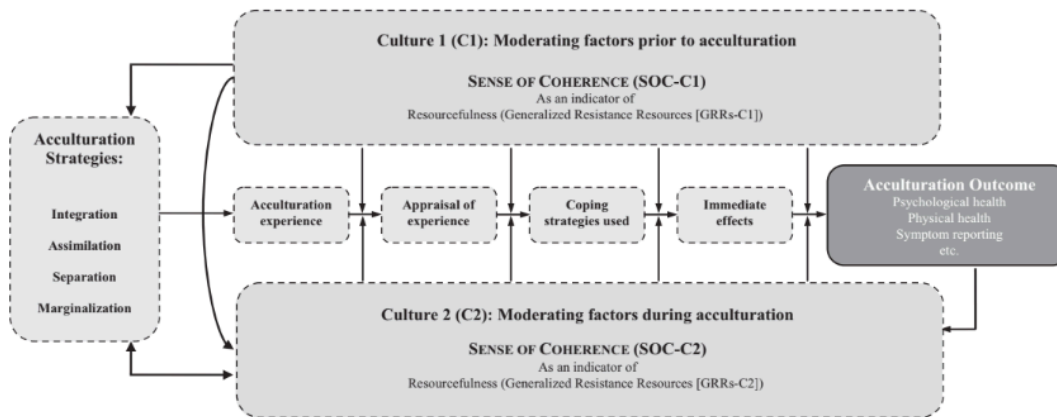
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This study will use the Integrative Framework of Acculturation and Salutogenesis as a theoretical base to guide the inquiry. Salutogenesis, is a strength-based theory encompassing resources available to a person and their ability to use those resources to cope with stress based on their “sense of coherence” which comprises three elements: *comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness* (Antonovsky, 1987). Berry’s acculturation theory provides a systematic way to approach the study in a way that captures the conflicts arising from facing a new place of residence, change of status, specific practices, beliefs, values and when adopting a new language, among others; will be taken into account. (Riedel et al., 2011). As shown in Figure 1, Acculturation and Salutogenesis can be integrated in a way that allows the understanding of the

individual's experiences throughout the stages of their acculturation proposes, as well as taking into consideration their resources from their home cultures and the host culture as well.

Figure 1

Integrative framework of acculturation and salutogenesis in Riedel et al., 2011



In this case, the focus will be on the stages of Berry’s acculturation process (represented horizontally in the middle section of Figure 1) and will consider the moderating factor of Sense of Coherence (SoC) that influences said process as part of the Antonovsky’s Salutogenesis theory (reflected in the top and bottom text bubbles in Figure 1).

3.1. Berry’s Acculturation Theory

The five main events described in Berry’s acculturation theory include the Life Event itself, which is the initial phase, where the intercultural encounter experience and a number of migration-related life events take place (Riedel et al., 2011). For international students in particular, this is the time when they first become aware of the cultural contrasts and affinities between their host university and country.

The actual *Stressors* that will be assessed and evaluated are identified in the second stage (Riedel et al., 2011). Depending on how much has to be changed—including how students talk, dress, and eat—this might result in more or less problematic ways for foreign students. However, certain more serious disputes that cannot be settled might result in a psychopathological reaction, which may cause melancholy and social anxiety among other things.

Thirdly, the *Coping* stage describes the person's use of coping mechanisms to deal with the troubling event. This is accomplished through two moments of assessment, the first of which is the evaluation of the actual acculturation scenario, and the second of which is the evaluation of the social and cultural resources the individual possesses to meet the demands of the new contextual environment (Riedel et al., 2011).

The next step is the *Stress* stage, which is the immediate psychological and emotional result of the management of the change activities (Riedel et al., 2011). The last concept is *Adaptation*, which is the integration of long-term consequences into an individual's life (Riedel et al., 2011). This ideally leads to the individual to successfully integrate to a new cultural context by managing the tension state through their psychological, social, institutional or cultural resources (Riedel et al., 2011).

3.2 Antonovsky's Salutogenesis Theory

Salutogenesis is a strength-based theory that considers resources available to a person and the way those resources are used to cope with stressful situations based on their "sense of coherence" that involves three elements: *comprehensibility*, *manageability* and *meaningfulness* (Antonovsky, 1987). Sense of Coherence (SoC), is considered in Antonovsky's theory as part of a self regulatory process where individuals use both internal (inherent to the participant) and external resources (from institutes, municipalities, etc) to navigate potential *tension states* (Antonovsky, 1987). Sense of Coherence also considers three main elements which are, firstly, *Comprehensibility*. that allows the individual to make sense of the information and cognitively structure it (Antonovsky, 1987). Secondly, *Manageability* refers to the perception the individual has of the level of control it has of the situation in regards to its own internal and/or external resources (Antonovsky, 1987). Finally, *Meaningfulness* allows the individual to assign emotional meaning and therefore invest energy to engage in solving what is being demanded of them because they find it valuable (Antonovsky, 1987).

The other self regulatory process is regarding the Specific resistance resources (SRRs) and General resistance resources (GRRs). On one hand, SRRs are certain characteristics that are useful in managing specific tensions, they have been described in certain cases as an

instrumentalization of a general resource (Antonovsky, 1987 in Seah et al., 2022). On the other hand GRRs are resources of a person, a group or a community that facilitates the individual's abilities to cope successfully with stressors and in consequence increase the individual's Sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987).

3.3 Integrative framework

These two theories which combined are systematized in the Integral framework of acculturation and salutogenesis, provide significant theoretical tools that will be useful to analyze the complex acculturation experiences that students from outside EU/EEA have in Bergen. As stated in Riedel et al. (2011) migration processes depend on the individual's subjective assessment, and migration is not in and of itself a stressful or unpleasant life event. Such unique experiences are impacted by radical and enduring changes in the person's life situation (Riedel et al., 2011) which is why for this specific research the integrative framework presents as a valuable analytical tool. The acculturation process presents a chronological structure that can organize the stages that conform the experience of managing acculturation. Moreover, it presents a categorization of strategies and according to it, the possible outcomes individuals may face after dealing with stressors and using diverse strategies. But at the same time, the salutogenesis lens of the theory allows for the research to dig deeper into the nature of the resources the individuals have, as well as illustrating the role of sense of coherence in the acculturation process.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 Research design

This research project aims to understand the experience of international students from outside the EU/EEA, and specifically identify the main stressors they face and the coping strategies they use to overcome them.

For this reason, the most appropriate methodological approach is qualitative research that follows a narrative design, which allows deepening into the chronology of life experiences (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). This approach was complemented by using reflexive thematic

analysis as a tool for analyzing the data. This technique, due to its versatility, can be combined with other designs, resulting in a deep and comprehensive approach to the qualitative information to be analyzed and discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

This approach allowed for the development of a deep understanding of the singular subjective experiences of the students considered for this work (Nobleaga, et al., 2019; Pistrang & Barker, 2012). Through this design, it was possible to collect the participants' unique experiences regarding the stressors faced, potential stressors, resources, and their sense of coherence.

4.2 Participants

For the purpose of this research, the participants were international students who were currently enrolled as international students in the University of Bergen, Norway. The inclusion criteria included students over 18 years old who lived in Norway for at least six months at the time of data collection, have conversational fluency in English, and are from outside the EU/EEA. Students who had children, students who were married, and students who had been living in the EU/EEA prior to their arrival as students in Norway, were excluded from participation.

Six students were selected as participants. The participants ranged in age between 21 and 33 years old. Three were women, two were men, and one participant identified as a transgender woman. The sociodemographic data collected can be seen in Table 1, where the names presented are popular names in the respective countries of the participants, as a way to protect their anonymity while still being easy to identify. All participants were individually interviewed, two online and the remaining in person. The interviews were carried on until the researcher believed enough data was obtained to address the research question adequately and achieve the study's objectives. This was also because of Resource Constraints as practical considerations such as time, and availability of participants were limited.

Table 1

Sociodemographic data of participants

Participant	Age	Nationality	Gender	Religion	Dietary specifications	Time in Norway so far (in months)	Previous academic mobility experience?
Iman	29	Sudanese	F	Atheist	No	18	No
Veronica	33	Bolivian	F	Atheist	Vegetarian	37	No
Ashley	21	American	F	Atheist	No	6	No
Kato	29	Ugandan	M	Atheist	No pork and lactose intolerant	65	No
Rodrigo	31	Colombian	M	Christianity	No	13	Yes
Soraya	27	Iranian	F	Atheist	No	18	No

For recruitment, the researcher approached potential participants through social media groups where international students frequently interact with other students. It was also useful to reach out to students who were taking the Introduction to Norwegian language course at the university, since those registered in class are only international students. Once some initial participants had been recruited, additional participants were identified through snowball , where contact was made through the initial participants who provided access to more students who also wanted to contribute to the study.

4.3 Methods of data collection

The data was collected following certain procedures. First, relevant data was collected through a sociodemographic data sheet to obtain specific information about the participants (See Appendix A). Then, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gather data on the participant's life experiences (See Appendix B). This method was useful for achieving the research objectives, allowing the interviewer to add relevant questions throughout the interaction.

Three of the interviews were carried out in private meeting rooms in the university facilities to ensure a safe space for the participants to privately share their experiences in a comfortable and familiar environment. One participant was interviewed in a cafe given the lack

of availability of study spaces during the interview, but the interview was carried in an area of the establishment that was the least busy. Finally, due to scheduling conflicts, two of the interviews were carried out online.

4.4 Data management

Before conducting the interviews the research project went through an evaluation in the Rette platform, as a way for UiB to assure the nature of the project and ensure certain ethical considerations. In Rette, access was limited to the researcher and the supervisor of the project.

All the interviews were recorded with an audio recording device for private use only and which only the researcher had access to. The participants were informed beforehand of the recording process and the subsequent storage of it. These recordings were kept in a SAFE desktop server provided by the university and transcribed with the aid of Whisper.ai. in said server. It was explained to the participants that the recordings were only for academic use and purposes.

4.5 Data analysis

The method for the analysis was reflexive thematic analysis as explained in Braun & Clark, 2012. Following their six steps, first, the researcher became familiarized with the data by transcribing the interviews, reading the transcripts actively and critically, and picking up on any personal assumptions. The data was initially transcribed using AI but was subsequently verified by the researcher to confirm accuracy, remove errors, and organize it to reflect the conversation. Then, the data was coded using NVIVO software and initial themes were generated. The main focus was then in reviewing and developing themes until these were well formulated and had fitting names that represented the contents. Finally, the researcher developed a report to share the findings in a systematic manner, and to later generate a discussion linking them to the theoretical framework.

The data analysis followed the Integrative framework of acculturation and salutogenesis (Riedel et al., 2011) as a starting point for deductive reasoning in an attempt to systematically organize the data. This means that the process of categorization of the information collected was

guided by an established theoretical model. However, as Braun & Clark (2012) mention, it is not possible as researcher to be completely inductive or deductive, and therefore, both approaches tend to fluctuate during codification.

4.6 Trustworthiness of research

In order to achieve a good study following a qualitative method, a structured process was followed thoroughly. From formulating the research objectives, to deciding the best methodological approach, theoretical framework and collecting data to later analyze and report the findings. For this reason, four main criteria were taken into consideration: *Credibility*, *Transferability*, *Dependability* and *Confirmability*.

Credibility refers to the reflexivity and positionality of the researcher. This criteria ensures the internal validity of the results which means making sure that the study is actually measuring what it intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). For example, when carrying out the interviews the aim was to collect in-depth experiences and understand the subjective perspectives the students have on certain topics (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). In this manner, the researcher formulated open-ended questions that permitted the exploration of experiences oriented to respond to the study objective. At this point, as a researcher I also reiterated the questions by reformulating it in a different way during interviews to assure the collection of important valuable information necessary for the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also avoided the use of complex, technical and professional vocabulary to better connect to the participants. (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability is considered as the research aims to describe with precision the methodology used in their study (Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). In the case of interviews, the questions formulated into a guide and any changes are presented in the final report of the study. The awareness of *Transferability* provides external validity as It outlines the scope and limitations on applying the study's findings outside of the initial setting (Malterud, 2001).

The researcher reported challenges that might have arisen during the whole process of the study to assure *Dependability*, closely linked to external validity. These are oriented to have

people who are not involved in this particular study be able to replicate, to an extent, the kind of findings that are being presented.

Finally, even though it is virtually impossible to ensure real objectivity (Braun & Clarke 2012; Shenton, 2004) *Confirmability* is being considered by revising existing data and evaluating the credibility of the findings. In other words, conclusions are more credible when two or more sources of data arrive at the same conclusion (Tracy, 2010).

4.7 Role of the researcher

Reflexivity, it is important to moderate the space with precaution, creating rapport but maintaining a neutral role that won't interfere with data being collected. In this case, due to the fact that the researcher has lived through the experience of being an international student in Bergen, a lot of self-reflection had to be taken into account throughout the project. The participants could also have felt more comfortable to share certain experiences due to the interviewer being close in age and having experienced similar situations as an international student. In qualitative research, it is of extreme importance to care for the dynamic between the participants and the research since it can influence the quality of the data. For example, it can affect how much people are comfortable with sharing. But it can also affect the study later in the process as the researcher must avoid making assumptions based on what the students mention and compared to the researcher's personal experience. For this reason, a level of self-reflection was taken into account during the formulation of the study, the process of data collection, the rapport with the participants, the data processing and the reporting of results, findings and conclusions.

4.8 Ethical considerations

4.8.1 Overall and specific ethical issues

The researcher had prepared an emotional management protocol meant to be used to prevent and manage emotional distress that may have arisen during the student's participation in the interviews (See Appendix C). However, it ended up not being used. The researcher also

aimed to create a judge-free zone for the participants and prevent her own values from influencing the data collection and processing. After finalizing the study, the transcripts were deleted in order to protect the participant's information from being distributed beyond the scope of the study. After finalizing the study, the transcripts were deleted in order to protect the participant's information from being distributed beyond the scope of the study.

4.8.2 Informed consent and protection of the rights of participants

Regarding the ethical considerations, participants were informed about the overall research aims and methodology through an oral and in paper informed consent (See Appendix D). This consent expressed the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. Moreover, the confidentiality and anonymity of the people involved were secured through the whole research, by modifying any information in the narration of their experiences that could jeopardize it. Additionally, as indicated before, the names presented in *Table 1* and the quotations in the following chapter are common names in their respective countries, to identify the participants more easily without using their real names.

4.8.3 Instances of ethical clearance (NSD)

The study made sure to align to the ethical requirements UiB states for all projects. Therefore, the researcher was registered in Rette and stored the data in the SAFE server in order to assure the confidentiality of the participant's contribution. At all times, only the researcher and the supervisor of the project had access to the information store there.

Chapter 5: Findings

The research project presented in this thesis seeks to understand the acculturation experiences of international students coming from outside the EU/EEA to study in Bergen. This chapter presents the interview data and is organized in three sections, which correspond to the research questions posed earlier: 1) The existence of stressors or main challenges international

students from outside EU/EEA encounter during their mobility experience in Bergen and 2) How these non-EU/EEA international students in Bergen, Norway are coping with potential stressors?

5.1 The predominant stressors experiences by international students from outside EU/EEA in Bergen

The study participants described a number of stressors and challenges they faced during their mobility experience in Bergen. From the data collected, nine themes stand out as the interviews provided clarity on some of the ways the students faced those particular situations.

5.1.1 Environmental stressors

5.1.1.1 Being indoors.

One stressor participants mentioned was a marked increase in time spent indoors. In one case, this was especially hard to deal with during the winter because Bergen's weather is very different compared to her home country.

I'm not used to darkness at all or cold weather. All year long in Sudan it is summer and sunny. So that was a lot, especially on my own, having to deal with my room the whole time (Iman, 29, Sudan)

A related stressor compounded the negative impact of spending more time at home because the accommodations were set up so the students lived alone, making it harder to socialize. This forced them to find a new way to carry on social activities when the weather would limit the options to relax outdoors.

Back home, after work, when we were at the university, Friday or Thursday night, we would get some beers at the campus, you know, with some friends, seeing the sunset (...) Here the way they relax is a little bit different, yeah? So I couldn't do the same. So hanging out in the campus, there is no campus here. Most people tend to be indoors because of the weather and the way the faculties are structured is just different. So in a

way, I had to adjust to that. So if I wanted to chill with my friends, it wasn't on campus, it was somewhere else, in a different environment. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

5.1.1.2 Lack of sunlight in Bergen.

For most of the participants, winter in Bergen represented a challenge that had influenced their academic performance, physical health (being vitamin D deficient) and mental health. Specifically, the students who came from the southern hemisphere directly to autumn and winter in Norway, mentioned not being used to such darkness and cold weather and having to deal with it at the same time as other stressors was mentioned to create a difficult time for them.

The weather was really quite difficult because I came close to winter (...) I didn't know that if you're coming from the tropics where you have a lot of sun, of course you don't need vitamin D. So for the first six months, I ran out of vitamin D. I got a vitamin D deficiency and I didn't know. So I was feeling low on energy. I was kind of getting depressed. (...) when I went to the doctor and I did some checks, I had low vitamin D. So I didn't know. I didn't have that knowledge back then. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

It was the most difficult thing to deal with a lot of stress. I almost didn't pass my exams and at the same time it was autumn, it was dark and raining, and I was new here so the first semester was the worst. (Iman, 29, Sudan)

5.1.2 Social Stressors

5.1.2.1 Lack of social support

On a related topic, many of the participants mentioned different ways in which their social network was negatively affected upon arrival as they left behind family and friends from their home country and struggled to make friends in Bergen, join clubs in the university, find

opportunities to socialize spontaneously in everyday life. For example, Soraya mentioned her feelings regarding being distanced from loved ones.

Sometimes you feel that you are invisible here, especially that you are far from your family and friends. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

Also, half of the participants mentioned that they experience difficulty making friends in comparison to their place of origin. In some of their cases, back home making friends or establishing social relationships comes with very little effort, for example, people in the neighborhood tend to become close not only physically.

The social culture here is, I can't say entirely exclusive but you have to really work hard or put in a lot of effort to make friends (...) Like, back home I have a very big community, regardless of where people come from, it is easy to connect, to make friends, it's easy to share a lot of things. But in Norway, people are very helpful but it is quite hard to make long lasting friendships. Yeah, it takes a lot compared to back home (Kato, 29, Uganda)

We tend to be closer, you know? (...) Back home we know everyone on the block, the one that's living next door or in front of us. So, I think we are way warmer in that sense. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

The majority of participants also identified that there is less spontaneous socialization in Norwegian society than in their home cultures, where greeting people in the street is something usual.

My city is about half the size of Bergen in my home country. And a lot of the time you'll just pass each other on the street and say hi or just smile to each other. And here it's a very "keep to yourself" type of thing. (Ashley, 21, USA)

Back home, when you wake up, maybe you're going to work or you're going to school and you find people, you greet them. You greet them and you smile and even if you don't know

them, you know? But mostly that's not the case here. It is very rare to wake up and greet a stranger. They'll be like, "what's wrong with you?" (Kato, 29, Uganda)

These cultural differences impacted the way they would interact with peers, people around them and Norwegians, whose way of making friendships was confusing for them at first. They have experienced feeling like they are getting closer to a Norwegian person but then realizing that that level of proximity is very rarely maintained the following days.

The thing is that they are very friendly in a party and the next day they just go back to the factory setting [not being social]. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

There was also one participant who mentioned that it was difficult for her to find a club to join at university in comparison to their home university. This was an option she searched for as a way to integrate with people through a common interest and build a social network beyond the academic ground, but could not find it.

I think at least at my home university it's way easier to join an academic club or a sports club or something like that and here I haven't really found many of those that are advertising or anything like that. (Ashley, 21, USA)

5.1.3 Feeling of otherness

Two of the participants reported in their interviews having moments of realization of their differences from the recipient culture. This is a possible stressor because for these participants it represented an unpleasant experience that generated friction and caused stress. In some cases, it was the language, or physical appearance and in others the differences in the economic capacity to purchase certain things served as a reminder of being an outsider.

Now I'm more at peace with that feeling but I remember that I was really conflicted about it at the beginning when I started to feel that (...) oh, I really look different. I'm different. I'm an outsider. I think it's mostly with appearance. I imagine as well not being able to speak the language. It puts a lot of barriers and limitations on how much you can engage with other people. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

My lifestyle is not like them yet because I still can't live like them. As an international master's student, there is some more pressure on me than a Norwegian student. It happens sometimes that my classmates want to go hiking together but I can't do it because I should be at work or it's something that is too expensive for me. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

5.1.3 Cultural Stressors

5.1.3.1 Different diets, food and meals

Another stressor mentioned by all students was food. Participants describe having to adapt to it in many different ways. For instance, international students pointed out that not only is food more expensive in Norway but also there is less diversity or variety of food products compared to their home countries. Both these things have had an impact in what they finally decide to purchase and what their diets now consist of.

So somehow the food that I eat kind of doesn't change, doesn't vary that much compared to when I'm home. Yeah. And also the diet is like less meat and more vegetables or other kinds of fish because meat is quite expensive. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

But they also encountered some cultural differences with meals in Norway. They mention differences regarding what the meals consist of as well as the time they are usually eaten at.

What they eat for lunch is just what we eat for breakfast (...) [In my country] We eat a warm meal during lunch. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

Yes, we usually have our lunch around 2pm or sometimes even later, 3pm and then we have our dinner at 9pm or 10pm. It's very different here. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

Additionally, four students also mentioned that they counted on some sort of support from their family in order to purchase some food products whereas others mentioned even

getting fully cooked meals. Naturally, this help stopped once they got to Norway as they were fully in charge of their food purchases and cooking for themselves on a daily basis.

I go to university in my home city so both my parents are still there. So, on the weekends I would go to one of their houses and get food from them. (...) [In Bergen] I have to do a lot more of getting food and cooking food myself. (Ashley, 21, USA)

5.1.3.2 Different dress codes

For most of the participants, the way they dressed changed once they moved to Bergen. This happened for multiple reasons like adapting to the weather in Bergen where winter is very cold and it rains considerably throughout the year.

I'm from the coast in Colombia and it's very hot all year round. (...) We like wearing very fresh clothes with different colors. (...) The girls, they like dressing very in nice colors and they like getting ready for parties and things like that because the weather allows that (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

But another observation the students pointed out was the fact that people in Bergen tend to dress in less colorful clothing, more minimalistic style and very similar to each other in comparison to their home countries. This created some tension in certain individuals as they either easily adopted that same way of dressing or had a hard time coming to terms with it.

I love second-hand clothing. And I was looking for very muted colors. And I was thinking, 'but I used to dress more colorful. Why am I doing this?' And I realized it's because that's something that happens here a lot (...) It's that it seems that society here wants to fit a mold. I think for me it's still kind of annoying that thing of, I don't know, like people looking the same. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

5.1.3.3 New languages

All the participants interviewed were at the time enrolled in a study program completely taught in English, but only one of them has English as their first language. For these reasons it was somewhat difficult for some of these students to adopt English as their everyday language.

However, for some of them what caused the most stress was that the use of English was perceived as a disadvantage for learning Norwegian since most people in Norway speak English and one can get by without necessarily using the local language. One student who decided he wants to stay after graduation quickly realized how the language is required to enter most workplaces and it can become an even bigger challenge to attempt to learn it at the same time as finishing their study program and looking for a job.

I think it's hard in a way that if you can go just fine without speaking the language. Of course it puts a barrier of integration in the culture. I mean everyone speaks English, almost everyone. So in that sense it's easy to communicate. And it's quite comfortable just to stay speaking English. Which is an advantage but also a disadvantage if you want to learn the language. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

5.1.4 Practical Stressors

5.1.4.1 New technology

A technology that was challenging for the students were the transportation apps as they found they had to adapt to a new way of commuting than in their home countries. Regarding learning to use the Skyss app for reading the timetables, Veronica mentioned how in her home country there are no timetables for public transport so she had to get used to making sense of them. Another comparison came from the process of purchasing tickets online without any personal interaction, where Rodrigo mentioned his first attempt to use the transport app was a challenge due to him being new and not having a Norwegian phone number to complete the purchase of his ticket.

When I got here I was hoping to see someone at the train station. I was hoping to interact with someone to get my first ticket or card or anything. And it was nothing like that. Because here everything works digital, like on your phone. So when I got here, I got off at the station down there and I tried to get a ticket but I was surprised. I needed a number because I was supposed to get a code through messages. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

For Soraya, the app is still not easy to use and she prefers using google maps instead. For one student it was also a surprise to see how unreliable the map app could be when showing a walking path due to the many hills or mountainous terrain throughout the city.

At least in the first week, you can't really tell from the top-down view of maps how there's a massive hill in the middle of campus. So it's a little bit more of a hike to get to class. (Ashley, 21, USA)

5.1.4.2 Academic responsibilities

For two students specifically, certain stress was felt due to their perception of academic pressure in Norway. On one hand, for Soraya the stress surged from her own perception of there being extra pressure on her compared to Norwegian students. Iman, on the other hand, struggled to obtain good grades when facing a new evaluation system, and found herself feeling responsible for representing Sudanese students' academic capability.

At first it felt like, I am losing my IQ strength, am I getting stupid? Or what is wrong with me? And then I also felt like this is not only about me, I felt the responsibility that since the scholarship it was for Sudan for the first time so it was my responsibility to reflect that Sudanese students are good (Iman, 29, Sudan)

For the student from the USA, we found that there were some differences with her grading system back home which she had to get used to.

Small things that happen along the way like being a little bit more closed off or placing a higher importance on classes for example, placing a high importance on final exams and final essays instead of smaller assignments throughout the year. (Ashley, 21, USA)

5.1.4.3 Employment

For one particular student the topic of finding a part time job to financially sustain herself in Norway created a lot of stress. For instance, getting a job that provided a part-time contract was required in her case to be able to present said document in the visa renewal appointment and proof that she had the funds to be a student in Norway without having to present an amount of

money she did not have in her account at the time. This was complicated by the fact that she encountered an employer who unfortunately did not provide her a contract and ended up working for free.

I had some problems with finding a part-time job, I remember. First, I worked in a restaurant (...) They didn't give me a contract and they didn't pay me anything. I had this in my mind that in Norway, everyone is giving you rights, you don't have to fight for it and these things are just for Iran, no one takes advantage of you. But they did. (...) I was stressed for a time, I postponed my [Visa] appointment and it was a time that I thought I could never find a job with a contract, like what I really need. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

5.1.4.4 Worrisome visa process

Half of the students interviewed mentioned some elements of the visa process as something stressful. For some it was perceived as if they “play up the stress aspect” so that students would not take it lightly. For others, there was a mistake and she ended up getting an D number instead of an ID number which implied having to do the process all over again. And finally, the fact that was mentioned prior to this theme regarding the connection with employment.

The stressful part was doing the visa thing because they talk about it like if you don't have all these documents you're never going to get it and they're going to ban you from the country or something (Ashley, 21, USA)

I think I did it and they gave me like a D number so, yeah, and I was meant to get an ID number so I had to do that again, like fill out a form and send it, send it, the post system was also kind of confusing at the beginning as well, like the mailing system. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

5.1.5 Other stressors

Moreover, in contrast to the main stressors mentioned before, it is possible to identify the ways of coping that directly or indirectly responds to each of the former ones, whereas for these

last ones there is a lack of information to be certain about it. For this last set, the coping consisted mostly in looking up information online or easily dealing with it by changing a specific behavior.

5.2 Coping strategies of international students from outside EU/EEA in Bergen

The second section will focus on Coping and will describe the diverse ways in which the participants addressed the stressors they experienced.

5.2.1 Enjoying nature and traveling

There are many ways students use nature as a health coping strategy. Students found relief in doing outdoor activities during the summer and getting together with friends. Some other students also took the opportunity to travel around and explore Norway and surrounding countries.

The vibes of summer here it's very nice, you can go swimming in the ocean. I think most of my fond memories are with friends and doing outside activities, which is something that you do quite a lot here in Norway. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

Think the most fun I've had is leaving the main city and going out to different areas and I'm planning to do a weekend trip to Oslo during the study week or whatever it is. So that should be fun. I think just exploring is my favorite part of living in a new place (Ashley, 21, USA)

5.2.2 Finding social support/having a network

Finding ways to build a network played a crucial role in many different ways. Every student mentioned at least one way they got social support and found it valuable in their experience in Bergen so far. The first thing mentioned is how there was a moment where the realization came of needing help during this process of adapting to this new culture and situation.

It was a learning process here that you have to get rid of your pride and just ask for help here. So that's something that I've learned quite a lot here. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

For the participants, the support came from many different areas in their lives. For example, some mentioned how they kept in touch with friends from their home culture as a way to navigate similar challenges together. This included friends who were physically in Norway too facing the same stressors, but also friends from back home which could be reached online.

We had a group on WhatsApp. It was all of us who came from Iran for master's last year. There was a lady that helped a lot. She shared lots of information or helped us to find some furniture for our place when we first arrived.(...) We weren't so lost. They can help a lot. I'm happy that I found some friends from Iran here because it's very important to be from our own nation. There are some things that we can't share with other people, especially because when I came here, all those revolutions in Iran happened. We had some bad days. Far from the family and the internet was shut down in Iran. We don't have access to our family also. It was good that we had each other here. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

There was also a specific kind of comfort found in relying on other international students to get through certain challenges together. For some, they found support in the international students also in Bergen. However, there was a student who mentioned she kept in touch with a friend from her home country who was going through their own “semester abroad” experience elsewhere. Even though they were not in the same location, they shared some similar challenges being international students abroad.

I usually ask my international friends because they were going through the same problems and they know or they suggest someone else that I can ask. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

Especially with my friend who's studying in Japan. He's also dealing with the same thing of not knowing anyone when you're there. So I think having each other to talk to is pretty important and getting together on a voice call and playing a video game together or just talking to friends back home. I think it's pretty helpful for sure (...) in terms of adapting

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to being more alone, on the weekends I'll FaceTime them so it's not as alone. (Ashley, 21, USA)

In this manner, social media was mentioned to be useful to maintain these social relationships at a distance and combat loneliness. This resource was also the way they stayed connected with family in their home country. Some of them used to live at home with their families so they mentioned they would use video calls to find social support and catch up with their relatives or ask for help and advice from them.

That kind of depended on what kind of problem I had. So if it was something that could be easily solved by let's say friends, I would contact my close friends. Yeah. I would contact my close friends or I would call my family back home (Kato, 29, Uganda)

Also, some participants bonded with other international students through sharing the same language classes or being new in the same study program. They mentioned that they attributed this positive aspect to the way the university's program was structured. Linked to that, students also pointed out UiB services that were helpful to find support regarding specific information about the university.

I think specifically that program was very helpful. And I really had like during my first master which was coincidentally like the, when I just arrived here, the group of people that were in this program were really nice as well. They were really willing to help you if you asked for help (...) it seems that everyone was kind (...) I think it was something with how it was structured that program in design and the people that were there probably. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

The mentorship program. Yeah. And also the fadderuke [mentor week]. So yeah, I think those were quite helpful for sure. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

The two students who identify as male mentioned how they established friendships through common interests. For example, having a friend or a group of friends to go work out

together or share activities in their free time. But also, one student mentioned he found support in the group of people who belong to his workplace.

But also I think it depends on your interest as a person. For example if you like sports, like I like sports, I like to run. So there is a very big running community in Bergen. So for me when I kind of started running then I started to get the community opened up. I started to get very big groups of people where we could behave like a community. So it became very easy to mingle with the locals. Yeah, based on the activities. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

As a group, I would definitely say the place where I work has been a great source of support and what do you say, like, some people who have tried to make me feel at home. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

5.2.3 Interactions with Norwegians/ Norwegian society

On a societal level, one student pointed out her perception of Norway having a welcoming system to foreigners. Specifically, she felt they were politically correct and had a nice attitude.

But yeah, I could see that Norway really has a more prepared system in a way, even though it may have its flaws. It has a more prepared system to host people coming from different places and it's very politically correct in a nice way (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

While on a personal level, many students shared positive socialization experiences they had had with Norwegian people. Even when some of them had an expectation of Norwegians being cold, minding their own business, or not being social to strangers at all, they have found situations that countered these assumptions in a positive way.

He stayed with me for like half an hour, recommending things, learning about each other and at the end we became friends. He even told me, "When you're ready to go pay, tell me I am going to go to the cashier and I am going to put on my personal discount" because he was working at the shop so I got a special discount. Two days after I was

working out with him at SATS and yeah, he is Norwegian. It was one of the very first experiences and probably one of the nicest ones. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

I was expecting from what you hear as well that people are cold and stuff, but actually, something nice, at least in my case, is that I found myself approaching people that were kind to me. So that was really, it was a really nice surprise from what I was expecting (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

5.2.4 Changes in diet/adapting their diet

Students had mentioned in the stressors they faced that food was pricier in Norway and that there was a lack of variety of products compared to their home countries. The way they coped according to the interviews was by adapting the foods they would usually cook and reducing the amount of certain products. For example, one student mentioned how they used to eat a lot of meat and sugar but now she has more agency in her diet and has reduced sugars and started to think more about what products she is buying and what kind of food she is making. Some others are also making sure to have on their meals some supplements or vitamins necessary to continue nourishing their bodies even with a different diet..

I used to eat a lot of meat, but on the other hand, I used to eat a lot of sugar as well. So since I moved here I have been watching my diet since I cook for myself and I am doing the grocery shopping. So yeah, it changed a lot. Now I am watching what I am eating (Iman, 29, Sudan)

He [the doctor] recommended I go on vitamin D tablets and also to change my diet, like eating more vegetables and spinach. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

Other students, for example, explained how they now have incorporated new international foods and recipes to their diets as a way to deal with the lack of variety of products known to them from their home countries .

I didn't know much about dishes or recipes. But I have learned since I came here. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

I also learned to prepare more international dishes here. Because, I don't know, with the global food they have like more ingredients to prepare other stuff. Because there is a lot of influence from different parts of the world in the food here, I think. So it's, you can just buy in the grocery store, spring rolls or whatever. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

5.2.5 Adopting new ways of dressing

Most of the students interviewed came from warmer countries and had to quickly adapt their usual ways of dressing to Norwegian winter and Bergen's rainy weather. They all started to purchase and wear winter appropriate clothes and rainproof garments to be able to protect themselves and be prepared from the cold and rain.

If you live in Bergen, It's raining every day so you have to really put on clothes that are water resistant, a good jacket, boots or shoes that are water resistant. The dress code really changes. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

Of course here it's colder so you have to protect yourself. You got to wear more jackets, more sweaters, thick clothes and stuff like that. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

For two participants specifically, the new dress code was something that was dictated by religion back in their home countries. For Iman and Soraya, the way people dressed in Norway gave them the freedom to feel like they were not being judged in regards to what they wore.

In Sudan I had to wear a hijab even if I am not covering my hair, it had to be somewhere on my shoulders. Last year I think since the airport I took it off and never wore it again (laughs) and I don't care, I just wanted to wear whatever I feel like wearing, I don't have to worry about the community or what other people will think of me (Iman, 29, Sudan)

Once in Bergen they felt free to explore different ways of dressing and taking the hijab off without any pressure from society. They also mentioned that this had an impact on how they perceived themselves. It allowed them to feel more confident in themselves, more beautiful and a chance to express themselves through clothing .

First of all, I'm not forced to wear a hijab. That's the best part. I remember when I first came here, I felt like I was more confident about myself. I felt like I'm more worthy, even more beautiful. I didn't feel like that in Iran because everyone tried too hard to seem better than what they are. But here I can be myself. (Soraya, 27, Iran)

Sudan it's a country that is based on religion and here no one gives a shit about what you practice or anything so, I was having a double life in Sudan, I had to hide it but here I can be myself nobody cares what I wear or how I behave. So it was a good chance for me to explore myself and do what I want. (Iman, 29, Sudan)

5.2.6 Learning and practicing languages

Regarding the adoption of new languages to communicate in their everyday life, students all pointed out that they had had previous interaction with English to different extents, however, none of them had previous significant interaction with the Norwegian language before coming to Norway. English was used as a resource to communicate and socialize with peers and locals, as well as the language in which their study program in Norway was carried out. For a student this specific aspect was seen almost like a personal challenge or a very conscious personal development opportunity to practice English in a sustained way.

I knew English, yeah, we learned it at school but we never practiced it until I moved to Norway (Iman, 29, Sudan)

I always wanted to go to a university where I could be given the opportunity to speak in English and develop myself, like, my career and my professional life in English so I saw it as a challenge and I really wanted to do it. It didn't really matter where but I wanted to do it. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

It was pointed out how most Norwegians speak very good English and so it did not become a necessity for them to invest their time and energy to learn and practice said language unless they were maybe planning to stay longer. However, if they did decide to study the

language, students mentioned some informal and formal setting in which they approached Norwegian. Some started using everyday interactions to pick up phrases or signed up to a learning app, but some also started taking Norwegian courses provided by the university.

I didn't learn much Norwegian until I'm learning it now in the second semester. But it's okay to pick up a few phrases like, do you need a bag? It's very often used (Ashley, 21, USA)

I don't know much. I'm trying to learn through Duolingo because I don't have time to take the classes. But it's hard for me. They have some "ø" sound that I can't pronounce because we never had it before in our language.(Soraya, 27, Iran)

Now since I am planning to stay, I have to learn it. But I can survive without it if I wasn't planning to stay. So far, I am learning it and it [the Norwegian course] is going well I think. (Iman, 29, Sudan)

In the language class, nobody knows the language so you're all getting through it together kind of. (Ashley, 21, USA)

5.2.7 Using functional public transport

One aspect regarding transportation that really facilitated students to learn how to commute around the city was feeling that it was safe, convenient and comfortable to use the public transportation services like buses and trams. One participant also mentioned that for him, it was pretty straightforward, because the steps to follow were easy to understand.

In Sudan most of the time I was renting a car to go home, back and forth but here I can use the public transportation, it is safe. I feel comfortable and safe, and it is more convenient (Iman, 29, Sudan)

Not really. I mean it was kind of straightforward because I was staying at Fantoft which is just close to the tram station. So it was very easy, like 20 minutes on the bus and then,

or the train or you could also take the bus if you missed the train. So it was quite easy to navigate. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

5.2.8 Self care practices

Students mention various ways in which they started to take action to maintain a good mental and physical health. The two males interviewed mentioned how for them, it was all about maintaining an active lifestyle. Having a routine and staying active helped them feel like they were taking care of their bodies and their social needs too, especially during the winter. .

I'm more active in sports and a lot of other activities.(...) I like to run. So there is a very big running community in Bergen. So for me when I kind of started running then I started to get the community opened up. (...) Because I'm quite social so that helps me to kind of keep my social spirit high. (Kato, 29, Uganda)

I had to adapt to that [the darkness in winter] . Coming to terms that “okay, I want to wake up because I want to take advantage of my day. Even though there is no sunlight, I know I want to be up”. So just continue with the things that you would do back home. Like, okay, I usually wake up at 7 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. in the morning, do some workout, get some food, do some reading, and then keep my day. So, it was a little bit hard at first. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

For another student, she recognized the social aspect was lacking at times. However, she found a way of self-care that helped. She used her passion for photography and found a new creative outlet doing so immersed in Bergen’s nature.

It would be nice to find more people that are like-minded but I think I just dealt with it by finding other creative outlets like doing photography or just doing hikes on the mountains around Bergen. (Ashley, 21, USA)

And finally, for another student, when things got difficult in her studies, she used to blame herself for getting bad grades or for being a bad example of what other international

students are able to achieve academically, but the way she coped with this thoughts was changing her internal monologue and validating herself.

I think it was something mental about me because I have always cared about my grades and wanted to get an A or a B. (...) I had to be at peace with myself that “is ok whatever grades you are getting, you’re dealing with a lot” and nobody here cares about grades really. (...) after a while I felt like it was too much, “I am not responsible about this”
(Iman, 29, Sudan)

5.2.9 Others diverse coping facilitators

Lastly, some other things mentioned in the interviews gives us more information to understand some coping strategies used against diverse stressors simultaneously. All participants identified at least one personality trait or characteristic about themselves that they feel helped them face some difficult situations during their acculturation process. For example being more introverted but extroverted at times, being stubborn or not getting easily stressed.

it was easier to adjust to the more “keep to yourself” attitude because I’m pretty introverted so I don’t have to talk to a bunch of people to feel fulfilled or anything.
(Ashley, 21, USA)

I’m very stubborn with stuff and it’s kind of a good thing and a bad thing because I am stubborn. It takes me a while before I ask for help with things but I will also really search for information and try to find resources on my own, like on my own. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

I think perseverance also because at some point I was like, nah, I think I’m done. But I’m someone who really tries hard to keep on pushing even if things are not going right.
(Kato, 29, Uganda)

Another thing that facilitated their adaptation process was their motivation to do the study program at the University of Bergen or the courses they were enrolled into in Norway. For some

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it was more the study field and for others the study program itself. UiB had interesting classes that they could take and offered their prestigious campus facilities.

In my home country, we don't have a master's degree in design. And usually the masters in design in South America are very focused on branding with a very commercial aspect to it. So I started searching for programs in Europe because I knew that some countries at the time had free tuition for international students. And Norway was one of those countries and it's at least in South America, we know that it has a certain prestige to study degrees abroad (...) specifically the programme in design here, one of the advantages is the facilities that we have in the faculty. The workshops. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

For one student, it was also like a personal challenge that motivated him to take the opportunity of studying in Norway and facing the maybe hard situations that at times that could provoke. In his case, a previous experience living in Australia also gave him the confidence to know he had the tools to deal with this new challenge, and being more prepared on what to expect from the study abroad situation.

Is just like seeing, living, exploring. I mean, it's also like a way of seeing life, most people don't take these kinds of changes and challenges the same way. So at least in my case, it's not the first time living in a different culture, in a different country with different people. So I have some experience in that sense. (Rodrigo, 31, Colombia)

Finally, accessing information online was also a resource mentioned in the interviews and explained to an extent by two participants. One of them specifically pointed out how useful it was to have important information available when you looked for it, as everything is digitalized.

One good thing is that you can find information if you look out for it. There's usually, on the internet like with how to do your taxes, how to... There is information available on the internet which wouldn't necessarily be the case in Bolivia. You really would have to go to the office and talk to the person and here it's very digitized in a way which is nice. (Veronica, 33, Bolivia)

Chapter 6: Discussion

This thesis aimed to understand the stressors and coping strategies associated with the acculturation process of non-EU/EEA international students in a public university in Bergen, Norway. This chapter will contextualize the research findings within previous research and existing literature on immigration and acculturation. The chapter concludes by sharing new insights illuminated by the current project.

As Riedel et al. (2011) explains, immigrants bring acquired patterns of thinking, feeling and acting shaped by their home cultural context, and as they face the new culture, they face a local population with an unfamiliar programming of the mind that migrants must learn to deal with. The potential stressors and various challenges that students face originated from adapting to a distant cultural context where everyday things work differently than their home culture. As the literature suggests, the present study's participants mentioned conflicts through the new roles played in the new place of residence, specific practices, beliefs, values, and conflicts through acquisition of a new language (Riedel et al., 2011).

These findings are relevant to health promotion as they are aligned to several health promotion action areas (WHO, 1986) that aim to create supportive environments, strengthen community action and develop personal skills. Furthermore, it is relevant to international efforts that aspire to create health promoting universities and colleges, such as the Okanagan Charter (Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, 2015). This Charter shares similar visions regarding the value of embedding health into all aspects of campus culture and recognizing the interconnectedness between individuals and their environments, highlighting the power they hold to actively reflect and create health-promoting settings that support well-being and where they can thrive.

Hence, this research has a practical application as the results can guide universities that welcome international students in improving the acculturation experience. For example, actions such as measuring satisfaction in certain areas or services the university offers to their international students, group interventions or workshops to generate thriving communities that support each other in strengthening their wellbeing, participatory panels for discussing relevant matters that engage local and international students.

The framework in Riedel et al. (2011) points out two categories of coping strategies: Problem-focused and Emotion-focused. However, as mentioned earlier, this research confirms not only those but illuminates a third category of coping strategies that capture the complexity of certain coping strategies that impact the emotional responses of students through behavioral changes. These findings have practical application since the results can guide universities that welcome international students to improve the ways they support students through the acculturation experience.

6.1 Problem-focused coping strategies

This section refers to stressful situations of different magnitudes that are approached by the students with efforts that include learning new skills and developing new standards of behavior directed at a specific problem (Riedel et al., 2011). The following are examples of some situations appraised as controllable by behavioral changes by the students (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

For example, stressors like experiencing a lack of availability of familiar products and higher prices compared to their home countries were addressed by the participants with new behaviors. Two students mentioned how they learned to cook new dishes and international recipes since coming to Bergen, because they found places like Global Foods, a store with many international products at an accessible price for students. Also, regarding dressing codes, most students interviewed came from warmer places and this was a stressor they needed to face. This required them to acquire new clothing that was water resistant and could protect them from Bergen's extreme weather. Finally, getting by in Bergen while not speaking Norwegian was also something that was identified as a stressor by the students. However, they mentioned how they used English as a resource in everyday life, and even if at first they were not used to speaking it so much, it made communication more manageable for them.

All of these are behavioral shifts that correspond with how Riedel et al. (2011) mentioned that non-problematic approaches can be common in aspects like the ways of speaking, dressing, eating, among others. Non-problematic issues are defined by Riedel et al. (2011) as small challenges that do not create a significant unmanageable amount of stress. This shows how the

individuals changed some behaviors as a way of enforcing health enhancing resources which as Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer (2020) explain, is a way people deal with stressors by interacting with their social environment.

Moreover, these findings can also be viewed and analyzed through the lens of Salutogenesis, as it highlights the role that resources in the environment play for individuals as they manage tensions to achieve health (Riedel et al., 2011). Some elements of this theory such as Specific resistance resources (SRR) and elements of Sense of coherence (SOC), such as comprehensibility and manageability, also contribute to identifying resources in certain situations that students have described.

A stressor found repeatedly among participants was about finding a social network or social support while being away from their communities, friends and family. However, students perceived other international students to be in the same “starting point” where everything was new to all of them and so they encountered similar problems. It was pointed out by the participants how the specific services catered to international students made them feel integrated. They had the perception that their programs gave them the tools needed to integrate when being new to the city and also felt that in general Norway has a system well prepared to host people coming from abroad. This information given by the university, through for example the international students office, or teachers from the program in charge of orientation, would qualify as what Antonovsky (1987) described as a specific resistance resource (SRR). SRRs are certain characteristics that are useful in managing specific tensions (Antonovsky, 1987).

For all of these, the tension originates from the acculturation process which can lead to the person to find a resource they can use in a particular circumstance for a specific need (Riedel et al., 2011). In other words, it is not just teachers in general or employees from the faculty that they look for when searching for orientation, but they seek out the international student office at the university that caters to their direct needs with specific tools and guidance.

For example, students mentioned how trying to find detailed information about several topics during their experience was mildly challenging. They mentioned how they resorted to online information in most of the opportunities before having to reach out in person for support. This illustrates two more elements of salutogenesis that can be key to manage acculturation

stress since it is very related to the appraisal process of the individual (Braun & Mayer, 2020). Firstly, comprehensibility refers to the capacity of the individual to make sense of the information being given and the ability to structure it (Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer 2020; Riedel et al., 2011). The second element is manageability which refers to stress management by using internal and/or external resources to control the demands (Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer 2020; Riedel et al., 2011). In that sense, based on the experiences the students shared in the interviews they found that, not only were they able to identify the resource and access it when they needed the help to manage certain possible stressors, but, the information given to them was easy to understand and useful to them.

6.2 Emotion-focused coping strategies

The literature states that emotion-focused coping strategies involve facing a challenging situation by regulating the emotional response to it (Berry, 1997 in Riedel et al., 2011). Some strategies are wishful thinking, minimization and avoidance, which in certain contexts can reduce the immediate effect of the level of stress that is mentioned in the fourth stage of Berry's acculturation framework (Riedel et al., 2011).

For example, students have mentioned how finding a support network represented a challenge when they first arrived. However, one of the ways students cope with this situation, was a change of mindset to *“get rid of your pride and just ask for help”*. This is precisely explained by the role assigned to appraisal stated by Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer (2020) as they identify that the emotional response to the stressor can make a difference when it comes to the individual's capacity to create health in a given environment (Antonovsky, 1987).

Another example of emotion-focused strategy was another student who dealt with some academic stress by changing her internal monologue and morphing her thoughts in a way that validated her achievements more. These kinds of strategies where thoughts are being normalized show self-regulatory capacities that students use to reach their goals even when things get a bit challenging. These two examples presented: finding a support network and morphing the thoughts; are directly linked to meaningfulness as it refers to assigning emotional value and investing energy in facing demands that the individual finds of high importance (Antonovsky,

1987). For these students, their goal is to succeed in their study programs and to learn from the mobility experience in itself. They have chosen to actively participate in it and this seems to provide a sense of direction or objective that maintains their motivation to deal with the stressors that can appear throughout the process.

Furthermore, a sense of belonging is another aspect that originates from the interactions with their new social environment. This feeling of connectedness can come from an academic context such as feeling part of the international student body but it can also come from extracurriculars like being part of a running community in Bergen, having friends through other common interests, etc. Literature has in many cases corroborated the benefit of international students' involvement and integration for creating a sense of belonging. For instance, Hale et al. (2020) in Gaulee (2020) explains how the sense of belonging is closely linked to their perception of inclusion/exclusion, cultural adaptation and campus support. Hale (2020) and Rivas et al. (2019) also state how even though professors and other higher education professionals have little control over how students interact with one another outside of class, they can promote ways in which students perceive inclusion by making changes in areas where they have power. This is certainly an observation that can be a starting point to plan activities in accordance with it.

Students shared in the interviews that their expectations of Norwegian society and Norwegian people was of them being cold, specially to strangers and minding their own business. However, the participants shared experiences they had that helped them revise these expectations. They mentioned how even though to an extent Norwegian students have a very “keep to yourself” attitude, they were able to make Norwegian friends and penetrate the local community. This resulted in them feeling a little more integrated into Bergen, especially as a student. This is compelling because expectations and previous knowledge of a culture play an interesting part.

Riedel et al. (2011) and Yan & Fitzpatrick (2016) mention how cultural distance is an important moderating factor to consider when understanding the acculturation process as a whole given the possibility of major differences between cultures. However, studies like Pacheco (2020) focused on international students going to US universities which showed how culturally distanced students presented low levels of cultural shock. This was attributed to their previous

exposure to USA's culture through social media, movies, music, etc (Gaulee et al., 2020). But, in the case of international students in Bergen this is not the case due to the lack of media presence that Norway has compared to the USA.

When analyzing the results through the salutogenesis lens, it is easy to identify another inherent resource and capacity that individuals have to create health. Personality is a GRR and can be a moderating factor that influences the response of an individual to a stressors. (Riedel et al., 2011). All students shared in the interviews how they could identify at least one characteristic in them that they felt was useful when navigating certain challenging situations during their mobility experience. Some mentioned their stubbornness, their perseverance, their ability to be more extroverted and introverted at times when they needed to reach out for help, not getting stressed easily, among others.

It is important to consider those aspects given that they are of value for students to have an easier time in their experience abroad, however, what makes this resource special is that it is something inherent to the person, so it's already established in their personality when arriving in Norway. However, these personality traits that end up being helpful can be strengthened by external factors like the ones mentioned throughout the study. This is because everything is connected and we have to consider the interactional process between the environment and individuals and how they influence each other naturally (Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer 2020).

Following that idea, it was possible to identify through one of the students, how having a past experience studying abroad was useful as a resource to navigate their current mobility study program. The participant mentioned how he felt more confident in this experience due to having studied abroad before, he felt he was more prepared this time and knew what to expect to help him anticipate certain situations that could happen. This could illustrate the two aspects of sense of coherence: comprehensibility and manageability. The former because the understanding and making sense of things this time around is facilitated by the previous experience (Riedel et al., 2011). The latter in the sense that, it refers to it as an internal resource that comes to the surface from within the person as he uses tools he has learned in similar situations to deal with the ones that require his attention now (Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer 2020; Riedel et al., 2011).

However, this case also serves to explain two very interesting points mentioned in the literature. Riedel et al. (2011) states that migrants are not an arbitrary representation of their own nations, instead they constitute a "positively selected" population with strong incentives and resources to go abroad. Cases like this exemplify how international students have their own personal and academic motivations that set them apart and work to their advantage. Additionally, when formulating the integral framework of acculturation and salutogenesis, it is mentioned that the acculturation outcome can be considered as a resource that will help the individual deal with challenging situations in the future (Riedel et al., 2011).

So in this case, the student uses tools that arise from experiencing a similar challenge before, and in the future, the tools and learning outcomes from this current acculturation experience will be useful in a later stressful situation. One could argue, not only will these experiences be useful for other acculturation or mobility experiences, but they could also be extrapolated to be of value in different areas of their professional and academic life, as well as their personal development, therefore serving as a generalized resistance resource.

6.2 New category: behavioral-based, emotional coping strategies

Guided by the results of the interviews, a new category of coping strategy emerged. Moving beyond Reidel's two original categories: Problem-focused and emotion-focused. The findings from this study suggest a third approach to coping which combines the problem-focused approach with emotion-focused approach. This study corroborated significant theoretical points made in Riedel et al. (2011), the coping strategies in this last section could be perceived as students executing a behavioral change to address an emotional stressor.

For example, behavioral change can have a big influence in certain cases where issues of clothing go beyond being prepared for the weather. Two students, one from Iran and one from Sudan mentioned how for them, dropping the strict dressing code from their home culture to instead adopt a new dress code in Norway had positive consequences for them. They highlighted a sense of freedom to choose to wear whatever they wanted, without having to incorporate the hijab, it made them feel more confident and gave them the chance to explore what they actually felt like wearing without feeling judged by society. We see how this behavioral change positively

impacted the individual's emotional state. This demonstrates a level of complexity that the problem-focused versus emotion-focused dichotomy presented in the integral framework by Riedel et al. (2011) is not able to fully capture.

Self care practices were also mentioned among the participants. One of those behaviors that was emotionally beneficial to a student was engaging in creative outlets such as photography to enjoy nature and perform outside activities. These kinds of strategies serve as self-regulatory capacities to overcome stress. Another student mentioned how an active lifestyle improved not only his physical but also psychological health as he got the benefits from the workout itself as well as the benefits from keeping a routine during the winter months where the body and mind needed some extra intentional care. This provided him with a reason to get out of his living space and socialize with peers who workout together with him. Again, this is part of the self-regulatory capacity to use internal and external resources to deal with stressors (Antonovsky, 1987). So in this way, the coping strategies may seem superficially just a matter of behavioral change, however we see how the behavior also affects the emotional and psychological state of the individual significantly.

Moreover, Salutogenesis offers some insight to understand this point further. It presents the mediator role that nature and environment can play in an individual's effort to manage tension states (Von Lindern et al., 2016 in Mittelmark et al., 2017). When the participants mention going out in nature, doing outside activities, traveling and discovering new places around them, such things are possible because the environments there are in allows for them to access it. Students find themselves in a new place that can provide health benefits from being exposed to nature. This is backed up by the meta-analysis exposed in the Handbook of Salutogenesis that affirms the psychological benefits from being in contact with nature given that it reduces feelings such as anxiety and sadness (Von Lindern et al., 2016 in Mittelmark et al., 2017).

6.4 Limitations

This research provides valuable insights and starting points to further other related research, as a way to complement it and understand an even bigger picture of international

student mobility. Time was limited in the current research and the group of students interviewed could not be amplified due to the resources. However, I would recommend further research to consider more participants as there is definitely valuable data in their unique experiences. This could allow us to focus even further on the specific groups and their values, preferences, and maybe even resources that are culture specific. In that manner, actions could be thought out in a way that considers this information as well.

Another research that could be conducted as an approach to needs assessment could be measuring the satisfaction of users with the already existing psychological services and other support services provided by the university. This could help identify what specific areas may need strengthening and which ones were found very helpful and why.

6.5 Further implications

To conclude this chapter, we can see how adaptation to a new cultural context is not solely determined by stressors or challenges, but also on the ability of the students to cope with them. There is a diversity of strategies being used by them that can be categorized according to the theory as problem-focused and emotion-focused; however, it seems that there is a level of complexity that also encompasses both aspects at the same time which is referred to here as behavior-focused, emotional coping strategies.

As Riedel et al. (2011) reiterates, humans are highly complex bio-psycho-social beings which is why examining their self-regulatory capabilities to problem solve becomes a complex of a process. International students come from all parts of the world, with their own cultural backgrounds more or less culturally distanced from Norway and even though each of them will have a very unique experience influenced by different factors, we see how certain aspects are a common part of the "Study in Norway" experience. Both sides of this experience-- the international student and the host university and city-- can anticipate certain needs to ensure a healthy and positive experience overall. This does not necessarily mean reducing the challenges or stressor the students will face, since some things are merely part of the process (like the weather, or the visa registration), but what is possible to do is give them support and information on behalf of the university as well as through past international students experiences.

Therefore, it becomes evident that universities can play a pivotal role in supporting the well-being of their international student community. Reaching out to international students and providing information on useful skills and behavioral changes and pertinent information has the power to directly and positively impact their emotional and psychological states. Having this consideration provides the opportunity to craft or strengthen existing initiatives such as culturally sensitive counseling services, mentorship programs, or fostering a supportive campus environment.

In this way, universities can proactively address the multifaceted needs of their international students and cultivate an atmosphere conducive to health and success of their diverse student body. Furthermore, guided by these results, it is possible to contemplate ways for the university to align to international efforts to create health promoting campuses and communities.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The experiences of international students are complex and unique. However, it was possible to identify not only some of the main stressors the students from outside the EU/EEA faced but also to understand how they were coping with said stress. This includes, lack of social support, feeling of otherness, different foods, different dressing codes, different everyday languages, lack of sunlight, among others. On the other side, the challenges were met using different resources to cope such as having a new network that supported them, adapting their diet, adopting a new dressing code, self care practices, being highly motivated about the academic opportunities, etc. Moreover, it is important to mention how this research can be a valuable starting point to further conversations regarding the topics of student mobility, globalization, and health promoting universities.

We can also discuss that in fact, the benefits of integration of these students to the university transcend themselves as internationals, but also nurtures the whole student body as they get to have contact with students from all around the world with different opinions, perspectives and experiences. This could present another opportunity to explore what happens in parallel with the local or domestic students and how they perceive international students, whether

they find their participation valuable and why, whether they feel like they have contributed to their study journey and have felt like the opportunities to socialize and mingle with them were there.

All of the above can also be a starting point that builds up into establishing tentative lines of action to not only further understand but also support international student communities in a globalized world where education crosses borders. We have seen how many aspects are involved and influence a person's experience studying abroad. International mobility programs should aim at strengthening the students' sense of coherence and provide adequate resources to promote health in the student community.

For example, group interventions can be a successful way to approach the students given that it was mentioned throughout the literature and in the findings chapter of this research that social support was a big constant resource that provided a sense of belonging, emotional support, among others. So for instance, having a panel with second year international students in Bergen in a friendly space organized by the university during the first weeks of arrival could be beneficial. This panel could touch on topics such as the challenges they faced, their favorite things in Bergen so far and some tips regarding their experiences so far. This kind of event could go beyond just the conversation itself since it could provide a chance to have an informal meeting with the panelists or other participants as well who might have something in common, therefore offering them one of the first chances to socialize and build up new support networks.

Another activity could be offering workshops where international students get to meet and talk about the challenges so far that they have experienced and the tools they believe they have brought with themselves from past experiences living abroad or acquired in past situations. This could be facilitated by the university or a service like Sammen, however, having the topics, stressors and solutions being proposed by themselves can offer a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. In this manner, the goal would be to have them explore their own resources that they may have not realized they already have and strengthen them. It can also work as a display that an important resource they have is each other.

Lastly, the university or educational setting could have a plan to evaluate student environments to examine to what extent they are promoting health. This is linked to the aspect of

for example from things such as incorporating green areas in libraries for cognitive restoration or giving students assignments that involve exploring the nature that Bergen has to offer to making sure material in english is spread throughout the university library to promote integration and avoid international students to be excluded from certain meeting point areas.

As a last point, the research highlights how important it is for these evaluations and interventions and research to be done periodically since these different cohorts of international students through time may have different characteristics. As time goes by, policies change in Norway and political and cultural changes impact the home countries of international students, so will their needs and resources change when preparing to come to Norway and arriving in Bergen to study abroad. In other words, the acculturation process in international students is a dynamic phenomenon more than a static one.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Sociodemographic Data Sheet

Age: _____

Nationality: _____

Gender: () Male () Female () Other/Rather not say: _____

Professed religion: () Christianity () Islam () Hinduism () Buddhism ()
Agnostic/Atheist () Other: NO

Dietary specifications: Vegan () Vegetarian () Pescetarian () Celiac () Other () NO

Mobility program: ___System Dynamics Master_____

Which university/school/institute are you attending in Bergen: _____

Time in Norway so far (in months) : _____

Have you had any other student/academic mobility experience before?: Yes () No ()

Email address: _____

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Appendix B

Guide for individual semi-structured interview:

Area	Objective	Question(s)
<p>General introduction</p>	<p>Building rapport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thanking for agreeing to be interviewed - Handing out informed consent - Filling out together the socio-demographic sheet as a way to build rapport and introduce each other - Could you share a good experience you have had so far during your stay in Bergen?
<p>Life event: intercultural encounter experience & Migration-related life events. For international students in particular, this is the time when they first become aware of the cultural contrasts and affinities between their host university and country.</p>	<p>Understanding their specific mobility status/situation</p> <p>Exploring their general perceptions of the cultural distance between host country (Norway) and home country.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am interested in knowing more about your exchange program/study abroad experience. Why or how did you decide to study in Norway? - Do you consider Norway to be culturally different from your home country? In which ways? How did you notice it? When did you notice it?
<p>Stressors: that will be assessed and evaluated are identified in the second stage & Behaviour adjustments (language, attire, food consumption)</p>	<p>Exploring different aspects of the student that might have suffered changes when moving from one context to the other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were there any aspects of your everyday life that had to change when moving to Bergen? Which ones? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the way you commute to university in Bergen similar to how you commute to university in your home country? - Has there been any changes in the way you eat in Norway and the way you used to eat in your home country? How come?

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has your experience using languages (such as English and Norwegian) in Norway been so far? Have you interacted with these languages before in your home country? - Has the way you dress changed in Norway compared to your home country? Why? In which ways?
<p>Coping: person's use of coping mechanisms to deal with the troubling event. Actual acculturation scenario vs. social and cultural resources the individual has to meet the new demands</p>	<p>Exploring the resources the student might be able to identify when dealing with stressors mentioned before, and in navigating everyday life in a new context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you deal with these changes? - Can you recognize any resource (provided by the university or any other institution) that helped you navigate these changes? Which ones? - Can you recognize any personal knowledge or skills that helped you navigate these changes? Which ones? - What role do you believe friendships and social groups played while navigating these changes?
<p>Stress: immediate psychological and emotional result of the management of the change activities</p>	<p>Exploring any psychological process or experiences closely related to stressful situations or unpleasant emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In regards to these changes. Was there any difficulty (ies) that felt overwhelming or that was a bit harder to overcome? How did that feel? Could you share more about this process?
<p>Adaptation: Integration of long-term consequences into an individual's life</p>	<p>Exploring their perception on their own acculturation process and resolution of said process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What comes to your mind when thinking of "cultural shock"? - Do you believe you have experienced cultural shock? - Do you now feel integrated into Bergen as an international student in the university? How come? To what extent?

Appendix C

Emotional distress protocol

The objective of the research is to explore the experiences of international students from outside the EU/EEA studying in Bergen, Norway. Therefore, a semi-structured in-depth interview guide will be used. The instruments and the sessions contain questions related to the particular experiences of the students in a new cultural context in Bergen, Norway, which may include struggles and overwhelming situations. Therefore, it could be mobilizing for the participants. Within the framework of the ethics of care considerations, this protocol is proposed in order to avoid any harm to the participants. The following procedures will be applied in situations in which they are considered pertinent; their objective is to provide containment and emotional support in the case of a negative reaction in the participant to the topics addressed.

An assisted breathing technique will be prepared in case the participant experiences intense emotions. The following procedures are proposed according to possible critical situations:

Upon the appearance of a significant degree of anxiety on the part of the participant:

- Offer him/her to drink water.
- Perform breathing exercises: inhale and exhale together with the interviewer for a few minutes until he/she feels confident that he/she can continue with the interview, otherwise, offer to terminate his/her participation.
- During the breathing exercise, ask him to pay attention to the in-breath and out-breath only, without modifying the breathing.
- If thoughts arise that interrupt the relaxation process, ask the participant to simply watch the interviewer and return his or her attention to the breathing.

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- Make eye contact with the participant: place him/her in the present and encourage a sense of companionship, in order to make him/her perceive a safe environment and feel that there is someone he/she can trust.
- Ask him/her, over and over again, to return to focusing attention on his/her own breathing, without judging him/herself until he/she is able to calm down.

At the end of the exercise, ask her how she feels and suggest, once again, to end her participation.

In the face of participant crying:

- Stop the interview and provide emotional support to calm the crying.

Indicate that the interview and the recording will be paused. You can start with the following prompt, "Don't worry, we're going to stop everything for a moment."

- Offer to give her a drink of water.
- Start the relaxation exercise with assisted breathing. You can start with the slogan: "Okay, now let's relax for a second and breathe slowly".
- Wait and accompany the participant until he/she calms down.

At the end, ask him/her how he/she feels and propose, once again, to end his/her participation.

In the event of excessive discomfort from the participant when asking questions about his or her experiences related to stereotypical or violent comments received for practicing musical theater:

- Pause the interview and recording to remind him that the information he provides is confidential.

Remind him that no judgment will be made about his answers, as we are only seeking to learn about his experiences and not to make a value judgment about them.

Remind him that, as long as it is his right, he is free to withdraw.

If a problem arises that requires specialized help for the participant in some of the topics touched on during the interview.

- Listen attentively to their needs and provide emotional support if necessary.
- Stop the interview and the recording when the topic or situation that requires specialized help begins to be addressed.
- Remind her that, as a student, the researcher is not trained to provide any psychological care services, but that she will be shared a list of contacts to whom she can be referred for care, if deemed necessary.

Appendix D

Informed Consent

The purpose of this consent form is to provide participants of this research with an explanation of the nature of the research and their role as participants. The present research is conducted by Valeria Turín, a student at the University of Bergen (UiB), as part of her master thesis in Global Development: Theory and Practice and is under the supervision of Dr. Hope Corbin. The objective of the research is to explore the experiences of international students from outside the EU/EEA studying in Bergen, Norway.

Therefore, we are asking you to participate in a 60 minute interview (approximately). The information collected will be recorded and used only for educational and/or publication purposes, following all the ethical and confidentiality considerations mentioned in this informed consent protocol, and not for any other purpose that is not contemplated. Once completed, the audio will be deleted. Only the researcher and the consultant will have access to this recording. Therefore, your participation is voluntary, strictly confidential and does not pose any risk to you. If you have any doubts regarding the development of the work, you are free to ask any questions you consider pertinent. In addition, you may terminate your participation at any time during the interview without any consequence to yourself.

All information collected will be handled with absolute confidentiality, protecting and modifying personal and contextual data that could reveal the identity of the participants. Once the analysis of results has been completed, a return to the participants will be made by mutual agreement through the email address provided by each of them. If you have any questions about this work, you may ask questions at any time during your participation. If you find any of the questions during the interview uncomfortable, you have the right to let the researcher know and not to answer them.

We thank you for your participation in advance

I, _____ give my
consent to participate in the interview and am aware that my participation is entirely voluntary.

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By giving my consent I agree that the interview will be recorded and that the data collected will be treated confidentially, and that some of the data may be used as described in the information sheet detailing the work in which I am participating.

I understand that I may terminate my participation in the study at any time without any prejudice to me. If I have any questions about my participation in the interview, I can contact Valeria Turín Alcedo at vatur7792@uib.no or Hope Corbin at Hope.C@uib.no