



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**

Turku School of
Economics

International Students' Motivation for Academic Mobility and Contribution to Tourism

Economic Geography

Master's thesis

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28.4.2024

Turku

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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Number of pages: 67 pages + appendices 5 pages

Date: 28.4.2024

International academic mobility has increased significantly over the past few decades and discussion has arisen about whether students' motivations for mobility and exchange programs' objectives are in alignment. In theory, international students are considered to be primarily motivated by the completion of degree-level studies at a foreign institution, yet studies have shown that the tourism aspects of the study destination are given more weight than the attributes of the destination university.

Exchange students have been classified as academic tourists, highlighting their importance for the tourism industry of the study destination, yet academic tourism has not been widely researched, especially in Finland. The objective of this study was to examine exchange students' motivations for international mobility and destination choice, as well as tourism-related behaviour during the mobility period. To gain a new perspective to previous research conducted in Europe, Erasmus students and Asian students, who form the majority of incoming exchange students to Finland, were compared regarding their motivations.

This study was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, through which the perspectives of international students who had chosen the city of Turku to undertake student mobility were examined. First, a literature review on the prevalent theories and previous studies on international student mobility was conducted. With a sample of five Erasmus students and five Asian students, an online questionnaire was administered, and semi-structured interviews were carried out, after which the data was analyzed through theory driven content analysis.

The results support the findings of previous research: exchange students consider destination pull-factors more important than university pull-factors and contribute substantially to the tourism sector of the destination country. Despite the wide network of different mobility programs, students' choice of destination was heavily limited by different factors, mainly bilateral agreements between universities. It was also found that Finland as a country was primarily considered the destination as opposed to the city of Turku. Differences between Erasmus students and Asian students were unexpectedly few but occurred both in motivations for mobility and behaviour resembling tourism.

Key words: International mobility, exchange students, academic tourism, travel motivation

Pro gradu -tutkielma

Oppiaine: Talousmaantiede

Tekijä: Emilia Varhi

Otsikko: Kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden motivaatio akateemiseen liikkuvuuteen ja vaikutus turismiin

Ohjaajat: KTT Heli Marjanen, KTT Anna-Maija Kohijoki

Sivumäärä: 67 sivua + liitteet 5 sivua

Päivämäärä: 28.4.2024

Kansainvälinen akateeminen liikkuvuus on lisääntynyt merkittävästi viimeisten vuosikymmenten aikana, ja on syntynyt keskustelua siitä, ovatko opiskelijoiden motivaatiot liikkuvuudelle linjassa vaihto-ohjelmien tavoitteiden kanssa. Teoriassa kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden katsotaan olevan ensisijaisesti motivoituneita suorittamaan tutkinto-opintoja ulkomaisessa oppilaitoksessa, mutta tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, että opiskelijat kiinnittävät enemmän huomiota opiskelukaupungin tai -maan turismitarjontaan kuin kohdeyliopiston ominaisuuksiin. Vaihto-opiskelijat luokitellaan akateemiseksi turisteiksi korostaen heidän merkitystään opiskelukohteen turismisektorille, mutta akateemista turismia ei ole etenäkään Suomessa tutkittu laajalti.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tarkastella vaihto-opiskelijoiden motiiveja kansainväliseen liikkuvuuteen ja kohteen valintaan sekä turismin kaltaista käyttäytymistä liikkuvuusjakson aikana. Tutkimus toi uuden näkökulman Euroopassa aiemmin tehtyyn tutkimukseen vertailemalla Erasmus-opiskelijoita ja aasialaisia opiskelijoita, jotka muodostavat enemmistön Suomeen saapuvista vaihto-opiskelijoista.

Tutkimus suoritettiin yhdistämällä määrällisiä ja laadullisia menetelmiä. Osallistujat olivat vaihto-opiskelijoita, joiden kohteeksi oli valikoitunut Turku. Aluksi toteutettiin kirjallisuuskatsaus, jossa tarkastellaan vallitsevia teorioita ja aiempia tutkimuksia kansainvälisestä opiskelijaliikkuvuudesta. Viidestä Erasmus-opiskelijasta ja viidestä aasialaisesta opiskelijasta koostuvalla otoksella toteutettiin verkkokysely ja puolistrukturoidut teemahaastattelut, joista saatu data analysoitiin teorialähtöisen sisällönanalyysin avulla.

Tulokset tukevat aiempien tutkimusten löydöksiä: vaihto-opiskelijoilla on merkittävä vaikutus kohdemaan turismisektoriin ja he pitävät kohdekaupungin tai -maan vetovoimatekijöitä tärkeämpinä kuin kohdeyliopiston vetovoimatekijöitä. Huolimatta erilaisten liikkuvuusohjelmien laajasta verkostosta, opiskelijoiden kohdevalinta on hyvin rajoitettua, johtuen pääasiassa yliopistojen kahdenvälisistä sopimuksista. Havaittiin myös, että opiskelijat pitävät Suomea pääasiallisena kohteena eivätkä Turun kaupunkia. Eroja Erasmus-opiskelijoiden ja aasialaisten opiskelijoiden välillä esiintyi odotettua vähemmän, mutta niitä ilmeni sekä motivaatioissa liikkuvuudelle että turismin kaltaisessa käytöksessä.

Avainsanat: Kansainvälinen liikkuvuus, vaihto-opiskelijat, akateeminen turismi, matkustusmotivaatio

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	9
1.1	Motivation to study international academic mobility	9
1.2	The purpose of the thesis	11
2	Academic mobility generating tourism	13
2.1	Educational and academic tourism	13
2.2	International students as partial tourists	16
3	Factors influencing international students' touristic behaviour in host countries	21
3.1	Motivation for international mobility	21
3.2	Adaptation process	25
4	Research design	29
4.1	Study area	29
4.1.1	Finland as a destination country	29
4.1.2	Turku as a destination city	30
4.2	Research approach	31
4.3	Data collection	32
4.4	Data analysis	36
5	Findings on Erasmus and Asian students' motivations for mobility and tourism-like behaviour	38
5.1	Motivations for mobility period and destination choice	38
5.1.1	Push-factors - motivations for going to study abroad	38
5.1.2	Pull-factors - choosing Finland and Turku	40
5.2	Tourism-related activities during the mobility period	43
5.2.1	Cultural activity and travel within Finland	43
5.2.2	Travelling to other countries	45
5.2.3	Visitors received	46
5.3	Satisfaction with the mobility period	47
5.3.1	Adapting to the new culture	47
5.3.2	Satisfaction with the destination	49
6	Discussion	53

6.1 Tourism-related aspects prioritized over academic purposes	53
6.2 Differences in motivations and behaviour between Erasmus and Asian students	56
7 Summary and conclusions	59
References	61
Appendices	67
Appendix 1 Questionnaire	67
Appendix 2 Interview questions	70

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of international students completing a mobility period in Finland and Turku.	10
Figure 2. Conceptualizing educational tourism.	15
Figure 3. International students' influences on tourism beyond their core education.	19
Figure 4. Push and pull factors in travel motivation.	21
Figure 5. Path model of travel consumer satisfaction.	24
Figure 6. Participants' answers to questionnaire items about motivation for mobility.	38
Figure 7. Participants' answers to questionnaire items about destination choice.	41
Figure 8. Number of countries and Finnish cities visited by participants.	45
Figure 9. Compulsory and voluntary divisions of motivation in choosing Finland as a destination.	56

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Traveller and tourist types.	18
Table 2. Participant information (E = European, A = Asian)	34
Table 3. Number of visitors received by participants.	46

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation to study international academic mobility

As one of the several effects of globalization, the international mobility of students in higher education has been growing consistently over the past two decades (OECD 2021; Rodríguez et al. 2012, 1584). The number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside of their country of residence had been increasing by approximately 5,5% per year since 1998, until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Before the pandemic in 2019, 6,1 million tertiary students worldwide had moved to another country to study. (OECD 2021.)

International student mobility encompasses degree students, who complete a whole degree abroad, and exchange students, who go on a shorter mobility period as part of their degree (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018a). This study focuses on the latter group, international exchange students, and their decision to come to Finland, more precisely to Turku. The objective is to examine the students' motivations and tourism-like activities, and although there are more degree students in Finland than exchange students (which is in part explained by the degree students staying for several years), it is more interesting to focus on exchange students. Compared to degree students, exchange students have less pressure to advance their studies during the mobility period and thus it can be expected that their motives are less educational. Instead of being study-oriented they may want to experience as much of the destination country as possible. Additionally, as opposed to degree students, exchange students (including non-EU/EEA students) are not required to pay tuition fees if they are registered at a foreign university and study in Finland as part of an official program (Studyinfo 2024). Since they do not have to invest in tuition fees, they may be prone to spend more money on tourism. With all this in mind, it is interesting to find out, what makes exchange students choose Finland and Turku since mobility programs usually offer destinations worldwide.

Following COVID-19, there has been a resurgence in the activity of international student mobility in Finland (see Figure 1). There have traditionally been more incoming than outgoing students, and accordingly, the number of incoming students has recovered faster and is likely to reach and surpass pre-pandemic figures soon. (EDUFI 18.04.2023.) In 2022, nearly 85% of the students completing a mobility period in Finland were from Europe, with Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, and Belgium as the most

common countries of origin (Vipunen 2023). The reason for such high level of activity within Europe is the Erasmus program which has aimed to promote cooperation between universities and higher education institutions across Europe ever since its establishment in 1987 (European Commission n.d.). Asia was the second largest continent of origin accounting for approximately 10% of incoming exchange students (Vipunen 2023).

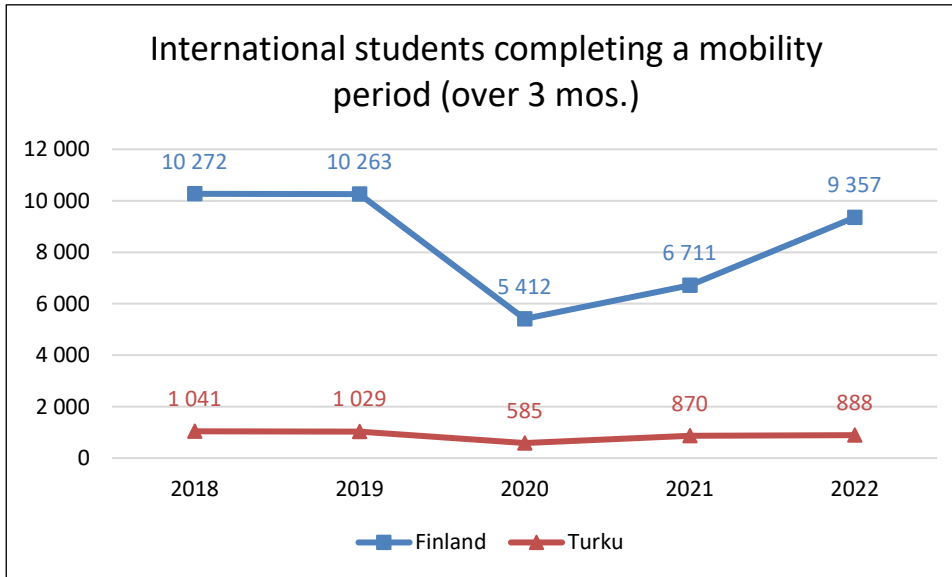


Figure 1. Number of international students completing a mobility period in Finland and Turku (Vipunen 2023).

In practice, the number of incoming international students in universities has already reached the same level as before the pandemic, while in universities of applied sciences the student mobility figures have not recovered as quickly (EDUFI 18.04.2023). In Figure 1, Turku's numbers are formed by the city's three largest universities: University of Turku (UTU), Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS), and Åbo Akademi University (ÅA). COVID-19 cut the number of incoming international students to Turku by half, but the universities have recovered at a similar rate to the rest of Finland.

The international student market presents a significant opportunity for the local and national tourism industry (López et al. 2016; Weaver 2003), and the economic impact on cities hosting the students must be highlighted (Rodríguez et al. 2012, 1584). Differing from typical tourists, international students benefit the local community more broadly through non-tourism economy, e.g. the housing market and grocery stores. The economic advantages that international students bring to the regions where they study are particularly important for areas that might not otherwise attract many international

visitors. (Weaver 2003, 96.) While the number of international students compared to traditional tourists is small, their importance is much higher. Regarding overnight stays, a typical Erasmus student is equivalent to about 50 conventional tourists who, on average, spend 3,8 nights in Finland (Visit Finland 2018). This relevance further increases if the student receives visitors or goes on trips to other parts of the country. A significantly longer stay compared to conventional tourists also lessens tourism's dependency on seasonal factors. (Rodríguez et al. 2012, 1589.)

López et al. (2016, 136) distinguish two separate impacts international students have on the tourism industry. Depending on the length of their stay, the students may directly qualify as tourists and, in any case, may act tourist-like with their consumption. Second, during their stay, the students may receive visitors whose activities must also be considered. (López et al. 2016, 136.) This is also recognized by the Erasmus program, which encourages government stakeholders and society as a whole to consider how Erasmus students, together with visiting family and friends, raise economic activity and tax revenues by buying products and services (ESN 2015, 10). Weaver (2003, 97) observes two additional aspects: the influence the international student has on other students to study in a particular foreign country and the possible return visits once the international student has graduated in their home country. In an ideal situation, the student would not only want to visit Finland again in the future but also decide to settle in the country. Attracting international students plays an important role in finding solutions to Finland's shortage of workers, which is why, in the case of foreign degree students, Finland has taken steps to make it easier for them to stay and find work in Finland after graduation. (Finnish Immigration Service 11.11.2022.)

1.2 The purpose of the thesis

While academic purposes should be the primary motivation to undertake international student exchange, studies have shown personal, leisure-related factors to be of more importance as motivational factors. Universities may wish international students to be attracted to their quality of education, but travel and leisure-related destination attributes hold more weight. (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008.) Within Europe, the Mediterranean countries are the most popular exchange destinations due to their pleasant climate (Rodríguez González et al. 2010, 427). It is, therefore, interesting to examine what motivates international students to choose Finland, a country known for cold

weather and darkness, as their destination, and what kind of tourism-related activities the students carry out during their exchange.

Research on the tourism impacts of students undertaking study at overseas universities has been limited (García-Rodríguez & Jiménez 2015, 176; Weaver 2003; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008) and most of the European studies about international students and tourism in the destination country tend to focus only on Erasmus students (e.g. García-Rodríguez & Jiménez 2015; Lesjak et al. 2015). For this reason, this study shaped out to be a comparative study between European students and Asian students, the second largest group of incoming exchange students to Finland. The geographical and cultural distance, as well as the differences in mobility programs, experienced by Asian students are significant compared to Erasmus students, who even when moving abroad, are keeping to the familiar European setting. It can be expected that these two groups will have contrasting experiences regarding their motivations and activities. Gaining a greater understanding of what motivates students to undertake an educational exchange, as well as the factors they consider important in choosing their destination will enable host locations and universities to attract more international students. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What motivates international students to study abroad?
- What motivates students to choose Finland or Turku as their study destination?
- How do international students contribute to tourism beyond the core educational experience?
- How do these motives and tourism-related activities differ between Erasmus and Asian students?

The study was carried out using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, with a focus on qualitative methods. Ten international students studying in various higher education institutions in Turku were interviewed. Five of them were Erasmus students and five were from Asian countries. A literature review of the central themes was conducted and a theoretical framework was built based on previous studies. The framework guided both the creation of the data collection tools (a short questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) and the analysis of the empirical material.

2 Academic mobility generating tourism

2.1 Educational and academic tourism

The growth of tourism has been fuelled by the growth of leisure time combined with an increase in disposable income, driving people's desire to engage in holidays both domestically and internationally. It is difficult to determine the precise magnitude of the tourism industry because there is no universally accepted definition of tourism. (Ritchie 2003, 2.) As Smith (1988, 181) pointed out: "there are many different legitimate definitions of tourism that serve many different, legitimate needs", which implies that the definitions vary depending on the motivations of the organization or individual trying to define tourism. There are different components to defining tourism, which range from the tourists themselves to the tourism industry and the host community or destination. As such, tourism can be viewed as a system of components with several interrelated factors (Ritchie 2003, 2-3):

- On the *demand side*, there is the tourist market encompassing characteristics such as motives, perceptions, and socio-demographics.
- The *supply side* involves the tourism industry including components like transport, attractions, services, and information, which in combination form a tourist destination area.
- The *tourism impact side* addresses the repercussions of tourism, with both direct and indirect positive and negative effects on destination areas and the tourists themselves.
- The *origin–destination approach* illustrates the interdependence of generating and receiving destinations, transit destinations, and their associated demand, supply, and impacts.

The growth of tourism on a global scale, combined with the search for novel destinations and experiences, has added to the questioning of tourism's impacts. This has led to a demand for alternative forms of tourism. The issues tied to mass tourism, including its transformative effect on destinations and adverse impacts on host communities, have prompted a shift towards embracing more "soft" or sustainable forms of tourism, giving rise to the development of niche markets such as rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, and cultural heritage tourism. (Ritchie 2003, 4.) This is also why the linkage between education and tourism has gained interest among academics and managers of

tourism products and destinations. It is argued that tourists who are motivated by the desire to learn and be educated have a more positive impact on destinations than those driven by hedonistic motivations. (Weaver 2003, 95.) Singular destinations are not the only ones to benefit from tourists willing to learn, since learning through travel also enhances “global citizenship” which according to Schattle (2009, 12) entails “being aware of responsibilities beyond one’s immediate communities and making decisions to change habits and behavior patterns accordingly”.

During the last few decades, educational and learning experiences within tourism have been increasing, especially the variety of possibilities for school groups and university students. This form of tourism does not only cater to the youth, since with the rise of life-long learning and the growing mass of pensioners with disposable income, educational travel is also targeted to senior citizens. The wide demographic range of educational tourists makes travel for education a complicated area of study, as the tourists’ objectives for the learning experience differ, ranging from informal journeys of self-discovery to formal academic courses involving study credits. (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017.) As Ritchie (2003, 17) points out: “an educational tourist experience could consist of a 30-minute visit to a museum, or a three-year degree undertaken partly in a foreign country.”

Ritchie’s (2003, 11-13) segmentation model of educational tourism (Figure 2) has been considered a standard on the subject ever since its conception. The model illustrates a number of potential educational tourism market segments and the relationship between education, tourism, and the changing external environment. In the segments falling towards the “tourism first” end, travel is a primary motivating factor and purposeful learning is secondary. Falling towards the “education first” end are for example school excursions, language schools, and university or college student experiences, all of which are primarily motivated by education and learning. Even though the individuals participating in these experiences may not view themselves as tourists, they have an impact on regional if not national tourism and development (Ritchie 2003, 18).

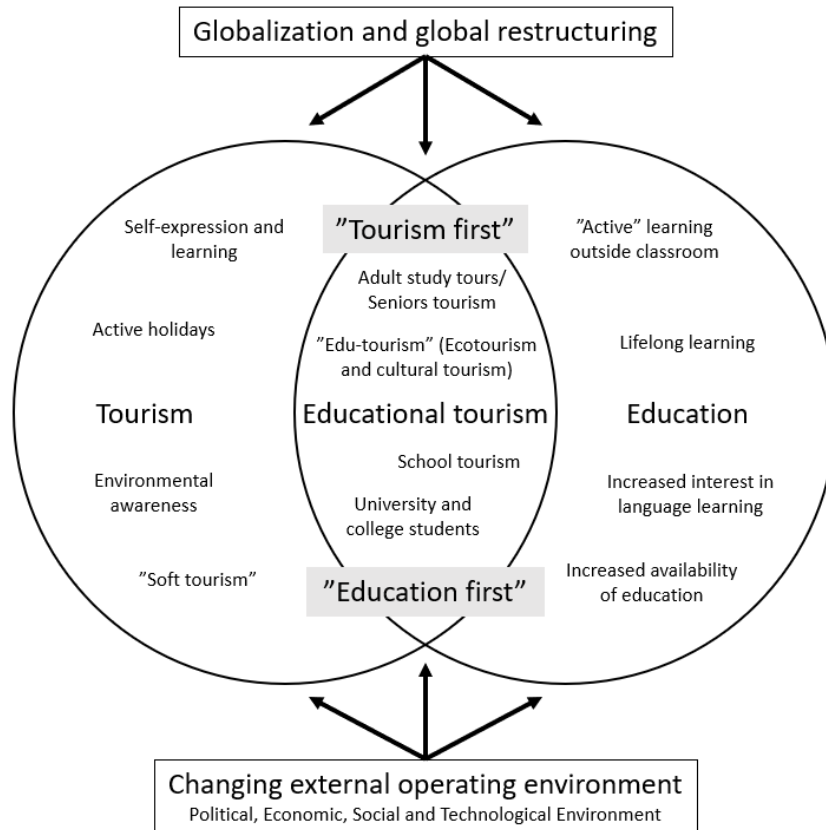


Figure 2. Conceptualizing educational tourism (adapted from Ritchie (2003, 13)).

While Ritchie's model helps conceptualize the overlap between tourism and education, it has been criticized for presuming people's motivational factors and falsely compartmentalizing them based on demographics (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017). For example, for many senior tourists, lifelong learning is a primary motivation, but senior tourism is positioned as a "tourism first" activity in the model (Pitman et al. 2010). Additionally, assuming that travel is motivated either primarily or secondarily by the desire to learn has been seen as problematic. For example, schoolchildren may have no desire to learn on a trip and could be motivated by spending time with friends or avoiding some less-appealing activity. (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017.)

Pitman et al. (2011) summarized that "educational tourism can be defined as non-formal learning: the intent to learn is deliberate, the experience is to some degree led and controlled by a knowledgeable expert, however the resulting 'education' is not assessed or otherwise quantified", making it problematic to categorize international student mobility purely as educational tourism. Rodríguez et al. (2012, 1583) agree that international student mobility has its characteristics which clearly differ from other types

of travelers, naming this kind of mobility “academic tourism” and defining it as “a distinct type of tourism that would include any stays made in higher education institutions in places outside their usual environment for a period of less than one year, the main objective of which is to complete degree-level studies in universities and/or attending language courses organized by these centres.” Drawing from this, academic tourism can be seen as a subcategory of educational tourism, comprising the “education first” end of Ritchie’s model. McGladdery and Lubbe (2017) seem to agree, saying that while educational tourism can be applied to all stages of life, “international educational tourism” (by which they essentially describe academic tourism), is usually considered a tertiary level educational phenomenon.

Apart from the purpose of the stay (participating in studies), Rodríguez et al. (2012, 1584) recognize other particularities of academic tourism:

- A longer length of stay than in other types of tourism
- Consumption patterns similar to those of residents rather than those of conventional tourists
- Types of accommodation differing from conventional tourists (shared apartments, dorms, local families, college-organized housing)
- High capacity of new visits, e.g. receiving friends and family as visitors during the stay

There are several reasons for the growth of international student mobility in higher education, but according to Rodríguez et al. (2012, 1584), they can all be classified under two broader categories. On the one hand, there’s a growing interest for students to educate themselves in a global context, referring for example to the interest in learning new languages, experiencing other cultures and customs, and making new friends. On the other hand, there are reasons related to countries increasingly promoting university mobility, for example in the form of grants, agreements, and exchange programs. (Rodríguez et al. 2012, 1584.)

2.2 International students as partial tourists

International students are a unique group of temporary travellers, with a great impact on the tourism industry of their destination country yet classifying them as tourists is not simple. The lack of attention on international students as part of the tourism industry is

the result of several factors, such as the absence of an intuitive connection between long-term study and tourism, as well as the fact that in most countries international students form only a small proportion of total visitor flows. Yet, as they stay in the destination far longer than conventional tourists, these students create an economic impact that is disproportionate to their actual numbers. (Weaver 2003, 96-97.)

According to Cohen (1974, 533), “a 'tourist' is a voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round-trip”. He also suggests that studying abroad is one of the most common forms of partial tourism, since for international students the trip is a means to advancing their degree while abroad, yet, especially in the case of short-time international students, there is a conflict between furthering one’s studies and acting as a tourist (Cohen 1974, 542). Education and broadening of personality were among the main motivations already for early tourism, particularly The Grand Tour, which was a culminating experience in the education of English upper-class men. These young aristocrats were exposed to different cultures, arts, languages, and politics while travelling around the continent. In fact, the term “tourist” is derived from “tour”, meaning a circuit during which several places are visited for the purpose of business, pleasure, or education. (Leiper 1983, 278; Cohen 1974, 529.)

Many of the widely quoted definitions of the tourism field originate from the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) guidelines on statistical data collection standards. UNWTO defines tourism as the multifaceted activities of persons referred to as visitors. The term visitor is clarified as “someone who is travelling under certain conditions, namely, for holiday, leisure and recreation, business, health, education or other purposes”. These conditions also demand that the duration of the trip must be less than a year and the traveller should not be seeking employment in the country or place visited. (UNWTO 2010, 1-2, 10.) As such, while all international students are non-resident travellers, whether they are considered visitors depends on their length of stay. Those with a study period lasting less than one year are considered visitors whereas students enrolled for more than a year (e.g. degree students) should be regarded as part of the environment in their study location, and thus be excluded from visitors. (UNWTO 2010, 20-21.) Therefore, accounting these definitions and conditions, the term “tourist” can be used to refer to travellers who move away from their usual place of residence for less than one year with the purpose of study. Should these studies take place in higher

education institutions, the term “academic tourist” can be used. Naturally, a distinction between domestic academic tourism (when moving within the country) and international academic tourism (when moving abroad) can be made. (Rodriguez et al. 2012, 1584.) As this study focuses on the activities of international students, the term academic tourism is used to refer to the latter phenomenon. For the sake of this study’s coherence, relevant traveller and tourist types are characterized in Table 1.

Table 1. Traveller and tourist types.

Type	Definition
Traveller	Someone who moves between different geographic locations for any purpose and any duration (UNWTO 2010, 9).
Visitor	A traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited (UNWTO 2010, 10).
Tourist	A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) whose trip includes an overnight stay (UNWTO 2010, 10). A voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round-trip (Cohen 1974, 533).
Partial tourist	A tourist who is not travelling only for novelty and change; travel may also contain varying degrees and forms of both noninstrumental (e.g. pleasure, recreation, culture) and instrumental (e.g. economic, political, religious) purposes (Cohen 1974, 532, 541).
Educational tourist	A person who is away from their home town or country overnight, where education and learning are either the main reason for their trip or where education and learning are secondary reasons but are perceived as an important way of using leisure time (Ritchie 2003, 18).
Academic tourist	Travellers who move abroad for less than one year with the purpose of study in a higher education institution (UNWTO 2010, 20-21; Rodriguez et al. 2012, 1584).
International (or internationally mobile) student	Individuals who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin (UIS n.d.).

International students contribute substantially and directly to the conventional tourism sector in their destination country, for example by traveling for noneducational purposes during their stay (Weaver 2003, 96-97). Weaver (2003, 101) modelled five types of tourism activity generated by international students beyond their presence as educational or academic tourists (Figure 3).

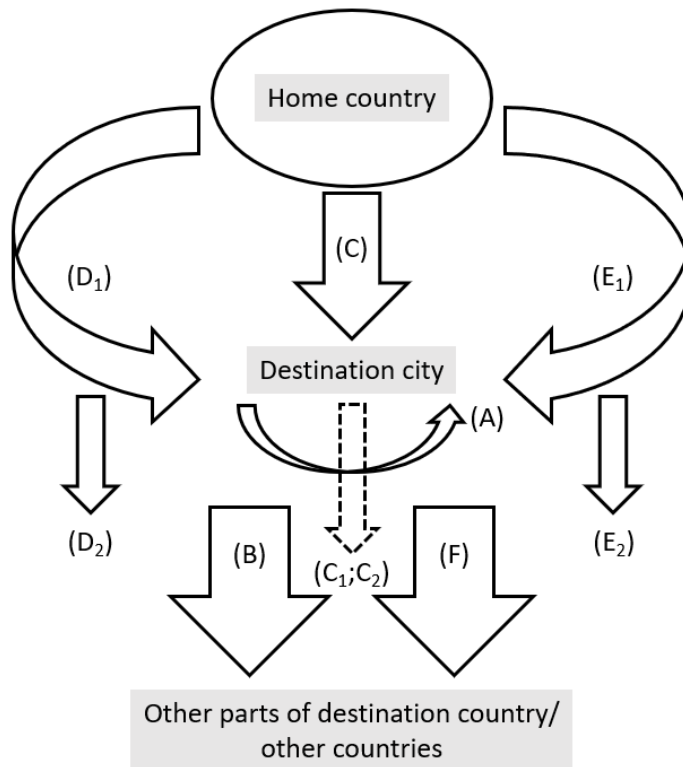


Figure 3. International students' influences on tourism beyond their core education (adapted from Weaver (2003, 101)).

First, international students studying at the destination university may visit local tourist attractions during their mobility period (A in Figure 3). Second, students may travel within their country of study for tourism-related purposes, undertaking either organized or independent travel (B). Third (C), the student may be visited by friends and family from their home country, motivated primarily by a desire to spend time with the student. Some of these visits may include (and in part be motivated by) a trip together with the student to other parts of the country (C₁). There is also the possibility that while visiting the student is the primary motivation, the friends or family may carry out further travel in the country without the student's company (C₂). Fourth (D), the student may have been influenced to study in the destination country or university by previous international students and may in the future influence other students to make the same move. This influence is usually directed towards the current host university (D₁) but may also result in others choosing a different university although in the same country (D₂). Lastly (E), the students might make return visits to the host country in the future. These trips may be taken to the local area where they undertook their studies (E₁), or to other parts of the country (E₂). (Weaver 2003, 100-101.) Weaver created the model to reflect the

international student body in Australia and thus did not include students' trips to other countries. As the model is part of this current study's theoretical framework, F was added to present a sixth type of tourism activity: students visiting other countries during their mobility period.

3 Factors influencing international students' touristic behaviour in host countries

3.1 Motivation for international mobility

To better understand the motivations of international students and their differences compared to traditional tourists, it is necessary to examine the existing theories of travel motivation. Dann (1977) made a significant contribution to travel motivation theory by creating a two-tiered framework of “push” and “pull” factors (Figure 4). Push factors are internal to the individual and deal with tourist motivation, while pull factors relate to the attributes of a travel destination. According to the framework, individuals are driven to travel by socio-psychological, innate, and intangible factors (e.g. nostalgia, wish to escape). These forces originate from within the individual, influencing their decision to embark on a journey. Conversely, destination attributes (e.g. the 4S's of tourism: Sand, Sea, Sun, and Sex), which act as pull forces, satisfy the unmet needs of the tourist, acting as magnets that attract them to a particular location. (Dann 1977, 186; 1981.)

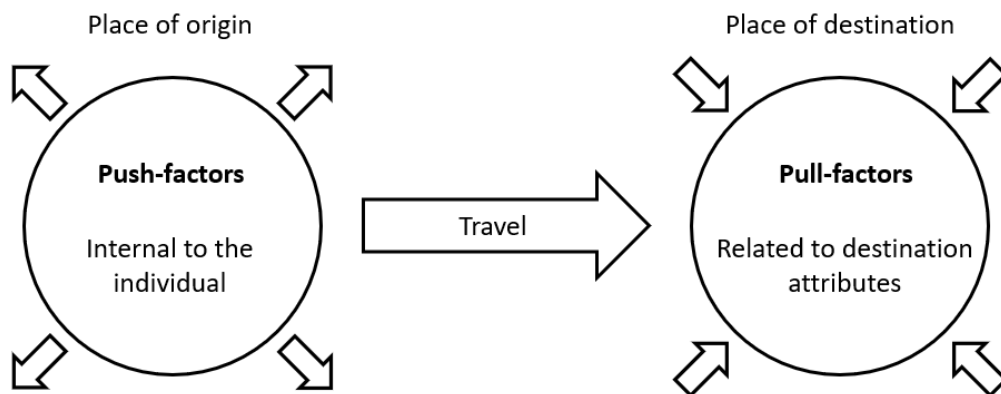


Figure 4. Push and pull factors in travel motivation (adapted from Dann (1977) and Alvarez and Müller-Eie (2018, 269)).

Through travel, a traditional tourist seeks an alternative world, a fantasy of sorts. Ordinary life becomes bearable when there are chances of occasional escape from it, and travel becomes the ideal outlet. Additionally, travel permits the individual to indulge in behaviour that would perhaps be frowned upon in their home environment: wearing flashy clothes, getting drunk, listening to loud local music, or adopting a more liberal attitude towards sexuality. (Dann 1977, 187-188.) Cohen (1979, 188) agrees saying that it's the inauthenticity of life in the tourist's own society which motivates the tourist for

their quest for authenticity in the first place. It might be argued that international students have access to more authentic experiences than traditional tourists. Tourists are often motivated by a desire to see life as it is truly lived, even to become acquainted with natives, yet at the same time, they are deprecated for failing to achieve these goals (MacCannell 1973, 592.). The opportunity to interact with local students has been identified as one of the important motivational factors in deciding to undertake an exchange program (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008, 603).

The pull factors have been disproportionately highlighted when seeking to explain why tourists travel. While a destination may have several attributes that attract a potential tourist, the actual decision to visit the destination is consequent to the tourist's prior need for travel (i.e. the push factors). (Dann 1977, 186.) Similar findings have been made concerning international students: push factors such as the desire to travel, to have fun, and social interaction were considered the primary motivation instead of the pull attributes of the chosen destination and university. Students are first motivated to study overseas, which leads to the selection of the host country and university. (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008, 601; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, 84.)

While the previous chapter explained that, in theory, international students are academic tourists with their primary motivation being the completion of degree studies in a foreign institution, in reality, studies show these students to be 'tourism first' educational tourists, with travel being their primary motivation and the educational component being of secondary importance (Pinto et al. 2021; Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008; García-Rodríguez & Jiménez 2015; Quintela et al. 2022). As García-Rodríguez and Jiménez (2015) concluded in their study on Erasmus students in the Canary Islands, the general motivations for academic exchange have more to do with personal rather than academic development. This was also noted by Pinto et al. (2021) who found out that international students in Curitiba, Brazil, have similar motivations and experiences as leisure tourists. Similar results were presented by Quintela et al. (2022) on Erasmus mobility in Porto, Portugal, where the main drivers for selecting Porto as a destination for academic mobility were related to the positive characteristics of the region, not the quality or prestige of the university. Of course, the academic prestige of the destination country or university can't be ruled out as a motivating factor, but it's often not the primary one. This issue has long been present, and the students' motivations have been questioned. For example, in the

case of the Erasmus program, it has been brought up that there is a “danger of misusing public funds to finance leisure pursuits”. (Rodríguez González et al. 2010, 425, 427.)

Rodríguez et al. (2012), who studied academic tourism in Galicia, Spain, concluded that academic tourism demand depends mainly on factors that are not strictly economic. International students’ habits and preferences, which are shaped every year through various channels such as university agreements, the reputation and attractiveness of host institutions, and word-of-mouth (WoM), play a crucial role. Additionally, the ease of mobilization through the Erasmus program contributes to the overall demand. Among the economic factors, only the costs of travelling proved to be significant, which reflects the importance of geographical proximity, as the international students who enrolled in Galician universities came from countries located relatively close. (Rodríguez et al. 2012, 1589.) Similar findings were made by Rodríguez González et al. (2010) who described Erasmus mobility as a dual phenomenon. On the one hand, student mobility is influenced by the economic variables mentioned above along with the price level of the host country, as well as variables that support the student’s career prospects, such as the relevance of the host country’s language. On the other hand, there’s a tendency to choose countries with a warm climate, which implies student mobility is seen as a leisure activity. (Rodríguez González et al. 2010, 425-426.)

The decision whether to study or travel in the mobility destination is based on the student’s image of the destination country, which in turn is formed and influenced by a range of information sources. These sources include tourism-specific information sources, media, previous visits, and word-of-mouth as well as education-specific resources. Thus, the destination image is composed of general awareness of the country, views on education in the country, and perceptions regarding travel. (Glover 2011.) The travel motivations of international students are heightened by the fact that most of these students lack the desire or ability to stay in the host country beyond their time at a university. Thus, they may want to see as much of the country as possible during their stay. (Babin & Kim 2001, 94.) Regarding the economic aspects of this kind of mobility, despite the financial support granted by the EU or other institutions, differences in the costs of living and geographical distances are still relevant factors in student mobility flows (Rodríguez González et al. 2010, 427). An assumption can be made that for students motivated to travel during their mobility period, countries with lower price levels, as well

as destinations acting as hubs for either in-country or international travel are especially attractive.

Babin & Kim (2001) studied the impact of travel destination characteristics and consumer involvement on international students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their travel experience. A satisfying experience could be produced through both hedonic and utilitarian factors (Figure 5). Attributes related to safety, educational benefits and perceptions of fun were considered destination attractors, whereas consumer travel involvement was investigated by examining the planning efforts put forth before a trip. (Babin & Kim 2001, 94.)

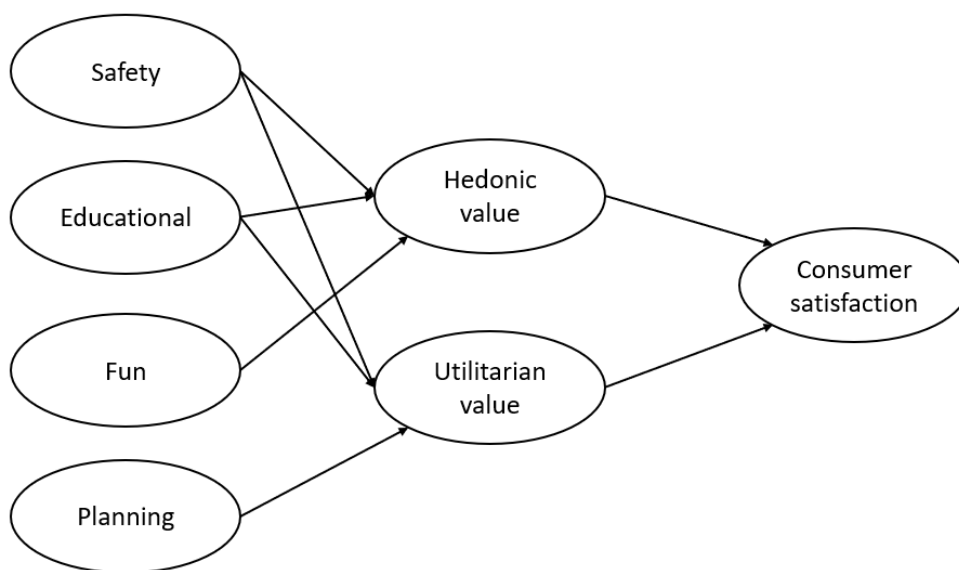


Figure 5. Path model of travel consumer satisfaction (adapted from Babin and Kim (2001, 96)).

International students face many unknowns in the host country and their perception of safety has a great impact on their experience. Feeling unsafe decreases the spontaneity and activity of the student, limiting their life during the mobility period. Satisfaction is also brought by the educational benefits of the student's time abroad: bettering oneself and learning through travel has a positive impact on the students' experience. Naturally, travel behaviour is largely motivated by the desire to have fun, and the students' satisfaction is in part dependent on their recreational activities being successful. International students, just like any travellers, differ in whether they plan their trips well beforehand or not. Some may prefer more spontaneous trips whereas others plan every detail months in advance. In any case, if one has certain expectations of a trip, planning facilitates greater fulfilment of those expectations. (Babin & Kim 2001, 96-98.)

Students' awareness of the host country and its institutions is critical in the process of attracting international students. Word-of-mouth is an important source of information for students both when gathering information about tourism destinations and when choosing a destination for academic mobility. (Michael et al. 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, 90; Rodríguez et al. 2012.) Alumni of a particular institution are likely to recommend it to their family, friends, and even acquaintances, making the reach of their influence significant (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, 85). Since students are likely to use social media platforms to search for information about a destination or institution, an even wider reach is gained through electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM), which is defined as "any positive or negative information made by present or previous consumers about products/services, which is made available to other consumers via the internet" (Henning-Thurau et al. 2004).

3.2 Adaptation process

Adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, coping, adjustment, and integration are just a few examples of the various terms that have been used to refer to what is essentially the same process experienced by immigrants and travellers in unfamiliar cultures (Kim 2000, 31). All of these terms can be incorporated into the more generic concept of cross-cultural adaptation, which Kim (2000, 31) defines as "the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments."

Although certain experiences of cross-cultural adaptation are shared by everyone involved in a new and unfamiliar environment, Kim (2000, 15-17) addresses the divergence between immigrants and refugees settling into a new culture more or less permanently, and the short-term adaptation of temporary travellers, such as international students. Immigrants who establish long-term residence in a new culture tend to display a higher commitment to adaptation compared to temporary travellers. Additionally, short-term travellers may not always be held to the same standards of culturally appropriate behaviour by their hosts; their occasional missteps are often forgiven as long as they display genuine interest or respect for the host culture. (Kim 2000, 17.)

Most researchers have tended to view cross-cultural adaptation as an undesirable experience, thus justifying their studies as scientific efforts to find ways to ease the

distress. This problem-based perspective becomes apparent in addressing the adaptation process as culture shock (i.e. a negative experience). (Kim 2000, 17.) Oberg (1960) first coined the term culture shock in reference to “the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” and defined it as a disease. Adler (1975) proposes a contradicting view: culture shock indicates “the attempt to comprehend, survive in, and grow through immersion in a second culture”, and as such contributes positively to cultural learning, self-development, and personal growth.

Oberg (1960) conceptualized the process of culture shock in four sequential and cyclical stages. There are different views on the number and quality of the stages (see e.g. Adler 1975), but Oberg’s perception has been the most popular one and drawing on it, Winkelman (1994) lists the four phases as follows:

1. The honeymoon or tourist phase
2. The crises or cultural shock phase
3. The adjustment, reorientation, and gradual recovery phase
4. The adaptation, resolution, or acculturation phase

The initial stage, referred to as the “honeymoon stage”, is characterized by a fascination with the new environment and an overall enjoyable experience, which can last from a few days to six months. During this phase, individuals tend to romanticize their initial immersion in the novel environment. (Oberg 1960.) The first stage is the opposite of what culture shock is defined as. The experiences of honeymooners, vacationers, and business people are largely limited to institutes (hotels, resorts, businesses, airports) which isolate them from having to interact with the local culture in a genuine way. (Winkelman 1994.) However, a transition occurs into a second stage characterized by aggressiveness and discomfort, where individuals start to develop hostility towards their host environment. For some individuals, the crises phase may start immediately upon arrival while for some it takes several weeks. Differences and problems become overwhelming, and the locals seem indifferent to these worries. One finds innumerable reasons to dislike and criticize the culture. This is the stage where the individual either overcomes the hardships or leaves the environment. (Oberg 1960; Winkelman 1994.) Over time, individuals may progress to a third stage of acculturation or acceptance of their host environment. The resolution of cultural shock lies in learning how to make an acceptable adaptation to the new culture, and although all the problems do not suddenly disappear, the individual recognizes that

they stem from the inability to understand, accept, and adapt. During this stage of adjustment, reorientation and recovery, the individual develops problem-solving skills and an appreciation of the new culture. However, some individuals adjust to the environment without true adaptation, for example by living in an ethnic enclave and avoiding substantial learning about the new culture. (Winkelman 1994.) In the final stage, the customs of the new environment are accepted as just another way of living. An effective adaptation will lead to personal change and the integration of new cultural aspects into one's life. (Oberg 1960; Winkelman 1994.)

In Oberg's (1960) description of the process of culture shock, the first stage only begins when the individual arrives in the new environment. Adler (1975) argues that the initial contact with the second culture often takes place when the individual is still physically present in their own culture. At the time of Adler's publication, technology and social media had not yet taken on the role of catalysts for global social integration, as they have in the 21st century, but the distinction he made has worked as a foundation for modern perceptions of culture shock (e.g. Pacheco 2020).

It is essential to recognize that technological advancements over the last three decades, which have contributed to globalization and the acquisition of virtual cultural knowledge, have also had a significant impact on the acculturation process of international travellers. Travellers are proactively introduced to a range of cultural, social, and even environmental aspects of their intended host environment, which were previously attainable only through physical contact and immersion. (Pacheco 2020.) It has been acknowledged that the timing and depth of the crises stage of culture shock depends, among other factors, on the preparation the individual has done (e.g. Oberg 1960; Winkelman 1994; Kim 2000, 21). Arguably, the shock international students used to experience upon arriving in a new host environment, partly due to their lack of familiarity and inaccurate expectations about their new socio-cultural surroundings, has been diminished by the impact of globalization (Pacheco 2020). Given that the majority of applications to higher education institutions are submitted online, it is reasonable to assume that most international students have internet access. Being able to access a seemingly endless amount of information about their host country, they can prepare for the exchange period thoroughly, acquiring information about price levels, accommodation alternatives, typical weather patterns, common food items, street views, and public transport.

One contributor to international student stress is lack of engagement with one's own culture (Pacheco 2020). Winkelman (1994, 123-124) points out that although adaptation requires the individual to temporarily set aside some culturally rooted reactions to become more tolerant of the local culture, they don't have to give up on their identity, values, and cultural background. Individuals such as international students can effectively navigate culture shock without making major changes in their personality or existing lifestyle. The difficulty lies in achieving this in a new cultural setting that lacks the familiar support systems. (Winkelman 1994, 123-124.) Furnham and Bochner (1982, 164) further point out that sojourners can be strategic in what they learn, employing enough behavioural traits to navigate their surroundings without necessarily comprehending or embracing the unfamiliar culture. They can consciously decide to keep to their habits as they acknowledge their stay abroad is temporary. It's not worth it to change one's habits and customs only to do it again upon returning home. (Krzaklewska & Skórska 2013, 116.)

Winkelman (1994, 124) talks about maintenance behaviours, which are "ongoing activities that are necessary for maintaining one's cultural sense of identity and sense of well-being", but which may also stem from resistance to cultural adaptation. Examples of these behaviours include conversing in one's native language, consuming the foods of one's own culture, reading books and newspapers from home, or talking and interacting with home nationals (Winkelman 1994, 124). It is common for international students to seek out fellow countrymen to reduce the stress the new environment creates (Furnham & Bochner 1982; Krzaklewska & Skórska 2013, 115). International students forming groups with fellow nationals or other foreign students and avoiding mixing with the locals is often criticized precisely because of it restricting cultural learning, yet Krzaklewska and Skórska (2013, 123) defend this phenomenon by stating that the circles of foreign students provide a secure and relatable environment for learning and a safe source of information to counter the high stress levels.

Although globalization has led to the reconceptualization of culture shock, it does not mean that international students are entirely immune to experiencing homesickness, discomfort, and vulnerability when they arrive and spend time in their host countries. The point is that individuals who choose to embark on cross-cultural journeys are no longer as naive about the various aspects of their sojourn as they might have been before. Consequently, they may not react as extremely as was once commonplace. (Pacheco 2020.)

4 Research design

4.1 Study area

4.1.1 Finland as a destination country

Since Finland has kept its popularity as a study destination both among degree students even after the introduction of the tuition fees and among non-degree students all the while (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018a; 2018b), there must be certain aspects that draw students to Finland year-round. The country's selling points regarding these aspects are contemplated to create an image of Finland as a tourist and study destination.

Finland's central selling point is its nature. The Finnish landscape is characterized by thousands of lakes and islands, shaped by its unique geography and climate, which contribute to a distinctive way of life for its inhabitants. Finnish nature has a high appeal for tourists and the symbolism of its two main attractions, the Northern Lights, and the Midnight Sun, is deeply embedded in Finnish folklore, and culture. Similarly, unique concepts associated with Finland and attracting tourists are Santa Claus and saunas. (Visit Finland 2023.)

The Finnish climate is characterized by mild summers and harsh winters, with temperatures ranging from 30°C in the summer to -30°C in the winter (Finnish Meteorological Institute 2024). The differences in temperatures between Southern and Northern Finland are significant in the sense that winter and summer look very different between Lapland and the more densely populated south. This extreme climate greatly influences Finnish life and culture, marked by heavy snowfall and extended periods of either darkness or daylight. Despite being one of Europe's largest countries by land area, the population density is low which allows for plenty of undisturbed nature and peace and quiet. More than 75% of the land area in Finland is covered by forests and nearly 10% is covered by lakes and rivers. (Finland Toolbox 2021.)

The Finnish culture shares many commonalities with its Nordic neighbors, emphasizing principles of equality, liberalism, and the creation of a well-functioning society. Finns enjoy excellent living standards and are highly educated, thanks to heavy investment in free education for all. The Finnish education system has built a reputation abroad and has even become an export asset for Finland. (Visit Finland 2023; Finland Toolbox 2021.)

Finnish and Swedish are the official languages, and Russian is being widely spoken, especially in Eastern Finland. The Finns have high-level English skills as it is taught from an early age. The language holds a prominent place, particularly in academic settings, with many degree programs now delivered entirely in English. (Finland Toolbox 2021.)

Finland has a reputation as a safe country with very low crime rates and has been chosen as the happiest country in the world for seven consecutive years (WHR 2024). The price levels are high compared to most European countries, especially for groceries, eating out, and alcohol (Helsinki Times 21.6.2023). Helsinki is the priciest area, but costs are lower in other major cities, such as Tampere and Turku, as well as in rural areas. Finland also stands out as the only Nordic country to have adopted the Euro. Although distances are long within Finland, the country's location allows for easy travel to other Nordic countries and Central Europe.

4.1.2 Turku as a destination city

Turku, located on the coast of Southwest Finland, is one of Finland's biggest cities with about 200 000 inhabitants (City of Turku 2024a). Turku was founded in 1229 and is the oldest city in Finland although its façade has gone through plenty of restoration due to the city having burned down several times during its history. While Turku offers many sights and activities, it is compact enough that one can get almost everywhere on foot or by bike. Turku is one of Finland's largest student cities: there are two universities and four universities of applied sciences, and every fourth resident is either a student or a professional at a higher education institute. (Study in Turku n.d.-a.) Compared to the Helsinki metropolitan area, the housing prices in Turku are more student-friendly and the student village is located close to the campus areas and the city center. Student culture is active in Turku and there's a plethora of student unions and organizations offering extracurricular events. International students are free to participate in any of the events and there are also organizations that focus purely on exchange students: the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) organises cultural events, sports activities, excursions, and parties mainly targeted at international students, and their partnering organization, Timetravels, specialises in student tours to Lapland, other Nordic countries, and the Baltic states. (Study in Turku n.d.-b; Timetravels 2023.)

Alongside historical attractions and contemporary art, Turku offers incredible nature destinations. One of the main attractions in the region is the Archipelago Trail, a 250-

kilometre-long ring road through a network of islands. Bridges and ferries connect the islands and there's a great number of destinations and tourist services along the trail. The trail is mainly active during the summer months when people explore it by car, by bike or on foot, and quiets down for the winter. (Visit Turku 2022.) The city of Turku has formed along the Aura River, which splits the city center into two and is considered the heart of Turku. The shores are packed with cafés, restaurants, and riverboats and one can even take public transport waterbuses to nearby islands or go on cruises to the archipelago. One such cruise sails to the neighboring city of Naantali which has attractions such as the Moominworld and the summer residence of the President of Finland, where one can tour around the garden. Daily passenger ships between Turku and Stockholm are a popular tourist activity also among the Finns and a part of Turku's image. (City of Turku n.d.; Visit Turku 2022.) Turku also has an airport that offers passenger flights within Europe but on a significantly smaller scale than the Helsinki-Vantaa airport.

Turku is considered a summer city, meaning it's very popular and active in the summer but quiets down for the winter months. This is natural in all Finnish cities, apart from the popular destinations in Lapland, as the darkness, cold, snow and ice hinder outdoor activities. Due to its Southern and coastal location the winters in Turku are unpredictable and the city cannot guarantee the winter activities and environment that are often associated with Finland. This is a challenge acknowledged by the city itself, and Turku has started an EU-funded Scale-Up project to improve the year-round activity in the city. (City of Turku 2024b.) As the academic year is divided into two semesters: from August to December and January to the end of May, most of the international students see more of winter than summer in Turku, and while they may not get the full experience, they are an important factor in bringing activity to the city outside of the main tourist seasons.

4.2 Research approach

International students' motivations and tourism-like behavior have often been studied using quantitative methods (see e.g. Michael et al. 2004; Rodríguez González et al. 2010; Weaver 2003; Quintela et al. 2022), but a qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the topics than what a survey could offer. Qualitative methods are suitable for research that focuses on individual subjective experiences (Puusa et al. 2020, 74) and explanatory knowledge which is gained through answering "how" and "why" questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 4-6).

After having chosen the topic for the study, set the limits for it, and designed the research problem, a literature review was conducted to get familiar with the themes related to the topic. The selection of the data collection and analysis methods, which are covered in the following sub-chapters, overlapped with the writing of the literature review, and through the examination of previous studies it became clear what kind of data would be suitable for answering the research problem. Studies on academic tourism have often been country-specific studies yet many of them share a similar theoretical framework. Drawing from these studies, conducted for example in Spain (Rodríguez et al. 2012), Portugal (Quintela et al. 2022), Australia (Weaver 2003), and Brazil (Oliveira & Freitas 2016), the literature review of this thesis was built around the theoretical background of academic and educational tourism (Ritchie 2003), travel motivation (Dann 1977), cross-cultural adaptation (Oberg 1960; Kim 2000), and travel consumer satisfaction (Babin & Kim 2001). The theoretical framework guided the creation of the questionnaire and the interview questions as well as the structure of the results section.

In this study, two groups of international students, Erasmus students and Asian students, were compared regarding their motivations for international mobility and destination choice, as well as tourism-related behaviour during the mobility period. Studies with comparative design are often based on contrasting cases. The purpose of this kind of comparison is to develop a more systematic understanding of the analyzed material, rather than answer questions of generalization. (Flick 2007, 41.) The process to choose groups of students to compare started with Erasmus students, because they are the largest incoming academic mobility group to Finland. However, plenty of European research on motivation and destination choice focuses only on Erasmus students, which is why it seemed prudent to widen the scope to another group in order to detect similarities and differences. The second largest continent of origin of exchange students coming to Finland is Asia, and the prominent differences in cultures, geographic distances, and mobility programs compared to European countries were expected to provide contrast in the results of this study.

4.3 Data collection

As opposed to quantitative research, where sampling is usually done by drawing a random sample from a population, in qualitative research the cases, events, or people are deliberately selected in order to study the phenomenon of interest in the most instructive

way (Flick 2007, 26-28). The method of purposive sampling (Flick 2007, 26) was used in this study as both the number and certain characteristics of the participants were determined in advance. Additionally, the snowball sampling technique, where a participant is asked to name other people that could be included in the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 53), was used. The sample size was ten, consisting of five European students and five Asian students. First, five international students the researcher had gotten to know in the autumn of 2023 through the Study in Turku -network's Friendship Program (Study in Turku n.d.-c) were contacted. All these students were willing to participate in the study and through them, the rest of the participants, none of whom the researcher was familiar with, were contacted. It was envisioned for the sample to consist of a variety of countries, but the snowballing technique resulted in all of the Asian students, apart from one Bangladeshi, being from Japan, which naturally decreases the generalizability of the results. The demographic features as well as the relevant educational information of all the participants are presented in Table 2.

The participants chosen for this study were students who had stayed in Finland for at least one semester. All the participants had arrived during the ongoing academic year and while all of the Asian students were staying for more than a semester (four of them for an academic year and one for a complete master's program) they were for the time being comparable to those staying only for a semester. The idea was to focus on the experiences and behavior of exchange students, instead of degree students, and even though one of the participants ended up being a degree student, his experiences provided an interesting contrast to the others. The decision to focus on exchange students was based on the fact that they are annually the largest group of inbound international students coming to Finland and since they remain in the study location for less than a year, their behavior is more similar to tourists (Lesjak et al. 2015; UNWTO 2010, 20-21).

Table 2. Participant information (E = European, A = Asian)

	Country of origin	Age	Length of mobility period	Study field at home	Destination university	Scholarship
E1	Austria	21	Up to one academic semester	Business	TUAS	Erasmus
E2	Germany	25	Up to one academic semester	Psychology	ÅA	Erasmus
E3	Germany	26	Up to one academic semester	Business administration	NOVIA	Erasmus
E4	Belgium	22	Up to one academic semester	Sustainability and environmental studies	TUAS	Erasmus
E5	Slovakia	23	Up to one academic semester	Business and law	UTU	Erasmus
A1	Japan	21	Up to one academic year	English language	UTU	JASSO
A2	Japan	21	Up to one academic year	Business	UTU	No scholarship
A3	Japan	21	Up to one academic year	Service design	TUAS	JASSO
A4	Japan	21	Up to one academic year	Tourism and town management	TUAS	JASSO
A5	Bangladesh	25	More than one academic year	Computer engineering	ÅA	ÅAU scholarship

The data was collected by combining quantitative and qualitative methods: a short questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire, which on average took the participants seven minutes to fill out, was created using the REDCap software, and a link to it was sent to the participants a couple of days before the interview. The idea of the questionnaire, which can be found in Appendix 1, was not to conduct quantitative research as such, as the sample size would've been far too small, but the findings about motivations were used as supporting data in analyzing this particular sample's results. The main idea of the questionnaire was to collect the participants' basic information, build

a base for the interview as well as familiarize the participants with the topics, and stir up memories and thoughts before the interview. The questionnaire was structured with the interview in mind so that the participant's answers to specific topics were elaborated on during the interview.

In the questionnaire, the participants rated the importance of 13 items about motivations for mobility and 12 items about destination choice on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = of little importance; 5 = very important). These items or questions were from Pinto et al.'s (2021) study and originate from the Erasmus Student Network Survey 2010: E-Value-ate Your Exchange (ESN 2010). Using a previously documented measurement scale is a way to minimize validity problems and reinforce the internal consistency of the questionnaire (Baker et al. 1994, 4). As Pinto et al. (2021) focused on international students in Brazil, they modified some of the questions from the ESN (2010) survey to suit non-European students, which also fits this present study. For example, the motivation to "take advantage of Erasmus grant" was changed to "take advantage of a grant" (Pinto et al. 2010, 67). Additionally, "easy access to and from other cities" was expanded to include other countries as well, and "familiar language and lifestyle" was changed to "familiar lifestyle" since Finnish is not a prevalent language and including it would undermine the lifestyle aspect of the motivation. Participants also answered questions about how many Finnish cities or other countries they had visited during the mobility period as well as whether their family or friends had come for a visit. Having thought about and answered these questions before the interview the participants had a better recollection of their experiences and were able to talk about the topics more broadly during the interview.

The interviews were semi-structured, making them fairly conversational and informal while still keeping them to a pre-defined outline of topics and questions. The set of questions (which can be found in Appendix 2) was created with the guidance of the theoretical framework, which resulted in five different sections: basic information, motivation for studying abroad, motivation in choosing the destination, tourism-like activities, and satisfaction with the experience. Conducting semi-structured interviews not only creates a setting that allows the participants to give more in-depth answers but also increases the similarity of the research situations and helps the analysis and comparison of the data (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 79, 83; Flick 2007, 42-43). The interviews took place between the 6th and 22nd of February 2024.

At the start of each interview, the participants were asked for permission to record the interview. They were also notified of all the collected data being deleted after the completion of the thesis. The objective of the study was explained to the participants both when they were asked to participate in it, as well as at the start of the questionnaire they filled out. Before starting the interview they were told the topics of the questionnaire would be talked about in greater detail. All the interviews except for one were held in Zoom and the sessions were recorded using Zoom's recording function. The one in-person interview took place in an Åbo Akademi building and was recorded using a phone. All communication with the participants leading to the interviews, including sending the links to the questionnaire and the Zoom meeting, was done in WhatsApp. All the interviews were held in English and one participant asked to have the questions sent beforehand because they weren't confident about their ability to answer in English on the spot. This didn't take away from the flexibility of the interview as the participant had prepared broad answers and was able to answer follow-up questions.

4.4 Data analysis

Content analysis was used as the data analysis method in this research. Through content analysis, the collected data can be transformed into a summarized and generalized description. While it's an efficient way to organize the data, the method does not give answers to the research questions and any conclusions must be made by the researcher. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 87-88.)

At the start of the analysis process, the audio recordings were transcribed using the transcription tool in Word. Transcribing the data into written form allows the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data and to closely examine it, and make observations (Kallio 2022). In the next phase of content analysis, the transcribed data is combed through so that only statements relevant to the research question are compiled in simplified form. After this, the collected expressions are coded, meaning that passages with similarities are grouped under the same categories. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 92.) The formation of the categories can be driven by the collected data, theoretical framework, or a combination of these two (Juhila 2022). In this study, the categories were guided by the theoretical framework. Sections of the transcriptions were underlined in NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software) according to the topic in question. Individual

sections were then scrutinized in more detail to find out the underlying answers to the questions.

The categories also worked as a basis for the structure of the results chapter of the thesis. In the first section, Dann's (1977) "push-pull" framework was used to identify the factors that motivate students to undertake study abroad, as well as what attracts them to Turku. Second, Weaver's (2003) model of tourism activity guided the division of the second subchapter into three parts: cultural activity and travel within Finland, travelling to other countries, and visitors received by the international students. The last subchapter, where the students' satisfaction with the mobility experience was addressed, was split into two. First, the students' adaptation to the Finnish culture and environment was examined based on Oberg's (1960) and Kim's (2000) theories on cross-cultural adaptation. Second, the students' satisfaction with the destination country, city, and university was gone through on the premise of Babin and Kim's (2001) model on travel consumer satisfaction.

5 Findings on Erasmus and Asian students' motivations for mobility and tourism-like behaviour

5.1 Motivations for mobility period and destination choice

5.1.1 Push-factors - motivations for going to study abroad

Nearly all participants said that it's common for students from their university to study abroad, and even those who said that it isn't, explained that there are plenty of possibilities for it, but it's more about the students not wanting to or not being able to go due to personal reasons. Only one participant (E1) was obliged to have a semester abroad as part of her studies, and she said that she had initially chosen her studies based on that fact. It became clear both in the questionnaire and during the interviews that all the participants were partly motivated to go study abroad by wanting to experience a new culture and meet new people as well as grow personally (see Figure 6). Regarding personal growth, several participants talked about wanting to live abroad alone using a different language, and learning to become more independent. For example, Belgium is such a small yet expensive country that it's often more affordable to live at home with your parents and travel to the university every day, so the Belgian student was in part motivated by wanting to learn to live by himself.

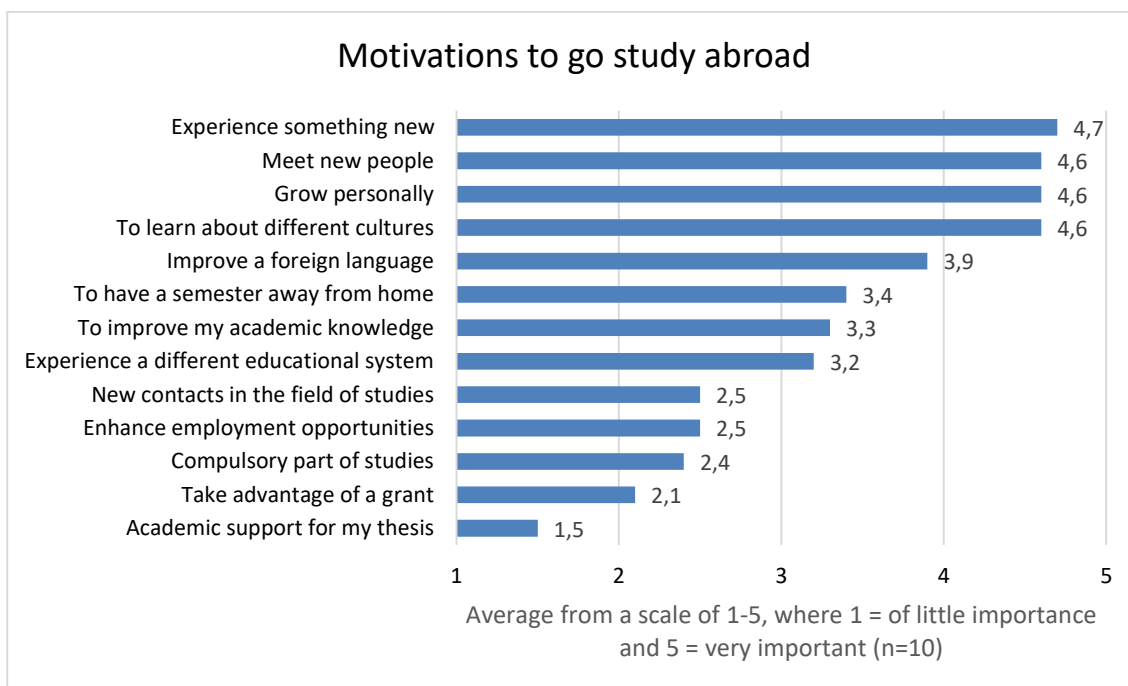


Figure 6. Participants' answers to questionnaire items about motivation for mobility.

More specific motivations were also talked about, which turned out to be fairly different between the European and Asian students. Many of the Japanese students (A1, A2, A4) brought up learning English as one of their main reasons for going to study abroad and said that it's a very common motivator for Japanese students to apply for exchange in general. The only Japanese student (A2) who wasn't focused on improving her English was very adamant about coming to Finland. In her own words:

"If I couldn't come to Finland, I wouldn't go anywhere." (A2, Japan)

Such a specific drive for Finland was not present with any of the other participants, which becomes clear in the following subchapter. The Bangladeshi student was motivated to complete his whole master's degree abroad, experiencing a different culture and new people. He also said that due to instabilities in his home country, students are taking advantage of the opportunity to study abroad:

"There are some situations going on in our country. It's not stable right now. So more and more people are going abroad. Like the top students, all are aiming for abroad." (A5, Bangladesh)

Compared to the Asian students the European students emphasized word-of-mouth from previous exchange students as having had a more significant effect on their decision to apply for exchange than the official marketing from the university:

"Everyone I was talking to told me that it was one of the best experiences they had in their life, like studying abroad for a year or semester or just the shortest possible amount of time." (E5, Slovakia)

Perhaps due to the size and activity of the Erasmus network, as well as the shorter geographical and cultural distances compared with Asian students, the European students seemed to be quite relaxed about the concept of going to study abroad.

"It was not a big deal. They [the university] had information like online sessions and a contact person and they've had like many students who went abroad before -- they could highly recommend it." (E3, Germany)

"We get like emails all the time where they advertise the experience and say like -- just fill out this and that and it's free for everyone. -- it's not that hard to get in because for

me, I was like late to reply and late to apply and I still got in because there were some places – – left in some universities” (E2, Germany)

The security of getting an exchange destination, even if it’s not the first or second choice, may have resulted in the Erasmus students’ motivations not being very destination-specific. For example, the German who was late to apply said he was writing his master’s thesis during the exchange and could’ve done it anywhere. Two other Erasmus students (E4, E5) also brought up that it’s not easy to get to go to the country of choice due to the evaluation process which takes the student’s GPA (grade point average) and language skills into consideration and because smaller study fields have fewer destination options so there’s competition for popular destinations. The Slovak student also talked about monetary issues preventing student exchange:

“The universities do encourage that, but people don’t go because of certain issues and also the financial issues like Finland compared to my country is super, super expensive. – – even with the grant from the European Commission, it’s not very affordable for everyone.” (E5, Slovakia)

This demonstrates that while it may be more expensive and difficult for Asian students to come and study in any European country compared to Erasmus students, Finland is one of the most expensive countries in Europe in terms of living costs and not even all European students can afford it.

5.1.2 Pull-factors - choosing Finland and Turku

In the questionnaire, when asked about the importance of certain factors in choosing Turku as their study destination, only a few of the presented motivations stood out as important (Figure 7). Turku being safe and secure was the most important factor followed by rich natural attractions and a high living standard.

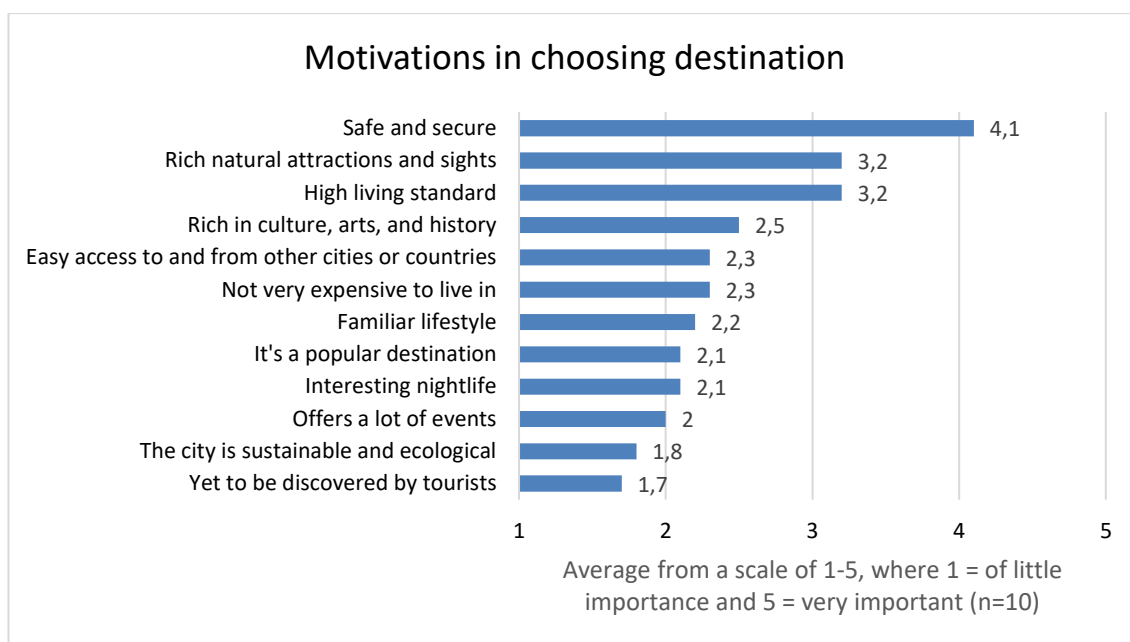


Figure 7. Participants' answers to questionnaire items about destination choice.

For many of the participants, both European and Asian, the destination decision was affected by a limited choice of destinations. For example, two of the Japanese students (A3, A4) were offered only three possible countries of destination by their university: Australia, the US, and Finland. For both of them, the main reason for choosing Finland was that they saw it as the cheapest country out of the three. Other deciding factors were experiencing the Finnish winter, the overall safety of the country, and the drinkable tap water (which they also have in Japan). In Finland, these two students had the option to go to either Turku or Tampere. They decided on Turku because they had heard it's the oldest city in Finland and were interested in its history and because Turku University of Applied Sciences' (TUAS) course selection was more suitable for them compared with Tampere University of Applied Sciences. Another Japanese student (A1) had Italy as her first choice, but Finland was close in second place, so she wasn't disappointed with ending up in Finland. Due to her home university's contract, she could only choose the University of Turku out of all the Finnish universities. The Bangladeshi student (A5), who wanted to complete his master's studies abroad, also didn't have Finland as his first choice. In fact, since Finland doesn't have an embassy in Bangladesh, he didn't even consider Finland as an option. It was only after he went on a vacation to India, which has a Finnish embassy, that he started to think about Finland as a destination. He applied to Finnish universities more as a backup option, since he primarily wanted to go to the US, but Åbo Akademi ended up being one of the first universities to offer him a place and as the

scholarship was decent and he had looked up that Turku was one of Finland's warmest cities, he decided for Finland and Turku.

While all the other Asian students either didn't have Finland as their first choice of destination or were heavily steered towards it, the one Japanese student (A2) who only wanted to come to Finland was primarily motivated by learning Finnish and about the Finnish culture and values, especially regarding working life:

"When I was a high school student studying Geography -- I was very impressed by the [Finnish] nature. And after I went to the university, I studied business, especially human resource management and I studied Nordic countries work life and -- about work-life balance in Finland and support for women's work. And equality of women and men. And it's very different from Japan." (A2, Japan)

This student didn't pass her university's English test which was required for going abroad as an exchange student, but she didn't let that bother her and applied directly for a residence permit of a visiting student in Finland. With this permit, she could've gone to any university in Finland but chose to come to the University of Turku because through one of her professors in Japan, she had gotten to know a Finnish professor at the University of Turku and she was also interested in the history of the city.

None of the Japanese students could include their study credits in Turku to their program in Japan, so for the most part they were able to organize their time and studies in Turku as they wished. However, for some, the bilateral contracts between universities narrowed down the course selection and their home university demanded they choose courses related to their major for the exchange to be possible.

Even with the widely spread Erasmus network, European students also talked about their choice of destination being heavily affected by their university having limited bilateral contracts with other universities. Many of the Erasmus students talked about being interested in the Nordic countries and the Nordic lifestyle but for many of them, Finland would not have been the first choice. As one German student (E2) put it:

"My first choice would have been Denmark, like Copenhagen, or something in Sweden or Norway, but like the direction was always Nordic." (E2, Germany)

The other German student (E3) would've wanted to go to Sweden, but her university didn't have a partnership with any Swedish universities. The Slovak student (E5) was weighing between Iceland and Finland, but since the partner university in Iceland would've been quite small and remote, he applied to Finland. Due to specific partnerships, the Belgian student (E4) had the option to choose between Bergen in Norway, three cities in the Netherlands, or Turku in Finland. Only one of the Erasmus students, the Austrian student (E1), had Finland as her first choice, and the decision was mainly based on the good reputation of the Finnish education system. She, however, had primarily applied to Haaga Helia in Helsinki but wasn't accepted and ended up in TUAS.

It became clear during the interviews that none of the participants had been familiar with Turku before starting the application process for the mobility period. Most of them only knew Helsinki and perhaps Lapland and only learned about Turku when they started gathering information about different destinations. Word-of-mouth played a large role in eventually choosing the destination as both European and Asian students had friends, colleagues or acquaintances who recommended Finland or Turku to them:

“-- two of my colleagues from work had been to Turku before. And they told me it's like a good student city to experience Erasmus.” (E5, Slovakia)

“A student from TUAS -- comes to my university as exchange student and I make friends of the TUAS student. My image [of Finland] is more like specific and complete when I talk with them.” (A4, Japan)

In fact, seven out of the ten participants brought up having had a similar previous connection to Finland. It has to be remembered, however, that most participants had very limited destination options in the first place.

5.2 Tourism-related activities during the mobility period

5.2.1 Cultural activity and travel within Finland

Apart from having vague ideas about potential destinations, none of the participants had planned any of their tourism activities before coming to Finland. However, already during the first week, some had reserved a place in Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and Timetravels trips to Lapland and the Lofoten islands. All the participants, except the Bangladeshi student, felt they had been more culturally active during their mobility period

than back in their home country. Some of the Erasmus students talked about having travelled so much, they hardly had time to experience Turku:

“I was more busy traveling and visiting places than actually being in Turku.” (E4, Belgium)

“My plan was to get in touch with myself and it didn't work out at all because I was like stressed, I was doing so much.” (E2, Germany)

The Bangladeshi student was used to having a large friend group with whom he would go out every night back home and felt like in Finland people are more likely to be by themselves or in smaller groups and this cultural difference made him more passive in going out. It also took him a long time to get used to the climate and winter in Finland, as the coldest months in Bangladesh are equivalent to the Finnish summer. On the local scale, the others were active in visiting different museums in Turku, the national parks nearby, and especially Villa Järvelä, a sauna and ice swimming complex by a small lake near Turku. Both European and Asian students were excited by the amount of student events and student discounts and made the most of them. Many pointed out that while they went out often, they rarely ate in a restaurant because of the high prices and would rather cook at home or visit student restaurants. All the Erasmus students took actively part in the different local, national, and international ESN events and trips, and although all students are allowed to join them, only one Asian student talked about having participated in a longer trip organized by ESN. Two Japanese students had considered going to Lapland with ESN, but they found it cheaper to organize the trip by themselves.

Regarding travel within Finland, all the participants had visited Helsinki, some even on several occasions, touring the most popular tourist attractions. Other popular destinations were Naantali and Tampere. The number of Finnish cities other than Turku that the international students had visited during their mobility period is presented in Figure 8. All the Erasmus students had participated in a trip to Lapland, organized either by ESN or Timetravels. In both cases, they spent a week at a ski resort with different activities and visited the Santa Claus village in Rovaniemi. Two of the Japanese students had been to Rovaniemi as well and the rest of the Asian students expressed interest in going there later. Two of the Erasmus students had also visited Åland for a couple of days. Through contact with Finnish students, or organized by their school, some participants also visited smaller cities or towns, for example, Rauma, Uusikaupunki, and Jämsä.

5.2.2 Travelling to other countries

In addition to cities, Figure 8 also shows the number of countries other than Finland that the international students visited during their mobility period. The Erasmus students had seemingly visited more cities and destinations in Finland whereas the Asian students had traveled to more countries. The Asian students emphasized wanting to make the most of their time in Europe since a similar opportunity might not come again. One Japanese student (A4) had seen no other cities in Finland than Turku and Helsinki but had already traveled to Germany and Tallinn and was planning on visiting several other countries. In fact, all the Japanese students had visited Tallinn and one other had also toured the Christmas markets in Germany. All of them had either already been to or were planning on visiting France, Italy, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The Japanese student who had participated in an ESN trip through the Baltic countries also brought up having planned a trip to Morocco. One Japanese student (A3) attending TUAS said that as her courses include a lot of group work and her absence would affect other students' work, even though she would've wanted to travel more, she was hesitant to miss classes.

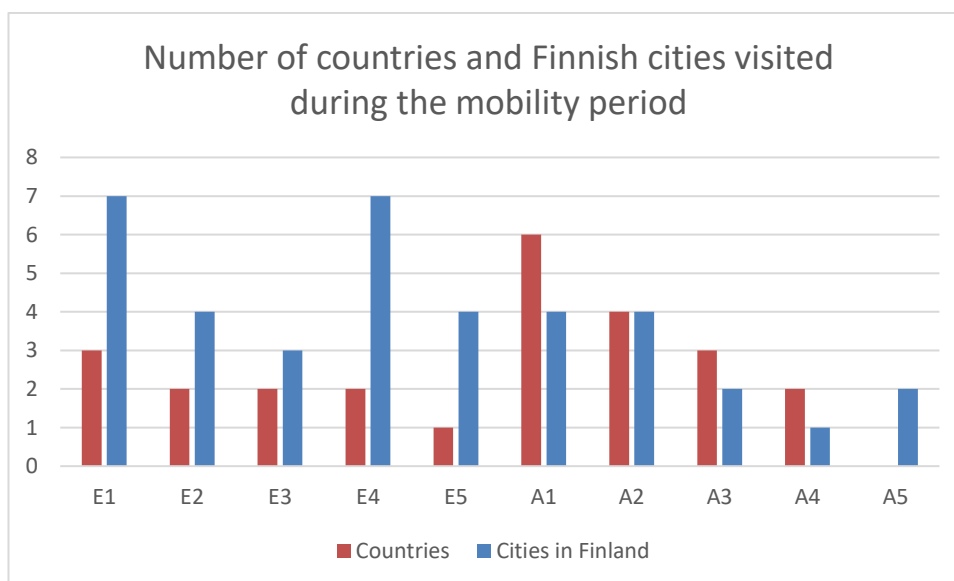


Figure 8. Number of countries and Finnish cities visited by participants.

The Erasmus students were understandably more inclined to visit the other Nordic countries than other parts of Europe. Two of them had been to Tallinn and the rest had planned a trip there but were in the end hindered from going. Three of the Erasmus students visited Sweden and two of them drove through the country on their way to the Lofoten in Norway with Timetravels. The Austrian student also participated in the same

organization's trip to Iceland. She had started her exchange by driving to Finland by car and left the same way. Similarly, at the end of his exchange a German student first took the ferry to Stockholm, then a train to Copenhagen and after having spent a few days there, took a train back to Germany. The other German student also visited other countries throughout her way back home by first flying to Sweden, then Norway and then Germany.

5.2.3 Visitors received

The number of visitors the participants had received by the time the interviews took place is presented in Table 3. Even if several visitors came as a group (e.g. family) they were counted individually to represent individual tourists. In the sample of this study, while some participants hadn't received any visitors, the average was two visitors per participant, meaning two additional tourists were generated by one international student.

Table 3. Number of visitors received by participants.

Number of visitors	Erasmus students	Asian students
None	1	3
1-2	1	2
3-4	1	-
5+	2	-

The Erasmus student (E3) who hadn't been visited by anyone said that it was her own decision because she was aware of the exchange period being so short that she would soon be back home with her family and friends and wanted to experience as much as possible on her own. Some of the Asian students whose mobility period was still ongoing had plans for receiving visiting friends and family later. The Bangladeshi student said it's complicated for his family members to get a visa and that he would first have to find work and gather enough funds to support their visit but that he had planned for them to stay for several months when they came. The two Japanese students (A3, A4) who had not received visitors said that because of it being so expensive, none of their family or friends would visit them.

Helsinki was the most popular tourist destination among the visitors. Almost all the participants who had visitors either met up with them in Helsinki or took them there on a separate trip. Some of the visitors didn't even come to Turku. For example, a Japanese student travelled from Helsinki to Rovaniemi with her visitor and they didn't come to

Turku at all. Those visitors who were shown around Turku and the nearby region were taken for example to the Turku archipelago and different national parks nearby as well as for a sauna experience at Villa Järvelä.

On average the visitors stayed 4,7 days with the student they were visiting. Additionally, some traveled by themselves before or after meeting the student. A German participant's sister was traveling in Sweden and took the ferry to Turku to spend four days with him and afterward kept on travelling in Finland by herself. A Japanese student's friend was travelling in Europe and came to visit her in Helsinki for a day. Some of the Slovak student's family had also been travelling in Europe and coming to spend some days in Finland with him was the last stage of their journey before returning to Slovakia. Because the exchange students had to attend classes during most days, the visitors also undertook tourism activities by themselves. For example, one student's parents went to travel the Archipelago Trail by car by her recommendation while she stayed in Turku.

5.3 Satisfaction with the mobility period

5.3.1 Adapting to the new culture

Most of the participants, especially the Erasmus students, seemed to be very aware of their limited time in Finland and didn't even seek to immerse themselves deeply into the Finnish culture. Although some shocks and surprises were experienced, the Erasmus students talked about European countries being culturally very similar:

"I still had the feeling that I live within the EU and the people were very friendly." (E3, Germany)

"There are teeny tiny bits that you can cherry-pick if you want to, but apart from that, I think that the European cultures are pretty much the same." (E5, Slovakia)

The Erasmus students talked about having quashed some stereotypes about Finland but having been surprised by some being true. For example, many expected the Finns to be introverted to the point of inhospitality but found the locals to be very friendly and helpful, even if a bit held back. On a less positive note, a few mentioned they hadn't believed that the Finns would actually drink that much alcohol, especially considering the price levels, but were proved wrong.

The Japanese students didn't seem to be particularly shocked by any cultural differences between their home country and Finland, but there were smaller things that took some getting used to. For example, one Japanese student (A3) was surprised by the Finnish people being very direct. On the one hand, she saw it as a good thing since it helped her learn more quickly when people would correct her mistakes straight away, but on the other hand, she found some people to be too direct to the point of impoliteness. The Bangladeshi student had experienced difficulties with adapting to the climate in Finland. Experiencing minus temperatures was a shock since for him + 10°C is winter already:

“A couple of months ago if you told me, like in minus temperature, I would go out, I'd call you insane. But now I'm going out in -10°C or -20°C.” (A5, Bangladesh)

He said he missed out on some winter activities because he was still adapting to the cold. Additionally, compared to his home city, where there is a constant buzz of noise and activity, the silence and calmness of both the environment and the people in Finland felt suffocating to him. He was hopeful for the upcoming summer and already seemed to be more prepared for the next winter since he expressed wanting to try different winter activities, for example, skiing.

Nearly all participants brought up Finland being a safe country and how it played a part in them feeling more comfortable and being able to carry out different activities. According to the Slovak student, it was visible that people in Finland have more money, and that the country works better compared to his home country. He had accommodation in Varissuo, a district with a poor reputation further away from the campus area, and had been told about it being “the trashiest part of the town”. However, his conception of a trashy district differed from the Finnish equivalent:

“I really imagined stuff, but in Varissuo it never happened to me or any of my friends, like something bad. It was just further away from the city.” (E5, Slovakia)

Another Erasmus student (E2) also living in Varissuo talked about not having to worry about walking alone at night and the level of trust people in Finland have in each other. Similarly, one Japanese student compared her experiences of being able to go out at any time of the day to her friend who was studying in the US and couldn't be quite as carefree.

The participants arrived at the start of the fall semester at the end of August, when the weather was still fairly warm and sunny and there was a lot of daylight. Autumn settled

in quickly and the first snow fell in Turku in November. The Erasmus students weren't really bothered with the cold, but some expressed having difficulties in adapting to the darkness.

"I really liked the cold. [--] You can dress up against the cold, but I had some struggles with the light, it was too dark. -- especially if it's cloudy for two weeks straight. So you don't even see the sun when it's actually light outside" (E4, Belgium)

While they had known in theory about how dark the Finnish winter would be, some of the Erasmus students were surprised at how big of an effect the darkness had on their energy levels. None of the participants had done very in-depth research about Turku before coming to Finland but neither did they bring up any retrospective regrets about not having more information in advance. As the Austrian student put it:

"I didn't really do research about it because I thought, like, maybe one time in my life I want to be surprised." (E1, Austria)

It seemed that apart from the structure brought about by their study program, the participants preferred experiencing things spontaneously. All the participants, except for the Japanese student (A2) studying Finnish culture, said they mainly hung out with other international students and that it was difficult to truly get to know locals. The Japanese student had gotten a Finnish roommate at the turn of the year and through them, had widened her circle of Finnish people. The other participants seemed to be happy with having a few Finnish acquaintances and spending most of the time with other international students.

5.3.2 Satisfaction with the destination

Most of the participants were happy with Turku being their destination and those who would've preferred it for the city or its people to be a bit more active acknowledged that Turku is a great place to live in for a longer period, although as a tourist destination, it doesn't offer much.

All of the Japanese students liked living in Turku. They talked about enjoying the close connection to nature, the historical background of the city, and its beautiful buildings. Most of them appreciated the calmness of the city and were happy to live a quiet life during their time in Turku. One of them (A2) said she preferred Turku to Helsinki because

the capital was too busy for her, with traffic and tourists. Another Japanese student (A1), however, would've wished Turku to offer more activities or places to go out and the Bangladeshi student expressed similar feelings:

“Maybe I would have chosen Helsinki because it's more of a center and there's lots of people there as well. In retrospect, Turku is quite small. And there's not much going on. But yeah, Turku is quite good for a long time living.” (A5, Bangladesh)

He also acknowledged that the winter months made the city especially quiet and that he would probably enjoy summer in Turku more. While there were other participants, who didn't have Finland, let alone Turku, as their first choice, all of them expressed being happy with Turku and not having any regrets. For example, a German student (E2) said that he would've probably felt more at home in Sweden or Denmark, because they are more similar to central European countries than Finland, but was in the end happy with having ended up in Finland because one of his main objectives for the exchange was to experience new cultures.

The Erasmus students weren't very impressed with the architecture in Turku and saw it more as a compact city with a close connection to nature. They were used to larger cities with beautiful historical architecture and found Turku quick to explore. For example, the Belgian student described his family visiting him in Turku:

“It was fun for my parents for a day or two, but then they said, like, OK, we have the feeling that we saw everything and there's nothing much more to offer.” (E4, Belgium)

He along with many other participants also talked about the weather turning colder and days becoming shorter reducing their desire to do different activities. The timing of their exchange was such that the weeks with the best weather were the first few weeks after their arrival when they didn't yet have an idea of all the things they could do in Turku, and then towards the end of their exchange the city quieted down and many of the activities they would've wanted to experience were only possible or worthwhile in the summer. All the Erasmus students apart from one brought up wanting to experience Finland during the summer and one student already had plans for a friend group reunion in Rauma. In fact, all the participants expressed wanting to come back to Finland in the future, if they had the chance, but apart from some who wanted to visit the Archipelago Trail, they weren't sure about coming back to Turku.

All the participants said they would recommend both Finland and Turku as destinations, but there were differences in whether they would recommend them as a tourist destination or as a study destination. The participants said that Finland in general is a great tourist destination, but because of the darkness and cold of the winters, they wouldn't want to live there for a longer time than their mobility period. As for Turku, the participants liked it as a study destination, but as a tourist destination, they wouldn't recommend spending more than a few days in the city.

"If you have time, you could go there for one afternoon or something, but I don't think it's like an attraction [– –] I think it's nice to study there, but to visit, yeah, for one afternoon maybe." (E3, Germany)

The Austrian student felt that an exchange of four months wasn't enough time to experience all she wanted and similarly, one Japanese student recommended staying for at least a year as a student. The other German student (E3) had wanted to extend her stay in Finland to a whole academic year, but due to the differences in the timing of the semesters between Finland and Germany, it wasn't possible. In general, the participants seemed to recommend timing the mobility period so that one can experience the summer in Finland.

Of all the Asian students, the Bangladeshi student was the only one completing a degree in Finland and thus the only one who had to pay a tuition fee for his studies. The one Japanese student (A2) who came to Finland independently only had to pay a certain fee per study credit or study module decided by the University of Turku. The three other Japanese students were also non-degree students on a year-long partnership exchange and only had to pay the regular attendance fee to their home university in Japan.

Apart from the Japanese student (A2) who was a visiting student, all the participants had a scholarship or a grant enabling their mobility period. Additionally, many had worked to save money for the exchange and had families supporting them. The Erasmus students, who all had the Erasmus grant, were satisfied with their financial situation, and didn't feel like they would've done much differently had they had more money. Some of the Japanese students, who had scholarships from the Japanese Student Services Organization (JASSO), talked about travelling or eating out more if they had more funds, but seemed satisfied with all the activities they could afford currently. The Bangladeshi student had an Åbo Akademi University scholarship covering most of his tuition fee but

said he would soon have to look for a part-time job to afford the rest of his time in Finland. The Bangladeshi currency, the Taka, was weakening compared to the Euro and it was becoming more and more expensive to cover costs with funds sent from home.

Most participants expressed being satisfied with their studies in Finland and had nothing in particular to comment, but some talked about difficulties or surprises. One Japanese student (A3) said the teaching style in Finland is very different, with a lot of group work and discussions in the classroom, which she found difficult but interesting and productive at the same time. The Belgian student had to attend certain courses in accordance with his study field and was not happy with the way of teaching. He said the course objectives were often vague and he would've wished for a more practical approach. The Austrian student who was interested in the education system, was surprised to find the study load quite light compared to her home country. On the one hand, she didn't feel very challenged at school, but on the other hand, she was happy to be left with more leisure time.

6 Discussion

6.1 Tourism-related aspects prioritized over academic purposes

The objective of this study was to examine exchange students' motivations for international mobility and destination choice, as well as tourism-related behavior during the mobility period. The results support previous research (e.g. García-Rodríguez & Jiménez 2015; Quintela et al. 2022; Pinto et al. 2021) on the findings that international students' general motivations for an academic exchange have more to do with personal rather than academic development. In answer to the first research question about what makes students want to study abroad, it was found that participants were primarily motivated to undertake international mobility by wanting to get to know other cultures and new people as well as grow personally. This indicates they were interested in travelling to a different place with different cultural characteristics, without any relation to the specific features of the destination city or institution.

Another aim of this study was to find out what makes international students choose Finland as their destination since within Europe, Mediterranean countries are considered the most attractive because of their pleasant climate (Rodríguez González et al. 2010). The results show that the push and pull factors weren't completely internal to the student or the destination as there were external compulsory elements at play, which can be viewed in Figure 9. Students had very limited choices of destination in the first place, due to their home universities or study departments having a restricted number of partnerships or agreements with other universities. In fact, only two participants had Finland as their first choice of country and the rest had either primarily wanted to go somewhere else or had chosen Finland as the most interesting country out of the very few options they were presented with. It's questionable whether these issues would have become apparent in a purely quantitative study, since at first participants were quick to say Finland was their primary choice, and only after being asked about their motivations for it did they clarify that, actually, it was their first choice out of very limited options, or even the only option. Then again, one of the students who had Finland as their primary choice, would not have gone to any other country, emphasizing Finland's uniqueness even in the Nordic setting.

Motivations for settling upon Finland were related to the country's nature, culture, and overall safety, which further reinforces the idea that students are primarily attracted to host destinations rather than host universities (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008).

Not only did participants have a restricted choice of countries, but also a restricted choice of cities within Finland. Turku wasn't described as a popular destination, in fact, none of the participants were familiar with Turku before starting to apply for their mobility period. This suggests that Finland as a country was what they were attracted to rather than Turku.

Previous research has highlighted the role of word-of-mouth in students' decision-making regarding both study and travel destinations (Weaver 2003; Michael et al. 2004; Rodríguez et al. 2012). The results of this study support these findings since WoM was found to have affected the decision to undertake study abroad, as well as giving affirmation to Turku's suitability as a destination. High satisfaction level with both Turku and Finland also suggests great potential for positive WoM marketing and repeat travel after the conclusion of the students' mobility periods. García-Rodríguez and Jiménez (2015) also emphasize the importance of improving the level of loyalty students included in the academic tourism segment have towards the city or country as they may act as ambassadors for the destination both during and after their stay.

Babin and Kim (2001) found security to be an especially important influence on international students' travel, which was also established in this thesis. Finland is considered a safe country and the participants all held this in high value both when considering it as their destination and when planning their tourism-related activities in the country. Regarding students' tourism activities, students were found to have participated in a plethora of sightseeing and travelling activities on local, national, and international levels, which reinforces the classification of exchange students as academic tourists (Rodríguez et al. 2012). Erasmus students, especially, seemed to spend more time travelling than in Turku.

More experiential travel seemed to be favored over traditional sightseeing and museums: sauna experiences, hikes in national parks, overnight stays in the archipelago, and of course, the variety of winter activities that are offered in Lapland were especially popular. Student travel organizations played an important role in the Erasmus students' travel, but Asian students preferred to organize trips on their own as they found it more affordable. Further contributions to tourism were made indirectly through visits by family and friends

from home countries. Interestingly, Helsinki was the most popular destination among both the students and their visitors and some of the visitors did not even come to Turku. In fact, Turku was not seen as an interesting tourist destination, but it was commended as an overall pleasant city to settle in for a longer period. Overall, Weaver's (2003) model of international students' influence on tourism was replicated in this study, including visitors travelling on their own in Finland and students travelling internationally. The results show that on average, each international student generated two additional tourists during their mobility period. Another interesting finding that could be used to further modify Weaver's (2003) model to the European setting is that some of the Erasmus students did not fly directly to and from Finland at the start and end of their exchange but took several days travelling through Central and Northern Europe by car or using public transport.

It was found that internationally mobile students adapt very superficially to their destination culture, keeping mainly to the first stage of the cross-cultural adaptation process: the tourist phase (Winkelman 1994). Erasmus students felt safe knowing they were still within the EU and saw Finland very similar to other European countries they had visited. They were interested in the Nordic lifestyle as opposed to the Finnish lifestyle which further undermined their adaptation to the Finnish culture specifically but increased their travel activities. Finland competes with other Nordic countries for both conventional tourists and international students (Visit Finland 2023) and especially Denmark and Sweden seem to be considered more attractive than Finland. If Turku intends to position itself competitively in the academic tourism market, coordinated actions between the academic sector and tourism agents are needed. According to Quintela et al. (2022), investments should not only focus on the promotion of universities and academic programs but also on the enhancement of the tourist elements that stand out the most.

The superficiality of the experience was reinforced by the students keeping to their friend groups of other international students instead of striving to mix in with the locals. This is a common phenomenon (Krzaklewska & Skórska 2013) and a conscious decision by the students as for the most part they were happy to have an environment of safety and peer support provided by other foreign students. While this may have hindered the adaptation process it fostered cultural activities and group travel as all international students had similar tourism interests.

6.2 Differences in motivations and behaviour between Erasmus and Asian students

Figure 9 summarizes the main motivations, whether compulsory or voluntary, in choosing Finland as the destination for academic mobility. Voluntary push-factors were related to cultural learning and a compulsory factor was identified to be forced by external factors. Voluntary pull-factors were related to destination characteristics whereas compulsory pull-factors had to do with limited options in destination choice. In the figure, below each motivation is the number of Erasmus (E) and Asian (A) students who brought up the motivation in question during the interviews or chose it as a “very important” factor in the questionnaire. Motivations highlighted in orange were especially important to Erasmus students whereas those highlighted in blue were more important to Asian students.

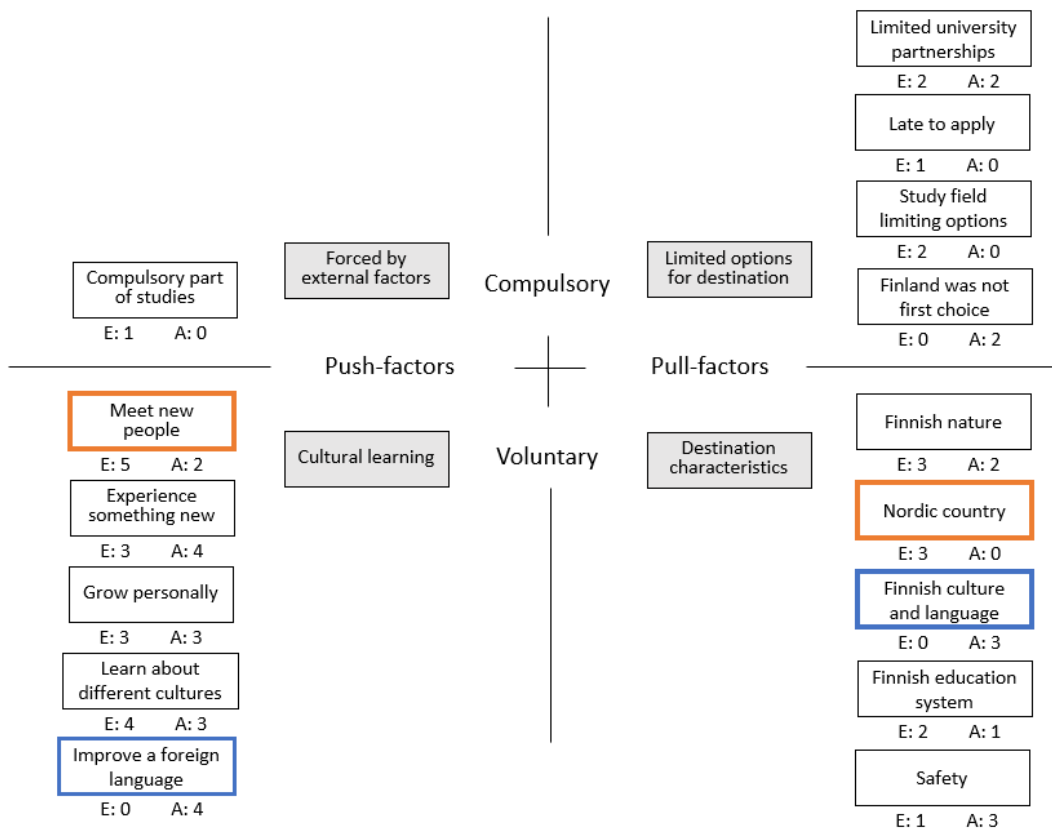


Figure 9. Compulsory and voluntary divisions of motivation in choosing Finland as a destination.

Japanese students stood out in the sense that their primary motivation was to either improve their English or to learn about the Finnish culture and language specifically,

which is in line with previous research stating that languages spoken in the destination country are an important motivator for student exchange (Oliveira & Freitas 2016; Rodríguez González et al. 2010). The results of this study show that Finland is considered a great study destination to improve one's English.

It was expected that Asian students would experience a stronger culture shock than Erasmus students, but in the end, the contrast wasn't very strong. Of course, four of them were from the same country, Japan, meaning their experiences were quite similar to each other, and the Bangladeshi turned out to have the highest level of culture shock in the sample. Had all the Asian students been from different countries, various higher-level culture shocks may have been observed. For the Japanese students, the difficulties in adaptation were related to having to live and study using a foreign language. Additionally, it took time to get used to differences in how people address each other. As Furnham and Bochner (1982) and Krzaklewska and Skórska (2013) pointed out, exchange students often adopt certain behavioural traits that allow them to navigate the new surrounding without truly embracing the culture.

The sources triggering the ranging levels of culture shock seemed to be more related to the climate and nature in Finland than the society or culture. The darkness and cold during winter months heavily affected the students' energy levels and activity and the quietness of the city seemed to be a source of disappointment. On the upside, many brought up satisfaction with the overall workings of the society: safety, high living standards, clean nature, functioning infrastructure, and drinkable tap water. The reliability of these fundamental factors of everyday life created a strong foundation for the exchange and fostered students' spontaneity and overall encouraged them to undertake various cultural activities.

As was pointed out by Babin and Kim (2001), international students wish to make the most of their time in the destination country in terms of travel. Similar findings were made in this study and a further issue must be highlighted: Asian students are motivated to see as much of Europe as they can during the mobility period. Similarly, those Asian students who had planned for visitors from their home country to come later, described them staying for a longer time and visiting several destinations in Finland and countries in Europe. Because of the larger geographical distance and costs of travel Asian students

had received fewer visitors compared to Erasmus students and the visitors they had received were friends or exchange students already staying in other parts of Europe.

While the contrast between Asian students and Erasmus students wasn't as high as was expected, the differences created by one student being a degree student and the rest being exchange students or visiting students were clear and confirmed the exclusion of degree students from tourists (UNWTO 2010, 20-21). While a stronger culture shock played a role in the degree student being less active than the rest, he also talked about having enough time to experience all the seasons a second time, implying lower pressure to act tourist-like. When completing a degree abroad the study load is equivalent to that of local students and leisure time is more limited compared to exchange students. Additionally, the degree student was planning to apply for a part-time job to be able to afford Finland's high living expenses for the rest of his stay, which decisively excludes him from academic tourists (UNWTO 2010, 10).

A few limitations should be considered when evaluating the findings of this study. The sample of this research sets some limitations for the generalizability of the results. First, the sample size was small, only ten participants, and as the idea was to compare two different groups of international students, the sample size per group was only five. Among the Erasmus students, there was sufficient variance regarding the country of origin, but four out of the five Asian students were from Japan. Additionally, the Bangladeshi student representing the only other Asian country was a degree student, meaning the basis for his mobility program differed from the others and resulted in his behaviour being that of a non-tourist. As all participants were international students at universities in Turku, future research may consider a sample more representative of a wider population. Additionally, while the Erasmus students had only stayed for the autumn semester and thus already completed their mobility period by the time of the interview, the Asian students still had many months ahead of them in Finland so the full extent of their tourism-related activities could not be analyzed.

7 Summary and conclusions

Over the last few decades, there has been a significant increase in international academic mobility and discussion has arisen about whether students' motivations for mobility and exchange programs' objectives are truly in alignment. Exchange students can be classified as academic tourists, highlighting their importance for the tourism industry of the study destination. While academic tourism has not been widely analyzed in the literature, studies have shown that international students put more weight on the tourism aspects of the study destination as opposed to the attributes of the destination university.

The aim of this study was to examine exchange students' motivations for international mobility and destination choice, as well as tourism-related behaviour during the mobility period. The study was conducted with semi-structured interviews being the main data collection method. As a comparative study between European and Asian students, who form the majority of incoming exchange students to Finland, ten international students studying at various universities in Turku were interviewed.

International students are motivated to study abroad by wanting to experience new cultures and people and to grow personally. A main finding of this study was that despite the wide network of different mobility programs, students' choice of destination is heavily limited by different factors. Bilateral agreements between universities bring students, who would choose to go somewhere else if they had the chance, to Finland. Yet, while Finland does not seem to be a popular destination, dissatisfaction with the country was not expressed.

Another key finding, which is in line with previous studies, is that exchange students consider destination pull-factors more important than university pull-factors. While Finland does not have as pleasant a climate as many of the more popular destinations in Europe, international students emphasized safety, high living standards, and natural attractions as important pull-factors in choosing Finland. The study also shows that Finland as a country is primarily considered the destination as opposed to the city of Turku.

It was found that international students contribute substantially and directly to the tourism sector in the destination country by traveling for non-educational purposes. Contributions are made directly through excursions to local and national tourist attractions, and

indirectly through visits by family and friends from their home countries. Additionally, with students acting as ambassadors of the destination country, they may influence students back in their home country to follow in their steps.

Differences between Erasmus students and Asian students were unexpectedly few. Apart from many Asian students being motivated by improving their English, motivations for international mobility and destination choice were similar among the two groups. The main differences were observed to be related to tourism-like behaviour. Asian students visited more countries during the mobility period, whereas Erasmus students visited more destinations within Finland. Because of the geographical distance and the high travel expenses, Asian students want to utilize their mobility period to explore Europe. Due to travel being so expensive, Asian students also received fewer visitors from home.

The findings are in line with previous studies although most of the ones conducted in Europe have focused on Mediterranean countries and only on Erasmus students. Thus, a new perspective was gained by including Asian students. This study focused on a particular city in Finland and while the results may not be generalized to cover all international students in the country, it provides useful insights into the academic tourism segment in Finland, which up to date has not been widely researched. Regarding future studies it is suggested that these insights be used to further examine the impact of mobility programs on tourism, on both local and national levels. Following Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008) an exchange student profile could be created and used to assess the economic impact of academic mobility on the tourism destination.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

Emilia's thesis: Motivations for international mobility

Page 1

Hi there!

Thank you so much for participating in my study!

The idea of my thesis is to examine international students' motivations for going abroad and choosing Turku as their destination, as well as the connection between academic mobility and tourism. I promise all your answers are valuable!

This survey will only take a few minutes to complete and it will help guide the conversation during the interview.

See you later! :)

Emilia

What is your first name? (Only to recognize your answers from others', won't be used in the study)

What is your age?

What is your home country?

Do you currently study in Turku or did you already complete the mobility period?

- I'm currently studying in Turku
 I already completed the mobility period

Where do/did you study in Turku?

- University of Turku
 Åbo Akademi
 Turku University of Applied Sciences
 Humak University of Applied Sciences
 Novia University of Applied Sciences
 Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
 Other

Duration of the program/mobility period

- Up to one academic semester
 Up to one academic year
 More than one academic year

What is your degree level in home country?

- Bachelor's
 Master's
 PhD

Do/did you have a grant/scholarship?

- No
 Yes, Erasmus
 Yes, other

If you chose "Yes, other", what grant/scholarship is it?

How much travel experience did you have before this mobility period?

- None
 A little
 A lot

Q1: How important were these motivations when you decided to go study abroad in the first place?

	1. Of little importance	2.	3.	4.	5. Very important
1.1 Meet new people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.2 Compulsory part of studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.3 Improve a foreign language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.4 Experience something new	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.5 Experience a different educational system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.6 Grow personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.7 To improve my academic knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.8 Take advantage of a grant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.9 To have a semester away from home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.10 Academic support for my thesis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.11 New contacts in the field of studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.12 Enhance employment opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.13 To learn about different cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q2: How important were these motivations when choosing Turku as your destination?

	1. Of little importance	2.	3.	4.	5. Very important
2.1 Easy access to and from other cities or countries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.2 Rich in culture, arts, and history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.3 It's a popular destination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.4 Familiar lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.5 Yet to be discovered by tourists	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.6 Safe and secure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.7 Not very expensive to live in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.8 Offers a lot of events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.9 The city is sustainable and ecological	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2.10 Rich natural attractions and sights	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.11 High living standard	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.12 Interesting nightlife	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Travel related questions

Q3: How many other cities/destinations did you visit/have visited so far in Finland besides Turku?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- More

Q4: How many other countries did you visit/are planning to visit during your time in Finland?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- More

Q5: How many times did your friends or family visit you in Finland?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- More

Appendix 2 Interview questions

Basic information:

- Where do you study in your home country?
 - What is your major?
- What do you study in Turku?
 - What kind of demands does your home university have for the courses you take in Turku?

Motivations for studying abroad:

- Describe in your own words your motivations for leaving to study abroad.
- Is it recommended or easy to go study abroad from your home university?
 - Is it possible for everyone?

Motivations in choosing the destination:

- Was Finland your first choice? Why did you choose to come to Finland?
 - Did you have a connection to Finland or did someone recommend it for you?
- How did you end up in Turku? Did you choose it specifically?
 - Were you familiar with Turku beforehand?

Tourism-like activities:

- What tourist attractions have you visited in/near Turku?
- Have you travelled to other cities/destinations in Finland?
 - How long have the trips been?
- Have you travelled outside of Finland during your study period?
 - Where? For how long?
- Did you plan (and/or book) these trips before coming to Finland?
 - Were they private (organized by yourself) or with an organization?
 - Do you feel like there have been enough/right kind of trips organized by Erasmus Student Network or other student organizations?
- Do/did you attend cultural activities and eat out more during the exchange period compared to in your home country?
- How do you fund this mobility period? Does your family support you regularly?
- If your economic situation were different (if you had more money), would you act differently? Travel more or do more activities?

- Have your family/friends visited you? Are they planning to?
 - How long did they stay?
 - Did/will you travel outside of Turku with them? Did/will they travel on their own?
 - Would they visit if the distance was smaller?

Satisfaction with the experience:

- How have you liked Finland/Turku?
 - Did you do a lot of research beforehand? Have there been surprises?
 - Are you satisfied with your experience in Turku/Finland?
 - Is there something you would wish to change?
- Would you recommend Turku as a destination? Or Finland in general?
- Did you get to know local residents? Did you mainly hang out with other international students?
- Do you think you will return to visit Finland in the future?