Change of Perception

A study on cultural views' adjustment

of non-EU international students

in the Netherlands.

Master's Thesis

Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

Today's competitive world is making students search for different ways to make them distinct and valuable employees. Studying abroad is one of the paths chosen as it provides international education and self-development opportunities for university students. During their stay abroad, students experience 'acculturation', which is broadly defined as the process through which an individual adapts to a new community. While most research of international students has been focused on studying the behavioral aspects of acculturation, less emphasis has been placed on the initial conditions and psychological outcomes, which may help to better understand the reasons behind international students' behaviors.

To study how international students' perceptions are adjusted during acculturation, this study focused on the initial (i.e. acculturation conditions) and current (i.e. psychological outcomes) opinions of international students in the Netherlands regarding certain cultural themes. The results indicate that current opinions of international students about their countries of origin, higher education at home, family, and friendship have been adjusted to reflect a sense of appreciation. Opinion of the Netherlands and its culture have been modified to a dual perspective of a tolerant society, closed to deeper interactions with foreigners. Future career's possibilities have expanded mostly for international students who initially thought of a future in academia. Also, international students have developed multicultural skills and identified organizational skills as an area of improvement. In regards to life views, international students have maintained similar opinions as before moving to the Netherlands, but have included contributing to society and spending more time with people who are important in their lives.

Keywords: acculturation, adjustment, international students, the Netherlands, family, friendship, higher education, future career, strengths, weaknesses, life views.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

1. Research context

Nowadays, it is extremely common to see that communities are not formed only by the local people who have always been there. Due to different reasons, people have been establishing their lives, for long-or short-terms, in different countries other than their native homes. This mobility of citizens has made them alter in some ways their opinions or behaviors on some subjects while they find their place in their new environment. This process is usually referred as 'acculturation'.

A large part of the early research done regarding 'acculturation' focuses on the experiences of immigrants who left their home countries for labor, family, or social reasons. However, 'acculturation' does not only occur when people move to start a new life in a different place. It also occurs when people decide to move for a certain period of time to a different place; such as the case of studying abroad.

Today's world demands employees who have more than theoretical and practical abilities in an expertise area. It also demands employees with multicultural skills to work in a global environment. In this quest to become a 'global employee,' higher education students are searching for options to continue part or all of their education in a different country than their home (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). Studying abroad is expected to provide students with a point of comparison and appreciation between what they have experienced in their countries of origin and what the host country offers them (Specking, Abel, & Needy, 2013). With the academic knowledge and acculturation experience acquired studying abroad, sojourning students are seen as individuals capable of succeeding in a multicultural environment (Specking, Abel, & Needy, 2013).

People who continue their studies in a different country experience 'acculturation' for a variety of reasons. In some cases, students may assume life in their host country will resemble life in their home if they find similarities between the two countries. However, as no society is the same as another, even international students with similar cultural background as the host country may still have difficulties to find their place. Also, when international students have an open mind and expect to find certain differences in the host culture, these expectations may still pose them with challenges if their experience turns out to be different than what they supposed it would be.

In the investigation of acculturation of international students, researchers have studied how ethnic visibility (Tan & Liu, 2014) and identity (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007) may affect the acculturation process, the extent of how acculturation may be related to school success (Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Liberman, 1994; Rienties, & Tempelaar, 2013), the role educational

institutions and colleagues relationships have in the acculturation process (Christie, Munro, & Fisher, 2004; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Zepke & Leach, 2005; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008), among other subjects. This means the research has been directed mostly toward the behaviors resulting during acculturation, rather than the conditions behind the behavior of a person.

This opinion is also shared by Celenk & Van de Vijver's (2011) research. In order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of acculturation measuring instruments, Celenk & Van de Vijver (2011) evaluated 50 methods based on three criteria: scale descriptors, psychometric properties, and conceptual and theoretical structure. Celenk & Van de Vijver's (2011) results indicated that the "priority [of measure instruments] is given to both explicit behaviors and preferences of immigrant as well as the mainstream groups" (p. 9), leaving unattended the conditions (i.e. the reasons behind a behavior) and strategies (i.e. the way they reach to that behavior) of the acculturation process. In addition, researchers pointed out another aspect neglected in most acculturation methods. While the majority of acculturation instruments included items to measure outcomes (76.6%), there is an overwhelming majority among those that evaluate behavioral outcomes (64.9%) rather than psychological outcomes (11.7%) (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011).

Although 'international students' could be considered a mainstream group as several researchers have evaluated their acculturation process in their host countries, the majority of these investigations do not study the conditions nor the psychological outcomes of acculturation, hence, leaving an important gap in literature. Taking into consideration people's conditions during their acculturation process may help to better understand the influence of the host country in the individuals. Also, researching psychological outcomes provides a different perspective on acculturation as individual's opinions may not be the same as individual's behaviors.

Another aspect to consider is that most of the work done in the area of international students' acculturation has taken place in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Liu & Winder, 2014; Tan & Liu, 2014). As such, there is still a need to analyze the acculturation of international students in countries other than the previously mentioned, such as the Netherlands. During the literature research of this project, only a couple research articles on acculturation were found to focus on the international students in the Netherlands (i.e. Rienties, Luchoomun, & Tempelaar, 2014; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013), while the rest concerned about the acculturation of immigrant populations in the Netherlands.

2. Research question

In the interest of addressing this need of acculturation of international students in the Netherlands, the aim of this study is to have a better understanding of how the points of view of international students on certain subjects may or may not be adjusted. Taking into account participants' opinions from before living in the Netherlands will help us to better comprehend the psychological outcomes (i.e. internal adjustment) of the individuals.

For that reason, this project aims to answer the following research question: *To what extent are views of cultural themes (e.g. home culture/country, host culture/country, academics, future career, competencies, family, friendship and life) of non-European Union students in the Netherlands adjusted during acculturation?*

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. First approaches on acculturation

One of the earliest definitions of 'acculturation' says that it "comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups"(Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). This definition was given as part of a request from a social science research council to properly study the problem of 'acculturation' (Redfield et al., 1936).

In this response, Redfield et al. (1936) developed an outline divided into five sections (1. Definition, 2. Approach to the problem, 3. Analysis of acculturation, 4. Psychological mechanisms, and 5. Acculturation results) to assist in the classification of acculturation research that had already taken place at the time. According to Redfield et al. (1936), people who experienced acculturation could be identified in three options:

a) *Acceptance*

This occurs when a person accepts more parts from the host culture, while at the same time losses a great portion of the home culture. There is an assimilation into the host culture as behaviors and inner values from the host culture are accepted.

b) *Adaptation*

People incorporate both host and home culture into their lives. This is done by adapting the two cultures into a modified culture for the people involved in acculturation, or by maintaining certain aspects of the host or home culture depending on the situation.

c) *Reaction*

A response due to oppression or unexpected results in traits from a foreign culture, where a person strongly maintains his/her home culture traits. This can be interpreted as a comeback for feeling inferior before the host culture or as a prestige obtained by going back to the home culture practices after being in contact with a new culture.

2. Modern Research

2.1 Acculturation strategies

In addition to cultural adaptation, Berry (2003, as cited by Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014) stated that there is a psychological and social adaptation to a new community during acculturation. Working with Australian aboriginals, Berry started his research on acculturation

focusing on marginalization and the difference between assimilation and integration (Berry, 1970, as cited by Ward & Kus, 2012; Sommerlad & Berry, 1970, as cited by Ward & Kus, 2012).

Later on, Berry started to investigate how much cultural identity could be preserved and how patterns of relationships could be found in plural societies during the acculturation process (Berry, 1974). In order to do so, Berry posed two issues to the sojourners related to cultural identity retention and relationship type with the host culture. The first issue deals with an immigrant's preference toward one's group, "Is it considered to be of value to maintain one's identity and characteristics?" The second issue makes reference to an immigrant's orientation toward other groups, "Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with larger society?." The answer to these questions in conjunction with the relationship patterns in plural societies became his acculturation strategies (Fig. 1).

		ISSUE 1	
		Is it considered to be of value to maintain one's identity and characteristics?	
ISSUE 2		YES	NO
Is it considered to be of value YES		**INTEGRATION**	**ASSIMILATION**
to maintain relationships with larger society? NO		**SEPARATION**	**MARGINALIZATION**

Fig. 1. Berry's acculturation strategies for sojourners (Berry, 1997)

a) Integration

People who are integrated embrace the new culture while at the same time continue to maintain one's heritage culture.

b) Assimilation

This strategy is followed when the sojourner decides to leave behind the home culture in order to fully acquire the attitudes and behaviors of the new environment.

c) Separation

It is achieved when the newcomer opts to value the home culture by retaining all its characteristics, and disregarding the aspects of the new culture.

d) Marginalization

In this case, the sojourning individual perceives no value in keeping the home culture nor accepting the new culture characteristics. Hence, there is a rejection toward both.

Berry´s (1997) acculturation strategies will serve to better understand the opinions given by the participants about the cultural themes of this study. Using these strategies to identify individual and broad patterns, it will help to observe the extent of acculturation in the sojourners´ perceptions.

Furthermore, Berry and colleagues (Berry, 1974; Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977, as cited by Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006) recognized the importance of the role the host society plays during the acculturation process. Contrary to Kim's (2006) cross-cultural adaptation theory where the host culture remained unaffected by acculturation, Berry (1990a, as cited by Berry, 1997,) pointed out that acculturation is considered a process that has an effect in both participants (i.e. people from home culture and people from host culture). This meant that the level of depth of acculturation depends on the host and heritage culture. This proposal is also supported by Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal's (1997), Sam & Berry's (2010), and Sayegh & Lasry's (1993) research. Nonetheless, Berry (1990a, as cited by Berry, 1997,) still states there is one group where most changes occur (i.e. the home culture group).

In order to explain the host society's role in acculturation, Berry (2001; 2005) proposed four strategies similar to the acculturation strategies identified for the sojourners (Fig. 2).

	ISSUE 1	
ISSUE 2	**Is it considered to be of value [for an immigrant] to maintain one's identity and characteristics?**	
	YES	NO
Is it considered to be of value [for an immigrant] to maintain relationships with larger society? YES	MULTICULTURALISM	MELTING POT
... NO	SEGREGATION	EXCLUSION

Fig. 2. Berry's acculturation strategies for host societies (Berry, 2001)

a) *Multiculturalism*

The receiving society supports the immigrant to maintain his/her culture, while at the same time values the incorporation of the immigrant's culture into the host society. This creates a culturally diverse society.

b) *Melting Pot*

Host society encourages the sojourner to relinquish his/her own culture in favor of being incorporated into the new culture.

c) *Segregation*

Receiving society expects immigrants to remain in groups of their own culture, and does not welcome cultural exchanges with the host society.

d) *Exclusion*

Host community members do not believe it is valuable for the immigrants to maintain their own culture while they are in a different country, and at the same time, do not want immigrants to be included in the host society.

From Berry's (2001; 2005) acculturation strategies, it becomes evident that the final result of acculturation is not entirely dependent on the sojourning individual's actions. It also depends on the willingness of the host society to allow the new individual to acculturate (Sandel, 2014). If the host society does not accept the presence of the immigrant, the immigrant's efforts to integrate will be in vain. This acculturation scenario also applies for the host society. In spite of welcoming a new individual into their society, if the sojourner is not willing to modify and integrate the new culture into his/her life, the immigrant will always be an outcast in the host environment.

While the perceptions of the host society will not be gathered in this study, it is important to consider the host society's role when analyzing the acculturation process of sojourners to determine its influence in the sojourner's opinions.

2.2 Conditions , Orientations, & Outcomes

Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver (2006b, as cited by Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011) itemized the acculturation process in three aspects: conditions, orientations and outcomes (Fig. 3). First, the conditions, or factors, are those cultural characteristics that are brought into the acculturation process by the immigrant, the origin society, and the host society. Then, the orientations, also known as strategies, make reference to how the immigrant chooses to handle his/her relation with the home and the host culture. Last, the outcomes, or consequences, are the psychological or behavioral results of the acculturation process.
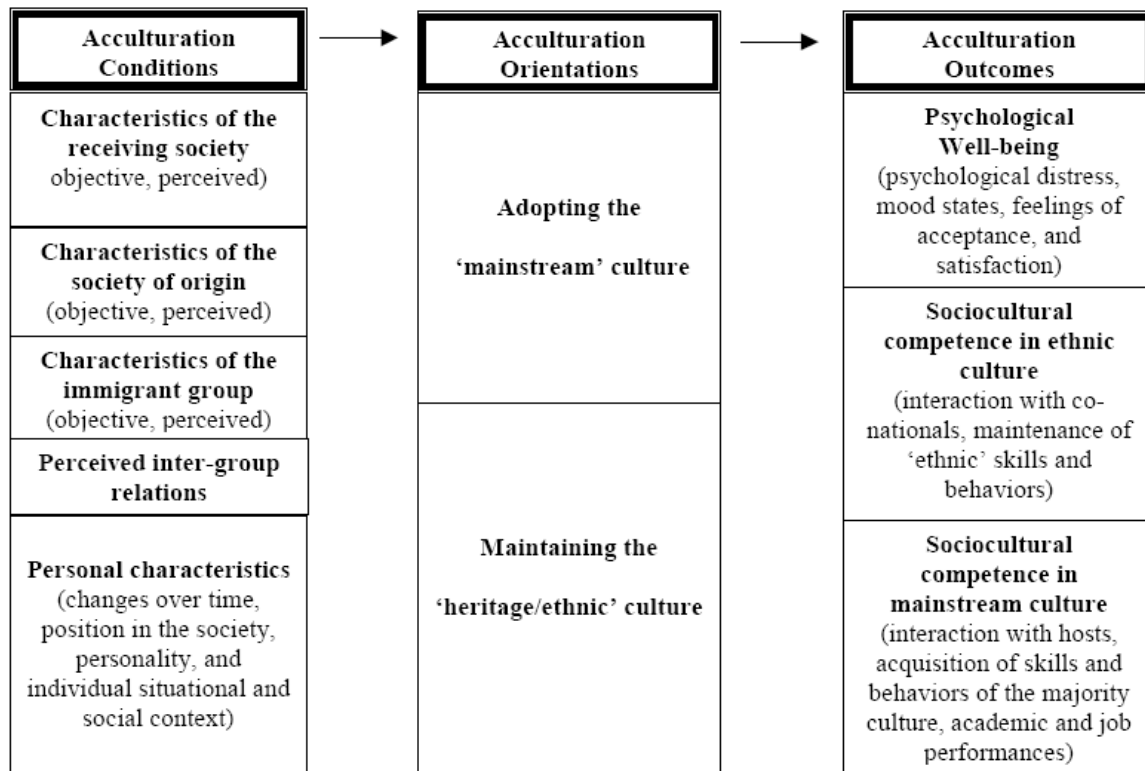
Fig. 3 Framework of Acculturation (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006b, as shown in Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011).

Despite the importance Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver (2006b, as cited by Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011) have given to acculturation conditions, Celenk & Van de Vijver (2011) have found that conditions are not usually mentioned in the acculturation instruments. Most of the instruments they reviewed focus on measuring outcomes, of which, psychological outcomes are also underrepresented in the instruments (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011).

As previously mentioned, conditions or factors are all those aspects that already exist within the immigrants and the host society. Since they are the first aspect in acculturation, it is necessary to consider them to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind the psychological and behavioral outcomes obtained from the acculturation process.

For this study, acculturation conditions will be gathered to use them as a comparison point against the current opinions of participants. This way, if there is a change or adjustment to a participant's opinion, it will be clear the extent acculturation may have influenced such perception.

3. Research on acculturation of international students

In the first stages of studying adaptation problems of international students, research was conducted following viewpoints from migration and mental health (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001, as cited in Zhou et al., 2008). Considering that a large part of the early literature on

migration emphasized the unfavorable aspects of cultural exchange, this trend found its way onto the research of international students to the point where cross-cultural exchange was deemed as a stressful situation that required medical attention (Zhou et al., 2008). Afterwards, being exposed to a different culture was seen as a learning, dynamic experience, which became the basis of the contemporary field of acculturation of international students (Zhou et al., 2008).

In order to make more comprehensive the study of sojourners' life experiences, researchers grabbed from the social, psychological and educational realms (Zhou et al., 2008). Due to this approach, it was possible to identify that processes and strategies within 'culture learning', 'social identification', and 'stress and coping' were key elements to analyze the affective, behavioral, and cognitive (ABC) features of international students' adaptation (Berry, 1997; Smith, & Khawaja, 2011; Zhou et al., 2008).

Stress, anxiety, and depression became common topics to study the psychological conditions of acculturation in foreign students (Desa, Yusooff, & Kadir, 2012; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004), while the social component of acculturation was addressed by focusing on culture shock, homesickness, lack of friends, and language difficulties among others (Klineberg & Hull, 1979, as cited by McKinlay, Pattison, & Gross, 1996; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

From the educational point of view, there was a concern international students were not fully prepared for the rigorous academic demands or that they would find academic expectations to be overwhelming (Aubrey, 1991, as cited by Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Fastre, Segers, & Gijselaers, 2008; Rienties et al., 2012). Exploring the conditions that led to school success or failure was important for the acculturation research as academic success has been said to influence the adjustment of international students (Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Baker & Siryk, 1999, as cited by Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013).

4. Acculturation in the Dutch society

In regards to immigration laws, the Netherlands has enforced an immigration policy that focuses mostly on family reunification rather than skilled labor (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). In addition, the government advocated for the integration of immigrants into the Dutch society and the maintenance of the immigrants' heritage culture (Baubock, Heller, & Zolberg, 1996, as cited in Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, a recent study indicates that immigrants' assimilation, the acculturation strategy where the immigrant leaves the heritage culture to be absorbed by the host culture, has been gaining more supporters among the Dutch (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006, Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). This preference for cultural assimilation rather than integration can be

understood by the increase in negative perception from Dutch natives toward immigrants (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000).

The majority of the research done in acculturation in the Netherlands has been targeted toward immigrants more than sojourners. As the Netherlands has a large population of inhabitants from Iranian, Turkish, Moroccan, and other Eastern European origins, their emphasis has been in researching the outcomes of the acculturation process of people who will settle in the country (Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Te Lindert, Korzilius, Van de Vijver, Kroon, & Arends-Tóth, 2008; Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998). This approach has created the need to dedicate more research to the acculturation process of other groups with international backgrounds, such as sojourning students.

5. International students in higher education in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a reputation for offering top-quality higher education (The Independent). In 2012-2013, the Netherlands had a student population of approximately 90, 850 international individuals enrolled in higher education (Nuffic, 2013). From those students, 20,350 come from non-European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Nuffic, 2013). In spite of these numbers, acculturation research of sojourning students in the Netherlands is not commonly found.

While there is a considerable number of studies of acculturation in international students, most of these have been carried out in countries other than the Netherlands (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994; Liberman, 1994; Tan & Liu, 2014). Although recently there has been a greater interest from academia to investigate foreign students' acculturation in the Netherlands (Rienties et al., 2014; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013), there is still a need to research this topic.

Therefore, this project will concentrate on the acculturation process of international students in the Netherlands. This project's aim will be to study the sojourning students' opinions regarding certain cultural themes using the participants' opinion from when they were in their home countries as a comparison basis. At the same time, considering that international students in the Netherlands who come from the European Union may have similar opinions as their Dutch counterparts, this study will focus on sojourners who come from nations outside Europe to see if the participants' initial and current opinions are significantly different.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research for this project was conducted using participants enrolled at a Dutch university to assess their opinions on certain cultural themes. A criteria selection was designed to eliminate potential biases from the participants (i.e. being from a country with similar values and lifestyle or being still in the 'honeymoon' stage of the acculturation process). The interview protocol included questions from various elements of life (e.g. academics, family, host society) to have an overall perspective of what aspects are the most adjusted during acculturation. The data analysis was performed using open code, story development, and Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies.

1. Selection of participants

The criteria to be met for participants were 1) to be a national of a country outside the European Union, 2) to be enrolled during the academic year 2014-2015 in a bachelor, master, of doctorate program in a Dutch university, and 3) to have been in the Netherlands for a minimum of one year.

The purpose of criteria 1 and 2 was to focus the investigation on a population not commonly researched in the Netherlands. Criterion 3 was added to prevent that participants were still in the "honeymoon" stage of their stay, where everything is new and exciting for the newcomers (Oberg, 1960). As the honeymoon stage usually lasts up to six months, it was considered that after one year, participants' opinions would not be severely affected by the newness of being in a different country. Accordingly, no exchange students were allowed to participate as there was the concern these students may follow a different acculturation process due to their situation of being "guest" students.

Initially, the international office of the university was contacted to help with the recruitment of participants by sending an email invitation to those who met the established criteria. However, due to privacy regulations preventing the international office to assist in such a manner, it was suggested to use a social media group administered by the international office to distribute the invitation to participate. Due to the low response of this tactic, snowball sampling was later used, which yielded a total of 23 potential participants. However, 2 participants declined before their appointment date saying they did not feel comfortable anymore to be interviewed, which left the project with 21 participants.

2. Participants

The gender ratio of participation was divided in 29% for women and 71% for men. While participation in this project was not limited to international students in abstract sciences, only a quarter of participants came from careers in social sciences. No bachelor students volunteered to participate in the project.

As the participation of international students was restricted to those who met the three criteria, it became necessary to be flexible with the time criterion of minimum one year. For that reason, Interviewee 9 was allowed in this research as he was less than 1 month from completing his first year in the Netherlands. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' characteristics.

INTERVIEWEE	GENDER	AGE	NATIONALITY	TIME IN NED	DEGREE	FIELD OF STUDY
1	Male	30	Asian	4 years	Ph.D.	Engineering
2	Female	27	Asian	2 years	Ph.D.	Sustainability
3	Female	25	Asian	1 year, 5 months	M.Sc.	Engineering
4	Male	24	Asian	1 year, 6 months	Ph.D.	Physics
5	Female	32	Latin American	2 years	Ph.D.	Physics
6	Male	30	Latin American	3 years	Ph.D.	Physics
7	Male	29	Latin American	3 years, 4 months	Ph.D.	Engineering
8	Male	26	African	1 year, 7 months	M.Sc.	Philosophy of Science & Tech.
9	Male	27	Asian	*11 months	Ph.D.	Physics
10	Male	27	Asian	1 year	Ph.D.	Physics
11	Male	27	Latin American	3 years	Ph.D.	Engineering
12	Female	27	Asian	1 year, 6 months	M.Sc.	Geoinformatics
13	Male	33	Latin American	1 year, 6 months	Ph.D.	Engineering
14	Female	34	Latin American	2 years, 3 months	Ph.D.	Sustainability
15	Male	33	Latin American	2 years	Ph.D.	Sustainability
16	Male	27	Asian	3 years, 6 months	Ph.D.	Engineering
17	Male	34	African	2 years	Ph.D.	Engineering
18	Male	27	Latin American	2 years	Ph.D.	Physics
19	Female	29	Asian	2 years	M.Sc.	Business Admn.
20	Male	33	Latin American	2 years, 9 months	Ph.D.	Engineering
21	Male	30	Latin American	2 years	Ph.D.	Geoinformatics

Table 1. Sociodemographic relation of participants.

3. University setting

Participants of this project were selected from the University of Twente in Enschede, the Netherlands. Established in 1961, the University has achieved recognition at national and international level being listed at 102 in the Leiden ranking and at 210 in the Times Higher Education Supplement ranking (University of Twente, 2014). Mainly considered a technical university, the University of Twente also offers careers in the social sciences. With more than 9,000 students enrolled in 2014 (University of Twente, 2014), the University of Twente also has a large population of international students.

In order to create an international university, the University of Twente offers several of its graduate programs in English to attract students from other countries. As the University of Twente is making an effort toward having an international campus (e.g. last year's theme of UT *Dies Natalis* was internationalization), it is of interest to analyze beyond the educational opinion these students have about the university. Researching the adjustment of participants' opinions about cultural themes in the Netherlands provides a more balanced perspective of the entire experience of sojourning students at the University of Twente.

4. Instrument

Seeing there is a need for more qualitative research on the acculturation process of international students to better understand its ramifications (Smith, & Khawaja, 2011) and because of the holistic approach of this project, it was determined that a qualitative approach would be more beneficial. Therefore, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed to cover the conditions and the outcomes of participants' opinions regarding certain cultural themes.

Considering that acculturation makes reference to the experience of an individual in a foreign place, it was determined that the first two themes to include in the interview protocol would be 'home country & culture' and 'host country & culture.' Also, one of the objectives of this project was to research the acculturation experience of international students, therefore, the themes of 'academics,' 'future career,' and 'competencies' (strengths & weaknesses) were included to analyze how the participants' opinions viewed their situation regarding higher education as this is currently the main activity in their lives. The themes o 'family' and 'friendship' were added to the interview protocol to observe if the personal aspects of the participants' lives were adjusted during their acculturation process. Last, the theme of 'life views' was included to have a broad understanding of how participants understood life now compared to what they used to think when they were in their countries of origin.

In addition to the sociodemographic questions, the interview protocol initially comprised 21 items (see Appendix 1). Yet, 2 more items were added to have a better understanding of how participants perceive their presence in the Netherlands.

As the purpose of this research was to analyze the adjustment of participants' opinions, the first question of each topic being researched asked participants to reflect back to the time when they were still in their countries of origin. The second question of the topic was elaborated to know the current opinion of participants after having spent time in the Netherlands.

The interview protocol included a notification of confidentiality and anonymity regarding the data, a withdrawal reminder if the participant chose to, a consent agreement to be taped before starting the interview, and interviewer's contact information in case of further questions.

All the interviews were conducted in English, and had an average length of 40 minutes. In some occasions, the interviews were interrupted by external factors, therefore, interviews 3, 13, 17, and 18 are divided in 2 or 3 audio clips. In the case of Interviewee 3, it was not possible to continue with the interview immediately, so a second appointment was scheduled to complete the last questions.

5. Interviewer

It should be noted that the author of this study functioned as the interviewer, and that she also meets the criteria of participants of this project. Hence, it is fair to assume the interviewer has gone through an acculturation process as well. However, to remind participants of the objectivity of this study, the interviewer also mentioned to participants before each interview to be honest as there were no right or wrong answers, just their own opinions, and to see the interviewer as a third-person, not as a fellow international student in the Netherlands who may or may not have had similar opinions. While it is not possible to determine with certainty the degree of honesty of participants, it should be acknowledged that the similar background of the interviewer with respondents could have had an influence in the openness of respondents. It exists the possibility that if the interviewer would have been an individual from the host society, in this case, a Dutch person, the responses might have been different or politically correct.

6. Analysis

Interviews for this study were conducted by the project's author and were audio recorded. Then, they were transcribed for coding. The interviews were first open coded to gather all the responses from before and after being in the Netherlands. In order to organize them, the responses were

grouped together in Table 2 in categories to assess the aspects that had been modified after the acculturation period (Appendix 2).

In order to establish the extent participants' opinions may have been adjusted during acculturation, an opinion development was drafted for each participant (Appendix 3). In these stories, the development process of every cultural theme being evaluated was summarized to determine the extent of being in the Netherlands had on the final opinion of participants. Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies were also used to further explain the process some participants underwent to reach such conclusions. Last, Table 3 was created to identify broad patterns of acculturation strategies at cultural theme or participant's level (Appendix 4).

To confirm it was possible to observe the adjustment in opinions of participants through the development stories, a person independent from this research was requested to analyze 19% of the transcribed interviews and development stories. Participants to be analyzed were randomly selected by the independent person from the total number of participants. The findings of the independent person concluded the development stories showed accurately the adjustments participants made to their opinions after being in the Netherlands. However, the same person mentioned the psychological aspects of Interviewee X (i.e. having felt depressed before moving to the Netherlands) might have influenced his opinions at the time the participant was in his country of origin, therefore, it was decided to include it as contextual information to better explain the initial perception Interviewee X had about life in general.

IV. RESULTS

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the extent opinions of sojourning university students in the Netherlands may have been adjusted, the themes selected were home country & culture, the Netherlands and its culture, academics, future career, competencies, family, friendship, and life in general. In addition to the open code and development of opinions created to analyze the extent of acculturation in participants' perceptions, Table 3 was created to have a better overview of the opinions that had or had not been modified after the respondents arrived in the Netherlands.

The main results of this project indicate that participants' views in the Netherlands have been influenced in different levels. A more detailed account of each cultural theme can be found in the next pages.

a) Participants feel more appreciative about their countries of origin and their culture after being away from home.

b) Regarding the Netherlands, respondents stated there are some elements of the host lifestyle that have embraced, and at the same time remain critical about other aspects.
In the same category, participants said they perceive Dutch people to be mostly friendly and helpful, however, the host society is also seen as a closed circle where the participants have not been able to enter.
In spite of most participants saying they have not found their place in the local community, almost all of them considered they have had a positive experience and would be willing to repeat it.

c) Being away from home interviewees have also shown appreciation for the quality of higher education received in their home countries, as well as the non-hierarchical interaction that exists in the Dutch academic system.

d) Future career possibilities appear to have expanded mostly for those participants who considered academia as their only path in life.

e) Strengths have changed almost in their entirety from what participants used to believe. Respondents said to have more abilities now in the social and multicultural field compared to when they were still in their home countries.

f) In the weaknesses realm, participants identified they lacked organizational skills at home. However, being in the Netherlands, they have been improving them.

g) Respondents stated being away from home has made them appreciate more their families and that the familiar bonds seem to have improved as a consequence.

h) The importance of friendship increased as they become the support system of sojourning students.

Dutch people are seen as loyal friends, however, participants commented on the difficulties to have Dutch friends as there seems to be a clear difference between a colleague and a friend.

i) Life expectations have been adjusted to reflect more contributions to society and inclusion of people important in the lives of participants.

1. HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE

1.1 Initial opinion of country of origin's country and culture

Since home country/culture was a broad theme, respondents covered various topics to express what represented their country and culture.

a) <u>Positive aspects of population</u>

Home population was the most frequent topic participants described about their home country and culture from the time they were still in their countries of origin. The two most common adjectives to portray people in their home countries were nice and friendly. However, respondents also mentioned people in their countries of origin were open, happy, good, helpful, festive, easy-going, not lazy, amazing, relaxed, hospitable, and hard-workers. Furthermore, respondents continued talking about people in their home countries describing them as enjoying life, doing things together, eating large quantities, and not posing a threat to others.

b) <u>Society and government criticism</u>

Nonetheless, it should be noted that interviewees also stated to be aware that not everything was great in their countries when they still lived there. People in their home countries were also illustrated as impolite, unreliable, unpunctual, disrespectful, undisciplined, and unappreciative, living in a chaotic, competitive, and money-driven community. Still, it seemed to be an accepted lifestyle in their countries of origin as Interviewee 4 explained:

> *"They are not very strict as in time, or punctuality, or … being, so when someone says 'OK, I'll get this job done by this time', people don't do it, so it is already assumed that it will be delayed."* Interviewee 4

Government complaints were also part of participants' description of their home countries. Corruption, lack of animal protection, education access inequality, inadequate labor conditions,

and government media monopoly were mentioned by the participants as negative aspects of their countries.

c) <u>Feelings toward country of origin</u>

Although the majority of the emotions people felt toward their country were positive when they were at home (e.g. greatest country, pride, appreciation, and love, there were two interviewees who expressed unfavorable feelings toward their heritage countries. Interviewee 11 noted to feel annoyed with people at home because they did not take a serious stance toward life, and Interviewee 14 pointed out to not feel proud of her home country because it had several aspects that needed to be improved.

> *"… I have to say that I've never been a very proud [national of my country]. I've always seen that there are many things that can be improved, regarding the government, and specifically my topic, regarding animal protections, there's a lot to do. So, I've always thought that […] we're still a developing country, we still have a lot of things to take part of to improve."* Interviewee 14

Participants also depicted their countries of origin in terms of biodiversity, geographical territory, population size, climate, development & economics, history & culture, diversity in society, and suitability to live in and visit their home countries. Although they did not explain in detail why they believed that it was relevant to describe their countries in those aspects, it was considered necessary to mention the results briefly as more than half of participants mentioned at least one characteristic in these terms.

1.2 Adjustments to country of origin's opinion after being in the Netherlands
a) <u>Appreciation for home country and culture</u>

Being away from home seems to have caused an emergence of appreciation and pride feelings in the interviewees regarding their heritage countries and cultures. Some participants said they now appreciate and value their cultural heritage and their people, another couple of respondents regrets have taken things for granted at home and to not have taken advantage of all the benefits their countries of origin offered, while others mentioned to feel proud of their nationality. This is the case of Interviewee 8 who has reaffirmed his nationality after living in the Netherlands.

> *"Now, I think my identity has been, been sharpened further, so […] I even feel more Ghanaian now [laughs] […] than before [laughs]. That's because I think when you're not in a particular […] place, environment, or situation, you can appreciate it better from a more objective perspective. So, when I was in Ghana, I took certain things for granted."* Interviewee 8

b) <u>Criticism of home country</u>

In spite of this sense of pride and appreciation, the number of participants who scrutinized their countries and their cultures increased to more than half of the total sample. Spending time away from their countries of origin has made participants question gender restrictions, information access, people's behavior, job conditions, money-driven culture, sustainability, hierarchies, income distribution, government, cultural development, traditions & obligations, and organization in their birthplaces.

This critical assessment was supported by respondents who challenged that questioning the manner in which their heritage countries operate did not dissuade people from complying with rules and regulations. On the contrary, it encouraged the population to have an active and informed participation.

"... people just follow [traditions] not knowing, like, why are they doing it that way? But also, I think they fail to ask a question like 'why do they have to do it?' or 'why does it have to be in a certain a way or certain order?' But when I try to find out the reason, yeah, there is a reason behind it. So, I think when you know the reason, [...] then you're more conscious about what you're doing...." Interviewee 3

c) <u>Similar description of population</u>

Concerning their co-nationals, respondents kept a similar opinion about them (i.e. being nice, friendly, happy, festive, helpful, inclusive, considered with religion, caring, diverse, hard-worker, and interacting more as a community), so there seems to be no distinct change in the participants' perception of people in their home countries now that they have spent time in Dutch territory.

2. HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE
2.1 Initial opinion of host country and culture

In spite of being citizens of different continents, the participants had a similar idea on what they knew about the Netherlands before actually living in Dutch territory.

a) <u>Tourist impression</u>

Interviewees concurred their first impression of the Netherlands included the legal use of drugs, the red light district, windmills, tulips, cycling, and wooden shoes. Additionally, respondents thought the Netherlands was developed, sustainable, safe, beautiful, and with solid and modern facilities and infrastructure.

b) <u>Previous opinion of Dutch population</u>

Relating to Dutch citizens, interviewees had mixed opinions of what they were going to encounter. On the one hand, some interviewees believed Dutch people would be closed to foreigners, unfriendly, cold, unwilling to speak in English, strict like the Germans, and to some level, racist. On the other hand, the same participants expected Dutch citizens to be open-minded, nice, helpful, willing to communicate in English, friendly, educated, tolerant, flexible, respectful, and proud of their heritage. This mixed position about how locals would be can be appreciated in how Interviewee 18 stated he believed Dutch people would be open, yet at the same time, distant in their behavior.

> *"I was expecting [...] like in [my home country], pretty open-minded, [a] country very tolerant [...]. I was also expecting, to be honest, like they were going to be like little bit, colder. You know because in [the countries of my region] that's at least what the people say about us [...], we tend to be more friendly [...], and in these countries I have the impression they were not that [...] warm [...] in that sense."* Interviewee 18

2.2 Adjustments to opinion of the Netherlands after living in it
a) <u>Negative tourist image removed</u>

Having lived in the Netherlands has given a different perspective to the participants about what media typically portrays of the Dutch. Participants stated that although the sex industry and drug consumption are part of the Netherlands, they are not everywhere as they had originally believed, removing from their minds the extreme tourist image participants had about Dutch culture.

b) <u>Likes & dislikes of Dutch lifestyle</u>

Moreover, respondents said they perceive the Netherlands to be a wealthy, socialist nation with a long history, an average or upper quality of life, a well-organized lifestyle, and a satisfying job culture. As Interviewee 16 explained, it is precisely the organized lifestyle and job culture of the host society that impressed some participants.

> *"[For] everything you have a step. [...] you have a structure or you have agenda for it [...]. This is not so normal in [my home country], [...] we are not a good time manager [...].*
>
> *[Having structures] makes life so efficien[t]. [...] Well, you think about the professors here, they have so many tasks every day, but still, they can have a 40 days vacation a year, and they can manage it. That is amazing to me."* Interviewee 16

Living in the Netherlands Interviewee 13 has changed his mind about how he believed the host country was developed and sustainable because he has now seen unsustainable practices in the Netherlands that he had not expected. On the opposite side, Interviewee 12 considers the Dutch people are sustainable conscious because of their energy savings when she compares it with the energy consumption in her home country.

Additionally, Interviewee 13, along with Interviewee 5, mentioned that while it may not be clearly visible in the Netherlands, corruption and dishonesty is also present in the Dutch society, just like in their countries of origin.

> *"Sometimes, the feeling about [people from my region and other regions with cultural similarities is that they want to take] [...] advantage from the system. But [in the Netherlands] I've seen [it is] also [...] possible, and also [...] they do it. [T]he difference [...] is the people here [act] as if 'Oh, I don't know, I don't know about this.' But I know that some people made this kind of [...] arrangement. [...] Maybe is not the same quantity that in [my home country] or [my region], but yeah, I see [it] also is here."* Interviewee 13

c) Dutch population description

In similar fashion as when describing their home country and culture, the majority of the responses given by the participants about the host country and its culture after moving to the Netherlands were concentrated on population. The majority of participants emphasized the niceness, helpfulness, politeness, happiness & enthusiasm, directness, warmth, education, amity, tolerance, and respectfulness they have encountered living in the Dutch society. On a different perspective after living in the Netherlands, participants also notice Dutch people can be uneducated, selfish, cold, cautious, not goal-driven, closed to foreigners, and unfriendly.

i. Being direct

While at the beginning being direct might have been difficult to understand, respondents said to have adopted being direct to a certain extent.

> *"... I still remember the first time I went to a course, there was an assignment [...] and the group that presented, after they finished presenting, the teacher told them "That's the way you should have not done it', and for me that was a comment that was really strong, never heard it before [...] in my home country, so, [...] I felt if I would be [...] in that group, I would have felt really sad and bad about myself, but the Dutch students just said, like 'Uh, OK, sorry, how can we do it better?', and then, you know, life moved on, so there was nothing wrong on [...]being direct. [...] [I]t was at the beginning shocking, but now [...] you [get] used to it, and*

I find myself that I've also became more direct. [...] I tell things more in front now, and I think that's good." Interviewee11

In the previous example, it can be observed that Interviewee 11 has experienced some of the acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) described by Berry's (1997) model. When Interviewee 11 heard severe words from a professor about the quality of a group of students' presentation, Interviewee 11 experienced "separation" (i.e. retaining home values and discarding host values) as the situation was shocking for him because he believed such harsh words would not have been used in his home country to comment on a student's presentation. After seeing that the direct exchange of words led only to the improvement of the presentation, Interviewee 11 realized being direct was not a problem, and became used to it. As Interviewee 11 has said he now talks more straightforward in the Netherlands, it could be said he has "assimilated" (i.e. leaving home values to adopt host values) into the host society as he has embraced being direct with others. While it was not part of the previous quote from Interviewee 11, it can also be observed that Interviewee 11 has implemented an "integration" (i.e. embracing host values while keeping home values) strategy about being direct as he said later during the interview that he knows he is switching between two sides on this topic. Interviewee 11 explained that while he is more direct in the Netherlands because it is accepted, Interviewee 11 realizes that he has to pay attention of being direct when he goes to another place to see if this type of behavior is appropriate.

ii.   Isolated host society

According to Interviewees 4 and 12, Dutch natives seem to keep their distance from non-Dutch people, which has caused other respondents to feel as foreigners or guests, and not as part of the Dutch community. The previous statements are supported by other participants who pointed out that while the Dutch may consider themselves an open society, in the experience of participants, it has not been the case.

"… [Dutch] are not [...] racist, and they don't exclude you [...], but they don't include you neither…

… it makes me feel [...] not rejected. [...] like some kind of a 'social limbo'. [...] I am foreigner, and I'm here, [...] I'm not rejected, but I am not accepted neither." Interviewee 7

iii.   Discrimination and racism

Discrimination and racism were topics that although were rarely mentioned by the participants, the occasions when they were discussed by two participants showed opposite viewpoints.

Although Interviewee 14 stated to not have personally experienced any racist or discriminatory behavior, Interviewee 14 declared to have witnessed how Dutch people behave differently toward non-white and Muslim people.

> *"… there are some shocks […] that I've found, […] I've seen […] somehow differences on the way [Dutch people] behave toward […] people who are darker, from their skin, […] and people who are Muslims, […] [s]o I've had… those experiences with the way [Dutch people] act towards them, and I've seen them, but to me, […] this has never happened."* Interviewee 14

In contrast, Interviewee 9 explained that he has not seen any behavior of such a kind in the Dutch society, in spite of expecting to find some degree of racism in the Netherlands.

> *"…because there was a notion […] back in [my home country] if you go to […] Western countries, like Europe, US, or somewhere else, there are people there [who] generally don't see Asians or [nationals of my country] particularly not in very high regard. […] [T]here will be some racial discrimination you will face. But here, it's completely different…"* Interviewee 9

Comparing the opinions participants had about the Netherlands and its culture before and after living in Dutch land, a notable difference can be found in the perception of Dutch people. While participants acknowledge that Dutch people are generally polite and helpful, participants also perceive the Dutch population is not open to interact profoundly with people outside its own circle.

d) Creating social bonds with Dutch people

When describing their current perception of Dutch people, participants frequently mentioned their challenges to become friends with them. However, as the "friendship" theme was also evaluated in this project, the responses that dealt with this were included in the section dedicated to the theme.

e) General expectations about living in a different country

Closer attention should be paid to general expectations created about living abroad. Interviewees 5, 15, and 19 declared that they did not create too many expectations about what they would find arriving in the Netherlands or how their lives would be. Throughout their interviews, these participants expressed satisfaction with their experience and the lifestyle they have found in the Netherlands.

On the contrary, studying in the Netherlands was the first time for Interviewee 7 to live away from his country of origin. Because of this, Interviewee 7 created great expectations about how his life would be in the Netherlands (i.e. making friends with Dutch people, learning a new language). Nevertheless, some of the first encounters Interviewee 7 had with Dutch people made Interviewee 7 to feel as if it was not possible to establish a social relationship with the locals. This perception was reinforced by the experience of other expatriates in the Netherlands who shared with Interviewee 7 to have only a few Dutch friends in spite of the years they have lived in the country. As his expectations about the host society have not been fulfilled, Interviewee 7 displayed a general discontent about the Netherlands. This can be summed up that despite the fact Interviewee 7 described his educational experience in the Netherlands (i.e. the main reason Interviewee 7 left his country of origin) as positive, he does not want to repeat the experience of studying in the Netherlands.

f) <u>Influence on Dutch culture</u>

Participants were also requested to provide their opinions about their presence in the Dutch society. When asked about their views on whether respondents believed that their presence had influenced the Dutch culture or people, the decision was approximately divided in half. The interviewees who answered negatively to the question expressed different reasons for saying so.

Interviewees 1 and 3 said they had not enough interaction with Dutch people to have an influence on them. Others cited not knowing the Dutch language, having been in the Netherlands for a short time, and being just one person was not enough to make a difference in the culture/people. Some respondents stated that it was not possible to have an effect on the culture or people in the Netherlands because the Dutch were closed to foreign influences.

> *"No, because in my point of view, you came here, but [...] you are kind of a spectator. You don't interact with them, and they don't interact with you. [...]They don't really care [for] your opinion, or they don't even maybe share [it] with you."* Interviewee 7

Nonetheless, another interviewee who answered to have no influence on the Dutch culture or people explained that it was not an expectation to make an impact in the Dutch community.

> *"... I think that is been more that I have adapted myself to the style of here, than me trying to bring my style to here.*
>
> *So, in that sense when I'm having a relation with Dutch people, I always try to keep how things are done here. I don't try to interfere or to bring my cultural background to these places."* Interviewee 15

Participants who answered that their presence in the Netherlands has had an influence said that they felt they were helping to eradicate stereotypes and to increase other cultures' interest in the Dutch. Others said their influence could be seen in the behavior changes in their colleagues.

"I have Dutch friends, for example, and they try to [...] improvise, let's say. They try to not plan stuff, but just, do stuff, you know, right away, just because I'm there also. That is kind of nice." Interviewer 18

The previous three examples show how three interviewees have used different Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies for the same concept. By expressing negatively about how Dutch people interact with international people, Interviewee 7 denotes to have 'separated' from the host society maintaining his home values and undervaluing the host society's position on this affair. Interviewee 15 has employed the 'assimilation' strategy about influencing the Dutch culture as he has expressed he does not want to interfere with the way affairs are handled in a host country. Finally, Interviewee 18 seems to have used 'integration' to a certain point as Interviewee 18 has connected with Dutch friends and some of his behaviors have been incorporated into the host society.

g) Participants' place in Dutch community

Questions regarding the interviewees' place within the Dutch society and the effort they had done to be part of the Dutch community were not originally included in the interview protocol. However, during the interviews it became important to include them to identify how the participants perceived themselves within the Dutch community. For this reason, some interviewees were not asked these questions.

Only about a quarter of the total number of participants responded affirmatively to have found their place to some extent within the Dutch society. The rest of the interviewees who were asked about their place within the Dutch community said they have not found it because they do not feel comfortable or lack interaction with Dutch people, feel always as a guest, came to the Netherlands only for educational purposes, and because interviewee needs to identify his own role before finding his place in Dutch society.

For example, Interviewee 14 explained how at the beginning she thought it would be possible to find her place within the new environment. In her opinion, Interviewee 14 was doing her part (i.e. learning the language, researching local customs and lifestyles) to become part of the Dutch society. However, Interviewee 14 has realized that it may not be the case as the Dutch society remained closed to her as a foreigner. From Interviewee 14's case, it can be seen she has also used

one of Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies (i.e. assimilation) to understand her circumstances are a normal situation for a foreigner in the Netherlands.

Interviewees 1, 2, 8, and 7 do not have a response in this section as it has been explained before. While the protocol for Interviewee 15 already included asking about find the interviewee's own place in the Dutch society, it was an oversight of the interviewer not to ask this question.

h) Honest effort to become part of Dutch community

The majority of participants stated to have made an honest effort to find their position in the Dutch society. According to the interviewees, their efforts have been concentrated in learning (or attempting to learn) Dutch, researching Dutch lifestyle and searching to interact with Dutch people. Interviewee 15 did not mention a specific reason why he considered to have made an honest effort to find his place in the Dutch society.

Respondents who expressed not having made an honest effort to include themselves in the Dutch community said their reasons were to not have spent enough time on it, to not have learned Dutch, to constantly feel as an outsider, and because Dutch people do not want to integrate.

Interviewee 12 chose not to answer this question, and Interviewees 1, 2, 4, and 5 do not have a response in this section were not asked this question as it was explained before.

i) Total experience in the Netherlands

All participants responded positively about how they would sum up their experience in the Netherlands. However, there were some participants who clarified that their response was based on planning short stays.

> *It's a good country. […] I think you are always a foreigner, here, [people from other nationalities] should know that. And, it's good […] for a short time, but not for a long time."* Interviewee 12

j) Repeat experience in the Netherlands

Participants were also asked if being aware of what they know now about living in the Netherlands would have affected their decision of choosing the Netherlands as their abroad destination for education. Out of the entire sample population, only one interviewee responded to not have chosen the Netherlands if the interviewee would have known back then what expected him here.

> *[…] I would say is a general lack of [tenderness]; [Dutch people] don't have [tenderness] for the others.*

I see that you live [...] with a lot of people here, but we live, alone together. ... [W]e still live alone, and I don't like that. I need to talk with others, to meet new people, to start a conversation with someone that you don't know, and that kind of things, I think so."
Interviewee 7

In general during the interview, the lack of social interaction with Dutch people seemed to be the main reason of Interviewee 7's unsatisfactory attitude with the Netherlands.

3. ACADEMICS
3.1 Initial opinion of higher education
a) <u>Purpose of higher education</u>

Since all the participants of this project currently belong to a higher education institution, all of them had strong opinions about education before and after coming to the Netherlands. At home, higher education was held in high esteem as it was considered important, the greatest level of education a human being could achieve, and granted respect, value, and status to those who entered. This can be explained by how higher education was said to be perceived of great meaning within the participant's family nucleus, therefore transforming it into a life goal for some participants.

Higher education was also understood as a necessity for country development and a requirement for people searching for better opportunities in life. Other participants believed that higher education was for people who wanted to study further than the average individual, and that higher education helped individuals in their self-development process, by giving them abilities to handle complex situations and expanding their social and mind scope. Because of this, it was common to hold high expectations of university graduates in their countries of origin.

"In [my home country], we have [...] a tradition to think if you go to college or if you go to a university, you have to know everything, I mean, [...] it's common impression, so if you [...] get the high [...] degree, [...] you are supposed to know everything. [...] The higher you are in, the more respect you get, and [...] the more knowledge you should deliver." Interviewee 16

b) <u>Criticism of higher education in home countries</u>

Nevertheless, respondents were still critical about the level of higher education in their countries. Some regarded it as occasionally overvalued and of average/low quality, while others complained

about the attitude of students who performed only to meet the minimum requirements. For Interviewee 6, university education in his home country simply did not meet his high expectations.

"When I was not [studying at a] university, I thought it was the greatest level of education you can have, of course. Then I was in [a university in my home country, and] I was a bit disappointed because I was expecting more like, opportunities to develop yourself and ways or learning, … how do you do to know, to actually acquire the… education or the knowledge, or however you want to call it." Interviewee 6

In addition to this criticism, respondents said about university studies in their countries of origin, respondents mentioned that studying at a higher education institution in their home countries was virtually a privilege of a few since it required large quantities of money to study at a university.

c) Perception of international higher education

In their opinions about higher education when they were still in their heritage countries, participants also mentioned they had a favorable opinion about the quality of international higher education. Interviewees believed the level of higher education in other countries was recognized internationally, better than in their countries of origin, and that it included plenty of resources.

3.2 Adjustments to higher education opinion after being in the Netherlands

a) Appreciation of quality of higher education at country of origin

After having spent time studying abroad, respondents have developed again a more profound feeling of appreciation toward their education at home. A couple of interviewees commented on the quality of their courses and professors being similar to what they found in the Netherlands. During his stay abroad, Interviewee 15 mentioned that he has compared his home education with colleagues in the area, as he has been part of a program with other students from around a dozen Dutch universities. Collaborating along his colleagues in the program's courses and seminars, Interviewee 15 has noticed that his educational background is on the same level as his colleagues.

Interviewee 5 went further to say that her education from home had been more complete compared to those students who were at her level when they first arrived in the Netherlands.

"I think my background from [my home country] is absolutely, absolutely much better than the background that you have here. I mean, my bachelor and my master is… 10 times more complete that the bachelor and master that the people have here.

And that is.. I think that is weird because in [my home country] you think that in Europe is the best education ever, and you're right here and say 'Hm, is not.. really the best , I mean, maybe they have a lot of money , so you have a very nice laboratory, you have very good instruments, but.. not very good.. education itself." Interviewee 5

Likewise, Interviewee 6 expressed his appreciation for the university education received in his home country. According to Interviewee 6, he believes his bachelor education was more complete because in his home country the academic areas of his career included several areas that in the Netherlands could not be studied in a single career, but in separate career programs.

b) <u>Continued criticism of higher education in home countries</u>

In spite of this appreciation for their university education at home, participants did not omit that being in the Netherlands has made them identify or confirm the educational aspects that they believe need to be improved in their countries of origin. Some participants said higher education in their countries of origin was mostly theoretical, leaving students without studying the real-life applications of the knowledge. Among other respondents, Interviewee 14 complained that the hierarchical system employed in higher education in their native countries does not allow students to freely voice their opinions.

"So, here [in the Netherlands] it's confirmed what I've always thought was wrong with the system in [my home country]. That [in the Netherlands] people are open and whatever your opinion is, no matter if you're a student, even if you're just a bachelor student, you can [...] be honest and be direct with professors, even [...] with highly recognized professors, [...] you can speak with them, you can even get into a discussion, an academic discussion with them without no problem and without having [...] any repercussions. And that's something you cannot do in [my home country]." Interviewee 14

Being in the Netherlands, Interviewee 4 now realizes that the relaxed job culture in the interviewee's home country is what makes Ph.D. candidates to work nonstop. According to Interviewee 4, Ph.D. students worked long hours during the entire week in his home country, hence, he expected all Ph.D. positions to be the same. However, after his experience as a Ph.D. candidate in the Netherlands, Interviewee 4 has seen that this prolonged work schedule was due to the inefficiency during regular working hours, hence his opinion about Ph.D. positions has changed.

c) Current opinion of higher education's purpose

With respect to the opinion of higher education as a whole, respondents maintained a similar position to what they thought before coming to the Netherlands, although the number of participants who shared this opinion increased. In the participants' opinion, higher education is meant to assist the human being to improve oneself, to expand the multicultural and mind scope, to manage challenging situations, and to acquire problem-solving abilities and new learning methods.

d) Current opinion of Dutch higher education

As expected before moving to the Netherlands, participants found there is an abundance of resources in Dutch higher education institutions. Nevertheless, an aspect that no participant expected of international higher education when they were still at home was the non-hierarchical system employed in the Netherlands. Participants expressed their appreciation for this approach which allowed respondents to maintain an honest and direct relationship with professors and colleagues, and where decisions were usually taken at a group level.

As Interviewee 14 had experienced higher education in Germany previous to studying in the Netherlands, Interviewee 14 said hierarchies were a major difference in higher education despite the geographical closeness of the two countries. According to Interviewee 14, the German higher education system works with a hierarchy system that makes a clear difference between those who are students and those who are professors. Interviewee 14 stated that in the Netherlands professors remember they are people in spite of the academic degrees they have earned.

In general, respondents described a satisfactory opinion of their experience with Dutch higher education stating it is less bureaucratic than in their home countries, practically-oriented, with a deep emphasis in quality research approach, and served as an open environment for new ideas. Nonetheless, Interviewee 20's opinion did not appear to be satisfied with his experience studying in the Netherlands as he expressed a discrepancy between what he thinks higher education entails and what he found in the Netherlands.

> *"...now I feel that Dutch education is not as good as I expected because I think is very efficiency driven, so every time the study time is shorter, [...] people do their bachelor in three years where in [my home country] we do it in five, people study way less time than we study in [my home country], and people for example here they choose an emphasis which is nice, but, however, I think that you should not choose an emphasis before doing your master because you really need to feel what everything is about. You are choosing stuff without knowing it." Interviewee 20.*

e) <u>Selective access for higher education</u>

When Interviewees 5 and 11 were still in their respective home countries, they already believed higher education was designed for people who wanted to concentrate on learning. After being in the Netherlands, they confirmed their expectations, and were joined by Interviewee 3 who also believed that higher education was intended for people with the skills and the desire to study further. In his opinion, Interviewee 3 said higher education was not meant for everybody.

Interviewee 3 justified his answer arguing that people sometimes had non-academic abilities (e.g. arts) who chose to attend a university only because of the societal appreciation and financial value they would obtain in return, not because they wanted to be in a university. For Interviewee 3, the under appreciation of non-academic careers is causing higher education to become a business where the only interest of higher education institutions is to attract more students who can pay a tuition fee.

In similar fashion, Interviewee 5 explained that she considered appropriate that in the Netherlands, people studied at a university because they wanted to expand their knowledge, not because it was necessary to have a decent life.

> *"Here in Netherlands [...] you don't need the higher education, you can study in a university or you can study in Saxion o sometimes you don't need to study. And also you have equal opportunities, or you can have a good salary, and [...] you study or you have higher education because you want, because you like [to] study in general. [...] [It's] really something that you choose [...], it's not something that the society tells you that you have to do."* Interviewee 5

4. FUTURE CAREER
4.1 Initial opinion of career expectations

For most of the interviewees, their future career prospects had limited options before living in the Netherlands. Some respondents perceived obtaining an international higher education degree was necessary because they believe they needed to acquire more knowledge for their future careers as it can be appreciated in the experience of Interviewees 12 and 3.

> *"That's why I came out from my country to here [to know more than colleagues at home country], to learn more, to have something special."* Interviewee 12

> *"... when I was doing at the end of my bachelor's I was thinking... 'OK, this is not enough. It looks like I need to do more because my knowledge is not enough' [...] So, that's how I applied*

for my master's because I thought when I finish my master's I will have more knowledge and more practical stuff, so then [...] there's a lot of chances of getting into a job..." Interviewee 3

From that group of participants, Interviewee 20 also considered that an international higher education degree was regarded as important and necessary to obtain further success in his home country.

Among the people who came to the Netherlands to pursue a Ph.D. degree, Interviewee 10 clearly stated that the most important aspect for him was to obtain a job regardless if it was in academia or private industry, half of the interviewees left said that their expectation was to work in in the private sector, while the rest thought their future was working in academia/teaching. Only Interviewee 15, who desired to work in academia, also mentioned searching for a job in the governmental category in the future.

4.2 Adjustments to career expectations after being in the Netherlands

Once respondents spent time in the Netherlands, most of them experienced a slight change in how they viewed their future. Interviewees 3 and 12, who came to obtain a master's degree to know more about their careers, still feel that they have not learned enough, and are uncertain or scared about what that means for them.

a) <u>Open possibilities for participants focused in academia/teaching</u>

More than half of participants who answered that academia/teaching was their only path when they were in their home country, are now open to the possibility of working in the corporate field. In spite of considering working in the private sector as a possibility for their future careers, the preference of these respondents continues to be working in academia/teaching.

b) <u>Minor change for participants focused in private sector</u>

On the contrary, being away from home did not cause a dramatic change in the decision of those respondents who foresaw themselves working in the private industry. Only a few of those interviewees considered a future in academia and research, and in the case of Interviewee 13, he considered academia but with certain reservations.

"The normal career [...] if you have a Ph.D. in Chile, not here, is ... work at a university [...]. I'm scared about this, I don't want to stay in university... every semester, one, two course[s]; no, I don't want this. I mean, if I have to do, OK, no problem, but just this, no. I want to stay

also in a job that I can go to the field work. If it's possible, maybe, I can go with my students to the field work." Interviewee 13

For the rest respondents it was not clearly evident whether they continue to have a preference for obtaining a job in the private industry than in the academic world, except for Interviewee 11. From the beginning, Interviewee 11 declared to regard working in academia as boring, therefore, Interviewee 11 said he preferred to work in the private sector. Since this perception of academia has not changed after being away from home, Interviewee 11 restated that the only path for him to follow was in the private industry, whether as an employee or as an entrepreneur.

c) <u>Value of higher education degree in the future</u>

The significance of a higher education degree also appeared as a topic to consider in the future careers of participants as a couple of participants perceived it from opposite directions. Whereas Interviewee 17 said the Ph.D. degree provided more opportunities to obtain top positions in the job market, Interviewee 1 stated the future looked more challenging because there were fewer jobs that required employees with a Ph.D. degree. Since earning a Ph.D. degree was the objective of Interviewee 1 being in the Netherlands, it is peculiar to find he now believes it will be more difficult to find a job due to the main reason Interviewee 1 originally left his home country for.

5. COMPETENCIES – STRENGTHS
5.1 Initial perception of strengths

Considering that the participants belong to a Dutch university mostly technical, it is not uncommon to see that most of the abilities participants mentioned to have before coming to the Netherlands were in that same area (e.g. engineering, data manipulations, drawing, analytical, technical, writing, mathematical, programming, computational, problem-solving, and calculation skills). Respondents also mentioned that when they were in their home countries they had abilities related to academics such as researching, generating idea, fast-learning, presenting/public speaking, observing, and teaching. While presentation skills were later mentioned by a couple of participants as a weakness before and after moving to the Netherlands, Interviewee 11 said to have felt confident enough presentation skills were a strength in him before leaving his home country.

> *"I always trusted the work I do, so, […] I don't feel nervous about presenting what I work. But then again that's because also I always want to work something good, […] and do it good, so then I trusted myself, and then I can present it […] to others."* Interviewee 11

At a personal level, interviewees responded that they considered themselves strong-minded, respectful, responsible, perseverant, extrovert, and able to face challenges. Also, participants thought to have managerial, multitasking, social, and language skills.

5.2 Adjustments to perception of strengths after being in the Netherlands

a) <u>New strengths emerged</u>

Compared to the number of technical skills participants mentioned before coming to the Netherlands, only two technical abilities (i.e. technology analysis & their impact in human behavior and mathematical skills) were reported as strengths after having spent time in Dutch territory.

For academic skills, research, fast-learning, observing, and teaching were considered again as interviewees' strengths. The respondents also mentioned public relations, knowing how to sell skills, and being a more independent researcher as new academic abilities after being in the Netherlands.

Regarding personal abilities, there were some strengths that remained after moving overseas (i.e. being responsible, respectful, able to face challenges, perseverant & persistent, language skills). However, living in a different environment made Interviewee 3 question the strengths she believed to possess before moving to the Netherlands.

> *"When I was actually facing some problems here, like a new place, new things, when I had to adjust, I was ready for the challenge [...] I was facing it, but not in an easy way [...] I was worked up, stressed up, I was scared [...] I was like actually doubting my ability, whether do I have the ability to do this."* Interviewee 3

Additionally, Interviewees 4 and 19 discovered that being in the Netherlands helped them to become more efficient and organized.

> *"I have learned the Dutch way; I am much more organized now. So, for example, even for a small meeting, we arrange for appointment. So, [I learned to] be a very organized person."* Interviewee 19

Attending an international university in the Netherlands, respondents have developed acquired more social skills regarding communication, multicultural capabilities to create a network of people, and understanding of affairs from a balanced perspective.

> *"I have developed skills in interacting with other cultures, working in multicultural environments, and also the skill, or probably the awareness of being informed of other*

person['s] culture to avoid the situation in [which] I can offend or somehow [d]isrespect other persons." Interviewee 21

b) <u>Hidden strengths in the Netherlands</u>

Interviewees explained that some of their abilities have not changed; they simply have not been able to use them due to the circumstances. For example, Interviewee 2 received positive comments from others and considered herself to be a good teacher at home. Nonetheless, since Interviewee 2 is not required to teach in the university, Interviewee 2 cannot demonstrate this ability in the Netherlands. Also, Interviewee 20 declared that his business and social skills were of great value for him and his employers at home. Yet, since Interviewee 20 does not speak the local language and feels that the cultural differences do not allow him to connect with the Dutch population, Interviewee 20 stated his social and business skills are nowadays non-existent.

6. COMPETENCIES – WEAKNESSES
6.1 Initial perception of weaknesses

Before living in the Netherlands, respondents mentioned their weaknesses were low-confidence, no opinion of his own, poor communication, being callous or arrogant, not speaking better of home country, not making an effort when meeting people for the first time, not encouraging home population to appreciate own country, not adapting to the system, lacking multicultural manners, and even dancing. Nevertheless, the weakness people mentioned the most were languages. Interviewees 13 and 21 said that expressing themselves in English was out of their comfort zone, while Interviewee 21 acknowledged he did not appreciate the rich variety of languages of the interviewee's home country.

> *"Actually, 23 are official languages in [my home country]… But the thing is that we really don't care that much, probably because of the way we are educated to [not] give importance to that other 22 languages… I think that was a weakness. I was not aware of the importance of that cultural aspect."* Interviewee 21

Participants also mentioned they had several weaknesses in the professional aspect such as presenting/public speaking, absence of international experience, skills or knowledge of research topic, diplomacy, and running for public positions.

6.2 Adjustments to perception of weaknesses after being in the Netherlands

    a) <u>Different weaknesses away from home</u>

The respondents have also identified certain weaknesses in the professional area after leaving their home countries. Not being proactive, lacking practical experience, being a dependent research, scientific writing, expressing ideas, unwillingness to request assistance, presentation skills, and knowledge of research topic were the areas the interviewees lacked confidence being in the Netherlands.

> *"I think maybe sometimes I don't take help from other people. I've heard this a lot from my colleagues and also the professors, that I try to work alone."* Interviewee 4

    b) <u>Organizational skills</u>

In regards to the areas of opportunity, the category of organization emerged prominently among respondents' weaknesses before and after living in the Netherlands. Participants mentioned that when they were in their home countries they were lazy, inefficient, had bad time management, and lacked organization. For example, Interviewee 4, explained how as he was accustomed to a more relaxed job culture, he struggled to understand the way his colleagues worked in the Netherlands.

> *"The first two months I spent [in the Netherlands], it was very difficult for me to work because back home I was used to, like, going easy, and doing all the work [...] in the night, and during the day just going around and working on weekends or something like this. So, once I came [to the Netherlands], the first two months I found it difficult because when I worked in the [...] office here, everyone worked so efficiently, and you're like 'OK, I'm not doing anything'."* Interviewee 4

Interviewees 4 and 19 said to have incorporated organizational skills in their lives in the Netherlands. As they have embraced the new organizational habit over their previous behaviors, Interviewees 4 and 19 demonstrate to have used Berry's (1997) "assimilation" strategy in this cultural theme.

However, changing surroundings did not seem to have a significant effect on other participants since laziness, bad time management, and disorganization appeared again in some participants' weaknesses after being in Dutch land.

> *"I have a terrible problem with scheduling things. I have a terrible problem with organization, still, I always had it. I keep forgetting stuff. And, you know, sometimes [...] when*

it comes to small things, then, it's not really a problem, but if you forget like a meeting with a professor or something, then it really becomes a problem." Interviewee 18

    c) <u>Dutch effect on weaknesses</u>

Likewise as with strengths, during the acculturation process the majority of participants identified other weaknesses different to what they had in their countries of origin. However, there were two cases where being away from home, produced particular effects in the participants. On the one hand, Interviewee 7 expressed to have no weaknesses before moving to the Netherlands. Interviewee 7 even said he must have been arrogant because he believed he was good at everything that was important, and he did not lack confidence on himself. However, after spending time away from home, Interviewee 7 declared to doubt his capabilities and knowledge because Interviewee 7 encountered people who knew more than him, making him lack confidence on himself.

On the other hand, Interviewee 17 said that although he had declared English to be his only weakness when Interviewee 17 was still at home, after spending time in the Netherlands, he was not able to identify a current area of improvement in his life. As Interviewee 17 smiled when he answered this question, he was asked again if he really considered he did not have any weaknesses nowadays, to which Interviewee 17 confirmed that he did not.

7. FAMILY
7.1 Initial opinion of 'family'

While a few interviewees summarized "family" as everything in life, in general, participants explained their concept of family before coming to the Netherlands as a group of people that offered its members love, care, help, security, friendship, fun, trust, freedom, understanding, knowledge, and above all, unconditional support.

Although family composition was different among the participants, they mentioned that the members of a family did not change after moving abroad. Some respondents said family was only the inner circle of parents and siblings, a couple interviewees said it included the extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins), others regarded friends as family members, and Interviewee 5 even considered animals as part of the family unit.

7.2 Adjustments of 'family' opinion after being in the Netherlands

   a) <u>Reshaping of family interactions</u>

In all of the cases, the interviewees maintained that the meaning of family has not changed from the time before coming to the Netherlands. Nevertheless, being away from home has reshaped the family bonds. On the one hand, some interviewees said communication with their families has increased and improved. This can be attributed to how being away from their families has made participants appreciate more their relationships with their families, and now they communicate more often.

> *"I am more fond of these relationships because in [my home country] I don't have such feelings that when you don't contact with your family members for, like for one week, feel nothing. But here, because you are so far away, you are interested in what happened at home. You ask your parents or your brothers or sisters […] what they are doing, […] how you are these days […]. This is a very stronger bond compared to previous times."* Interviewee 10

On the other hand, there were Interviewees 13 and 21 said the distance had actually caused to lose some contact with the family because it was hard to maintain the relationship that way.

Being in the Netherlands has also given life experiences to the international respondents which in turn have allowed them to discuss more profound topics and to have their opinions considered by their families, such as the case of Interviewee 3.

> *"Now I have started living far away from home, and I started dealing with the life […] I can call my parents and have a support and everything, but I have to deal with […] some things [that] have to be done with, like by me. Then I have to do and react. So now I feel that I'm more mature than before, so now I can really discuss about more deep stuffs."* Interviewee 3

   b) <u>Appreciation of family</u>

Leaving family behind has also made respondents to appreciate, and in some cases be concerned about, their families. Interviewee 15 expressed being worried because his relatives' health may be diminishing as time passes, and because they may need help that the respondent may not be able to provide due to the distance.

> *"In that sense you realize also how important is family and how important it is that you can […] be able to help or to support if something happened to your family.*
>
> *…when you are in [the home country] you give [family] for granted because you have them besides you. But when you come here, […] it's been part of the process to realize how*

important they are, and also how important, in this case for me, is to try also to be close to them in order to if something could happen or just to be there or so." Interviewee 15

    c)   <u>A family away from home</u>

For a couple of respondents, being away from their countries of origin has made them create a new family in the Netherlands with friends. Interviewees 7, 11 and 14 stated that they have realized it is not necessary to have a blood relationship with other people to consider them family.

    d)   <u>Incorporation of European family lifestyles</u>

When asked about their perception of family before and after living in the Netherlands, almost no participant mentioned what they thought of Dutch families. However, Interviewee 21 mentioned one aspect of his perception of European families that he would like to integrate when raising a family. According to Interviewee 21, most members of European families try to move out of their homes at a young age. While in Interviewee 21's home country this situation is not common, Interviewee 21 expressed his desire for integrating this lifestyle as he believes it encourages responsibility and independence from a young age.

8. FRIENDSHIP
8.1 Initial opinion of 'friendship'

Before coming to the Netherlands, interviewees regarded friends as important and necessary in their lives. Friends were sometimes considered family, with the difference that friends could be chosen, and this was an aspect that some interviewees truly appreciated.

> *I think that friendship is one of the most important part of my life, [...] or anyone, I think. Because [...] family members you don't decide, [...] they are there because is family, so blood-relations, you can't change that. [...] but the friends are the people whom we choose, [...] who come together because of not any reason, because they just like to be together. [...]With family there's obligation."* Interviewee 9

Taking into consideration that friends were seen as family members, respondents described 'friendship' with similar answers as when they explained their meaning of 'family' (i.e. people who loved, understood, trusted, with whom have fun times, and provided unconditional help & support). However, contrary to when participants talked about 'family', Interviewee 12 acknowledged that friends could also be unreliable due to their life circumstances (e.g. being married and having children).

Participants also described their opinion of friendship when they were at home as respectful relationships with people who could be inconvenienced, and sometimes even become conspirators, where interests, opinions, experiences, emotions, time, and other factors were exchanged and shared by all of those involved.

For some of the interviewees, it was important to explain that they did not have large numbers of friends, but rather a small group.

> *"Because I think the society tell[s] you that you have to have friends [laughs], something like that, so you say 'OK, I don't have many friends, […] you have to start to look for reasons, why you don't have many friends. […]. But what I think about my few friends, they are very important for me. That is it, … they are my family."* Interviewee 5

8.2 Adjustments to 'friendship' after being in the Netherlands

While some opinions and characteristics of friendship prevailed after being in the Netherlands (i.e. trustful, loving, respectful, treated like family, sharing experiences & interests, offer unconditional support, necessary for life, small quantity of friends, and friends are chosen, not assigned), participants also recognized certain adjustments on their current perception of friendship.

a) <u>Friendships at home</u>

Comparing their views on friendship nowadays and what they lived in their countries of origin, respondents described friendships at home were intimate, like a family, informal, emotional, and open to meet new friends. Nevertheless, other interviewees said it was not easy for an outsider to enter a circle of friends and that it took time for people to call each other "friend" at home.

For Interviewee 20, the type of good friendships he had at home has posed a struggle in his current life. As Interviewee 20 said he has not been able to find a friend in the Netherlands similar to what he had at home, Interviewee 20 explained friends are not important for him anymore. Still, Interviewee 20 said the previous statement did not mean that he maintained a strong relationship with his friends at home because being in different countries has made him and his friends grow apart.

b) <u>Appreciation & concerns about friendship</u>

Some interviewees have stated that after spending time in a different country, friendship means to know what happens in the life of the people involved, to become more selective when choosing friends, and to focus on quality, not quantity of time spent with friends.

In addition, several respondents stated that friends are more valuable and important than before because they have become the support and encouragement that families cannot provide due to the distance.

> *"...so, being away from home, friends are really important. [U]sually I would try to help them if I can [...] because when you are away from home, you see your friends more often than your parents, than your siblings, so friends are important."* Interviewee 19

In spite of being away from their home countries, only Interviewees 1 and 17 commented on the hardships to maintain friendships with people at home.

c) Perceptions on Dutch friendship

Participants' opinions on Dutch friendship were varied. On the one hand, some respondents saw Dutch people have a few, strong friendships, and were honest, helpful, open, loyal, talkative, direct, and good friends among themselves. Still, Interviewee 20 acknowledged that in order for a Dutch person to consider somebody else a friend, a lot of effort and time needed to be invested.

> *"...it´s frustrating for me, I mean, I think they are very loyal, but on the other hand, [...] they are missing the whole picture because [...] the word 'friend' here [...] it's heavier, like you don't call not everybody is your friend, but on the other hand, I think that all the time they are closing themselves to make friends until you prove to be their friend."* Interviewee 20

On the other hand, a couple of interviewees explained that Dutch friendships did not consider friends as family, had boundaries, appeared to be close, but were not truly close to each other, were closed to accept new friends, and seemed to exist to obtain benefits.

Regarding the type of friendships participants have in the Netherlands, Interviewees 2, 5, 6 and 21 said to have mostly international friends and a few Dutch friends, and Interviewees 13 and 17 declared to have no Dutch nationals among their circle of friends. The rest of participants gave no specifics about who their friends were.

d) Colleague vs friend concept

Respondents said that friendly interaction between international and Dutch students appears to be limited to the activities where both groups participate and nothing else.

> *"Because with the Dutch people it starts and then it ends, and it starts and it ends.. [...] Sometimes I make friends through my associations, the one I joined the board, and I´m very close with people, and we do stuff, but once the activity ends, I never see nobody like that [laughs]."* Interviewee 8

This statement is also supported by Interviewee 3 who during the entire interview continuously mentioned to know and to interact with most of her Dutch classmates when possible. However, that did not mean they were friends.

The previous examples are an explanation of what could be summarized as the "colleague vs friend" concept. While in some cases participants expected that interacting with a colleague may lead to a friendship, this has not been the case for some participants in the Netherlands.

> *"They have a very strong definition about [...] what's a colleague and what's a friend, and for me at least, that wasn't very clear until I came here. For me every person [...] I talked to, or [...] had a beer with automatically becomes a friend for me. And here, that's not valid, I think."*
> Interviewee 6

In order to understand this situation, Interviewee 15 explained that reading about the types of friendships among the Dutch, he found that from an early age, Dutch people create a small group of friends with whom they will most likely grow up. Consequently, it is very difficult for a foreigner to be accepted as a 'friend' in those circles since their members have developed and strengthened their bonds throughout the years.

9. LIFE VIEWS

9.1 Initial opinion of 'life in general' being in home country

    a) <u>Previous life expectations</u>

Respondents' views on life in general when being in their home countries were also an assortment of expectations. There were participants who thought life was mostly about focusing on work and increasing their incomes as in Interviewee 20's case.

> *"When I was in [my home country], I was very money-driven, so I had like three different jobs, and all that I did was for the money. I mean, [...] it's a shallow way of thinking, but let's say career-wise, for me everything was about the money I was making and how much I could work."* Interviewee 20.

In contrast, other interviewees commented that when they were in their countries of origin, they perceived life should be about enjoying it, helping others, loving the work one does, retiring young, moving to a different place, or having a professional and personal balance.

The common pattern of study/work/marriage/children emerged as the life expectation of some respondents when they were still at home. Nevertheless, there was a difference in perception among two participants from the same country of origin. Whereas Interviewee 3 expected this

pattern would be in her future at some point in her life and appeared to be satisfied with it, Interviewee 12 expressed discomfort to follow this path.

> *"... after graduation[I] should find a [...], and then get married, and have children, all so boring, I don't want to do that, I want to have new experiences. [...] I want to explore all of my abilities and skills."* Interviewee 12

Participant 6 mentioned his life perspective when he was still at home was affected by a difficult situation he was experiencing, while for Interviewee 7, life was a difficult journey as he had been taught at home. Finally, Interviewees 16 and 18 plainly mentioned that when they were still in their countries of origin, they did not reflect on what their future would be.

b) Previous opinions on how to live

In addition to what respondents thought of life at home, the participants shared their opinions on how they thought life should have been lived at the time. Interviewee 8 said life was about doing good to everyone, being independent, and following the golden rule. A couple of interviewees pointed out life was doing and having what one wanted. Interviewee 10 said life was about accomplishing a higher goal every time. Interviewees 7 and 18 believed a person had to make an effort to obtain the best possible result in life. Last, while Interviewee 15 mentioned there were many ways to live, Interviewee 14 said she believed that a person had to follow certain rules and order to have a successful life.

9.2 Adjustments to opinion of 'life in general' after being in the Netherlands

a) Current life expectations

Spending time away from their countries of origin has made the participants modify to some extent their views on what life is about and what it may bring nowadays. Compared to what respondents thought before coming to the Netherlands, more interviewees expected to enjoy life and to achieve a professional and personal balance. Interviewee 9 now expects to find a very good job at home after studying in the Netherlands.

Pattern of study/ work/marriage/children as a life expectation appeared again in the interviewees' responses. However, Interviewees 3 and 17 said it was also necessary to make a contribution to society in addition to studying, working, marrying, and having children. This appeal for contributing to society was also shared by Interviewee 13, but only as working and helping, there was no mention of wanting to follow the pattern of family and work.

Even though no major changes occurred in the participants' opinions of life views, having spent time in the Netherlands has made some the participants update their perspectives on life to

include more appreciation, freedom and social responsibility. For Interviewee 10, this modification to his perception of what life means can be understood as he also adjusted his opinion of family after moving away from his home country. Before moving to the Netherlands, Interviewee 10 perceived an individual was supposed to face challenges and aim for higher goals in a non-stop manner. However, this perception has been modified as Interviewee 10 has realized the significance his family has on his life.

> *"… [R]ight know I think, family is more important. You want to meet with your family, spend more time with your family. The good thing is that you don't want to [climb] many mountains, maybe one or two is enough, and then, stay with your family, traveling all around the world, is the […] happiest thing for me."* Interviewee 10.

Interviewee 14 also appears to have adjusted her perception of life when she realized that when she was in her country of origin, her weakness was that she was not adapting to the circumstances of life. Before living in the Netherlands, Interviewee 14 expressed her views on life were well-defined with no space for exceptions (e.g. a democratic country was a nation where every aspect of democracy was fulfilled, otherwise, it was not a democracy). Nevertheless, Interviewee 14 explained that being in the Netherlands has allowed her to interact with several cultural identities which have made her appreciate and respect different lifestyles and beliefs to become truly open-minded in her life.

> *"I don't see life [now] as a strict way or that it should have strict rules in order to work. […] it could be flexible from one day to another, and it's just about adapting yourself, and cherishing the circumstances."* Interviewer 14

In this case, Interviewee 14 appears to have used Berry's (1997) 'integration' strategy to adjust her concept of life. Being more flexible about rules and order, Interviewee 14 has kept part of her initial opinion of life and integrated it with the multicultural lifestyle she has experienced in the Netherlands. Even though previously Interviewee 14 had used another acculturation strategy to deal with finding her place in the Dutch society, this is an example that people utilize different acculturation strategies depending on the circumstances.

b) <u>Adjusted value of work and money</u>

One of the aspects of participants' opinions about life that was modified was their perception regarding money and work. When Interviewee 4 and 20 were at home, they basically lived their lives thinking work and money were their only life goals, respectively. Nonetheless, the

participants experienced a different perspective of the value of work and money in the Netherlands, and have embraced it.

> *"So, I've seen people [in the Netherlands], and people still do good work and also enjoy their life with other activities, and I definitely want to be someone […] like that. […] I realized that OK, work is just a very small part of life."* Interviewee 4

> *"I started to care less and less [about money], and I think with what you earn here with a job you can have a very nice life […] I don't want to go back to work 20 hours a day, just for the money, even if I make a lot of money. Whereas here, with a regular job you earn sufficient to have a decent life and to invest in yourself."* Interviewee 20

Analyzing the quotes from Interviewee 4 and 20, it can be observed both participants have employed Berry's (1997) "assimilation" strategy regarding work and money. Both respondents used to live under a different concept of money and work. However, in the Netherlands they have encountered a different meaning of the same themes, which has replaced their old money and work concepts. As they have left behind their previous beliefs in favor of the host society's values, it can be said that Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 20 have "assimilated" these concepts.

c) <u>How to live life nowadays</u>

Regarding types of lifestyles, participants also updated their opinions to adopt the modifications they made to their views on life. Valuing the people one loves, material possessions do not provide happiness, focusing on experiences, being flexible, adopting a trial & error approach, and continuing to improve oneself and stopping when one wants were among the adjustments participants made to their opinions about life.

After having lived in the Netherlands, the participants who said that doing/having what one wants was the best way to live, maintained their opinion, but with some modifications. Interviewee 11 added that doing what one wanted has to be done with the people one wants, Interviewees 3 and 13 said that whatever it is an individual wants to do or have, it should also contribute to society, and Interviewee 18 added that it should require the least amount of effort. In the same topic of effort, but with a different perspective, Interviewee 12 pointed out that people should remember that the type of life an individual depends mostly on what the individual offers in exchange.

> *When you are in your country, you expect to earn a lot without working. You expect to get everything without doing anything. But when you are here, you should work a lot. It's so hard to be at the same level as in Dutch people, […] so you <u>should</u> try it that much. And, if I try as much as I´m doing here, in my country, I would get a lot."* Interviewee 12

For Interviewee 12, living away from her home country has made her reassess her opinion about life. While Interviewee 12 was at home, she believed life would be completely different for her when she lived abroad. Now that Interviewee 12 has had that experience, she has comprehended that the result in life does not lie solely upon the location as she previously expected. Although Interviewee 12 minimized the effect of the location in an individual's future, Interviewee 1 thought otherwise because future life for him is more challenging for a foreigner as he constantly has to prove himself because he is not a native.

In the case of Interviewee 8, being in Europe has made him see life as a competition. However, Interviewee 8 is clear that this perception may work in the Netherlands because the government takes care of its people. At home, Interviewee 8 said it would not be possible because one has to rely on other people to live, so there has to be a sense of community. Because of the previous reasons, Interviewee 8 stated he may not follow life as a competition when he returns to home.

V.   DISCUSSION

Living in a fast-paced world, studying abroad has become more than an opportunity to live in a different country. As international companies are constantly searching for 'global employees' to join their organizations, students are choosing to study abroad to obtain international experience, making them more attractive assets in the job market (Rienties et al. , 2012). In addition to the skills acquired in an educational institution, international students also experience an acculturation process, during which, perceptions on certain cultural themes may be modified. For that reason, the purpose of this investigation was to study the opinion's adjustment of sojourning students in the Netherlands regarding home country & culture, Dutch country & culture, academics, future career, strengths, weaknesses, family, friendship, and life in general.

Overall, participants showed an adjustment of opinion mostly in the non-personal themes. The adjustment about participant's perceptions about home & host countries, academics, and competencies (i.e. strengths & weaknesses) can be understood as participants did not have a point of comparison before. Living in the Netherlands has broadened their scope, giving the participants the opportunity to compare and analyze their opinions based on real experiences, not on ideas. Future career and life views were themes that involved probabilities even when the respondents were in their countries of origin. Therefore, it is understandable that interviewees adjusted their opinions about them now that they have experienced other lifestyles.

Family and friendship seemed to be more profound subjects for respondents, and as such, in the Netherlands, participants strengthened their opinion about the importance of family and friends in their lives. Although nowadays participants expressed appreciation for their family and friends, there seemed to be a difference regarding how participants reached to that conclusion. While respondents did not comment on their opinion about Dutch families, the absence of respondents' families in the Netherlands was enough to make them appreciate their families. In the case of friendship, the limited social interaction with local peers influenced the interviewees' perception of friendship as they became more appreciative of what a having friends meant.

1. **Cultural themes**
1.1 Appreciation of home country and culture after being in the Netherlands

The participants' perspectives about their home countries and cultures do not seem to be greatly modified by their stay in the Netherlands, other than appreciating more their countries of origin. While respondents described their countries and cultures in positive aspects before living in the Netherlands, there was not a clear trend to denote appreciation or pride for their countries when they were still at home. This could be because previous to studying abroad, they may not have had

a point of comparison. Also, it could be because when respondents provided their opinions about this topic while they were still in their countries of origin, they also shared unfavorable aspects of their countries; giving with this a more balanced perspective of positive and negative from the beginning. This means that their time spent in the Netherlands has helped them mostly to confirm, and in less number to point out, what aspects of their countries need to be improved in their opinion.

1.2 A tolerant and closed society toward foreigners

Regarding host country/culture, interviewees experienced an adjustment in their perception of Dutch population. Due to the media image of the Netherlands being a liberal society, sojourning students expected to find an open society toward foreigners. However, participants said that while Dutch people are not rude or offensive toward sojourners, they are not making them or assisting them to be part of their society either. The great majority of participants agreed that despite Dutch people is not open toward them, Dutch population is mostly polite and helpful in daily life.

a) Influencing the Dutch

The last questions of the interview protocol were to understand how participants perceived themselves in their new environment. As the acculturation process involves adjustments in the newcomer as well as in the host society (Berry, 1990a, as cited by Berry, 1997; Bourhis et al., 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010; Sayegh & Lasry, 1993), it was important to know how participants perceived their presence in the Netherlands. Respondents' answers were almost divided in half between those who thought they had affected the Dutch society (i.e. encouraging interest from the local people to try international food and relax their scheduling parameters), and those who thought their presence had not influenced the Netherlands and those interviewees. Some of these respondents stated that as foreigners, they had no choice on this matter. As there is not a clear majority, it is not possible to determine if the non-EU international students believe their presence could influence the host environment.

b) Honest effort finding your place in the Netherlands

From those who responded to have made an honest effort to find their place in the Dutch society, the majority considered they had done their part trying to learn the local language, joining student association boards, or searching for living accommodations with Dutch people. However, when asked if they had actually found their place in the host society, most respondents who answered this question said they had been unsuccessful. Participants explained they perceived Dutch culture to be closed toward foreigners, leaving participants feeling as outsiders in the Netherlands. The previous opinion is an example of Sandel's (2014) research who explained that

an individual's acculturation process is also dependent on the actions of the host society. This result suggests that international students believe there needs to be more involvement from the host society to assist in a positive acculturation process of international students.

Another aspect of this study is that while Wilcox et al., (2005) research shows that social integration seems to be the key factor for higher education students to remain at a certain university, this study was not the case. Despite not having found their place and the limited interaction with the host society, participants did not mention if these reasons had made them consider the possibility of continuing their education somewhere else. However, it should be noted that the participants in Wilcox et al's (2005) study were selected from students in their first year at undergraduate level, while the participants of this project were from master's and Ph.D degrees. This discrepancy shows the reasons to remain at a university can be different between undergraduate and graduate students.

Also, it should be taken into account that participants of this study were international students, which may influence the decision of staying at a higher education institution despite not being integrated in the host society. International students are most commonly bound to financial and/or immigration situations compared to local university students who may have less restrictions to change educational institutions.

Redmond & Bunyi (1993) conducted a study at an American university to assess the relationships between intercultural communication and stress levels of international students. In their study, Redmond & Bunyi (1993) found that students from Europe and South America were more integrated into the host environment compared to their Asian peers. Participants of this study were from a variety of nationalities in the American, Asian, and African continents. However, there was no discernible pattern in the results to distinguish if a group of respondents from a certain continent was more integrated than the others.

c) Total experience in the Netherlands

Although the lack of social interaction with Dutch people was generally criticized throughout the interviews, it does not seem to affect the feeling participants had about their overall experience abroad. While a few respondents explained that their answer was based on a stay for educational purposes or for a short time, every participant stated to have a positive experience in the Netherlands. These results permit international students considering studying abroad to know that despite the difficulties to create social bonds with local students, there is a high possibility that their experience in general will be positive. The previous positive response about the total

experience abroad can also be understood as the basis for the affirmative answer given by almost all the participants in regards to repeating the experience of being in the Netherlands.

1.3 Appreciation of home education and non-hierarchical approach in the Netherlands

With respect to higher education, it can be concluded that the most common modification made to the participants' perceptions was appreciation for home education and the non-hierarchical system employed in the Netherlands. Previously, responses about top-quality education were reserved for international higher education. These responses are in agreement with Ahsan-ul-Haq, Dar, Abbas, & Quratulain (2015) who found in their study that more than half of the students believed developed countries offered high standard education. While most respondents agreed that higher education in the Netherlands provided them with extensive resources and facilities that were usually unavailable in their heritage countries, respondents also noted that there is not a significant difference between the quality of the actual education taught in the host and home countries.

The non-hierarchical approach in the Dutch educational system was considerably valued for the participants of this study. While at home respondents felt their points of view could not be expressed or not valued in class, the open relationship between professor-student in the Netherlands has given participants a new perspective about learning methods.

1.4 More choices for future career

Being in Dutch land has expanded the possibilities for the interviewees who anticipated their future career was only in the academic realm. For those respondents who contemplated a future in the private sector, being away from home seems to have only affected participants' opinions to a low degree.

1.5 Development of multicultural skills

The results of this study demonstrate there is a significant adjustment on the strengths of participants as the majority of respondents declared to have different or adjusted strengths from before moving away from their countries. It is noticeable that while the strengths interviewees thought to have when they were still at home were mostly technical and analytical (e.g. mathematics, academic, computational, data manipulation), having lived in the Netherlands appears to have assisted in the development of social and multicultural skills. This adjustment on participants' strengths supports Coelho (1962, as cited by Carlson & Widaman, 1988) and Deutsch (1970, as cited by Carlson & Widaman, 1988) who said that one of the benefits for people who studied abroad was to become global citizens who have a better understanding of multicultural

environments. While participants may have expected to increase their cultural awareness, the fact that they mentioned in lesser quantity their technical skills as their current strengths shows that they perceive themselves more as well-rounded, global citizens than when they were at their homes.

The author of this project is not suggesting that multicultural abilities did not exist in the past. Nevertheless, the author agrees that social and multicultural skills were not extremely evident in the countries of origin of participants since most of the people in those places share similar lifestyles and behaviors.

1.6 Improving organizational weaknesses

Being in the Netherlands has also made participants aware of their lack in organizational skills. However, living in a different country has not had a significant effect on participants, except in a few isolated cases.

1.7 Family first

In general, 'family' was the theme less adjusted in respondents. The importance of family for participants was only strengthened as the respondents expressed to feel more appreciation and concern for their families while they were away from home. Participants' responses indicate there is a need for a familiar support as some interviewees have now created their own family away from home with friends.

1.8 Friends are more important being away from home

Having no family nearby during their stay, participants appeared to have relied on friends to find a safe, support zone. Similar to when talking about 'family,' the majority of respondents said during the interviews they appreciated more their friends now than when they were at home.

a)   Collectivistic vs Individualistic societies

The data collected shows that the main dissatisfaction in the Netherlands for the participants is the difficulty to create social relationships with Dutch people. However, this can be understood as the interviewees come from nations where a sense of community is deeply embedded. According to the country comparison tool by The Hofstede Centre website, all of the countries of origin of participants of this project are considered collectivistic cultures, compared to the Netherlands, which is regarded as an individualistic culture. This means that while for the participants it is important to create and maintain social relationships with those around them, making new social

relationships is not essential for the Dutch as they may be satisfied with their inner circle or with the friends that they already have.

Also, international students should take more into account when going to the Netherlands that the Dutch have an individualistic lifestyle regarding their social interactions. That way, the cultural shock could be less in international students if they experience difficulties to approach and connect with Dutch students, and could seek other alternatives early in their stay.

b) Colleague vs friend in the Netherlands

For most of the interviewees, it was difficult to understand how to create a friendship with a Dutch person. Some respondents believed the Netherlands, being a tolerant society, implied Dutch people would be open to make new friends with international people. However, most respondents have found that it is not part of the Dutch culture to make new friends rapidly. As it seems to be necessary to stay in the country for a long time to become friends with a Dutch person, the possibility of having Dutch friends is very limited for sojourning students. This study's results are in accordance with Nowack and Weiland (1998, as cited in Zhou et al., 2008) who found that social interaction of international students with peers from the host country is often minimal.

It is important to not undervalue what this lack of social relationships with locals could mean for international students. At the beginning, students find support in their families and friends at home. However, as time passes by, the new relationships created at the university become the main source of support for students throughout the academic year (Wilcox et al., 2005). If non-EU international students are unable to establish a bond with Dutch students, their social relationships and support are limited to only those students with international background.

1.9 Life expectations

After having lived in the Netherlands, life views have been adjusted to include contributing to society and spending time with the people one loves. These modifications can be explained as participants have also adjusted their perceptions about money and work or appreciated more their families and friends. Being in the Netherlands, participants have experienced different concepts of the same themes and appear to embrace them in their philosophies of life. A similar case occurred with the perception of family and friends as respondents commented to be more conscious of their importance in their life, and now participants include them in their future.

2. Acculturation patterns

Considering that participants were asked a variety of cultural themes, it can be understood that different Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies may be used by a single participant according to the circumstances. In other words, the acculturation strategy Participant X uses about his interaction with host society may be different from the acculturation strategy he uses regarding his position on life. However, as a group, participants seem to have employed two strategies at the same time. When analyzing participants' opinion about being friends with the Dutch, a mixture of 'separation' and 'assimilation' strategies appeared.

As explained earlier in this document, most participants commented it was hard to create friendships with Dutch people because they appeared to be not interested in having new friends. Due to that perception, participants have maintained their opinion of friendship, and have searched for new friends mostly among co-nationals and other international students, 'separating' themselves from the host society. However, some respondents also mentioned that although they are not in agreement with how Dutch people become friends, they have also accepted it as part of the Dutch culture, meaning that respondents have 'assimilated' this concept.

Also as a group, respondents have used the 'separation' strategy regarding the 'family' theme. After having spent time in the Netherlands, participants have not changed their opinion about 'family'; they have strengthened its original meaning. With this, the author is not suggesting that participants have discarded the host society's perception of 'family' as the 'separation' strategy entitles. Simply, the Dutch idea of 'family' seems to not have influenced significantly the opinion of participants as respondents mentioned only once that they would like to incorporate an aspect of the European family lifestyle.

3. Limitations

Considering that the topics being researched in this project were too broad, there was an ample variety of answers respondents used to answer each question. Whereas some participants thought important to describe their countries in terms of geography and resources, others believed describing their country's government and social situation was a more accurate description of the same subject. Because of this varied answers, the results of this investigation may not be specific enough to generalize the results among the non-EU international student body in the Netherlands.

Another limitation to this project is the introspection requested from the participants at one time. Participants were asked to reflect back and think about what were their opinions about a certain subject before and after being in the Netherlands. Due to this, it is possible that participants may

not have remembered in their entirety what their opinions were before arriving in the Netherlands. A more beneficial approach would have been to collect a first set of data early in their arrival, and then a second set after they had spent one year in the Netherlands. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to do it in such a manner.

As two questions were added to the interview protocol when the interviews had already started being conducted, these missing answers may be a limitation for this study. However, these two items were not part of the initial scope of the project (extent of views' adjustment on home country/culture, host country/culture, academics, future career, strengths, weaknesses, family, friendship, & life in general), so it is the belief of this project's author they should not diminish the results of this study.

4. Further research

The most common struggle found by participants of this project was the lack of social interaction with Dutch people. However, as they were not asked for their suggestions on how to improve the situation, it would be of interest to know the international students' opinion about this.

Another venue of further research would be to know the opinions of the local students regarding the effort made by sojourners to find their place in the university environment. Certainly, participants of this project stated to have done an honest effort to find their place. However, that is just one side of the situation. To have a more balanced perspective, it is necessary to investigate if the local students believe the sojourners are working toward finding their place in the host society and what it is that they believe sojourners need to do in order to succeed.

VI.   CONCLUSION

During their acculturation process, participants' opinions about certain cultural themes have been adjusted to a certain degree. While participants maintained a critical view of their countries of origin, they have also become prouder and appreciative about them. Opinions about the host society were significantly adjusted as respondents said they have encountered a nice and polite society in the Netherlands that at the same time is not inclusive of foreigners. Because of this, most participants expressed that despite their efforts to become part of the Dutch society, they still feel as guests.

Being away from home has also made interviewees appreciate the quality of the higher education of their countries of origin. Although some participants stated to have expected more of the quality of Dutch education, the majority of participants said the abundance of resources and the non-hierarchical educational method were great advantages of higher education in the Netherlands.

Regarding their expectations about their future careers, respondents now recognize additional possibilities of what they can do with their careers. Those who initially thought academia was their only path in life were the most affected as they said they now consider working in the private industry as well.

Becoming acculturated to the Netherlands, respondents have seen an increase in multicultural skills as they now interact in an international environment at the university. Besides, being in the Netherlands has made participants realize their lack of organization was a weakness as it prevented them from becoming more efficient.

Family and friends are themes that interviewees now perceive with more appreciation as being away from home has strengthened their importance in their lives. Although participants did not say what they thought about Dutch families, being away from their families seems to have sufficed to appreciate their families' presence in their lives. The most significant change in the participants' opinion about friendship is related to becoming friends with Dutch people. In the Netherlands, respondents realized that Dutch people perceive friendship differently (i.e. colleague vs friend), and that becoming friends with the Dutch was difficult due to their temporary stay.

In general, participants' viewpoints regarding life were slightly adjusted. In the Netherlands, as respondents became more aware of the importance of family and friends and their responsibility to contribute to society, they incorporated these elements in their opinions about their future lives.

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Appendix 1 - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for participating on this investigation. To maintain the accuracy of the information, it is necessary to record this interview; do I have your permission to record?

START OF INTERVIEW

First of all, please note all the information recorded during this interview will be treated anonymously and confidentially by the thesis supervisors and me.

Please also note that you can withdraw from this interview at any time if you desire.

As mentioned in the email, the purpose of this research is to explore the cultural exchange you may have experienced after being in the Netherlands for at least one year. For that reason, the questions I will pose will ask you to give your current opinion or point of view on specific subjects, as well as to reflect back to before you came to the Netherlands and what were your opinions at that time.

Do I have your consent to proceed?

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC
   a) What's your age?
   b) What's your nationality
   c) What's your current educational level and field of study?
   d) How long have you been at the UT?
   e) Why did you choose to come to the UT?

HOME CULTURE/COUNTRY
1. Before you came to the Netherlands, what did you think of your home country and its culture?
2. You have now been in the Netherlands for at least one year, what is your current opinion of your home country and its culture?

HOST CULTURE/COUNTRY
3. What did you think of the Netherlands and its culture before coming here?
4. What is your opinion of Dutch culture after living in it?

ACADEMICS

5. Regarding academics, what was your opinion about higher education when you were still at home?

6. What do you think of higher education after being in the Netherlands for one year?

CAREER

7. What was your opinion about your future career when you were still in your home country?

8. What do you think about your future career nowadays?

COMPETENCIES - STRENGTHS

9. Thinking back to when you were at home, what did you think were your strongest skills or abilities? What were you good at?

10. After one year away from home, what do you think are your strongest skills/abilities?

COMPETENCIES - WEAKNESSES

11. When you were still at home, what did you think were your weaknesses?

12. After one year away from home, what aspects of your life can be improved in your opinion? What are your current weaknesses?

FAMILY

13. What did you think of the concept of "family" when you were at home?

14. Is your opinion of "family" different or the same after spending a year abroad? How so?

FRIENDSHIP

15. While at home, what did you think of "friendship"?

16. What is your opinion of "friendship" now?

LIFE VIEWS

17. Can you tell me what you thought of "life in general" before going to the Netherlands?

18. What do you think now of "life in general"?

19. Do you think you have had influence in the Dutch people/culture?

*20. Do you think you have found your place in the Dutch society?

*21. In your opinion, have you made an honest effort to find your place in Dutch society?

22. How would you sum up your experience in the Netherlands?

23. If you could have known this information about your experience in the Netherlands ahead of time, would you choose to go to the Netherlands again?

* Questions added to the interview protocol.

Thank you for your participation in this research project. If you have questions about this interview, you can contact me via telephone at +31 6 1631 9638 or via email at v.g.quirozramos@student.utwente.nl.

END OF INTERVIEW

Appendix 2 – Table 2

HOME COUNTRY & CULTURE					
Before			**After**		
Positive aspects of society	Hospitable	1	**Positive aspects of society**	Nice people	11
	Nice people	9/11/12/15/17			
	Open	15/18			
	Friendly	1/5/15/18/19		Friendly	1/5/13/14/18
	Happy	5/18		Happy	14/21
	Good people	17			
	Helpful	1		Helpful	1
	Festive people	5/20		Festive people	20
	People eat lot	5			
	No danger to others	12			
	Easy-going	4			
	Enjoy life	21			
	Hard-workers	20/21		Hard-worker	7/20/21
	Not lazy	7			
	Group interaction	16		Group interaction	4/16
	Amazing people	20			
	Relaxed society	20			
				Caring	5
				Diverse society / personalities	9/16
				Inclusive w/foreigners	5/14/15
				Considered with religion	9/12
Negative aspects of society	Impolite	5			
	Unreliable	4/11/20			
	Not punctual	4			
	Disrespectful	16/17			
	Undisciplined	5/7/13/21			
	Unappreciative	12/18			
	Chaotic comm.	9/20			
	Competitive	9			
	Money-driven	13			
General opinion of country	Developing country	14/15			
	Rich culture	2/3/9/18			
	3rd world	11			
	Known history	10			

	Long history/ background/ culture	2/18			
	Good / varied food	9/18/19			
	Good/Nice place to live	16/20			
	Amazing life quality	20			
	Paradise	20			
	Best place on earth	6			
Feelings toward country & culture	Greatest country	6	**Feelings toward country & culture**		
	Proud	6/12		Proud	2/8/10/15
	Not proud	14			
	Like home culture/ country	3/11			
	Love	12			
	Annoyed at too-relaxed culture	11			
				Took for granted	8/10
				Not taken advantage benefits	12
				Appreciate heritage / family	5/6/8/9/10/ 12/15/16
Cultural and geographical	Huge biodiversity	5/15/21			
	Nice place to visit				
	Multicultural / diversity	8/9/15/19			
	Fine to live & visit	6/10/11/15/ 16/20			
	Weathers / climate	5/19/21			
	Big population	9/10			
	History & culture	2/3/9/10/ 13/18/19			
	Geographical characteristics	5/10			
	Corruption	9			
	Lack of animal protection	14			

Criticism	Edu. access inequality	13			
	Poor labor conditions	10/16		Labor conditions	14/19
	Gov't media monopoly	17		Controlled information access	6/18
				Sustainability	14
				Hierarchies	17
			Criticism	Income distribution	6/13
				Government	10/14
				Cultural development	18
				Traditions & obligations	3
				Organization	7/16
				People's behavior	7/11/12/20/21
				Money-driven culture	13
				Gender restrictions	13

HOST COUNTRY & CULTURE					
Before			**After**		
Tourist perception	Legal use of drugs	5/8/9/11/13/15/16	**Tourist perception**	Drugs not everywhere	8/9/11
	Red light district	8/9/11/13/16		Regulated sex industry	8/11
	Windmills	10/11/15			
	Tulips	10/11/15/16			
	Cycling	15			
	Wooden shoes	7			
General perception of Netherlands	Developed country	13/14/15/21	**General perception of Netherlands**	Not that sustainable	13
	Sustainable	13		Not that developed	13
	Safe	2/12/14		Conscious of environment	12
	Beautiful	16			
	Facilities & infrastructure	12/17/19/21			
				Corruption	5/13
				Dishonesty	13
				Wealthy	9
				Socialist	6/8/14/17
				Long history	10/11/13/18
			Positive aspects of NED	Average / upper life quality	2
				Well-organized	8/11/12/16/17/19/20
				Satisfying job culture	5/9/14/16/19
Negative aspects of society	Closed to foreigners	1		Closed to foreigners	1/7/14/16
	Unfriendly	1/4/14		Unfriendly	20
	Cold	4/14/15/18		Cold	5/7/18
	Unwilling to speak English	14		Keep distance from foreigner	4/12
	Strict (like German)	1/14		Make foreigners feel as guests	7/12/14/20
	Some degree of racism	9		Not racist	9
			Negative aspects of society	Discrimination	14

				Considered open society, not in real life	7/8/14
				Cautious	8
				Not goal-driven	20
				Selfish	20
				Uneducated	13/18
Positive aspects of Dutch society	Nice	12	**Positive aspects of Dutch society**	Nice	3/4/9/12/15/19
	Helpful	2/14		Helpful	1/2/9/14/15
	Respectful	21		Respectful	19/21
	Educated	13/17		Educated	7
	Tolerant	18		Tolerance	2/3/7/9/18
	Flexible	2		Happy/ Enthusiastic	2/10/14
	Proud of local heritage	20		Direct	3/9/11/19
	Open-minded	2/3/5/15 16/18		Warmth	15
	Willing to speak English	2/4		Polite	7/15
	Friendly	4/20			
INFLUENCING DUTCH SOCIETY					
			No	Not enough interaction w/Dutch	1/3
				Don't speak Dutch	5
				Short time in NED	9
				Just one person	10
				Dutch closed to foreigners	7/13/14
				Not my place to influence	15
			Yes	Eradicate stereotypes	2/12/16/18
				Increase interest in home culture	4/6/8/17/19/21
				Change of behavior in locals	11/18/20
FOUND PLACE IN DUTCH SOCIETY					
				In university, yes	17

			Yes	Society accommodates + no racism	9
			Not 100%	Not deeply yet	6
				Started to integrate	11
			No	Not comfortable with host society	3/20
				Lack interaction with Dutch	4/13/ 14/16
				Feels as guest	5/12
				In NED for edu purposes	10
				Find own role, before role in host society	21
			Not sure	Dutch should answer it	
			HONEST EFFORT		
			Yes	Learning Dutch	7/9/13/14/ 18/19
				Researching local lifestyles	9/14
				Actively searching for interaction	8/15/16/17
			Not yet	Haven't spent enough time	10/21
				Don't speak Dutch	3/21
				Dutch don't integrate	6
				Feels as outsider	20
			No answer	No specific reason	15
			Declined to answer	Chose not to answer	12
			TOTAL EXPERIENCE		
				Nice	3/15/16/18
				Great	2/4/15

				Good	3/5/9/10/11/ 17/21
				Amazing	13
				Happy in NED	20
			Positive experience in NED	Positive	6
				Growth & learning	2/10/11
				Complete	8
				Satisfactory	8/21
				Better than expected	4
				Liked it a lot	13
			Positive experience in NED for a short time	Nice (for academics)	17
				Great (short stay)	4
				Good (short time)	12
REPEAT EXPERIENCE					
				Yes	1/2/3/4/5/6/ 8/9/10/11/ 12/13/14/15/ 16/17/18/19/ 20/21
				No	7

ACADEMICS					
Before			**After**		
Perception of higher education	Important	5/14			
	Greatest level of education	6			
	Granted respect/value/ Status	11/12/15			
	Great meaning within family	5/12			
	Life goal	2/3/14/21			
Purpose of higher education	Needed for country development	21			
	To find better life chances	2/5/10/19			
	For people who want to study further	3/4/9/11	**Purpose of higher education**	Acquire problem-solving and learning skills	3/8/11/21
	Helps self-development	7/14/21		Helps self-development	4/7/8/11/21
	Handle complex situation	1		Handle complex situations	1
	Expanding knowledge	14		Expanding knowledge	11
	Exposure to new people	10		Exposure to new people	3/4/7/19/21
Criticism of higher education at home countries	Overvalued	5			
	Average/low quality	20	**Appreciation of home higher education**	Similar quality to NED	3/9/15/18/20
	Poor students attitude	11		More complete than in NED	5/6
	Not met expectations	6			
	Expensive privilege	5/18/20/21			
			Criticism of higher education at home countries	Lacks practical applications	3/6
				Hierarchical system	3/4/15
				Too relaxed work culture	4

Perception of int'l higher education	International recognition	15			
	Better than at home	5/6/15/17/18			
	Lots of resources	18	**Positive perception of Dutch higher education**	Lots of resources	3/6/9/17/18
				Non-hierarchical	11/14/15/17/18
				For people who want to study further	5/11/13
				Less bureaucracy	18
				Practically-oriented	3
				Quality research	3/4/16
				Open to new ideas	7
			Negative perception of Dutch higher education	Less time for uni. degrees	20
				Emphasis chosen too early in career	20

FUTURE CAREER					
Before			**After**		
Expectations	Abroad to acquire more knowledge	3/12/20	**Expectations**	Still more to learn	3/12
	Intl degree for success			Uncertain / scared/stress	2/3/12
Job options	Private sector	1/3/6/9/10/ 11/12/13/17/ 19/20	**Job options**	Private sector	1/3/4/5/7/8/ 9/11/12/16/ 17/18/19/20
	Academia/ teaching	2/4/5/7/8/ 14/15/16/ 18/21		Academia/ teaching	4/5/6/7/8/ 13/16/18
	Government	15			

STRENGTHS					
Before			**After**		
Abstract skills	Engineering	13	**Abstract skills**		
	Data manipulation	6			
	Drawing	6			
	Analytical	8/11/21			
	Technical	6/20		Tech analysis & impact on human beings	8
	Writing	8			
	Mathematics	5/11/18/21		Mathematics	5
	Programming	21			
	Computational	4			
	Problem-solving	21			
	Calculation	17			
Academic skills	Researching	13	**Academic skills**	Research	2/15
	Generating ideas	6			
	Fast-learner	9/12		Fast-learner	20
	Observant	8		Observant	20
	Presenting/ Public speaking	11			
	Teaching	2/14		Teaching	14
				PR	6/11
				Knowing how to sell oneself	6
				Independent researcher	13
Personal (Internal) skills	Strong-minded	3	**Personal (Internal) skills**		
	Respectful	14		Respectful	14
	Responsible	14		Responsible	14
	Perseverant	4/5		Perseverant / Persistent	5/17
	Face challenge	3		Face challenge	3
				Efficient	4
				Organized	19
Personal (External) skills	Managerial	1			
	Multitasking	19			
	Social/ Extrovert	13/18/20/21	**Personal (External) skills**	Network of people/ social	9/10/17/21
	Language	18		Language	13/18
				Communicative	1/17

WEAKNESSES					
Before			**After**		
Organizational skills	Lazy	3/12	**Organizational skills**	Lazy	3/18
	Inefficient	4			
	Bad time management	3		Bad time management	3
	Disorganized	14/18		Disorganized	14/18
Personal weaknesses	Low-confidence	3	**Personal Weaknesses**	Low confidence	3
	Not own opinion	11			
	Poor comm.	9/10			
	Callousness	3			
	Arrogant	7			
	Unable to speak well of own country	5			
	Bad with people's first impressions	18			
	Not encouraging people to appreciate own country	9			
	Not adapting to the system	14			
	Inability for multiculturalism	19			
	dancing	7			
Professional weaknesses	Presenting/ Public speaking	1/6	**Professional weaknesses**	Presenting/ Public speaking	1/19
	Lack of int'l experience	20		Lack int'l experience	5
	Knowledge of research topic	13		Knowledge of research topic	13
	Diplomacy	20			
	Research	21			
	Running for public positions	18			
	Languages	13/17/21			
				Not being proactive	6
				Dependent researcher	14
				Scientific writing	21
				Expressing ideas	6

				Not asking for help	4
			Lack of weaknesses	No weaknesses	17

FAMILY					
Before			**After**		
Meaning of family	Everything	4/16/17/18	**Meaning of family**	Everything	17/18
				Important	3/6/12/ 15/18/21
Characteristics of family	Love	5/7	**Characteristics of family**	Love	5/7/12
	Care	12			
	Help	2		Help	2/12
	Security	8/20		Security	8
	Friendship	4/8/12		Friendship	8
	Fun	8		Fun	8
	Trust	11		Trust	11
	Freedom	8		Understanding	8
	Understanding	3/5		Understanding	3/5
	Knowledge	18			
	Support	2/3/5/7 /9/11/12/ 13/16/19/ 21		Support	2/3/5/7/ 9/11/12/ 13/19/21
				Exchange / share everything	7/21
			Feelings toward family	Appreciation	7/10/ 15/16/ 19
				Concern	12/15/20
Composition of family	Inner circle	2/14/20/21	**Composition of family**	Inner circle	9
	Inner circle + extended family	9/13		Inner circle + extended family	2/3/21
	Friends included	5/7/11		Friends included	11/14
	Animals included	5		Animals included	5
			Distance communication with family	Increased/ improved communication	4/10/11/ 17/20
				Hard to keep in contact	13/21
				Able to discuss deep topics	3/18
				Opinions taken into consideration	3/18
				Encourage early	21

			EU family aspects	independence as in EU	
					92

FRIENDSHIP					
Before			**After**		
Perception of friends	Important	6/9/12/18/20	**Perception of friends**	More important	5/7/9/ 18/19
	Necessary	6/12		Necessary	3/12
	As family	3/4/5/7/21		As family	5
	Can be chosen	9/18/21		Can be chosen	14/
				Valuable	6/17
				Selective when choosing friends	11/14
				Time quality, not quantity	21
Characteristics of friends	Love	3/15	**Characteristics of friends**	Love	
	Understanding	19			
	Trust	6/8		Trust	1
	Fun times	1/10/16			
	Help	2/9/7			
	Support	3/5/15/21		Support	5/8/15
	Unreliable (life circumstances)	12			
	Respectful	3		Respectful	10
	Can be inconvenienced	6/8			
	Conspirators	8/10			
	Exchange/ share everything	3/7/9/10/ 11/13/15/ 19/20/21		Exchange/ share everything	3/10/13/ 14/ 15
				Knowing what goes on	4
			Problems to keep distance friends	Difficult to maintain from the distance	1/17
				Unable to find same type of friend in NED	20
			Characteristics of friends at home	Intimate	9
				Like family	9
				Informal	9
				Emotional	9
				Open to meet new friends	15/21
				Not easy for outsider to enter circle of friends	17
				Takes time to say "friend"	21

			Types of friends in NED	Mostly int'l / few NED friend	2/5/6/21
				No Dutch	13/17
Qty. of friends at home	Small group	5/13/14	**Qty. of friends at home**	Small group	5/13
			Positive aspects of Dutch friendship	Few friends/strong relationships	11/20
				Honest	2/20
				Helpful	16
				Open	10/21
				Loyal	20
				Talkative	10
				Direct	19
				Good among themselves	18
				Requires lots of effort & time	20
			Negative aspects of Dutch friendship	Not seen as family	4
				Boundaries	13
				Appeared close, but not	6/7
				No new friends	3/15/17/18
				Only for benefit	8
			Interaction between participants and Dutch community	Interaction limited to activities	3/8
				Seems Dutch don't want to interact	12
				Colleague vs friend	3/4/5/6/7/8/13/15

LIFE VIEWS				
Before			**After**	
Life expectations	Focus on work	1/9		
	Increasing income	4/20		
	Enjoy life	11/15	Enjoy life	11/15/18/21
	Help others	3	Contribute to society	13
	Love your work	13		
	Retire young	15		
	Move somewhere else	12		
	Professional & personal balance	2/21	Professional & personal balance	2/5/21
	Study/work/ marriage/ children pattern	3/12/17/19	Study/work/ marriage/ children pattern	3/16/17
			Find a good job with EU degree	9
			More challenging being away from home	1
	Find a scape	6		
	Life is difficult	7	Life is difficult	7
			Competition	8
	Did not think about it	16/18		
How to live life	Do good	8		
	Be independent	8		
	Golden rule	8		
	Do and have what one wants	5/11/13	Do and have w/ people one loves	
			Do and have + contribute to society	3/13
			Do and have w/ least effort possible	18

			How to live life	Stop climbing when needed	10
	Climbing mountains	10			
	Make an effort to obtain the best possible	7/18			
	No single way to live	15		Trial & error	6
	Follow rules/ order	14		Be flexible	14
				Work is small part of life only	4
				Less importance for money/ material things	7/20
				Location does not make a difference, attitude does	12
				Appreciate family & friends	10
				Focus on experiences	19
				Effort qty = results	12

Appendix 3 – Story developments

INTERVIEWEE 1

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described as friendly and hospitable. No change after being in NED.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Expected the culture to be similar to Germany. Later, found people were helpful, but not close to foreigners.

ACADEMICS- Participant believed person with higher education should know how to handle complex situations. No change in the opinion after being in NED.

FUTURE CAREER- Interviewee expected to work in private company. Now, the future looks harder as fewer options for PhD are available.

STRENGHTS- At home, managing people was the strength. Now, the strength is communication.

WEAKNESSES- Presenting skills were and continue being a weakness.

FAMILY- At home, family meant a strong relationship, and no change happened after moving to NED.

FRIENDSHIP- At home, it meant people with whom to go out. The distance has now changed the relationship with friends. Now, friends are those who can be trusted.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- N/A

LIFE VIEWS- Back home, life was about developing oneself in education and work. Having happy moments with those one loved. Perception is now more challenging as one should prove oneself in all aspects when being in a foreign country. Respondent said it is necessary to accept being a foreigner to feel comfortable in a host country.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. There is a lack of interaction with Dutch people.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- N/A

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- N/A

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- A good experience in professional life. A foreigner loses some emotions due to the distance.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yes. Main reason was to study.

INTERVIEWEE 2

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described it as a rich background and culture. In NED, respondent has been surprised to find people who are well knowledgeable about respondent's home country. Participant also believed and continues believing that media affects people's opinion of home country.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Previous knowledge of NED being a safe country and the Dutch being open, easy-going and helpful came from family members. Coming to NED, participant found NED to be safe and the Dutch people to be open, helpful, happy and free with their lifestyle.

ACADEMICS- Back home, respondent's generation desired to obtain higher education to find a better job or ranking position. In NED, interviewee differentiated between home and host PhD studies, and discovered that in NED, a PhD is a researcher full-time, leaving the teaching part on the side. Respondent expressed researching and teaching should go together.

FUTURE CAREER- Participant desired to stay in academia to continue learning, although not for the titles. Now, interviewee is stressing out about future due to the situation as a foreigner.

STRENGTHS- Respondent mentioned being a good teacher as the strength at home. Being a good researcher is the strength now.

WEAKNESSES- Respondent considered a weakness to not dedicate enough time to the non-academic activities due to stress. It continues being a weakness.

FAMILY- Composition of inner circle. Concept has not changed by moving abroad. Family functions included supporting and helping to improve the family members. Respondent also described parents as advisors when needed.

FRIENDSHIP- Liked the proverb "Friends in need, are friends indeed" to differentiate among friends. In NED, respondent has found more good friends (mostly international) with whom the interaction is straighter than at home. Participant stated to try to adopt own rules (making a mixture of what's good from the cultures) and then apply it.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- N/A

LIFE VIEWS- Most people are satisfied with career and own family. Interviewee wanted to keep a balance between career and family. Now, that opinion is stronger.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Probably. Specially those who think that females from the respondent's home country are prohibited from obtaining an education.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- N/A

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- N/A

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Great experience. Respondent's has obtained international friends and career that always wished for.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE 3

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Liked the rich, home culture and followed it if there was a reason behind the behavior. After living abroad, participant continued considering heritage culture was rich and questioning the reasons behind traditions and behaviors.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Host society was perceived as open-minded, liberal, and honest. It has lived to expectations.

ACADEMICS- Higher education was to find an interest and specialize in it. Later on, the definition was expanded to include exposure to people from other cultures, therefore, new ideas and perspectives. Also, respondent noted the difference of resources between home and host countries.

FUTURE CAREER- Felt lack of knowledge, so the participant started a master's program. Now, participant feels there is still more to learn, and also, scared of finding a job. Considers returning home after job experience is obtained.

STRENGTHS- Strong-minded and calm to face challenges at home. The last one continues to be the strength now, however, there was a time in the NED when respondent doubted it was a strength.

WEAKNESSES- Being callous, poor time management and laziness were and continue being the weaknesses.

FAMILY- Defined as total support system that knows and understands without having to give explanations. No change on concept after moving to NED, but now respondent discusses with family deeper subjects.

FRIENDSHIP- Opinion has not changed after living abroad. Friends share, respect, support and love.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- No Dutch friends. Respondent knows Dutch people, but does not consider them friends. Friendship among the Dutch is perceived as a close group with a true appreciation for friends within their circle, yet not looking for new friends.

LIFE VIEWS- Study, work, and settle down while helping others to live. Living abroad reinforced view on life as now participant has seen how other societies work.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. Few interactions with Dutch people.

FOUND YOUR PLACE: No. Respondent is shy and does not feel comfortable to freely act among the Dutch.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Sometimes felt as outsider, other times felt as she needed to put more effort . Learning Dutch might have helped.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Good and nice. Mentioned again not having Dutch friends, but also the benefits studying abroad has brought.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Of course. Actual experience of being in the place and adjusting to oneself, made a better experience than reading about it on books.

INTERVIEWEE 4

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described it as easy-going people who interact a lot, are not punctual, and often unreliable. After coming to NED, respondent sees country is behind in in work related matters, but still sees people interact and do many activities together.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Expected people to be friendly, but later heard that people could be cold and unfriendly. Once in NED, found that Dutch people are nice, even though they keep their own personal space.

ACADEMICS- Respondent believed PhD work was 24/7. Compared to NED, PhDs at home work was inefficient. Also, respondent realized PhD work was about learning more instead of earning big money. It fills the person.

FUTURE CAREER- Interviewee thought to continue with Post-doc after PhD. However, after seeing similarities in private and academic research in NED, respondent has decided to consider industrial research as well.

STRENGTHS- Computational & theoretical skills and perseverance were listed as the strengths. The strength today is being more efficient.

WEAKNESSES- In the past, it was being efficient. Now, it is not taking help, working alone.

FAMILY-It means everything. Respondent mentioned family as friends for life and more important than work. Appreciation of family with the distance as communication has increased and improved.

FRIENDSHIP- No change in concept of friendship. Had a close group of friends. Family and friends are at the same level because sometimes one had the friends and not the other.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP-Perception of friendship among the Dutch is not seen as an extended family, as in the case of the respondent's home country. This opinion has made the respondent value its own concept of friendship. Learned colleague vs. friend concept.

LIFE VIEWS- Life philosophy was only about work and going back home afterwards. Expected to be satisfied with a good income. Now, work is a small part of life only. Job culture in NED affected view on life.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- A little. Respondent has tried to introduce own culture and food to Dutch colleagues.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No. Dutch people do not mix work and personal space. Respondent likes own way of living better.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY-

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Great, better than expected.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yeah. Has enjoyed it very much. Still, not for a long time.

INTERVIEWEE 5

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described it as a region with a variety of nature where people are friendly and happy. There was some corruption in the area. Moving abroad made the respondent to appreciate home country and people since they truly care about other people.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Knew the typical clichés. Believed all EU countries were developed and first-world, and that people were cold. Afterwards, respondent believed people had no identity. Initially saw them as cold persons, yet they opened when respondent learned Dutch.

ACADEMICS- Higher education was considered important and sometimes overvalued. At home country, only rich people can study. Belief in local area is that higher education is necessary, otherwise it is not possible to help the family. In NED, interviewee has appreciated higher education is chosen because people want to study, not because it is necessary to live a decent life. Interviewee has appreciated completeness of higher education received at home.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, participant felt privileged because of all the possibilities available once the PhD degree from Europe was obtained. There was also a desire to work in academia. Now, interviewee has also considered working for the private sector.

STRENGTHS- Strengths were mathematics and perseverance. Now, the strengths are the same.

WEAKNESSES- Weakness at home was being unable to motivate or speak well of own country. After living abroad the weakness is to need more experience.

FAMILY- It was described as the people who love, support and understand. It could be composed of friends and animals as well. Opinion of family has not changed after living abroad. At home, respondent functioned almost as head of family. Being away, not function as head of family too much, but still respondent is requested for advice.

FRIENDSHIP- Respondent said not to have many friends. Participant thought of friends as family. Opinion has not changed living overseas. Friendships are now considered even more important as they take the place of family.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Most Dutch people hang out with friends they have outside the university. Respondent has a few Dutch friends with whom to share, but are considered truly friends.

LIFE VIEWS- Respondent thought at home that a satisfactory life is where one does what one really wants, but was not confident it was possible in home country. After coming to NED, learned that it was possible to have a satisfactory job that allowed for personal time.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No, not at all. Maybe later if respondent learns Dutch.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Not in the Dutch society. Participant feels as a guest. UT is an international campus, so a person does not need to integrate with the Dutch to survive.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY-

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Good experience, with only benefits.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Absolutely, especially Enschede.

INTERVIEWEE 6

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE-Interviewee learned from those around that the home country was the greatest place. However, respondent was also aware it had good and bad aspects. Being away made respondent appreciate more the good things and truly note the inequalities of home society.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Initial perception of different language and mindset in host country came from Dutch in-law. Living abroad, interviewee perceived being a small, homogeneous population may play a role on Dutch people's behavior. Respondent perceived Dutch they take care of each other, yet they are not intimate with each other.

ACADEMICS- Participant believed higher education was the greatest level to be achieved, and became disappointed when it did not meet expectations. Respondent deemed international higher education on a higher level. Studying abroad, interviewee has appreciated good quality and completeness of home education and its practical limitations. Participant also noted the abundance of resources in international higher education.

FUTURE CAREER- Before living abroad, private sector was the only choice to apply knowledge. Now, scope has broaden and teaching/academia and entrepreneurship are open possibilities.

STRENGTHS- Participant identified technical skills as his strength at home and learning how to sell his skills and public relations as the strengths in NED.

WEAKNESSES- Speaking in public was a weakness at home while proactivity and how to express his ideas became the weaknesses in NED.

FAMILY- Family was and continues to be the most important thing in life.

FRIENDSHIP- Interviewee believed friendship was needed to go through life. In the NED, respondent considered it valuable for life. Friendship's purpose is to make someone happy.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Learned colleague vs. friend concept. Not many Dutch friends. Participant regarded Dutch as being close, but not that close to each other.

LIFE VIEWS- Negative perspective of life as participant was passing through a personal crisis before going to NED. Although not main reason, moving to NED was an escape route. Currently, respondent viewed life as a "trial & error" cycle.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Probably. Dutch acquaintances have shown interest in the interviewee's home culture.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No. He does not feel close to the Dutch culture.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- No. In the end, Dutch do not seem to want to mix with others.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Definitely positive. Interviewee saw it as a learning experience.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yeah (5x).

INTERVIEWEE 7

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Participant said there was a lack of respect at home country. It was an undisciplined society. Living abroad respondent has maintained the same opinion, and has seen other ways to put order.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Knew popular aspects of NED. Expectations were to be involved in new culture, learn new language, and meet new people. Living abroad, interviewee noticed cold, educated people who are not racist, but do not include foreigners.

ACADEMICS- Opinion of higher education in home country was that it made a better person. Now, it is a similar opinion where knowing other cultures also helps to develop the person. Respondent believed university should be the place to express and share ideas before and after coming to NED.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, future career was to become a university professor. Now, the idea is still to become a professor, but before doing that, respondent wants to gain practical experience.

STRENGTHS- At home, academic skills were the strength. Living abroad, participant identified persistence as the strength.

WEAKNESSES- In home country, interviewee said to be arrogant since respondent was unable to identify major doubts. However, doubts are present now along with a lack of self-confidence expressing himself.

FAMILY- Family represented the people one loved and appreciated. They also offered support. Living abroad the family concept has not changed. Role within family remains the same as being the voice of reason. However, being away from blood-related relatives made participant to create a new family with friends.

FRIENDSHIP- At home, similar concept as family, people who help and share time & feelings. Being away from family, friends have become more important.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Learned colleague vs. friend concept. Dutch person said to respondent that Dutch have the same intensity, it is just not expressed publicly. Interviewee has seen them jumping and hanging out together, yet no idea about intimacy degree.

LIFE VIEWS- Perceived life as difficult, but with effort, it would be OK. Holds same opinion now, the point of life is being happy. Discovered money does not give a person happiness.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. Dutch people will do their own stuff.

FOUND YOUR PLACE-

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Initially, yes (took Dutch lessons). Later, interviewee stopped after seeing no interest from Dutch.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Academically speaking, nice place to study. On a personal level, not the best place in interviewee's opinion.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- No, because of the lack of tenderness and social communication with society.

INTERVIEWEE 8

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described it as a diverse, multicultural, heterogeneous society. After living abroad, appreciated more home culture as respondent said took for granted many things.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Interviewee knew typical clichés and that it was an individualistic society. Also, although respondent knew most Dutch spoke English, respondent expected to learn Dutch. After living in NED, respondent noted that the media perception he had was false. Described the Dutch as cautious people, even among themselves.

ACADEMICS- Higher education was seen as a natural step in life. In NED, noticed a difference in importance of master and PhD degrees. Higher education is now seen as a sign of mastery and confidence, as well as money spent due to the high costs.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, only teaching was considered. Now, more options are available.

STRENGTHS- Good in observational & analytical skills and writing before coming to NED. Now, the strength is analyzing the impact of technology in society.

WEAKNESSES- Respondent said not taking public positions was a weakness. Now, the weakness if not maintaining the social relationships and friendships.

FAMILY-Family represented home, security, friendship fund and freedom. The same definition applies today. Role within family has improved with age and with life experience outside home by the participant.

FRIENDSHIP- Friends were described as conspirators and people one can trust. Respondent mentioned that in NED he has not found the same friends as at home.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Interaction with Dutch people is limited to activities. Outside of those, respondent does not hang out with them.

LIFE VIEWS- Life was about doing good to everyone and being independent. Now, life was seen as a competition. However, respondent does not expect to continue seeing it as such since it may work in NED, but it may not at home.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Symbolically, yes. Being a board member of different UT organizations has allowed respondent to eradicate misconceptions about home country.

FOUND YOUR PLACE-

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Yes, has felt free to join the associations where he can apply.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Complete and satisfactory up to some level. Respondent believed the Dutch say they are open, but they are not.

WOULD YO UDO IT AGAIN- Why not? Yes. Likes challenges.

INTERVIEWEE 9

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described as multicultural diverse, crowded and chaotic. Population is nice, influenced by religion, and not highly educated. In NED, participant learned to appreciate home country's situation due to the differences in population, culture and education.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Knew typical clichés, and expected to find some sort of racial discrimination. Respondent has now seen that Dutch people are nice, helpful and direct.

ACADEMICS- At home, higher education meant to specialize in a subject. After master's degree, decided to continue specializing abroad. In NED, the only difference the interviewee perceived is the abundance of resources in higher education of host country.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, participant expected to continue in research despite of not having practical applications for the research subjects at the time. Started a PhD sponsored by a private company expecting a more practical application, but has not found it yet. Since interviewee is not bound by contract to the private company, respondent is considering other options away from home.

STRENGTHS- A fast-learner at home. In NED, communication skills with other cultures are the strength.

WEAKNESSES- Initially, respondent had communication skills problems. Now, the problem is still the same, yet participant says to be working on it.

FAMILY- Composition includes extended family. They are a support at all times. Same definition nowadays.

FRIENDSHIP-Respondent explained that friends are chosen, and so the relationship is not based on obligation. Even in NED, friends continue to be an important part of respondent's life.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Friendship at home is more intimate. In NED is more formal.

LIFE VIEWS- While at home, life was really good for participant. Now, it will be better with Dutch PhD to obtain a good job.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. Difficult for a single individual. Time may not be enough yet for respondent to make a difference.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Yes. Respondent came here only for a PhD. Also, participant has not faced any discrimination.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Yes. Interviewee has tried to learn Dutch language and local customs.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Good experience better than expected. Participant has been positively influenced by Dutch culture.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yeah. Participant expected some level of discrimination, and has not experienced it yet.

INTERVIEWEE 10

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described it as a big country with a known history and a large population. Respondent recommends it for a visit, and is also aware that citizens are exploited in certain areas. Now, nothing has changed. Respondent felt proud of own culture and misses family, places, and food. Respondent continues being aware of dictatorship actions in own country through media.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Knew typical clichés only as NED is not very popular on media. After living here, respondent considered NED as a country with good views and enthusiastic people. Only complaint is the food.

ACADEMICS- It was not only about obtaining a degree, but about creating networks. Higher education considered necessary to obtain a good job. After being in NED, respondent sees international education as beneficial since it will help respondent to secure a very good job.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, future was study, find a job, children, live a peaceful life. Now, more options, specially to travel to another country and learn other cultures, are open.

STRENGTHS- Studying skills was the strength at home. Now, the strength is communication with people from different backgrounds.

WEAKNESSES- Communication skills was the weakness at home. Now, the weaknesses are being afraid of not being the best and making mistakes.

FAMILY- It was described as people who have a good relationship and live together for a long time. Living abroad, has made respondent to be more fond and appreciative of those relationships. A stronger bond has been created.

FRIENDSHIP- Respondent said friends are those with whom one shared personal stories and experiences. Definition is still the same now.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Respondent thought Dutch friends are open-minded about friendship.

LIFE VIEWS- Interviewee saw life as climbing one mountain after another. Living abroad has made him think it is OK to stop after climbing certain number of mountains and stay there. Value family.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. Respondent is too small to make a difference, plus NED is a matriarchal society.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No. Participant is returning home after studies.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- No. Interviewee considered not to have spent enough hours to feel part of society.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Good journey where respondent has learned a lot in varied aspects.

WOULD YO UDO IT AGAIN- Yes.

INTERVIEWEE 11

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Considered home country an amazing place to live with a too-relaxed culture. A third-world, underdeveloped country where people aimed for the lowest effort. Still thinks home population does not take matters seriously, hence that is why things do not work the way they are supposed to at home country.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Knew typical clichés, and that it was a well-organized society. Reality was different concerning the clichés. Also did not expect the directness of Dutch people.

ACADEMICS- At home, respondent believed it was for those who wanted a better life opportunity or to study further. However, participant noticed people aimed for the lowest effort. Higher education represented status in society. In NED respondent noticed most people in higher education did it to specialize in the topic regardless of the better living standard they may obtain.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, respondent expected to continue in private industry at managerial level. Found academia boring and repetitive. Now, interviewee still desires to work in private sector after graduation, or even be an entrepreneur.

STRENGTHS- Analytical, mathematics, presentation, and public speaking skills were the strengths before coming to NED. Now, the strength is to not judge, and to listen to both sides of the story to formulate an opinion.

WEAKNESSES- Respondent did not have an opinion of his own, he shared the opinion of the group of friends. Today, interviewee identified the weaknesses as stubbornness and not knowing how to say "no" when respondent cannot or does not want to do something.

FAMILY- Composition includes extended family. Family represented the unconditional support and could be trusted. Friends were also considered family. Respondent maintained the same opinion after coming to NED, and now appreciates even more those friends who have become family. Role within family has changed a little since communication with family has improved.

FRIENDSHIP- Used to be people with whom one shared time and other aspects of life. Now, friend has become a deeper word. Learned to differentiate between acquaintance and friend.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP-Dutch have a stricter definition of friendship. Only call (truly meaning it) a few people their friends.

LIFE VIEWS- Before traveling abroad, life was too short to not be enjoyed, and it should be done with responsibility. The concept remains, but "do it with those people you love" has been added.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Respondent believed to have an influence as Dutch colleagues have appreciated and adopted some items from the respondent's home culture.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Participants starts to feel integrated. It could be due to the Dutch society having a lifestyle similar to what respondent would have wanted in home country.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Yes.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Seen it as a growth experience. Fewer weaknesses than before.

WOULD YO UDO IT AGAIN- Without a doubt.

INTERVIEWEE 12

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Respondent was proud of rich home culture though knew people may not realize its importance. Population was described as nice and not being a danger to others. Opinion remains today, yet respondent wishes to have valued it while at home.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Knew that people and facilities in NED were nice, so expected to live European experience. Interaction with Dutch society made participant to see the Dutch as nice people, yet who treat a foreigner always as a guest. Respondent's appreciation is that Dutch seem to keep their distance, although respondent also said to not feel offended by that.

ACADEMICS- Participant believed that after master's degree could do anything. Now, participant believed there is more to learn in addition to needing job experience to find a good job.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, respondent desired a good job and salary, so respondent started a master's degree. Now, interviewee realizes has not learned enough, and needs more time to continue learning.

STRENGTHS- At home, fast-learner. Nowadays, liked challenges and finding the own path to follow.

WEAKNESSES- Being lazy was the weakness before coming abroad, and now it is communication skills.

FAMILY- It is the most important thing in life. It means support and caring. Definition has not changed. Showed concerned for being away from family.

FRIENDSHIP- Same opinion for before and after; good friends are needed, but their reliability depends on the life stage each friend is in. However, friends are more appreciated now that interviewee is away from home country.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- No opinion as there is no interaction with Dutch people.

LIFE VIEWS- Expectation of life was to find a job, get married, and have children. Believed that life would be very different outside of home. Living abroad has made respondent realize that life is similar everywhere. The results depend mostly on the individual. Amount of effort equals amount of rewards.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Maybe. Respondent demonstrated that a female from her home country can pursue academic education.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No. Felt like a guest, as if the host society does not want to keep you.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Preferred not to answer.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Good country for a short time.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yes, but not for living.

INTERVIEWEE 13

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Respondent described it as friendly people living in a developing country with a growing economy and social problems (materialistic culture). Being abroad, respondent considered being more critical and at the same time understanding of country's situation as respondent became more educated.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE-Participant knew typical clichés, and also considered NED as more cultured and educated. Realized that it was not more developed or sustainable.

ACADEMICS- Aspiration in life from the family circle to become somebody in life. In NED, considered higher education as important, yet believed that is not for everybody. Also, believed higher education is overvalued, while other careers/jobs are undervalued.

FUTURE CAREER- Career in home country was to work for the private industry in the field. Now, ideal is to do field work in topic related to PhD area. Uncertain about returning to home country, and if this happened, scared about future career as PhD.

STRENGTHS- At home, being sociable, engineering and research skills. In the NED, being more independent in research. PhD topic knowledge and Dutch language were areas that have improved.

WEAKNESSES- English was identified as a weakness before studying abroad. Knowledge of PhD research topic and return to academia from working on private sector were seen as weaknesses.

FAMILY- Support in life composed of the inner circle of family members. Same opinion of family prevailed, and has seen some changes in the communication with family in home country due to the distance.

FRIENDSHIP- Respondent said to have a close group of friends at home with whom interviewee shared common interests. Concept of friendship has not changed.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- No Dutch friends. Participant said to know them, but they are not considered as friends. Respondent said Dutch people seem to have more boundaries.

LIFE VIEWS- Life should be about loving the work and having what one wants. Now, it is the same concept, but doing something for society at the same time.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. They seemed like they don't want to change and closed in their culture.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Not yet. Dutch friends are missing.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY-Not 100%. Now learning Dutch language.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Liked it a lot. Place is amazing.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yeah, yeah. Achieved a lifetime goal already here.

INTERVIEWEE 14

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described oneself as not proud of nationality as several aspects need to improve. Opinion remains as respondent has now compared home with host country. Population at home country is seen as friendly, yet unhappy with government.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Expected it to be similar to Germany (a safe, developed country with strict, cold, and unfriendly people). Participant found Dutch population to be friendly and helpful, but a closed society to foreigners.

ACADEMICS- Higher education is seen as important to broaden the mind scope. Compared the hierarchical system between the host and home societies, and preferred the Dutch non-hierarchical educational system.

FUTURE CAREER- Expected to be a teacher and an activist. Nowadays, continues to choose teaching/academia (up to master's level) and being an activist.

STRENGTHS- Being a good, responsible teacher and respectful were and continue being the strengths.

WEAKNESSES-At home, respondent identified that thinking that the system had to change, instead of adjusting oneself to the system, was a weakness. At the moment, the weakness is not being a more independent researcher.

FAMILY- Composed of very few people within the inner family circle in part due to relationship with other family members. Now, friends are also considered family.

FRIENDSHIP- Had a few, strong friendship relationships at home. Now, has a similar quantity and type of friends with closer interests.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- No clear opinion as there is no much interaction with Dutch people. Respondent believed Dutch behaved among their friends just like other people from the same age behave with their friends.

LIFE VIEWS- Life had to follow certain rules in order to work. Life views have changed as participant is more flexible and adapts to the situation easier.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. Dutch see international people as foreigners. Participant has not experienced discrimination, yet has seen it on other people.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Initially, believed it was possible to find it, but now does not think that it will be the case. Respondent appreciated job culture in NED.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Yes. Participant has tried to learn the language and researched about their culture.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Fruitful experience. It allowed respondent to meet new cultures and also felt safe.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Definitely. Easier to find items from specific lifestyle.

INTERVIEWEE 15

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Participant had extremely positive opinion about home. Studying abroad has made the respondent feel prouder of home, and to share that feeling with the world.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Respondent had a general idea about European culture and tourist Dutch aspects before moving to NED. Interactions with Dutch people were described as nice, warm, kind, and helpful, although respondent pointed out the difficulty to establish friendships with the Dutch.

ACADEMICS- Interviewee was happy and satisfied with the quality of higher education at home country. However, considered it hierarchical and dependent from professors' approval when compared to Dutch higher education. Originally, respondent was not aware of reputation of Dutch education, but international rankings generated expectation of good quality of education.

FUTURE CAREER- Plans have not been affected by staying abroad. Returning home and working in academia or government institutions were and continue to be the final goal as there seemed to be more opportunities for participant in home country.

STRENGTHS- The academic world was and is still relatively easy for participant. Nevertheless, research skills have evolved in NED.

WEAKNESSES- Participant stated organizational skills were and still are a weakness.

FAMILY- It was assessed as very important before living abroad. Only modification to this concept after living abroad was that respondent now felt appreciation and concern for family.

FRIENDSHIP- At home, interviewee perceived friends as those with whom one could share experiences and support even on the distance. No change in friendship opinion. Also, interviewee said technology allowed distant friendships to be sustained.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Participant researched the "circle of friendship" concept to understand why Dutch have a closed group of friends and do not accept outsiders easily.

LIFE VIEWS- Before and after coming to NED, respondent believed there is no single way to live life, and recommended to enjoy life traveling and knowing other cultures. Personally, respondent expressed a desire to retire young, and admired the life/job quality of NED.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- No. Participant adapted more to host environment instead of sharing the home culture to the receiving society.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- N/A

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- Yes, at some point. Due to the nice interaction interviewee has with colleagues, yet again interviewee pointed out real friendship cannot forced.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Nice and great. Due to the niceness, politeness, and honesty of the Dutch.

WOULD DO IT AGAIN- Yeah, sure. NED would be considered as an option to study abroad.

INTERVIEWEE 16

HOME CULTURE/COUNTRY- Described as a good place to live where people do most activities together. Living abroad, participant continues to notice people from home country like to stay together. Participant now appreciates home food, and notices people at home country are not good time managers.

HOST CULTURE/COUNTRY- Knew typical clichés. Interviewee expected open country, but found it is not. It is a structured society where everything is scheduled.

ACADEMICS- Higher education in home country means the person knows it all. Yet, now higher education means more specialization so the more knowledge is limited to just one area.

FUTURE CAREER- Dream was to become a professor. Now, interviewee considered both academic and private sectors to continue research on the subject. Research in home country is aimed toward profitable subjects.

STRENGHTS- Mathematics and calculations were mentioned as the interviewee's strengths at home. After spending time abroad, mathematics continues, and understanding others are seen as the strengths.

WEAKNESSES- At home, communication with professors was very respectful to the point where a student could not speak up, only listen. The weakness discovered after living abroad is lack of persistence to follow ideas.

FAMILY- It is everything and gives support. Being away has made participant appreciate them more and be concerned about them. Feels no social pressure from them.

FRIENDSHIP- Respondent classified friends as needed when having a good time (e.g. enjoyable activity or something serious). After living abroad, participant feels no obligation with friends as before.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Friendship among Dutch may be similar to respondent's concept of friendship, however, some Dutch may be closer friends than others.

LIFE VIEWS: Before coming to NED, interviewee did not think about it. After spending time abroad, perfect life would include love interest, work and having kids. If no love partner existed, it would be to continue traveling.

DUTCH INFLUENCE- Yes, try to eradicate stereotypes of home country.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No, since there is not a lot of communication with Dutch people.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY - Searched for a place with Dutch people to live with.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Very nice experience.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yeah. I want to do my own thing, and in home country is not possible.

INTERVIEWEE 17

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Population was described as good people and with no access to private media communications to compare government information. Before and after coming to NED, interviewee regarded quality of education at home country to be less than in western countries. Also, respondent mentioned that the equality of the relationship of professors with students to be better than at home.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Expectation was a modern, cleaner, more technological place, with a community more less educated. After coming here, technology was present, but found an individualistic society that was not expected. With time, interviewee became individualistic as well. Everything in NED is scheduled, and participant has adapted to it.

ACADEMICS- Studying higher education came from the family. Education outside home is perceived as better. In NED there is no shortage of professors, an abundance of resources, and an equality of treatment among colleagues.

FUTURE CAREER- Expectation at home was to be a professor, and then leave for a while to the private sector. Now, PhD provides more possibilities to secure top job positions.

STRENGTHS- Back home, the strengths were studying and doing calculations. Now, the strengths are communication, networking, and self-learning.

WEAKNESSES- Weakness before living abroad was English. No weaknesses were mentioned after coming to NED.

FAMILY- Family means everything, so interviewee cares about their living standard and safety. Living abroad has not changed the concept, only that the visits are not frequent. Family relationships are closer now as they communicate often due to the distance.

FRIENDSHIP- Interviewee had friends but wasn't in close contact. Away from home, values friendship, and knows it is hard to maintain it because of technical & time differences and costs.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- No close Dutch friends. It does not bother interviewee because the closed circle situation would also happen in the home country.

LIFE VIEWS- Interviewee described life as earning a degree, working, getting married, having children, and continue living. Now, participant believes there has to be a contribution to society.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Maybe a little. Helping with the understanding of people of the respondent's home country.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Unsure about what was his place. At the university, yes. Outside in society, participant does not know.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY- At the university, yes. Outside in society, participant does not think so.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Very good, nice. At the beginning there is always a transition, and with time, one adapts.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yes. It's all about the opportunities education offers.

INTERVIEWEE 18

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Home described as a rich and vast culture that sometimes people may be not aware of. Friendly, open society toward foreigners. After living abroad, same impression, and believed the country can improve.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Respondent expected to find open-minded, tolerant and cold people, and that was the case. Interviewee expected society to be more aware of their cultural heritage.

ACADEMICS- Higher education at home is a privilege. Comparing the types of education, higher education institutions in the NED have more resources and less bureaucracy than home institutions. Regarding education quality, no major differences were perceived by interviewee when compared.

FUTURE CAREER- Previously, participant considered only academia. After living abroad, respondent has considered the private sector for the future, although continues to prefer the academic world.

STRENGTHS- Strengths were mathematics, languages and social skills. Now, the strengths are public relations and learning more languages.

WEAKNESSES- Participant expressed no being good at meeting people for the first time. Now, the weakness is organizing the schedule.

FAMILY- Family was considered the nucleus of everything and the first school a person attended. The concept of family has not changed after living abroad. Function within family continues to be of a role model. Interviewee continues to care, but now tries to do more things that are important to him.

FRIENDSHIP- Interviewee said friends help a person to learn other matters, and they can be chosen. Living abroad, friendship concept has not changed.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Respondent's perception is that Dutch have close circles of friends and do not accept many foreigners.

LIFE VIEWS- Interviewee said life was everything people had, and to make the best out of it. Viewpoint about life has not changed. Do what you love with the least amount of effort. The opinion has not changed, just varies depending on the place where one is.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- A little. Participant has detected some changes in the behaviors of Dutch colleagues. Also, participant mentioned to provide a point of view different than media about home country.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Not yet. Initially, there was not much interaction with Dutch people, but recently, there has been more contact.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY-Initially, no. Now, participant is trying more.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Full of new experiences. Interviewee would recommend this place without hesitation.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yes. People are open-minded and tolerant.

INTERVIEWEE 19

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described as multicultural country with a variety of food with friendly people. After coming to NED, interviewee has realized people at home country are overworked.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- At home, interviewee knew only basic aspects of NED. Expected to blend in. Participant found Dutch people to be direct, and also listen to others' opinions.

ACADEMICS- Higher education was a necessity at home to have a better job. Now, participant sees it more as self-improvement, and also, as interacting with other cultures.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, interviewee thought to climb the career ladder in a consultancy firm. Now, the interest includes more financial areas. Participant expects to obtain a better job with master's degree.

STRENGHTS- Multitasking at home, and organizational skills after spending time in NED.

WEAKNESSES- Communicating with people from different backgrounds at home. Presentation skills in NED.

FAMILY- Family means support of any kind. Meaning is the same, but now participant appreciates more the family relationships. Roles within family did not change with distance.

FRIENDSHIP- Interviewee has maintained friendships from early school years. Friends are those who know you well and do things together. Being away from home, friendships are even more important.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Respondent has seen interactions among Dutch friends to be direct and also to exchange opinions quickly.

LIFE VIEWS- Participant knew the idea was to find a job, buy a house, buy a car, and have a family, although in no specific order. After coming to NED, participant has concluded life experiences are more important than material possessions.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Maybe. Respondent considers to be giving Dutch people the experience of working with a non-Dutch person.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- Unsure. Participant feels comfortable, yet believes the answer can only be given by Dutch society.

HONEST EFFORT TO BE PART OF SOCIETY-Yes. Interviewee has learned Dutch.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Feels happy. Dutch are organized and direct, so participant learned how to do it too.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yes, traveling was always one of the participant's dreams.

INTERVIEWEE 20

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- Described as amazing quality of life. People are also amazing, hard-working, festive, relaxed, and chaotic. After being away, interviewee sees people from home country to be selfish and not consider all the consequences of their actions.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Expected people to be proud of their culture, friendlier and shorter. Living abroad, respondent has found Dutch are not friendly or goal-driven.

ACADEMICS- Participant thought home higher education is not accessible to all and of average/low quality. Now, interviewee sees home education is good, and Dutch education not as good as expected.

FUTURE CAREER- Interviewee perceived an international degree and knowledge was highly regarded and needed for further success at home. Now, respondent has the degrees, yet participant is not sure about the knowledge gained abroad.

STRENGHTS- These were technical and social skills. In the NED, these are being observant and fast-learner. No opportunity to use social skills in NED.

WEAKNESSES- Participant did not have enough international knowledge and needed to be more diplomatic back at home. Respondent's weakness now is the lack of social interest.

FAMILY- Composition made of inner circle. Safety-zone for support. Now, concept is stronger and shows concern for family. Participant's role within family is still being the youngest member.

FRIENDSHIP- Used to think friends were very important and dedicate them a lot of time. However, life circumstances are now different, so the perception of friendship is different. Plus, the friendships at home have changed as well with time.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Participant considered them honest, direct friends, but unwilling to open the circle to new friends.

LIFE VIEWS- At home, participant was money-driven. In NED, respondent gave a different value to money, and learned to separate personal time from the regular day.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- For sure. Participant sees it in the colleagues' behavior.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No, participant does not feel comfortable among Dutch people.

HONEST EFFORT TO BE PART OF SOCIETY- No. All expats will never feel at home. Feels like a long vacation. Is more about the feeling that this is not one own country.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- An amazing experience. Happy with the NED, does not feel Dutch.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- It would depend on the mindset at the time.

INTERVIEWEE 21

HOME COUNTRY/CULTURE- People are hard-workers and enjoy life. Interviewee suggested source of happiness, despite social and economic conditions, was due to natural scenery of the country.

HOST COUNTRY/CULTURE- Respondent expected infrastructure and good economy. For the population expected to see a nice, respectful behavior. Previous expectations were met.

ACADEMICS- Higher education was encouraged from home. Higher education in home country was explained as a privilege for a few people. Now, interviewee appreciates that international higher education allowed for interacting with other cultures and the benefits this brings.

FUTURE CAREER- At home, interviewee foresaw a future in the private sector, and later in academia. Now, previous commitment obliges interviewee to return home to work, yet respondent would like to keep the social aspect included in the future career.

STRENGTHS- Strengths were analytical, mathematics, programming, problem-solving skills and socializing. In NED, the strength is interacting with other cultures.

WEAKNESSES- English was a weakness. In NED, research skills and scientific writing are a weakness now.

FAMILY- Family is the closest circle that supports a person, and it is integrated into every aspect of life. After living abroad, family concept for interviewee is the same, although there are some aspects, (e.g. independence) from Dutch concept of family respondent would like to incorporate into his own. Role within family continue to be of example for siblings.

FRIENDSHIP- It is the family that can be chosen and supports a person. Now, concept was only modified to clarify that it does not matter how much time is spent, but the quality of time spent with friends.

DUTCH FRIENDSHIP- Dutch call people their friends easily. At home, interviewee explained it required more to call someone a friend.

LIFE VIEWS- A satisfactory life was seen as a balance between personal and professional lives. Now, it is the same. Work should not overwhelm a person; it should motivate the person.

INFLUENCED DUTCH SOCIETY- Yes. Interviewee has created an effect to build interest in language, natural landscapes, and food.

FOUND YOUR PLACE- No. Respondent has not even found his position in his work environment.

HONEST EFFORT TO BECOME PART OF SOCIETY-Not enough time to be involved.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE- Highly satisfactory. Obtained the possibility to learn from a variety of cultures.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN- Yes. Need to have the experience to truly know.

Appendix 4 – Table 3

	HOME COUNTRY & CULTURE	HOST COUNTRY & CULTURE	ACADEMICS	FUTURE CAREER	STRENGHTS	WEAKNESSES	FAMILY	FRIENDSHIP FRIENDSHIP	DUTCH	LIFE VIEWS	THE NED
1	NO CHANGE	ADJUSTED Not like Germans, helpful, but not close to foreigners	NO CHANGE	CHANGE B-Private A-Fewer jobs for PhDs	CHANGE B- Managing A- Comm	NO CHANGE B- Presenting A-Presenting	NO CHANGE Strong relationship	CHANGE B-Going out A-To trust	N/A	ADJUSTED B-Developing oneself, Life with loved ones. A-Prove oneself in foreign country.	I-NO FP- N/A HE- N/A TE-Positive-Edu DA-YES-Edu.
2	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE-Stress about future	CHANGE B- Teaching A-Researcher	NO CHANGE No time non-academic	NO CHANGE Support	NO CHANGE Intl friends	N/A	ADJUSTED Maintain work/family balance	I-MAYBE (female) FP-N/A HE-N/A TE-Positive DA-YES
3	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE	ADJUSTED B-Specialize A-Cultural exposure	NO CHANGE Needs more to learn. Scared about future	NO CHANGE-Facing challenges (doubted)	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE-Deeper interaction	NO CHANGE	Strong def. Closed circle. Colleague vs friend Know them, but not my friends.	ADJUSTED Pattern + help others	I-NO FP-NO HE-NO (needs more) TE-Positive DA-YES
4	ADJUSTED Behind in work culture	ADJUSTED Nice hosts but separated	CHANGE Efficiency & personal fulfillment	CHANGE	CHANGE B-Computational, theoretical & perseverance A-efficient	CHANGE B-Non-efficient A-Not accepting help	ADJUSTED Appreciation. Increased comm.	NO CHANGE	Value friendship. Colleague vs friend	CHANGE Work small part of life.	I-MAYBE (culture) FP-NO HE-N/A TE-Positive DA-YES
5	ADJUSTED Appreciation	ADJUSTED	ADJUSTED	ADJUSTED Private sector also possible	NO CHANGE Math and perseverance	CHANGE B-Speak well of country	NO CHANGE Requested less advice	ADJUSTED Appreciation	Dutch people to share.	NO CHANGE Do what one wants	IF-NO FP-NO HE-N/A

		Cold people, open when speaking Dutch	Appreciation Edu is not for everybody. Home Edu is complete.			A-need job experience	due to distance		Know them, but not my friends.		TE-Positive DA-YES
6	ADJUSTED Appreciation of good & bad	ADJUSTED Population size & type may help to govern	ADJUSTED Appreciated home Edu and int'l and their limitations	ADJUSTED Academia also possible	CHANGE B-Tech skills A-PR and selling one's skills	CHANGE B-Public speaking A-Proactivity & expressing ideas	NO CHANGE Everything	NO CHANGE Important	Colleague vs friend	CHANGE B-Personal crisis A-Trial & Error	I-MAYBE (culture) FP-NO HE-NO (What for?) TE-Positive DA-YES
7	NO CHANGE Lacked discipline. Seen other ways to improve	ADJUSTED Not include foreigners	NO CHANGE Ed helps self-development	ADJUSTED Continue in academia, but gain job experience	CHANGE B-Academics A-Persistence	CHANGE B-Arrogance A-Doubts, lack of confidence	NO CHANGE Support & love	ADJUSTED Appreciation	Colleague vs friend	CHANGE Money not = happiness	I-NO FP-N/A HE-YES (Dutch) TE-Positive (Edu) DA- NO
8	ADJUSTED Appreciation	ADJUSTED False media perception	CHANGE Difference between master and PhD.	ADJUSTED More options than teaching	CHANGE B-Observation & analytical skills A-Analyzing impact of tech in society	CHANGE B-Not taking public positions A-Not keeping friendships	NO CHANGE Role has changed though	NO CHANGE Unable to find same type of friends in NED	Friendship limited to activities	CHANGE B-Do good to everyone A-competition	I-MAYBE (board) FP-N/A HE-YES (board) TE-Positive DA-YES (why no
9	ADJUSTED Realized differences when compared with NED	CHANGE Did not find racism	ADJUSTED Only difference is abundance of resources	ADJUSTED Considering other options with practical applications	CHANGE B-Fast learner A-Multicultural interaction	NO CHANGE Comm skills, but working on it.	NO CHANGE Support	ADJUSTED Appreciation	Friendship is more formal	ADJUSTED Better now due to EU degree	I-NO FP-YES (No racism) HE-YES (Dutch) TE-Positive DA-YES
10	NO CHANGE Recognizes good & bad	ADJUSTED No clichés. Nice society,	NO CHANGE Necessary for job.	ADJUSTED Travel & learn	CHANGE B-Academics A-Multicultural interaction	CHANGE B-Comm	ADJUSTED Appreciation, stronger bond	NO CHANGE Sharing	Open-minded about friendship	ADJUSTED-Can stop after certain # of mountains	I-NO FP-NO (going home)

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	complaint is food	Int'l degree beneficial.			A-Being afraid, making mistakes						HE-NO (short time) TE-Positive DA-YES
11	NO CHANGE Lowest effort. Seen other ways to improve.	ADJUSTED Directness of Dutch	ADJUSTED Those who want to study despite the economic outcome	NO CHANGE Private sector, and even entrepreneur	CHANGE B-Tech, math & public speaking A-See two sides of issue	CHANGE B-Followed others' opinion A-Stubbornness & not saying no	NO CHANGE Support & trust	ADJUSTED Appreciation Acquaintance vs friend	Strict definition	ADJUSTED- Enjoy life with those one loves	I-MAYBE (culture FP-MAYBE (starting HE-YES TE-Positive less weakness DA- YES
12	ADJUSTED Appreciation	ADJUSTED Not include foreigners	ADJUSTED Still more to learn	ADJUSTED Needs more to learn	CHANGE B-Fast-learner A-Facing challenges	CHANGE B-Lazy A-Comm skills	ADJUSTED Concerned about them	ADJUSTED Appreciation	No opinion	ADJUSTED Life depends on the individual's attitude	I-MAYBE (female) FP-NO (guest) HE- not to answer TE-Positive (short time) DA- YES (Edu)
13	ADJUSTED More critical and understanding about home	CHANGE Not as developed or sustainable	ADJUSTED Appreciation Edu is not for everybody. While other careers are undervalued	ADJUSTED Scared about future. Do not want only academia	CHANGE B-Social and research A-Independent research	CHANGE B-English A-Knowledge of research topic	NO CHANGE Support	NO CHANGE Small group of friends	Know them, but not my friends.	ADJUSTED Do what one wants + contribute to society	I-NO FP-NO (miss friends) HE- YES (Dutch) TE- Positive DA- YES
14	NO CHANGE Friendly & unhappy with gov't	ADJUSTED Friendly & helpful, but not include foreigners	ADJUSTED Dutch non-hierarchical Edu system is preferred	NO CHANGE Activist & teacher (master)	NO CHANGE Responsible & good teacher	CHANGE B-Not adapting to the system A-Not being independent researcher	ADJUSTED Friends are now family	NO CHANGE Same type of friends	No opinion	ADJUSTED Become flexible to life circumstances	I-NO (foreign) FP-NO HE-(Dutch & culture TE-Positive DA-YES
15	NO CHANGE	ADJUSTED	NO CHANGE	NO CHANGE	CHANGE B-Academics	NO CHANGE	ADJUSTED	NO CHANGE Support	Circle of friendship	NO CHANGE	I-NO (I adapt) FP- N/A

	Proud of home culture and shared it	Friendly, but difficult to make friends	Happy with home Edu quality and in NED as well	Returning home and academia	A-Research skills	Organizational skills	Appreciation & concern			No single way to live life.	HE-YES TE-Positive DA-YES
16	ADJUSTED Appreciation for food & not good time managers	ADJUSTED Structured society.	ADJUSTED More specialization, knowledge is limited to an area	ADJUSTED Private sector also possible	CHANGE / ADJUSTED B-Math A-Understanding others & Math	CHANGE B-Unable to speak up in school A-Persistence	ADJUST Appreciation for support	ADJUSTED No obligation to reciprocate favors	Dutch may have similar concept about friendship	CHANGE Didn't think it, now partner, work and family.	I-YES (culture) FP-NO (lack Comm) HE-YES (living) TE-Positive DA-YES
17	NO CHANGE Good people, less Edu quality	ADJUSTED Individualistic society. Everything is scheduled	ADJUSTED NED has no shortage of professors & resources as at home	NO CHANGE EU PhD gave more possibilities for top positions in academia	CHANGE B-Academics & calculations A-Comm & networking	CHANGE B-English A-NO weaknesses	ADJUSTED Appreciation & stronger bond	ADJUSTED Appreciation Hard to maintain	Closed circle	ADJUSTED Family & work + contribute to society	I-MAYBE (culture) FP- YES (Uni) HE- YES (Uni) TE-Positive DA-YES (Edu)
18	NO CHANGE Friendly society that can improve	ADJUSTED Society type was the same, but cultural awareness was different	NO CHANGE Edu quality same, but more resources & less bureaucracy in NED	ADJUSTED Private sector also possible.	CHANGE / ADJUSTED B-Math, language, social skills A-PR & languages	CHANGE B-First impressions A-Organization	ADJUSTED No change in concept, yet does things important to him	NO CHANGE Help	Closed circle	ADJUSTED Do what one loves + least possible effort	I-MAYBE (behavior) FP-MAYBE (starting) HE-NO (trying more) TE-Positive DA- YES
19	ADJUSTED Home population is overworked	NO CHANGE Expected to blend in. Found Dutch directness	ADJUSTED Not just for work, but self-improvement	NO CHANGE Climb corporate ladder. EU degree may help	CHANGE B-Multitasking A-Organization	CHANGE B-Multicultural Comm A-Presentation skills	ADJUSTED Appreciation	ADJUSTED Appreciation	Among themselves are direct.	ADJUSTED Life experiences are more important than material possession	I-MAYBE (non-Dutch) FP-MAYBE HE- YES (speak Dutch) TE-Positive DA-YES
20	ADJUSTED	ADJUSTED	ADJUSTED	ADJUSTED	CHANGE B-Tech & social	CHANGE	ADJUSTED	CHANGE	Closed circle-	CHANGE	I-YES (behavior)

	People can be selfish, not consider consequences	Not friendly nor goal-driven	Appreciation for home Edu. NED Edu not as good as expected	Got degrees, unsure about knowledge obtained.	A-Observant & fast-learner	B-Diplomacy & int'l knowledge A-Lack of social interest	Appreciation and concern	Friendships not as important, unable to find the same in NED	Honest and direct.	Gave money a different value	FP-NO (uncomfortable HE- NO (Not at home) TE- Positive DA- Depends mindset
21	ADJUSTED Natural scenery helps people to feel happy	NO CHANGE Infrastructure, good economy. Citizens' respectful behavior.	ADJUSTED Edu allows multicultural interaction	ADJUSTED Keep social component in academia or private sector	CHANGE B-Tech & social A-Multicultural interaction	CHANGE B-English A-Research & scientific writing	ADJUSTED Incorporate aspects of Dutch independence	ADJUSTED Quality, not quantity of time.	Dutch call friends easily. It takes more time at home.	NO CHANGE Maintain work/family balance	I-YES (culture) FP-NO (not his own) HE-NO (short time) TE- Positive DA- YES

The Netherlands

I- Influenced the Dutch

FP- Found your place

HE- Made an honest effort

TE- Total experience in NED

DA- Do again the experience of living in NED