

# SRI LANKAN STUDENTS' LIFE EXPERIENCE IN NORWAY

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## **DEDICATION**

To everyone – fellow students, informants, staff at NTNU, family and friends - who in different ways helped me do this work.

Thank you!



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# 1. Introduction

This thesis tries to explore Sri Lankan students' life experiences during their sojourn in Norway. Particularly, it reflects their perceptions on different aspects of socio-culture and education on the basis of sense of place. As nations are becoming more interconnected in a time of globalisation, the movement of students from countries of origin to another country for the purpose of higher education is dramatically increased by internationalisation of higher education. Worldwide, it was estimated that more than 2.5million of foreign students had been enrolled into the international education program at the tertiary level in countries other than their home (UNESCO, 2006)

## 1.1. Internationalisation

Several authors have mentioned higher education in the context of globalisation and internationalisation. Scott (1998) has posed the question about internationalisation and globalisation in his edited book on whether these two are very similar or very different. As an answer to this difference, Knight (1999,) gave clear description to the discussion on the international dimension of higher education as follows:

Globalisation is the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas ...across border. Globalisation affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, tradition, culture and priority.

internationalisation of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalisation, yet at the same time respect the individuality of the nation.

Therefore, internationalisation and globalisation are seen as different but dynamically linked concepts. In other words, globalisation can be thought of as a catalyst while internationalisation is the response (Knight, 1999).

Norwegian centre for international cooperation in higher education (SIU) emphasises the relationship and coherence between internationalisation and globalisation as follows:

While globalisation is used to describe a very comprehensive and multifaceted process (cultural, economic and information technological development particularly gaining speed in the nineties), internationalisation is often (but not only) used about more tangible strategies to meet this development.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.siu.no/en/internasjonalisering>

The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU) is an administrative agency under the Norwegian ministry of education and research for international programmes and measure related to higher education. This centre is functioned with the mission of promoting and facilitating cooperation, standardization, mobility and the overcoming of cultural barriers to communication and exchange within the sphere of higher education at the international level.

Therefore, SIU's strategy 2005-2010 says<sup>2</sup>:

Internationalisation is the exchange of ideas, knowledge, goods and services between nations across national borders. The perspective is consequently that of the individual nation. In higher education, we take internationalisation to mean "...the process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension in the objectives, organisation and actions of the institutions".

In addition to the administration, SIU is playing a vital role for promoting Norway as an education and research nation. In this sense, Norwegian academic institutions are playing a leading position in academic cooperation and student exchange between countries. This is promoted by participating in international programmes and exchange between individual institutions (Norwegian Council for Higher Education, 2002), especially the cooperation with the countries in the South.

However, due to the effort of internationalizing the Norwegian higher education and the step towards a common European area of higher education along the lines of the Bologna Process, Norway is chosen as a study destination by many international students, not only by the internationalization but also due to other reasons such as free tuition, top ranking among all countries in human Development and rated the most peaceful country in the world.

Under the umbrella of internationalisation, many projects and programmes have been carried out between countries, particularly between the developed countries and developing countries. These projects and programmes are very important for both categories of nations' development because for developing countries they are acknowledged as a kind of development aid from developed country, whereas for developed countries they are relevant for research and development. They are not only for nations' development but also for young adults' careers and personal development as well as for their inter-cultural learning.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.siu.no/en/internasjonalisering>



## 1.2. Student mobility

As Szarka (2003) stated ‘student mobility can be defined and measured in several ways’, for the purpose of this study, it referred to mobile only with the purpose of higher education. According to Jenssen (2003,391), ‘Student exchange and Student flows across borders are definitely an important part of, and a necessity for, internationalisation.’

The patterns of global student mobility are influenced by varieties of factors that include geographic region of the world, historical connection to a particular countries, language and education systems, regional agreements and cooperation through educational and research. Majority of the foreign students are seeking places in major English speaking countries such as United States, Great Britain and Australia. While comparing to these countries, international students coming to Norway is very low. Currently it is estimated around 12,000<sup>3</sup> international students have enrolled in Norwegian universities and colleges through the exchange program and and exchange agreement between individual institutions, specially the cooperation with the countries in the south.

If we look at history of Norway’s approach to international students, small glimpses are given of events in the 1980s and early 1990s when predominantly secondary and bachelor level students came to Norway from developing countries. Over the last fifteen years, the number of international students’ arrival has increased due to the effort of internationalizing the Norwegian higher education and the exchange programmes (Brekke, 2006).

Institutional agreement between Sri Lanka and Norway in the field of higher education and the research is the main aspect of the present study that directed Sri Lankan students to decide Norway as their destination for higher studies. The institutionalized agreement between the Norwegian universities and the particular Sri Lankan universities offers advantages both on information wise and material wise to the students. information wise, it provides easy access to the information regarding admission procedures through the networks , reduce the uncertainty involved in student mobility and facilitate the decision to come to Norway. Material wise, this mobility often accompanied with scholarships and grants, for example, The NORAD fellowship programme, which was the first fellowship programme for higher education and research, and the Quota programme are relevant for Sri Lankans who are offered scholarship to study master’s or PhD degree at any Norwegian institution of higher

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.studyinnorway.no/study\\_in\\_norway](http://www.studyinnorway.no/study_in_norway)

education and NUFU programmes promote joint research and institutional cooperation between Sri Lankan universities and Norwegian universities<sup>4</sup>. Thus, these financial benefits encourage the students who have the ordinary economic background to engage in higher studies abroad without any investments.

Through this integration of international higher education programme, understanding student mobility is crucial. Trembly (2002) stated that mobility allows students to ‘absorb the cultural and social customs of their host country, and thus to act as ambassador both for their own country and their host country’ (2002,39). It is assumed that these cultural links could help reduce prejudice, hostility and discriminatory behaviour and to help increase international understanding and cooperation. However, the student experience – not only in academic matters but also in their day to day life – is very critical in forming and influencing their perceptions about higher education abroad because their life is characterised by socio-cultural, economic and academic issues during their foreign sojourn (Sam,2001).

Therefore, this thesis took the opportunity to explore the Sri Lankan students’ lived experience in Norway as a case study. In order to explore that, this chapter deals with the following sections: overview of historical background of higher education in Sri Lanka, statement of the problem, research objectives and research questions, significance of the study and structure of thesis

### **1.3. Overview of historical background of higher education in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan students who came to Norway to pursue their higher education have perceived the new place, people, culture and educational system differently with their home country experiences of culture and education system. Therefore, it was believed that look at the overview of Sri Lankan education system and its cultural basis would help to understand Students’ life experiences and perception in Norway.

### 1.3.1. *Ancient period*

From the arrivals of Vijaya and his followers in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Brahmins enjoyed the prominent status in Sri Lanka. The descendents of the royal family received their education under the Brahmins in their home, called Gurukula or Gurugedara.<sup>5</sup>

After the introduction of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the establishment of monastic institution was chiefly responsible for the spread of education. This paved for the way for the discontinuation of gurukula/gurugedera system and established the system of Buddhist education institution teaching Buddha. The village monastery gradually became the center for learning. While more monasteries were being opened up, curriculum was not confined only to religion, but also to other languages, history of many countries, Vedic and Post - Vedic literature, medicine, astronomy, poetry, architecture etc. In this stage, monastery became as a institution for primary education, the 'Privena', where the monks received their education, became the institution for secondary education and the 'Mahavihara' with learned staff, facilities for research and libraries, turned out to be the centre for tertiary education (ibid).

### 1.3.2. *Colonization period (1500-1948)*

After the Portuguese invaded Sri Lanka in 1505, the education system was introduced mainly based on Catholic religion. But the Dutch education system aimed to convert local people to Christianity and train them to assist for work in the government offices. One important thing was that under the Portuguese education system girls were given only elementary education and they were denied entry into the secondary schools which provided higher education, whereas the Dutch education system allowed free compulsory education and large amount of girls began to attend secondary school.

During the British colonization, the initial period was known as the missionary period when many missionary societies were actively involved in field of education. In 1831, the Colebrook commission put forward recommendations to reorganize the education system of Sri Lanka, where priority was given to the English education. However, Governor Mackenzy later proposed some recommendations, which reorganized the education with such important considerations as to admit children to all schools without the concern of religion, supply

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.moe.gov.lk/index.php>

books in national language. A new commission for school administration was established. This implementation brought a remarkable change in Sri Lanka's education system. Then, according to the request made by M. Kumaraswamy, a Member of the Legislative Council, due to the dissatisfaction of the education system, more recommendations were put forward, which introduced such things as primary education in national language, secondary education should be in English medium, scholarship should be awarded to study in Oxford and for girls it should be opened entrance. During the last quarter of 19th century, medical college, law college, school of agriculture, technical college and university college were started in Sri Lanka.

Another effort that placed education on a firm ground was the introduction of free education for all children from kindergarten to university. It was initiated by Dr. C. W. W Kannangara in 1945. This system of free education opened the door of higher education of every echelon of the society, while earlier (higher) education was concerned only by rich elites and their children. . The aspirations and ambitions of both parents and children were set on higher targets. An educational explosion after 1945 was being felt at the seats of higher learning and the demand for a University education was becoming more and more pressing. Therefore, widespread opportunities had been provided to all individuals for the development of their individual potentialities in Universities, Colleges of Technology or other Institutions for Higher Education.

### 1.3.3. *Period after independence*

After the independence, two higher educational institutions were started and paved the way for a large number of students who wanted to pursue higher education in the national language. After the nationalization of the educational system in Sri Lanka, there were several recommendations for establishing a different schools colleges and vocational training institutes, but later those were not succeeded due to change of governments.

After the nationalization of education, it is important to mention that, the decentralization plans and The Science and Technical Education Branch, English Unit and the Curriculum Development Centre attracted the attention of foreign agencies such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, British Council and SIDA. However, in 1970 due to the increasing population and other expansions on education, it seemed that the government was facing problems of improving the quality of education. Moreover, there was large number of young educated people unable to obtain employment due to the mismatch of the education provided and the

demands of the job market. Therefore, the government implemented certain reforms in order to overcome the above mentioned problems with regards to quality and mismatch of education in Sri Lanka (Winslow & Woost, 2004).

#### 1.3.4. *After the open economy*

After the open economy was introduced by the conservatives in 1977, reformation of administration on different sectors of employment, health care, education, helped spurt growth. However, the questions were raised as to whether these changes delivered benefit to all people?

However, the Open economy policies, created some rooms for improving the existing higher education through massive capital spending programmes which established new university campuses and added new facilities to the existing ones. During the 1980s, a separate ministry for higher studies was established under the Ministry of Education. In this way, higher educational efforts have made a profound effect on the Sri Lankan educational history.

Sri Lanka has been maintaining a high rate in education and literacy compared with other South Asian countries since its independence. According to the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2006), education status is estimated as 90.7% of literacy rate with the education index of 0.81. Today Sri Lanka tries to formulate a more global-oriented policy on higher education. In this sense, universities and other higher educational institutions are expected to function as development institutions. In other words, higher education is considered as an essential motor of Sri Lankan economy and its development (Ministry of higher education, Sri Lanka, 2007). So it is becoming a real partner in the social and economic choices of a society. In Sri Lanka, it is estimated that 6.5 % of tertiary students engage in higher studies abroad (UNESCO, 2006). To Norway, so far, 1600 Sri Lankan students were given resident permit by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Brekke, 2006).

It mainly highlights that students obtain higher degrees and go back to their countries. Sometimes, no one knows what these international students are experiencing apart from their educational activities during foreign sojourn. I, therefore, intended to look at these Sri Lankan students' life experience while they are in Norway.

#### **1.4. Statement of the problem**

Norway's attractiveness as a place to study among Sri Lankan students is due to links between Norwegian universities and institutions through academic programmes and availability of grants.

Internationalization of higher education is given high priority by the Norwegian authorities. In this context, while Norwegian students are taking the entire or part of their studies abroad, international students also enrol in exchange programme and international degree programmes in Norway. Thus, Norway's involvement with the Bologna process has promoted the cross border mobility of students through participating in international higher education programmes and exchange agreements between institutions.

The cross border mobility requires that students are expected to be accompanied with the cultural aspects of studying in a foreign country and also adapt to different personal, social and economic living conditions. Although the importance of these social issues are often underestimated in the evaluation of the process of internationalisation, it is believed that higher education and its impact should help to create more social cohesion. I borrow Scott's (1998, 100) view: 'education, in general, and higher education (HE), in particular, has been an important factor in laying the foundations for such an evolution of society. It is expected that HE will play a prominent role also with regard to globalisation and how this concept will evolve'.

One of the major aims of the internationalisation of higher education is to prepare students to function in an international and intercultural context (Volet, 1998). Experience and awareness of inter-cultural learning is important for their personal and professional development.

Sri Lankan students are entering, participating in and completing higher education in Norway with different backgrounds and they reflect the diversity of Norwegian culture, societies and education through their subjective appraisal of students' life experience in the new place.

Therefore, this study has undertaken to explore what kind of perception Sri Lankan students have on place, people, culture and education during their sojourn and whether these are positive or negative or both.

This will shed light on relevant concepts from Sri Lankan students' perspectives and guide further analysis. The objective and research questions related to the present study on student life experience in Norway.

### **1.5. Research objectives and research questions**

In order to explore Sri Lankan students' sense on different experiences at the new place, this study strives to answer the following research question

1. How do Sri Lankan students perceive the culture, place and people where they live in Norway?
2. How do Sri Lankan students perceive the higher educational system of Norway?
3. How do Sri Lankan students cope socio-culturally, educationally and professionally in the context of 'new' challenges and benefits?

### **1.6. Significance of the study**

Apart from obtain higher degree abroad this study is about how students perceive their student life experience in the new place during the sojourn abroad. Students who are coming all the way from south to north have to balance the excitements of new experiences against challenges of integration. Therefore, I believe that to carry out a study about Sri Lankan graduate students in Norway is very important because this study will address their experiences and reveal the challenges they meet while making this meaningful life overseas.

Many studies have been carried out in relation to studying abroad from the perspectives of mobility, migration and exchange programme. (eg, Tremblay, 2002). Few of these studies and reports, however, describe 'study abroad' from the students' perspectives (Sam, 2000).

Moreover, there seem to be no research has addressed Sri Lankan students' life experience in Norway. . Therefore, I would prefer to look at this study from the angle of lived experience of students with respect to their sense of place.

Apart from their education, getting experience at a new place should also affect their life performance. At some point, I believe this would not end only by addressing the issues on paper but also try to make some suggestion in terms of their experience of student life. This will also provide some information to the university administration (NTNU and UMB) for handling international student affairs.

Further, globalization has created an increasingly borderless world and pursuing knowledge abroad, has an impact on every international student's life. This study will reflect Sri Lankan students' lived experience from the view of intercultural context.

Being an international master student from Sri Lanka, I have been facing many challenges regarding education as well as everyday life matters in Norway. Therefore, I intend to look at what kinds of challenges are faced by the other Sri Lankan students in Norway.

### **1.7. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter, introduction and background to the study, gives brief contextual outlook to the study. The chapter introduces statement of the problem, significance of the study and research objectives and research questions.

Chapter two will introduce the theoretical consideration for the study. Here I will explain key concept which I use for my interpretation.

Chapter three will deal with research process and methodology. Mainly I will describe the methodology and its techniques to generate data for my studies, further, I will reflect my positionality according to my role and position during the research. Finally, it will discuss the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter four and five are the analyzing part of the thesis. Here, I will interpret my gathered data according to the theoretical concepts which I have chosen.

Chapter six will cover the discussion of findings, as a conclusion of the study.



## **2. Theoretical and conceptual underpinnings**

The intention of theory is to make thinking easier. The way of understanding a theory is to start by recognizing that everyone is always using it to construct meaning. The following theoretical concerns are at the basis of the topic of study and its research questions (Shurmer, 2002). There are many ways of approaching research questions; therefore, the research process is not divorced from theory. As a graduate student, specializing in geography, I am very much interested in doing research about experience of student life at the new place. With the sense of human geography, refers to the study of society in relation to space and place (Kitchin & Tate, 2000) my study is related to students and their new place.

In reality, research cannot be conducted without the base of theory because it will provide some answers to the research question. In doing so, knowledge is derived through different approaches which are crucial to understand what others researchers have done and to find the theoretical context to justify the research findings.

This research deals the concepts of place within human geography. However, the theoretical considerations are also derived from other discipline within the social science such as culture shock and adaptation. These concepts are looking at the aspect intercultural experience with the back ground of internationalisation of higher education and student mobility.

### **2.1. Concept of 'Sense of place'**

In this study, students develop sense of place through experience and knowledge of their new living area or surroundings midst of their stay in Norway. The feelings of personal and cultural experience over time make a place either strange or pleasant which anchor a person in it.

There are many definitions and description of sense of place. To some, it is a characteristic that some geographic places have and some do not have, while to others, it is a feeling or perspective held by people. As a geographic term, place commonly refers to a centre of meaning and felt value: what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place when we endow it with value (Tuan, 1977). Sense of place is a collection of meanings, beliefs, symbol, values and feeling that individual or group associated with a particular locality. Sense of place is a thought used by different writers to describe these as concepts.

By sense of place, it means the subjective and emotional attachment people have on place. In this sense, place is a way of understanding the world (Creswell, 2000). Sense of place is a social phenomena that exist independently of any individuals perspective or experience, however, its depend on human engagement for its existence<sup>6</sup>.

Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) thought that space is not only a location but also a setting for action, experience and communication. According to Relph (1976), place have been identified through three elements which are physical setting, the activities and the meanings.

“...it is possible to visualize a town as consisting of building and physical objects...objective observer of the activities of people within this physical context would observe their movements...but a person experiencing these buildings and activities sees them as far more than this – they are beautiful or ugly, useful or hindrances, home, enjoyable, alienating; in short, they are meaningful (Relph, 1976:47).

In this way, place bears on values, meanings, memories and feelings. Thus, for Sri Lankan students, place as a ‘meaningful location’ in Norway (Williams & Stewart ,1998).

## **2.2. Intercultural experience**

Culture can be defined in many ways. We cannot see or touch the culture but its effects surround us, especially those who participate in it. When we meet cultural attitudes that are entirely different from our own, we perceive the sense of strangeness. it is important to distinguish culture between local and global.

Culture is, therefore, particularly relevant in cross cultural negotiation(Gannon,2004). Thus, a cross cultural experience provides the opportunity for intercultural learning. In the context of an international study programme, culture can be defined as learned and shared experience that provides individuals with effective means for interacting with others in the new environment.

One of the major goals of internationalisation of higher education and student mobility is to prepare students to function in an intercultural context (Volet & Ang, 1998; Knight, 1999). Thus, thanks to a growing internationalisation of education and student populations are becoming more cosmopolitan (Tremblay, 2002). International universities and multicultural

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<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense\\_of\\_place](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense_of_place)

student bodies represent social forums for promoting cultural understanding and developing inter-cultural skills.

When individuals are crossing cultures, they face some common experiences and challenges with their new milieu. Indeed, 'one views everything in the host culture through the unique filter of his or her cultural back ground' (Harris & Moran, 2004, 189) because the gap between familiarity and unfamiliarity of their socio-cultural and physical environment limits their ability to function effectively. In this way, according to Kim & Goldstein (2005), individuals' crossing culture can be described as experiencing a degree of existential alertness. This cross-culture provides opportunities for intercultural learning. Under this intercultural learning the following key concepts are discussed.

Sri Lankan students have come to this different culture and place with high ideals, academic aspirations, and a certain level of anxiety. How they feel about their student life in reality and day to day life? Is life at the new place fulfilling their expectations? To understand these, it is believed that the following concepts will further guide this study.

### **2.3. Culture shock and adaptation**

According to Lawson And Garrod (2001, 57), "culture shock" refers to 'the feelings of disruption that individuals might feel when confronted with a different and seemingly alien culture which challenge the taken for granted assumptions of their own perspectives' therefore, 'cultural (or culture) shock is a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture' (Winkelman, 1994, 121). Further, Winkelman (1994) emphasises that cultural shock is normal in the environment of a foreign culture. When people find themselves in an unfamiliar cultural milieu for the first time, 'a person can be overwhelmed by the 'otherness' of the other culture and by the amount of new experience that has to be assimilated' (Mumford, 1998, 149). Furthermore, cultural shock reactions may cause social dysfunctions when the reactions hinder performance.

Several authors have studied culture shock in different dimensions related to different discipline. Further, they found, international graduates' cross – cultural adjustment for students was most difficult in the first 6 to 12 months from entry into the new cultural context, largely due to the influence of previous educational and cultural experiences on expectations. This is mainly due to the cultural distance, which refers to differences between home and host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Tinto (1993) argued that students can manage cultural distance through joining with the enclaves who have similar cultural values, attitude, beliefs and assumption of students' culture of origin. Moreover, 'enclave membership is critical for fitting in, for developing a sense of belonging to one or multiple groups and perceiving that there are people there with similar values, assumptions, perspectives, beliefs and meaning - making systems'(Kuh & Love, 2000, 207).

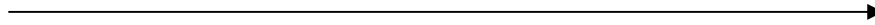
Students' feeling of strangeness becomes familiar as soon as possible through the initial exposure and cultural learning. This can be met through orientation week and its programme, attending classes, faculty contact, peer group and residential halls (Kuh & Love, 2000). Studying abroad implies many kinds of challenges and adjustments. As strangers in an unfamiliar place, we students encounter language problems, a different culture and advanced educational models that might totally deviate from our Sri Lankan system. Adaptation and the attitudes to being with the host place have to go through several stages and challenges. In this study, adaptation is thus considered with reference to the nature of the new place. To understand this, attention should be paid to the interaction between an individual and their place.

The most important part of the intercultural experience is how people adapt to another culture. According to Bennett (1998, 25), adaptation 'is the process whereby one's worldview is expanded to include behaviours and values appropriate to the host culture'. Or in other words, this is the characteristic of behaviour especially equipped to survive in its environment. Once humans have access to the true picture of the world as guaranteed by perception, they would automatically be able to behave in ways that are attuned to the environment. In my studies, adaptation is considered with the nature of the new place.

The following model of cultural adaptation in developmental terms makes more clear descriptions of peoples' experience. It seems that this model 'links changes in cognitive structure to an evolution in attitudes and behaviour toward cultural differences in general' (Bennett, 1998, 26).

## 2.4. Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

Experience of Difference



Denial	Defence	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
Ethnocentric stages			Ethno-relative stages		

Mainly the model describes the experience difference between ethnocentric stages and ethno-relative stages. According to Bennett (1998), ethnocentric refers to one's own set of standards and customs to judge all people unconsciously whereas ethno-relative refers to being comfortable with many standards and customs and judgments to a variety of interpersonal settings.

Stage 1: Denial: In this first stage of the model, people probably live in relative isolation from host and other cultures either by choice or by the conception of categories such as 'foreigner', 'people of colour', 'Africans'. This stage may use stereotypes in their description of others based on knowing only few things about them.

Stage 2: Defence: At this stage people may have ability to construe cultural difference. People think that their own culture is more perfect than other cultures.

Stage 3: Minimisation: people try to bury cultural differences within already familiar categories. Though this stage is considered as more knowledgeable than the previous stages, people at this stage are still ethnocentric in understanding the host culture.

Stage 4: Acceptance: people enjoy recognising and exploring cultural difference at this stage of acceptance. People are aware that they themselves are cultural beings. Thus, they start to think about the idea of cultural relativity; that their own behaviours and values are not the only good way to be in the world.

Stage 5: Adaptation: at this stage, people use their own and others' cultures to shift into a different cultural frame of reference. They can empathise with another person's perspectives. Thus people can modify their behaviours in ways that make it more appropriate to the cultures other than their own.

It is assumed that students' tertiary studies will have oriented and equipped them to understand their particular discipline in an international context. They will require by

graduate attributes of a cross cultural nature to enable them to work effectively in a multicultural workforce (Gabb, 2003). Further, Knight (1999) also argued that individuals' development is one of the major objectives of international education. As discussed above it implies cross cultural experiences through the opportunity of intercultural learning Therefore, the preparation of graduates is considered by many academics as one of the strongest rational for internationalisation of higher education, however, there is an attention that intercultural relations have to start much earlier than at the tertiary level of education.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The chapter presents that how the research was designed and carried out. This chapter will discuss the choice of methodology and the techniques, which were adopted to generate the data for my study. The chapter will conclude with the discussion of positionality of the researcher, validity, and reliability of the study and the field experience.

#### **3.2. Choice of methodology**

Contemporary human and cultural geography is extremely diverse in both the topics investigated and in the diversity of approaches and methods of enquiry and it is not one style of working and representation for subject matters that prevails (Kitchin & Tate, 2000; Shurmer-Smith, 2002). Therefore, here methodology refers to ‘a way of thinking about and studying social reality’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, 4). It is up to a researcher to decide which methodological approach would be the best to reflect his or her views and beliefs about the research topic based on preference and experience. Thus, there are many valid reasons for choosing qualitative research; however, one is the nature of the research problem (Creswell, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The term ‘qualitative research’ means any type of research that tries to find ‘subjective understanding of social reality rather than statistical description’ (Limb and Dwyer, 2001, 6). In other words, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998, 11), the present study can be referred to as ‘research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings as well as organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena and interaction between nations’. In view of this, I believe qualitative methodology and its techniques are ideal to my research as it is characterised by an in depth and subjective approach (Limb and Dwyer, 2001). The study, therefore, deploys qualitative approach and its techniques to see students’ life in the new place, which is mainly constructed by the intersection of a different socio cultural and educational process.

Furthermore, Qualitative methods became appropriate for my research when I considered such believes ‘that the world is not real in a fixed, stable or predictable way; that it is not entirely accessible, and that it does not appear empirically the same to everyone, no matter how carefully we look’ (Smith, 2001, 25). Thus, qualitative methodologies see the social world as dynamic and being constructed through the intersection of cultural, economic, social

and political processes. Eyles (1988, 2) pointed out that investigation of social world does not construct the real world anew but rather 'we are in the reality reconstruction business...of learning to see the world of individuals or groups as they see it'. Therefore, according to Smith (2001, 25), 'no one, neither researcher nor researched- can fully know the world or fully be detached from the construction of knowledge'. Here the knowledge is situated and partial contested and socially constructed.

However, qualitative methodologies have raised issues and debates as critiques in terms of researcher's subjectivity and positioning within the research process and the low sample of respondents.

In that sense, qualitative methods have been criticized that positionality of the researcher could have affects on research findings. however, authors discussed their own positioning in relation to the research they undertook (Limb & Dwyer,2001) is effective .In my case, my position, as a student from Sri Lanka like other respondents and having my own experience at this new place by meeting new people, new educational system and new culture, is being reflected in different ways into all stages of research process: how I was motivated to carried out this research because of some personal concerns, by imagined and shared my respondents' feelings and experiences during their student life with my life in Norway and presented my own experiences into the analytical section.

Even though there are critiques and questions about limits of subjectivity, several authors stressed that 'qualitative research requires an engagement with how the values and subjectivity of the researcher are part of the construction of knowledge' (Limb & Dwyer, 2001, 8). In addition to this, some recent works in geography also has focused that autobiographical experiences have been used within the research process offer a sense of warmth and personability to the reader, on the other hand, to make an opinion about researcher's expertise in a given field (Butler, 2001).

### **3.3. Methods to generate data**

This study deals with primary sources of data through life histories or personal narratives, in depth interviews and participant observation. These methods were chosen not only according to the research questions but also to understand the social reality and the position by the researcher with regards to the construction of knowledge.



### 3.3.1. *Life histories or personal narratives*

*'Life histories are interviews in which the researcher attempts to elicit information about the experiences and development of informant's entire life'* (Hay, 2000).

The study employed life history as a main method for collecting data about Sri Lankan students' lived experience in Norway.

Bruner (1987) state that 'how the life take on meaning through the means by which they are told and retold and the successive cycle of interpretation that goes with the continuous process of constructing an account of life' (cited in Shacklock & Thorp 2005, 157). In this study ,life stories are collected from Sri Lankans in order to look at their experience with the new place and identity they hold.

It was believed that by using life history as research method in this study had some advantages; First, was the ability to gain an idea that how these Sri Lankan students interact with place and people as their live change (Hay, 2000). Second, it showed their dreams and ambitions they brought all the way from Sri Lanka to Norway.

In addition, Shacklock & Thorp (2005) state that life histories allow the inquirer to introduce additional anchor point for understanding the subjective and structural as mutual informants in understanding our own and other people's life. First of all, informants should be triggered to talk feeling through interview by way of asking about turning points and transitions in their life. Through the narratives, it was learned how Sri Lankans experienced Norway with respect to the study program, cultural aspects, economic issues, political and administrative issues. Further, challenges of their life were also addressed.

### 3.3.2. *Participant observation*

This study employed participant observation to provide complementary evidence for gathering additional descriptive information before, during and after the data collection by life histories (Hay, 2000). Obviously, interviews can only generate information about what the participants say rather than the actual practices (Limb & Dwyer, 2001).But Participant observation, so called latest 'cutting edge' ethnography, 'involves studying both what people say they do and why, and what they are *seen to* do and say to others' (Cloke et al, 2004, 169). Therefore, participant observation is a technique that involves living, working and spending

period in a particular community in order to understand people's experiences in the context of their everyday lives (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). More than this, participant observation occurs through the different stages of conducting fieldwork such as access to field relations, talking and listening and recording data.

As its name suggests, it involves researchers moving between *participating* in a community and *observing* a community (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). In my case, I have taken part in the student community such as my own views and experiences that as a Sri Lankan student in Norway. My role has been like participant- as – observer.

Besides, this method will produce very detailed non-verbal information about them in a different context of student lives and enable the researcher to look at the community in a broader perspective. Further, this can be used to verify and confirm the information gathered through life stories.

### **Selection of respondents**

The study focused Sri Lankan students who are engaged in higher educational activities during this research conducting period. It targeted some Sri Lankan students who have been followed and following their graduate studies in two universities in Norway: Norwegian university of science and technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, University of life science (UMB) in Ås. Altogether there are 11 Sri Lankans take part in this research activities to talk about their lived experience and challenges in Norway. Talking and observing is somehow better way to develop an in depth understanding of research issues. Hay (2000) states that it is perfectly feasible conduct in - depth interviews with the small amount of right people.

### **3.4. My positionality**

I believe that the choice of methodology and methods for this study would depend on my understanding of social reality and the theoretical perspectives that I adopt, and subsequently my construction of knowledge is affected. Here, the knowledge is situated and partial. Recognizing the situated knowledge, therefore, apparently have effects on every stage of

research process, including data collection, rapport with informants, data representation and researcher's position and attitudes in the field.

In this section, I intended to discuss my own positionality and its reflection within the research process in different ways. My positionality was started when I decided to undertake this study with Sri Lankans, because I myself, as a Sri Lankan, was following international master programme and was motivated to look at the Sri Lankan students' lived experience in Norway. I, therefore, thought that it is very important to discuss my positionality and self reflexivity as my role within this study. For instance, when I was listening the life stories of my other colleagues, very often, I started to talk in between the conversation about my student life experience in Norway. This was realized when I was hearing the recordings of the conversation. On the one hand, I thought this might be a kind of interruption and not ethically correct. On the other hand, it was felt as a high level of involvement with my participants and research. In this situation, I am belonging almost to the same social group as my respondents with the language, ethnic, culture and native place in Sri Lanka. Here, this is of course my position as an 'insider'. This helped me to establish a good rapport with informants.

However, at some points, I felt that I was not able to be a 'fully insider' because of some characters of mine. For example, in Ås, I could not manage to reflect on the issues and experience in relation to both motherhood and student life in Norway. There, almost all the respondents are single (males and females) except one, who is a male student having a family. In this view, my reflexivity in that particular place (in Ås) was different than the other place (in Trondheim). For instance, I could talk about the role and challenges of motherhood and student with other Sri Lankan colleagues in Trondheim.

So, these are some of the issues I faced before, during and after the field work with regards to positionality. It is crucial in any research that we consider our own positionality, and its influences on the way we conduct the research because this is a part of the knowledge that we produce ultimately.

### **3.5. Validity and reliability**

Kitchin and Tate (2000) believe that all good studies aim to be valid and reliable. Further, validity 'concerns the soundness, legitimacy, relevance of a research theory and its investigation'. Validity can be categorized mainly into two parts which are validity relating to theory and relating to practice. Here the relating to theory concerns mainly the methods for

knowledge construction for the empirical study, whereas relating to practice concerns strategies of research used in the empirical study.

In my study, validity was measured in different stages of my research process. First, I would say validity is not fully dependent on the participant. Rather it depends on the richness of information generated through qualitative methods. Further, the validity of this study is reflected through my position as 'insider' because the information I collected is more valid than those of an 'outsider'. I was able to draw an insight of this research with Sri Lankans.

Reliability refers to the consistency of findings. Here again I believe that my study is more reliable with respect to the rapport of the insider which I made with my respondents.

### **3.6. Field experience**

First of all, I will explore my experience with the 'new' place where I went to conduct my fieldwork. As an outsider from developing country planning to do my research in Norway with my other colleagues was a bit challenging for me in terms of travelling, accommodation, and expenses. As I am only depending on loan fund for my studies, it is not quite normal expectation on these issues.

Further, I had problems in finding the Sri Lankans for my study. Even though, after finding them, I found great difficulty in getting their appointment for my interviews and meetings as people were busy with exams and not keen to be interviewed. So, at some point I was disappointed about conducting this research.

But the positive experience I had was, after meeting of these Sri Lankans. I felt that I have a big responsibility to present their life experience and challenges as well as their recommendation with regards to student life while in Norway. This is a good opportunity to represent their perspectives on different aspects like education, housing, family reunification and other cultural things.

Another issue was the time because I started to conduct my research in almost the end of the academic year. So, I faced problems in allocating time with final year students who were busy in submitting thesis and defending and getting ready back home.

## 4. Meeting the 'new' culture, place, and people

This chapter presents different dimension of Sri Lankan students' representation of their new spatial experience during their sojourn. Research question asked by the study were how do Sri Lankan students perceive the culture, place and people where they live within Norway. The chapter, therefore, addresses how new culture, place and people are perceived by the Sri Lankan students.

### 4.1. Meeting the new Culture:

A few Sri Lankan students, including myself, have decided to move to a new country for our studies. For us, every encounter with the new place may represent a different experience than what we are used to in our home country. Thus, since our arrival, we have been facing two challenges; evolving in a different socio-cultural environment and the feeling of losing our own familiar socio-cultural environment. For many of us, dealing with challenges such as facing a new socio-cultural environment, can be a stressful experience.

#### 4.1.1. *Culture shock*

When one meets a culture different from one's own, he/she may be feeling shocked because the way they lived in their home country is not considered normal in the new place. As a result, they can have feelings of a lack of belonging, or placelessness as well as loneliness, confusion, uncertainty, impotence and anxiety because of the different socio-cultural norms, values and rules at the new place. This has been called culture shock. Culture shock refers to the idea that entering a new culture is potentially a confusing and disorientating experience (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). When Sri Lankan students came to an unfamiliar new culture, of Trondheim or Ås they may experience culture shock. However, their perspectives and feelings of culture may vary over time (Ng, 1998). Right after their arrival, they might have very interesting and exciting feelings of this new place and people.

One student said,

*'We came during the summer and autumn, we saw people having a sun bath, and for me, it was bit new and in my country I am not used to seeing this scenes'.*-S1

Another said,

*'one day when I came into my apartment there were some friends of my flat mates having fun with each other, and when they saw me one boy eagerly came to hug me suddenly so I put both my hands in front of him to show that I am not interested in hugging. He was so upset and I tried to talk to him. Later on I noticed those people do not salute me even by shaking hands. I felt sad but I cannot help that situation because of my cultural values. We do not touch unnecessarily as you know' - S6*

The cultural shock also varied according to individual characteristics. However, soon after their arrival, almost all Sri Lankan students who live in Trondheim and Ås had similar reactions. They were shocked by the behaviours of Norwegians and other international students.

In spite of the impressions in the beginning, they experienced difficulties, which they had not anticipated. At the very beginning, their culture shock was related mainly to loneliness, homesickness, food difficulties, and worries about domestic problems back home. Especially, some students had serious concerns about their infants and children and some were worried about their parent and siblings.

One said,

*'The very next day of my arrival, I heard that my parents were not able to go back home from Colombo after they send me off because of the closing down the A9 road due to security reasons. They were stuck. This was a major source of stress for me and I was not able to cope with this and did not have the chances to get some time off at that particular time'. -S11*

Another student sharing experiences said:

*'After I came here, my two brothers were admitted in the hospital for some major surgeries. I had a feeling that if I were at home, I could have some responsibilities in helping in such matters as a brother. From here I could not do anything, I was not able to sleep for some nights until I received positive news related to their surgeries' - S1*

Beside this, it was noted that some had expressions and feelings of not knowing what to do or how to do things in their new country of residence, and did not know what is culturally appropriate or inappropriate. For example, a few students have had some negative experiences with their flat mates relating to food preparations and cooperation with tidiness. The flat mates were intolerant to the smell and the way the Sri Lankan food was prepared and

did not cooperate with their new flat mates with different cultural backgrounds. Due to such negative experiences, a few had to find other accommodations. A student said:

*'I had kind of small misunderstanding with one of my flat mate because I used some Sri Lankan spices when I prepared meals. He did not like smell at all. We are used to eat spicy foods and we are not able to avoid those here at all'. –S1*

Another student had a different kind of conflict with his or her flat mates.

*'I have had a few clashes with my Norwegian flat mates. For example, once I wanted to relax and use the kitchen in the weekends, while the rest of my flat mates wanted to have parties with their friends. Secondly, they always insisted that I take off my shoes at the staircase but for me it is a kind of stress to take off my shoes when I am very tired. I am not familiar with wearing a big coat, gloves, and shoes so I was not used to removing everything by sitting on the staircase. Sometimes, I was annoyed with this kind of rules.' –S11*

Such awkward social interactions and misunderstandings lead to increased disappointments, frustrations, impatience, and tension among the above Sri Lankan students. They feel helpless and confused because they think that their flat mates and other students dislike them. The very important thing is that the way people are expected to act varies from place to place and it was observed that coming to understand another's culture takes time. Further, it was not fully appreciated the extent to which all of these social rules are working.

For most of the students, moving to Norway is a first experience in living abroad on a long-term basis. Their experiences vary according to individual characteristics and personal values as well as the cultural background from Sri Lanka. According to Berry & Kostovik (1983) (cited in Ng, 1998), individuals' prior intercultural experience, urban living experience, level of competence and degree of preparation were reported as predictors of low stress while abroad.

To some extent, my own experiences verify the findings. Living in this new place and culture has not affected me very much compared to others for several reasons. First, I already knew something about European cultures through my working experience with some Germans through a project conducted by SPARC (previously was called IMCAP). I was also working and interacting with a more international staff and European expats during my work experience with an international NGO called World Vision Lanka, whose head office is in Colombo. Further, I had the opportunity to experience European cultures, weather, and

society through a short-term exchange research programme between SAI, Heidelberg University, and the University of Colombo fellowship funded by DAAD programme. These experiences gave me good opportunities to understand European customs and cultures. However, coping with a new environment successfully depends not only on these factors, but also on other situational factors and individual characteristics. For example, I came to Norway with very high ambitions to do my masters' studies, and determined not to be influenced by unfamiliar socio-cultural factors, but my experiences turn out to be completely different from what I originally planned due to unexpected pregnancy and other events, which followed.

However, Sri Lankan students experienced the culture shock to varying degrees. Having gained knowledge through the early stages, they imagined that they would have no further problems. However, there is likely to be ongoing tension because of the existence of cultural differences. One simply has the sense of incompleteness within the context of the new place and culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

*'Personally, I do not like this western culture, I highly value my culture. The thing is, we are living outside of our culture and people so the feeling is not better here. If we were in Sri Lanka, we could go outside and talk to our friends and neighbours. Here we do not know who is living in the next apartment. Generally, these people do not have close contacts with their neighbours. I think the language and culture are barriers for us to integrate...Here we do not have a temple, and without religious attachment, it is difficult to live in my case. I do not like it and wherever I am going, whether to the US or anywhere, I want to follow my culture. I am proud that I am a Sri Lankan and I want a temple to worship and so if these are not available I am suffering.'* – S8

According to the above perspectives, when one is unable to adapt to a new place, he/she has concerns about the cultural differences between the home place and the new place. Sri Lankan students have been irritated by cultural differences and have found a number of reasons to dislike and criticise the host culture. Regarding the above case, the respondent, belongs to the 'Sinhala' culture, enjoys his tradition and he internalised that as culture. It seems that people are brought up to be extremely culturally conscious, but when they are in a new place with a different culture; they have ethnocentric views and ideas. 'Ethnocentrism is a natural human tendency and it consists of using our own culture as a standard for evaluating others' (Pederson, 1999, 64). Thus, the above student is satisfied and complete as a person



within the context of his own culture. This feeling exists here because the students lack some familiar cultural surroundings in the place where they live, for instance, they do not have temple to go to and relax, and have fewer social interaction with others including Norwegians and Sri Lankans. In addition, the above student and his wife are fully occupied with their studies and their two kids as both of them are students. Thus, to explain the lack of adaptation, it found that this ethnocentric view might cause them to misjudge other people and make wrong assumptions about other people's culture and customs. These might be influencing Sri Lankan students' perceptions of new place and people (see section 'meeting the new place and 'meeting the new people').

Contrary to this point of view, a Sri Lankan student who belong to the 'Tamil' culture expressed the following

*'We are expected to present our cultural performance at some occasions but for instance, what is our cultural dance? Bharathanatiam is our adopted dance, our real Tamil dance I think is 'koothu'. Do you know how to dance it? Because I was not brought up like that, I am used to living in a kind of multicultural society and be accepted by everyone' – S1*

In this case, the above student has realised his possible cultural contribution at the new place. As him few others also expressed,

*'We feel our cultural values more here'. – S8*

*'We are encouraged to attend some functions with own cultural dress' – S6*

It seems that foreign students meet new cultures under the umbrella of an international study programme. Most of them feel that they have the opportunity to represent their cultural values and customs because the students are regarded as foreigners and have opportunities to represent their cultural background. In this way, they feel that they are fully accepted and respected as members of another new culture.

To some, this so-called 'culture shock' develops over time, especially during the winter. In Norway, all the Sri Lankan students have to face a winter climate which is characterised by long periods of freezing temperatures, restricted hours of sunshine and daylight and specially snow with seasonal variations like drizzle, flurries and sometimes strong winds. Thus, for some Sri Lankan students who come from tropical zones, experiencing an unfamiliar cold winter climate is a kind of challenge and stress.

*'We missed our food and traditions and family in addition to that. When it is getting darker early it leads to a kind of depression for me. Otherwise the snow is ok because it reflects more light'. –S4*

The short daylight and winter climate is likely to inhibit outdoor activities and may indirectly aggravate social isolation, which may, in turn, lead to depression (Ng, 1998). It was observed that most of the Sri Lankans did not want to be exposed to this winter climate. This is mainly because Sri Lankan cultural practices such as clothing, diet and shelter are not adapted to the cold. Further, it was observed that the cold weather influences the choice of part-time job. Most Sri Lankans prefer to do indoor related job while they are students. However, a few have learned how to tolerate and adjust to winter. I remember during my first year in Norway, I enjoyed the snow and I used to go out, for instance, to shop or to meet other class mates while there was snow on the ground because I was excited and enjoyed walking while it was snowing. But I was very careful because I was not able to differentiate slippery from non slippery surfaces, so I used spikes when walking. The following years I did not use spikes as I could manage to walk on the slippery paths.

#### *4.1.2. Adjustment or adaptation*

Through the stories, it was observed that some students have learned how to adjust or adapt to this culture. The adjustments were achieved through a cyclical adjustment process from their everyday life, and through the resolution of immediate culture shock.

Furthermore, the students are learning new ways to adapt to their new environment and to new systems such as educational system (chapter five), banking system, payments through the internet, the laundry system, socio-cultural activities and customs, and other social services such as medical services or day care, especially those who have a family with children. Every Sri Lankan student studying in Norway goes through, whether he/ she lives in Ås or in Trondheim this common process.

*'At the beginning, we were afraid of going out and travelling by bus or train but now we know how to do those things. Now we never bother, and we can travel anywhere in Norway' –S2.*

There are some adjustments that are made without adaptation. The perception amongst most of the students was that they did not want to adapt to anything here and that they have choices

whether to do so or not. They assumed that they will leave Norway and return to their own country.

*'I think, if I want to become a part of Norwegian society then I would have to change sometimes' – S6*

However, a few students did not realise that they had started to adapt to certain things such as foods, clothes, the climate, and cultural cues and for the sake of convenience.

*'In Sri Lanka, we usually eat rice for lunch but here we are used to eating bread for lunch' - S11*

Further, it was observed that a few have acclimatised to working conditions in the winter climate, though one said:

*'I do not like this winter and snow but enjoy watching it through windows'. –S11*

It is believed that there may be some situational factors which led a few students to work with in uncomfortable winter conditions due to extra expenses incurred during their stay as a student.

The feeling of isolation was common among the Sri Lankan students both in Trondheim and in Ås. I examined this feeling from two different views according to their status. Married students have only rare opportunities to integrate with others, including their fellow countrymen, international students and rest of the community because, apart from studying, they mainly spend their spare time taking care of the family and earning an extra income. Those students who live with families often need to engage in extra income generating activities because they cannot cover all their expenses with the state loan fund. Through their comments, it was revealed that some students want to make use of the work permit to earn some extra money for their future plans, and to look after their family members back home. Due to these activities, some students do not have time to socialize with different groups such as fellow foreign students, fellow Sri Lankans or Norwegian students. These are the main reasons why they are not able to function effectively within their community.

By contrast, unmarried students sometimes found plenty of time, apart from their study activities, to integrate with others and learn about the new culture, even though a few have part time jobs, though some still had a feeling of isolation. I think this due to some of their

own cultural perspectives which lead them to live in Sri Lankan enclaves and in very private settings.

However, experiences were positive at later stages, because the Sri Lanka students had gradually learnt to understand Norwegian behaviours in day-to-day activities. Further, Sri Lankan students changed their negative perspectives off Norwegian students because they had met a number of helpful Norwegians throughout their stay. They realized that there are different categories of people everywhere regardless of whether they live in a developed country or a developing country.

The following table illustrates different perspectives of cultural norms, customs and values experienced by Sri Lankan students during their sojourn in Norway through the concepts of ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ with regards to the host culture.

**Table 2: ‘Likes’ and ‘dislikes’ about the host culture among Sri Lankan students in Norway.**

Likes	Dislikes
Treat all professionals equally	Habits of smoking by males and females
Straight forward mentality, either ‘yes’ or ‘no’	Having Alcohol by both males and females
Most of their work done by themselves	Living together before being married
Simple way of life	Divorce
Equal rights for everyone	Privacy
Follow the rules and regulations	Party mind during weekends
Friendly mind	Dietary habits
Punctuality	Away from home after the age of 18
Moral behaviours	

Source: interviews and observations from the field work

The students expressed 'likes' and 'dislikes' in accordance to different perceptions they have in Sri Lanka of each of the elements given above. Students always compare their experiences in Norway with the Sri Lankan situation. For example, in Sri Lanka people are usually treated according to their class or caste. People from minorities never have equal opportunities and rights because of their religion and ethnicity. One Sri Lankan student reflects as following.

*'If we want to make a list of names, first it is considered according to the grades or profession, but here everything is according to alphabetical sequence' - S11*

Further, the lack of a visible class structure is a very positive factor experienced by Sri Lankan students. In Sri Lankan society, and especially in every administrative department, there is an assistant to carry files, do photocopies, and prepare tea or coffee. Through my observations, I have noticed that, in Norway, the person responsible does work and there is no assistant. If someone wants a cup of coffee, he or she does not call a boy or a girl to serve it. Another student stated that his Norwegian professor travels by bicycle to the faculty. In Sri Lanka, highly qualified professionals will have either a motorbike or car to come to university otherwise; they will not be respected by society.

Further, unlike Sri Lankans, people in Norway respect and follow the rules and regulations. In Sri Lanka, students experience economic and political influences in every aspect of life are common. Personally, I like the punctuality and the direct way of responding in Norway. First, it was observed that Norwegians maintain a time schedule for everything; for instance, when they arrange an official party they have specific time duration. Another thing is the public transportation buses that are always on time. Second, when it comes to responses, it was noted that Norwegians usually respond in a direct way. For instance, when we ask them something, if they know they say 'yes' and if they do not know say 'no', while Sri Lankan students agreed that we have an odd feeling when saying 'no' to somebody and it takes time for a negative answer to be given.

However, some Sri Lankan students criticised the local culture and discussed the negative side of some cultural aspects under the category of 'Dislikes'. Using alcohol is viewed differently by Sri Lankans. In Sri Lanka, usually, persons who have been affected by social problems or issues use alcoholic drinks, and it is used to recover from the loss of beloved ones, to forget severe problems and frustrations and so on. Very seldom do university students use alcohol, though there are some exceptional cases such as drug addicts. There is also usually alcohol during farewell party functions. When male students want to get some

alcohol, they never drink it in public or in front of teachers, they go to a hidden corner and drink with other colleagues and then come back to the function. This is because of the relationship maintaining between teachers and students. However, Norwegian students, both girls and boys drink alcohol at every function, and they never mind drink alcohol together with their teachers. It was also noticed, smoking by both males and females is a habit, a bit like having tea or coffee. Worldwide, it is known that smoking will have a negative health impact and lead to some respiratory diseases, but this smoking habit is common among the students in Trondheim and Ås. In Sri Lanka mainly men smoke, not women.

Another important issue, which was criticised, is the fact that Norwegians live together and divorce. In Sri Lanka, culturally, if a man and woman want to live together under one roof they should marry first, otherwise they would be looked upon as an immoral couple. In Norway, the community accepts living together with a boyfriend or girlfriend. However, until the 80s couples had to show that they were married in order to rent an apartment. In my view, I cannot say that this is very wrong because in Norway, I feel that children and young people are brought up having independence and freedom to do rightful things, especially as they learn about sexual health during their school days. Therefore, they know what is right and wrong, but in Sri Lanka, we never had sex education in schools. I still remember when I was in Ordinary level class, we were taught about the human reproductive system in one after school session by our teacher. Still, some people in Sri Lanka do not accept to talk about sex in front of their young children or even adults. They think this is shameful and a secret thing. The students coming from this background, therefore, are not accepting of these behaviours.

Another issue is about divorce, which seems common in Norway. Few students stated as follows, and their views at the same time reveal their prejudices and stigmatized views:

*‘They are living together and they get divorced if they do not like each other. They never think about their children. They are the most affected by the divorce. They spend one week with the father and spend another week with the mother, I think, in the long term this will affect them psychologically’ – S11*

Another student said,

*‘Here people do not want to tolerate each other. That is why they have lots of divorce cases. In my country, if we marry once we are trying to live with the partner until we die though we have some problems to bear things. Therefore, our culture is very different. We follow what*

*our parents and grandparents did. I have heard that during the 90s they had a very high divorce rate and now Norwegians are more concern to avoid divorce’ – S4*

The Sri Lankan students enter into an unfamiliar culture from a familiar culture. Although they already accepted the customs and values within their own culture to some degree, they are trying to acclimatize themselves with the host culture and its society. This process of coping with a new culture associated with culture learning comprises of socialization, formation of relationships with individuals and social groups, and interactions with the physical environment.

*‘Culturally we cannot go with them or cooperate with them at all, but rarely, we also go to parties. Compared to Sri Lanka, here the social mobilisation is high. We cannot be separated. Personally, I have many friends because I have a nature to make friends. After some days, they know that we do not touch them while we talk and I adjust with them. They respect our culture and we also have to respect their culture’ – S3*

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), the degree of difficulty experienced by sojourners in every day encounters is directly related to the distance between the sojourner’s culture and the host culture. Further, it was argued that if the host culture is friendly, they might have been able to learn the appropriate social skills necessary for satisfying the sojourners.

According to the present study, few Sri Lankan students, especially unmarried female students, have many friends among both international students and Norwegians. This was mainly due to their personal characteristics and the opportunities they had through their study programme and student organisations. For instance, as discussed above, one of my respondents has initiated discussions and interactions with people, thus she can make friends easily. Other female respondents also have the opportunity to take part and hold positions in students’ societies and some academically related teams such as ICOT(International Club of Trondheim) and EIT(Expert in Team). Through my observations and their stories it was noted that married students have much fewer friends. Among the male students, some have friends and some do not. This depends on their personal characteristics such as their age, personality traits, and levels of study they are in during their life in Norway.

There are many reasons why Sri Lankan students have very few relationships with the host community. One that is not all international study programs include Norwegians, for example

hydropower and physics. Secondly, the ethnocentric ideas, adjustment rather than adaptation, having multiple roles in the new place such as the role of student, wife or husband, parent and employee, and most importantly misunderstandings and mistrust with the host society can lead Sri Lankan students to shy away from relationships with Norwegians. Further, few more reasons were addressed as challenges to maintain relationship under the section 'meeting the new people and place'.

## **4.2. Meeting the New Place and People**

Space and place are always representing common experiences and the basic component of the lived world as we take them for granted. Place and its different settings and conditions play an important role in Sri Lankan students' integration with the 'new' people and place itself. Whether physical, social, cultural, professional, and personal, space and place was redefined through Sri Lankan students' experiences. Thus, the experiences in the new space and place are bearing different meanings.

Though place and space has many common aspects including physical and social settings, they have to be defined before discussing Sri Lankan students' experiential spaces that range from their accommodation (single/family apartment) to the city and its communities. Thus, according to Altman and Low (1992) (cited in Ng,1998) , a place is a space that has been given meaning through personal, group and cultural processes and it cannot be a known or experienced prior, as the new place in Norway, to Sri Lankan students. In my view, the new places are locations, to Sri Lankan students, given meaning by the experiences they have in them. Sri Lankan students who arrived to Trondheim and Ås for higher studies with different characters and background portray the place, according to the way we look or feel. The place and the people they interact with are stamped on their minds and these mental pictures are reflected through life stories.

### **4.2.1. *Experiential perspectives on the new place.***

Place is always along with us. It is meaningful differently in every one's life. Sense of place reflects its dimensionalities according to the different situation at different locations. Sri Lankan students in Trondheim or Ås live up to two or four years for the purpose of higher studies. They become attached to the new place and they derive different experiences<sup>7</sup> through their way of understanding (Creswell, 2004) at different moments. In this respect, the

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<sup>7</sup> 'Experience is compounded of feeling and thought' (Tuan,Y,F.1977,pg10)



dimensions of students' perception on new place started with the choice of their study destination and the university, the place where they live and accommodate and the people they meet and interact with as well as the cultural milieu they participate in.

As said just above, the study has indentified different spatial context where Sri Lankan students often interact with others, mainly into the university and its people, students accommodation and its tenants from host and other international, town and the city and its communities both host and immigrant. Perspectives of these spatial contexts were expressed differently as feeling of intimacy and attachment, sense of freedom, sense of loneliness and alienation. In addition, it was noticed that most of the respondents articulate their sense of the new place by comparing with prior experiences in their homeland.

Further, it is very important to relate to time in place and space. Although time is everywhere it is not noticed at all because time is almost completely within our subconscious. However, Sri Lankan students are having different senses on the new place, people and culture because of the movement from their homeland to Norway. According to Tuan (1977), 'people differ in their awareness of space and time and in the way they elaborate a spatial-temporal world' (Tuan, 1977, 119).

The Sri Lankan students' experiences at the new space and place reflect temporal meanings through their life stories. Each story line somehow reveals the connection among place people and time. For instance, '*while I,* in my home' (or my village), '*now*', '*after moved here*', '*there in Sri Lanka*', '*at the beginning*' and so on. It seemed that pronouns are tied to both spatial (here and there) and time (while, after and now); demonstrations which refer to the past, present and future. These characteristics of time also contribute to analyse the students' different senses of the new place.

#### 4.2.2. *Landscape experienced as 'sense of intimate'*

While I walk across the new Dragvoll Alle, I can see the beauty of Trondheim fjord and I have a feeling that I am in my home town, but I am not long in this lovely and peaceful place and will soon go. This voice of echo I always have in my thought when I walk toward my campus during summer. I am very much intimate with this scene because I was able to see a similar scene in my native place, Trincomalee, which has a natural harbour and port. This evocative scene make myself deliberately to engage in a research about Sri Lankan students' life experience on new place, therefore, I was very much interested to know about

other Sri Lankans' perceptions about their living place while they are engaged in higher studies in Norway.

How does the place (view) of Trondheim fjord create a visible image for me, as an outsider? The panoramic scene, which I articulated above, obviously the visceral scene, is deeply rooted into me. In addition, to me, consciousness of this sense of place is promoted by the image of my native town's physical landscape (natural harbour) and a piece of sculpture. Thus, this enhances the feeling of intimacy with the new place. The village or town we lived is part of our intimate experience and centre of meaning par excellence that has many visible symbols (Tuan, 1977 & Relph, 1976). These sentiments of the native place enable a few of us to gaze at the new place as their intimate place because it seems that the new place also have similar visual characteristics and local flavours (Tuan, 1977). This perception would help to develop the consciousness of place as intimacy.

According to Tuan (1977), deeply loved places are not necessarily visible and it can be made visible by certain means. However, this study found that deeply loved places are always visible wherever we go. It determines subjectivity related to you as an insider or an outsider in relation to the new place and its context:

*'This Ås is very peaceful, not like a city. I felt like my village and more than that' –S4*

For him, Ås, though as a new place, still conjures up images of his native place. This impression of place was expressed mainly through his rural background experience. Further he compared some of the characteristic of his native village with the new place and its situation over time. According to Holloway & Hubbard (2004, 66) exploring the concrete perspective in this place 'is 'given' in everyday encounter with the world, and exist prior to any abstract conceptualisation'. The above respondent establishes the difference between the village and city. For him, experience of the lived in his native village and its characteristics compared with city life might have given the feeling of peacefulness. Thus, he compared those characteristic of his village with this new place and perceived that this is like his village and more than that. The respondent was overwhelmed by the feelings of the new place itself. However, it seems paradoxical to me because while analysing, I wondered, why the respondent used the word 'peaceful' to describe the new place and what does the respondent mean by 'peaceful'. Thus, it was found as result from his experience of war at his home country. It is believed that either directly or indirectly his prior experience in war and its impacts led him to compare the new place as peaceful. In this point, as researcher and

observer, I would say that he has become more attached to the new place as a result of his previous experience, whether it is negatively or positively associated with his native place in Sri Lanka. The duration of his stay in this place may also influence a positive feeling of intimacy, because the respondent is currently following his doctoral studies and soon after he had finished his masters at UMB. As Holloway and Hubbard (2004) said, the intimate experience is gained over a long period through an extended encounter with place.

*'I came with a good feeling about Norway and I can say that feeling is being developed more now ...'.* – S7

The above story line shows that the respondent's eagerness to know about the place, where he wanted to live for next two years. It is very important to know the dimensions of this impression of 'good' and the respondent's interaction within the situational context. This pattern of impression arose in his thought during his preparation time to apply for higher studies abroad and after. Particularly, the respondent had the inspiration to apply for higher studies in Norway through his university lecturer and then he started to learn about Norway. Through the story, it was able to explore that the respondent had been trying to know a lot of information about Norway after he got the offer to do a master's in NTNU while he was in Sri Lanka, such as about Nobel peace prize, about Norwegians and their concern on nature. He understood that is why Norway does not have that many skyscrapers and they would like to go with natural landscape, and about past as well as the ongoing projects of Norway. For instance, he heard some his senior co-staff's experiences with CEY-NOR, and Redd Barna and NORAD.

After he moved to Trondheim, he said that he was treated well during his first week of arrival and he was provided relevant information with related to course, grants, weather, and food and so on. Thus far, he is satisfied with the service provided related to course and the relationship between the staff and students. The fact that he was conscious about his higher study place in advance increased the feeling of impression on the new place more. Undoubtedly, he owed this feeling of good impressions to those early experiences of knowing about Norway and Norwegians, while in Sri Lanka. He was able to become an insider to the new place.

*'Whatever, they maintain natural landscape without disturbing. This environment is very suitable for studies. Ecology wise Ås is suitable area. I visited to other cities like Bergen and Oslo but I feel Ås is ideal for me' –S2.*

In the situation, they accept the place and decided that this is good for their lives during the studies.

#### 4.2.3. *Accommodation experienced as 'sense of belonging'*

Becoming an insider of a place depends on the experience people have in the particular place. A few respondents said that though they did not have the feeling of satisfaction at the new place, especially at their student apartments about such facilities and in the beginning of their arrival (see Culture shock). However, they described how they felt that they were out of place when they went to the other cities and even to their friends' home.

*'When I visit to other friends' home or wherever I feel how I am more comfortable in our student apartment than these places, because I am satisfied by using my own bed and having shower here in our bathroom' -S1*

It was the accommodation that a few students had such a strong sense of belonging because it had such good settings and some facilities, which provided them a feeling of satisfaction and attachment. Single Students are accommodated in a separate room that contain bed, cupboard, and desk with the facility of broadband internet connection. The kitchen and bathroom are shared with other flat mates of 4-6 (this has created conflict also). In addition, it was observed Sri Lankan students spend most of their time, apart from university, around the student village. Thus, the student accommodation played a main part in their students' life. Not only the set ups and such facilities of accommodation and being around the place helped them to become aware of their place, but also through the close affinity with water which is praised as a substance of good quality by some Sri Lankan students.

*'We are really enjoying the water and we were able to compare its quality when we visited Sweden' -S2*

For the above students, sense of belonging to the student village has become greater because most of them continued to live in the same student apartment since their arrival. The way the above respondents revealed their attachment to their accommodation reflect Relph's (1976) 'insider' to a place that is considered not only the attachment to the place. In addition, people differently experience the different types of place relations.

#### 4.2.4. *The living place and classrooms experienced as 'sense of freedom'*

Sri Lankan students perceived the new place where they live as a place of freedom. It is very important to define what they mean by 'freedom', and how they experienced it. It was comprehended as the condition of being able to act and think whatever they want without being controlled in a place.

*'There in Sri Lanka, if I want to go out for a while, even to the next door neighbour I should get permission from my parents but here, I do not want to get any permission to go out' – S11*

For her, her home in Sri Lanka is a place of trap and safety but in Norway, she feels more freedom than Sri Lanka. This feeling was not only to her and it was observed that almost all the female respondents of this study had the extensive feeling of experiencing the freedom in the new place. This is mainly because they are experienced the gender ideologies on women and the patriarchal structures that are still predominant and influencing the society in Sri Lanka. Socio-culturally, there is a tendency to see women as dependents (ADB, 1999). It is obvious that females in Sri Lanka are treated rather differently by their parents and guardians from their male siblings in terms of physically, culturally, economically and politically.

Cultural understanding of women is different through space and time, and this understanding relate to the position of women in different societies. While we compare the position of women in Norway with women in Sri Lanka, it was said that Norway is a leading country in the field of equal rights between sexes. Women's participation and leading role in politics and sports represents one of the brighter sides of women's situation in Norway<sup>8</sup>. In my view, these were accepted as real when I was looking at a woman as a bus and taxi driver for the first time in my life in Trondheim immediately after my arrival and I was very impressed by this. In my country, as far as I know, I have never seen women drive buses or taxies, though educated rich women drive their own car.

Apart from this perspective, a few Sri Lankan students who belong to the ethnic minority expressed that they realise another dimensions of freedom in the new place. Going out without carrying identity cards or passports and go for a walk or travel alone very late nights they perceive as true freedom. It is acknowledged that they had this feeling. They felt

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<sup>8</sup> [www.explorenorth.com](http://www.explorenorth.com)

protected from the issue of conflict in these new places. Thus, these minority students have reconstructed their sense of 'freedom' in Trondheim and Ås by such experiences.

*'I realised that what a true freedom is, after moving here' – S3*

A few students also found freedom in the lecture rooms in NTNU and UMB.

*'During class hours, we are free to eat and drink, ask questions and whatever, I think this is kind of freedom' –S2*

Indeed, this is a result of Norwegian cultural attitudes and customs and these are reflected through the relationships people have with particular locations. For Sri Lankan students, the lecture rooms in Sri Lanka have less freedom and symbolises power, whereas the lecture rooms in NTNU or UMB are full of freedom and less power relations (this will be discussed further in chapter 4 on Education). However, this was not felt by all the Students.

#### 4.2.5. *Place experienced as 'Placelessness'*

By contrast, a few respondents' life stories in Trondheim and Ås reflect unpleasant, negative and strange experiences too upon their arrival.

*'This place is not equal to my place' – S11*

The above respondent spoke very frankly about her experiences at the new place. According to her story, she stated that she enjoys this new place as a scene or a very advanced country, but there are a very few possibilities to accept or become more involved with the new place during her stay in Norway because she perceived this new place as temporary. Further, she stated that she did not get full satisfaction being in this new place, while comparing it with some other places where she has lived so far. Those places became more central than this new place to her. When I asked what you mean by 'my place' and what satisfies you in those, she indicated, she has particular places in Sri Lanka under her concept of 'my place' where she was brought up and lived and studied and worked. Her fond remembrance of those places, according to Chawla (1992), comfortably embraced her as 'this is my place in the world'. Her attachments to those places mainly associated with family setups and its security, as well as the transcendent memories through childhood and education. These sensations prevent herself immerse in the new place. In other words, she is willing to be an 'outsider' of this new place. Her story is witnessing that she is more attached to the place in Sri Lankan because she is quite sure about her future place.

Another married student,

*'I did not think about what is new around me, I was not very happy at the beginning because I left my one year old baby in Sri Lanka so always my mind was there'. - S9*

The above respondent was a parent while she came for studies. She started to suffer at the new place without the child instead of became aware of the new place and things around there. Though she knew what situation she was going to face in the new place without the family, she found difficulties to cope with that situation because, in Sri Lankan practice, women have central role in the family as a mother to rear child, cook meals and looking after rest of the domestic chores. Thus, until she came to Norway, her place was in the home (in Sri Lanka) where it was being experienced as a place to take care of her child and family matters. When she left her home to go for higher education to another new country, she was disrupted and as a result she experienced the new place as 'homeless'.

This similar dimension to feeling of being 'out of place' or 'homeless' was also experienced by other couples of Sri Lankan students in Ås and Trondheim.

*'I felt loneliness and missed my family because we used to live as families and were attached that set up in Sri Lanka. So life without family is a kind of mental agony. Later they came and we are together now, but you know, at our home, we have always parents, relatives and friends around. Here, though we have more facilities than Sri Lanka, we feel that we are missing a lot, including food and everything' - S4*

*'We came from an extended family set up and we all used to live as neighbours and very close. Therefore, we can get any support from them at any time. But here that is a great miss. For instance, if I want to go for a conference outside I need more help to take care of my family. My husband only is unable to manage everything alone..... we have to do everything with stress.' -S10*

The above story lines were expressed by couples of married Sri Lankan sojourners. Generally, it shows the great difference of family life style between Norway and Sri Lanka and emphasises more on family attachments. Thus, they found great difficulty in managing family matters alone in Norway as they used to live with their support of relatives and friends.

The words of the respondent who used ‘missing a lot’ and ‘mental agony’ clearly express his stress and unsatisfied student life at the new place. In addition, this feeling was observed through their gesture during conversation. For Sri Lankans, the concept of family is very important in everyone’s life and they always would like to be with families. Not only for Sri Lankans but also for the people all over the world family and its ties are relevant even though its structure and relationships and patterns of residence may vary from society to society (Winthrop, 1991).

However, first of all, it is very important to understand the context that these Sri Lankan students live in. The place where they live in Norway belongs to cross cultural settings which constitute mainly Asian culture, African culture and European cultures including Norwegian culture. Therefore, not all the Sri Lankan students are comfortably adjusted or adapted to be integrated with the new cultural context. For instance, it was stated the mostly married Sri Lankan students found that they did not have enough time to integrate with other students in the new place. A few of Sri Lankan students felt that they are being isolated in the new place.

*‘Some times we do not know who are living in our next door apartment’ –S10*

Apart from the perspective of married students, it was interesting to observe their spouses and their contribution to being in this new place. In other words, how spouses or family impact on Sri Lankan married students’ acculturation process and their academic accomplishments in Norway. Spouses are too a part of the student life for Sri Lankan married students.

In this study, among the Sri Lankan married students, women are in the majority (see table 1). For them, obtaining a higher education abroad is a way to find a prestigious job and to achieve higher ranks in their professional fields in future. According to my observations and de Verthelyi’s (1995) view, particularly among the Asian student community in Trondheim, wives are following their husbands during their higher study period abroad, but in my study Sri Lankan married students’ husbands had followed their wives in pursuing their goals. The spouses’ decision to reunite with their wives because of supporting that their presence would help them feel secure and study hard. It is very important to notice how this supports influence being in the new place as either an outsider or insider. However, as a researcher I have not interviewed all the spouses of Sri Lankan students, their contributions in their family at the new place are reflected through the life stories of (their wives) married students.



However, one of my respondent who is a spouse and also has become a master student sometimes later during his stay in Norway, stated that though he did not have intention to come to Norway and he was forced by his wife thus, later he reunited with his wife with their one year old kid.

*‘In the beginning the feeling was not really good, both environmentally and financially because we arrived around October so it was winter season and we felt bad with this climate and new faces .... – S 8*

Like him, not all the Sri Lankan students chose Norway intentionally. The above respondent and his spouse chose Norway as an alternative as they did not succeed to get placement in other countries (see the section why and how they choose Norway in chapter 4). Further, it was noted the his feelings of initial were not good at all because he was not prepared to face any challenges at the new place with his family. This bad feeling was further increased when his wife started to get involved with the busy study schedule with her course works and exam preparation. He said that he had to deal with a kind of mental stress of doing without any activity and felt that he was left alone in the new environment. Therefore he wanted to engage in something useful, because as a man he has never done anything in a place. He used to work from 8.00 to 23.00 hours as a teacher in both school and private tuition centres in Sri Lanka. Further it was said this bad and isolated feelings lasted until he found a small job to do, though it did not satisfy him in terms of wages in the beginning, but it was accepted at least to get a feeling of working and also an exposure to be outgoing. He indicated, otherwise, he would become a mad person in this new place. In addition, his negative feelings affected his wife’s wellbeing in the new place. So they were placeless for sometimes (this feelings already discussed under culture shock above in the chapter 3).

But, it was observed that after he became a master student at NTNU and found another job for some more hours, his feelings and sense of this place, to some extent, have been changing positively towards this new place. This is because of his positional change and experiences he had at the different places since his arrival. This was further witnessed by his following story line.

*‘Now we are happy, financially also established and both are studying.’ –S8*

People may have feeling of ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ when they experience a place in different ways according to time. The position between these two, according to Relph (1976), are

being switched constantly and sense of place can be represented through the construction of everyday place relation. In addition, this initial feeling of strange was experienced not only by him but also by the spouses of other few respondents. 'This shows that coming to a new place and experience it without pre arrival information and preparation, and also not knowing some social networks is a great depression for a new comer, whether they are students or spouses until they find something to do.

However, the above experiences and feelings of out of place are not exceptional for my spouse. When I came for my higher education, neither me nor my husband had any idea to reunite in Norway as a family, though we both had been sharing the idea to apply our skills to migrate, to a suitable country. Unexpectedly, he had to join with me for rest of my sojourn due to my pregnancy and motherhood in Trondheim. At the beginning, like others, he did not seem to be under culture shock or any other struggling related to the new place because he was filled with joy when our first baby was born. Four months later, he was in a dilemma whether he wanted to leave me and my baby alone in Trondheim or stay with us until I finished my studies as he knew the expected length of stay. I decided to get maternity leave. He also decided that I need more support in this place as we do not have a close social network and stayed.

On the other hand, my husband was not able to cope with the life in Trondheim and found it very tiresome doing nothing, even to engage in any job. One of the reasons was that he could not find a suitable job in his area of expertise mainly due to the language (Norwegian) difference and accreditation problems. Thus, he was not prepared both mentally and physically to accept a part time work in supermarkets, paper companies and restaurants as he did not want to lose his professional identity. However, during summer, he obliged to do a part time work as a paper distributor to find a relief from financial crisis. This was because I was not entitled to receive loan for summer months as I was doing my fieldwork in Norway due to our country's instability. Not only for summer period, we have been facing financial problem since we started our family life in Trondheim, however, it was being managed through the assistances from housing bank and cash benefit for kids from state loan and fund and municipal council. Because of my husband's position and with other problems, I was not able to get involved with my student life with prospects of success and hopes. This feeling was experienced at the new place mostly as placeless.

Place does not necessarily mean the same thing to everybody and the experience is not always dependent on place itself. Rather, it is influenced by the situation and the issues we faced at that place. For me, my pregnancy and life afterwards influenced a lot on my study and life during my stay in Norway.

As mentioned above, the sense of place is being switched constantly either positively or negatively, witnessed through the following story line, which was expressed by the student who had a positive feeling on place about other aspects.

*‘We had telephone facilities. We could talk whenever we want even our home in Sri Lanka. We can easily access them through by using telephone card. But currently this facility was disconnected and it was said because of doing some updating. Whatever we are not clear about it and found difficulty to contact home too. It is a bit hard for us’.-S2*

It was noticed that the above respondent was comfortable and happy in the new place as long as he could talk to his family and became unhappy and unsatisfied when he was not able to communicate regularly. Obviously, he experienced the new place as being at ‘home’ through the regular telephone calls and he feels homeless when the service is out.

In contrast, some respondents also have the impression of good, but that was not lasting through their whole student lifetime at the new place. It was stated

*‘First impression was good for me, we were welcomed and treated well...’ –S3*

But when they were not able to face the challenges on education and routine life they got anxious about their life at the place. However, they all fairly content with the student life in Norway through different aspects of place, people, culture and education. According to these stories, the important aspect was found that, Sri Lankan students have been affected by different conditions and processes. Thus, their feelings have varied with the scale of that affection.

#### *4.2.6. Experiential perspectives on people*

Experiential perspectives on different categories of people in the new place were expressed by the Sri Lankan students differently in terms of their interaction, social relationships, and cultural integration with them.

As we discussed above, students had different feelings, and thoughts about a place. However, as Malpas (1999) argues people can not construct anything without being first in place. In other words, society itself is inconceivable without place. The place, therefore, is primary to the construction of meaning and society because it is the experiential fact of our survival. In this sense, it is important to consider that what Sri Lankan students know about people that they encounter in the new place and about the situation in which they encounter them. Thus, the idea of the social relationship arises within the structure of place.

Holloway and Hubbard (2004, 7) that ‘people, for example, can be thought of as objects behaving in particular ways’ in the new place. The type of people, Sri Lankan students encountered in the new place, have been categorised as Norwegians, International students, and other Sri Lankans including students and communities for purpose of this study. Representation of these types of people expressed specifically about the relationship and the behaviours towards Sri Lankan students during sojourn. The students derived different perceptions from the people at the new place.

Simply said, in our everyday lives, we are constantly talking and hearing about people and places and the experiences and feelings on each other. This relationship between people and place would reflect how Sri Lankan students make sense of their social world in the new place.

#### 4.2.7. *Norwegians: sense of integrity*

*‘People are here very nice, even in Ås or Oslo’ –S5*

Students studying abroad for their higher studies need a sort of help and guidance because they are arriving totally to a new place and culture. It is usual that a few preliminaries are arranged and provided by the administration of international relations through orientation weeks.

Beside this, it was noted that Sri Lankan students got ideas about survival tips related to maintain the apartment and commonplace, shopping and laundry matters through their Norwegian apartment mates. Students expressed their perception about the Norwegians who they encounter during their life in Trondheim or Ås.

*‘I learned that how to move with this society and like this from my kitchen mate who is a Norwegian’-S10*

Further, the Sri Lankan students at Ås had mentioned that they were grouped and guided what to do on official matters like banking and registration and so on. It was noted that this was the way they have to know each other new students on their new arrival time. Here Sri Lankan students made relationship with their flat mates and course mates to tune with different people to make their living environment and life as comfortable at the new place.

It was found that the tendency to treat foreigners was impressive which made them to feel that how human being should be treated. This was compared with the situation in Sri Lanka, especially by the students who have been affected by the issue of ethnicity minority and civil war experience. The experience they have in Norway is totally differing from Sri Lanka.

*‘Within our country we are treated differently according to our ethnicity, caste, language, and economic status but here, though they know us, we are treated much better, not like in our county’.* –S1

Therefore, most of the students have noticed and have the idea that the Norwegians treat people equally and they do not show any discrimination status wise.

However, a few have bad experience with their Norwegian flat mates (discussed in culture shock) but here the issue was seen that these matters are usual among student community to compromise each other concerning keep the apartment tidy and noiseless, while they live in student apartments with common kitchen. This kind of experience was not new for students like others and me who used to live in the residential university systems in Sri Lanka.

Overall, the above statements show that Sri Lankan students have a very good impression on the host community where they live. It is observed that, through some situations and events, they had moral feeling about this people. It was expressed through the words helpful, volunteer mind, good, which were used by this group of students in their stories.

*‘I like the people, here they treat equally. Another thing I wish to say about, the police station-there is a very big difference between Sri Lanka and Norway. In Sri Lanka, we are very afraid to go to the police station. We have tension to talk to them even if we are in very big post and status but here the situation totally the other way. You see the uniform too make us feel good but in our country their uniforms are making us so scared not only at the police wherever you go ,to shop or post office, they treat you as a human being’.*- S5

#### 4.2.8. *International students: sense of stereotype*

Students who are crossing borders to pursue their higher education definitely have opportunity to meet different students from different nations. This opportunity would help to build a network between nations and people in different ways. Sri Lankan students also have many chances to integrate with the other international students through their student life here in Trondheim and Ås.

When individuals move to another new country (and to the new culture) for an extended period of time cross cultural negotiation is important if distorted stereotypes are present. (Gannon, 2004). Sri Lankan students had different perceptions on Africans. After their meeting with the students from different part of Africa, they conceived a different opinion about them. Sri Lankan students assumed that all Africans are hardy and rough minded people. It was expressed like this,

*‘When we were Sri Lanka ,we always had different thought about Africans that they are very hardy people and so on but after being with them only we realised that how soft and nice there are’ –S 4*

Later it was claimed that we should not have negatively stereo typed Africans without interacting with individual African student. Another respondent expressed as follows,

*‘Here I maintained a gap between with foreign students, especially with Africans but later I found that they are very good friends and helped me more than what I expected’- S11*

In the case of Africans, the stereotype could be erroneous through the above instances. This may be a sense of ‘false stereotype’, according to Mullan (1995, 177), ‘that is, attributing to members of a type characteristics that you *falsely* believe to belong to the type’. The mental image about Africans was conceived differently through different medias like news paper, television and internet, but the situation after the interaction and integration with them provide new impression on them.

Unlike above, Sri Lankan students had sense of group stereotype on other students. During their sojourn, in everyday social interaction, Sri Lankan students tended to categorise other students based on a range of perceived characteristics in terms of previous knowledge, regional identity and some common cultural cues and practices. Sri Lankan students have stereotyped Asian students, particularly south Asians, as sameness. These feelings were based

on salience principle (Anderson & Taylor, 2006). Particularly this bond grows from common cultural heritage and shared experience of Sri Lankans. For instance, religious practices like celebrating festivals and fasting, routine life style like having rice as main food, playing cricket during leisure time in autumn season and get together in ICOT.

*‘Wherever we go first we gather with Asians whether to trip or any parties and occasions’-S6*

Another important and obvious base for group stereotype is skin colour too. This can lead a sense of positive stereotype towards the Asian students. To a few Sri Lankan students, they had feelings that they are studying with only Asians and Africans though they are meant as international students. It was noticed that this thought emerged among the students who followed particular course, for instance like hydropower and physics. Further, it was responded that the course itself does not provide a chance to integrate with other internationals. However, on the other hand, this may likely to be having the sense of group stereotype or lack of integration with Norwegian students.

#### 4.2.9. *‘Others’<sup>9</sup>: Sense of Alienation*

A few Sri Lankan students’ experiences towards the ‘others’ were unambiguous. For them, feeling of alienation stemmed from social relationship and cultural participation with others during their sojourn. The Sri Lankan students’ sense of alienation is expressed by the kind of ties that students establish with others and their reaction to students.

It was observed that some Sri Lankan students who arrived to the new place (Ås and Trondheim) with the purpose of higher education have various expectations towards the others in terms of cultural activities, future plans, reciprocity and making relationship and networks. Obviously, the students have gone through several excitements, personal problems and challenges with relation to socio cultural, economic and educational aspects. When they are not able to cope with these issues, they really wanted to share their experiences with their native people and colleagues around to get a kind of sense of relief because they think that this particular group of people can understand their problems at the new place than Norwegians or other internationals. But they failed to make good relationship with ‘others’ and perceived that they are unwelcome visitors.

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Others’ is defined by the people and the community from Sri Lanka, though they live and settle as permanent and temporary in the same place where these Sri Lankan sojourners live. The study considers ‘others’ including academics and non academics from Sri Lankan based.

Thus, according to Hajda (1961), sense of alienation is an individual's feeling of non-belonging or non-sharing or perception of unwelcome, which reflects his or her exclusion from social and cultural participation.

The following respondent expressed her feelings toward the people,

*'At the beginning, I was enjoying Sri Lankan society but now I am not interested, though that is for students, I was not satisfied belong to that society.'*

*On the other side, I was totally disappointed in the beginning with the same community I belong to. Though they knew that we do not know Norwegian language and new to this place and society, they used to send invitations and mails in Norwegian not even in English or even in our mother tongue. Another important matter was, we could not involve fully in some activities which they do, because we are in a situation to go back to our country therefore, we are not able to participate in some programmes what they organise in this place. Therefore, I decided, in a long term, these societies are not going to provide a kind of relief or good network for me and I did not take much interested with these.*

*Beyond that, I had feelings that we were not welcomed by our same communal society. I would say, when I had chances to meet them in public places or in temple, some are not saying even 'hello' to us. However, a few of them are ok and invited us for dinner. Totally, I was not very much satisfied in the relationship with the people related to Sri Lanka'. – S11*

Beside this, another respondent had a sense of alienation in a different way, as he pointed out 'others' through their economic status and low academic standards.

*'Here, the Sri Lankan people who came without proper education and have now become billionaires, but we came for higher education and are suffering in terms of money matters' – S 4*

It was noticed, though the above respondent had this dimension of alienation from a larger society (in Oslo) and he had very few chances to integrate with that society because he lived in Ås. Therefore, he perceived this not through direct participation at all. Rather, his ideas about society were through his observations and relationship with very few of them.

This sense of alienation is depended on various factors, which may be in limited situations, such as sporadic feelings arising from specific encounters, and events that can be involved with small or larger number of individuals, students' socio cultural locations, students' self-



concepts and others' view of them. The feeling of alienation among Sri Lankan students varies by societies and from place to place.

### **4.3. Challenges relate to their experiences in the new place**

As a researcher and part of this Sri Lankan students' group, I wondered why most of the Sri Lankan students are not going out of their students' village very often and I realised that one of the main reason is constrained by transport fares, which limit their movements outside. For instance, in Ås, if the students want to travel out of it, they have to pay 65 NOK to get a ticket for one way. So they have to spend almost 130 NOK for a return ticket. This amount is considered as such a big money for the Sri Lankan students. In Trondheim, most of the Sri Lankan students are used to walking and cycling and a few of them seldom use the bus on a regular basis. Actually, in Trondheim, students who are up to 29 years, can get the bus card for a cheap price so-called 'student price'. For Sri Lankan students, this is not possible because most of them are almost over 29 years (see the table1). Thus, they have to pay more, 685 NOK per month, though they are holding the student identity in this new place.

## **5. Meeting the new education system: benefits and challenges**

*'Here the education system is entirely different from our Sri Lankan system' –S3*

The purpose of the chapter is to highlight Sri Lankan students' experience with higher education in Norway. This chapter will address why and how Sri Lankan students have chosen Norway as their higher study destination and their experiences of the educational system at the universities where they have enrolled. Further, it will discuss their main challenges and benefits of meeting a different educational system. The overall emphasis is on Sri Lankan students' experiences at NTNU and UMB.

### **5.1. Why and how Sri Lankan students choose Norway as a destination for their higher education**

This was the first question I asked Sri Lankan students during the interviews with them. From their life stories, I was able to identify the factors behind their choice. Mainly, the reasons are related to the motivation of obtaining a higher education abroad.

One respondent stated that with his intention of doing master's abroad, he had looked for scholarships and placements and considered the free tuition of Norwegian universities.

*'When I was in my first year of undergraduate, I had intention to do my higher studies up to PhD. After finished my first degree, i decided to do my second degree in a developed foreign country than in my country. Then I started to look for the possibilities for doing master's abroad. Another thing, I was very much interested in water resource management during my undergraduate studies, so I wanted to do a master degree on that field.*

*Immediately after finishing degree, I got an opportunity to work with NEIAP project, funded by World Bank. By this chance, I was motivated further to study water resource engineering.*

*About Norway..., after graduated from Peradeniya, I discussed my future studies and career plans with one of our lecturer Dr .Muthukumaraswamy, who was an academic advisor at that moment. When I met him and talked about my future plans, he said 'all the students try to get a placement in America and UK., There are some countries like Norway , Sweden, Finland developed in some specific fields. Why don't you try these countries? Also in these countries, there is no tuition fee for higher education. His advice was very useful for me.*

*In Sri Lanka, we have free education system up to university. That was the main reason I came up to university and finished my engineering. It would not be possible for me to achieve this if I had to pay fee for my studies in Sri Lanka because I am not belong to a rich family and I am from just an ordinary village family.*

*So, 'free tuition fee' induced me to aim for applying towards Nordic countries...'*

-Respondent T2

In a way, it is said here that it would not be possible for this student to apply for higher education abroad by self-financing because of his economic background. This seemed an important and common characteristic among the Sri Lankan students in my study. This phenomena was observed through the life style they follow (in Trondheim) and through the friendly talk (in Ås). To the point, free education in Sri Lanka was acclaimed as the greatest opportunity for them to achieve their educational ambition in life later in Norway.

In my experience, I was always told by my grandmother that 'you can have a stable life by making a sustained effort in your education'. My family lived a stable life with one person's income, so for us too, it was impossible to go abroad on a self-finance plan.

It is no longer a particular group of people who have a better economic status who sends their children abroad for higher education from Sri Lanka. The middle class families also strive to give education and a better life with future safety through higher education abroad. This process occurs with the help of companies or agents and friends. Therefore, higher education is becoming important for Sri Lankan students. On the one hand, it seems that international education is regarded as part of a globalisation effort; on the other hand, it is due to our country's unstable situation and its impact on education.

Two of my respondents said their choice of Norway happened accidentally while they were planning to do their studies in the USA.

One said,

*'Coming to Norway was an accident for me because I got a placement as Fullbright to USA but it was rejected at my second interview with a tricky question related to my status and culture. Then, I came to know the opportunity for studying in Norway, through my Head of the Department.'* –S10

Another respondent said,

*'We really wanted to go to USA, but it was rejected because of low TOEFL points. Then we started to apply for other countries -S9*

From the above statements, it seems as though some Sri Lankan students preferred to do higher education in English speaking countries. Alternatively, they tried Norway when they failed to reach the USA. This is a common trend in Sri Lanka. The first priority is always to find a place somewhere in English speaking countries.

Another couple of respondents said they chose Norway because they wanted to enrol in a certain programme and its courses, which seemed suited to their previous education and their chosen profession. Thus, they applied and were nominated by their institution with the collaboration of NORAD.

By contrast, a few students said that they really wanted to study and specialise in some technical subjects and rare fields, for instance, GIS, Remote sensing, and Medical geography; although it is available in Sri Lankan universities, it is not in their language medium.

A group of Sri Lankan student has been selected for a special scholarship offered by UMB for tsunami-affected countries. This also became an opportunity to choose Norway for higher education.

Here the important fact is that all the students had been studying and working (temporarily or permanently) at the University of Peradeniya, the Eastern University, and Jaffna University, which have collaboration or linking programmes with NTNU and UMB. All these students had been selected under scholarship programmes called Quota, NORAD and other funding.

However, not all the students are very explicit about this cooperation between Norwegian universities and Sri Lankan universities. Some of my respondents stated that they obtained information regarding the admission's procedures through their friends, former students who studied at NTNU or UMB and seminars that were held for tsunami recovery.

*'To Norway, one of our batch mates was studying at that time; therefore we got some positive ideas about Norway'- S8*

As far as I was concerned, though I knew that my teachers had done their higher education in Norway, I did not know what they studied and where they had studied. I started to browse the

internet to find out more about Norwegian universities, the courses and the requirements. As a result I applied to NTNU and the University of Bergen and finally I was chosen by NTNU to do Master in Development studies.

In addition to the above reasons, few as a reason to choose it as a study destination also mentioned characteristics of Norway.

## **5.2. Experiences of academic aspects at Norwegian universities: NTNU and UMB**

This study mainly focuses on higher education at the university level in two of the six Norwegian universities, which are state run and have no tuition fee<sup>10</sup>. Norway is one of the first countries in Europe to follow up on the targets of the Bologna process on European higher education. In addition, Norway carried out a three-year higher education quality reform programme, completed in 2003, which was aimed, among other things, at improving student mobility and international cooperation in education<sup>11</sup>. As a result, internationalisation of Norwegian institutions of higher education mainly concern the importance of education and exchange of ideas and knowledge (culturally and economically) between countries<sup>12</sup>. Implications of the internationalisation of higher education may be reflected through the Sri Lankan students' sojourn in Norway.

### *5.2.1. Study programme and expectations*

Sri Lankan students are usually entered either in a two years international master programme or three years doctoral studies in the social sciences or natural sciences. Both NTNU and UMB have admitted Sri Lankan students especially to the following programmes: MSc in hydropower development, Development studies, Master in management of natural resources and sustainable agriculture, MSc in condense matter physics and PhD programmes. Generally, these master degree programmes are structured around compulsory courses, optional courses, and thesis work. When the question was asked about their study programme, there were positive and negative opinions that arose.

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<sup>10,7</sup> <http://www.norway.org.uk/education/education/higher/higher.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://siu.no/en/internasjonalisering>

The Master's in development studies is concerned with development issues like poverty, the globalisation process and conflict, North - South relations, winners and losers between development process and social changes in developing world. It takes advantage of the background of multicultural students in the programme<sup>13</sup>.

The students enrolled in the development studies courses expressed different perceptions about the course and their expectations. One student at UMB perceived his experience like this.

*'Apart from the MSc, my mind got lot of exposure while I am here than in Sri Lanka. While I am alone at my room, I have been thinking in different angles for instance, what can I write, what research can I do in future, how can I apply my learning to produce knowledge and how can I provide or teach this to others. Although we do this all in Sri Lanka, but I feel this place encourages me to think creatively.'* – S1

From the above statement, it was understood that the respondent put much emphasis on learning new theories and methods related to the issues discussed in the lecture halls and through his individual research. Generally, all Sri Lankan students realised that they learned how to use scientific formats, new approaches, new theories and methods and how to write a good proposal.

Another respondent added,

*'The content of programme was good but I noticed that there were some expectations that we had to carry out a research for thesis, related to their ongoing projects in the departments'.*

S11

It was noticed that few students came with ambitious plans about what they really wanted to do in their studies and in their future. Therefore, they were not in a position to accept the encouragements of researching on issues related to projects. In my case, my plans were totally turned upside down after my unexpected pregnancy upon arrival. Thus, I was unable to do what I had planned during my studies and research and changed my topic of research. However, I tried to cope and adapt to every experience I encountered in Trondheim during my studies and research.

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[http://www.ntnu.no/portal/page/portal/ntnuen/three\\_columns?selectedItemId=31059&rootItemId=29569&sectionId=6873](http://www.ntnu.no/portal/page/portal/ntnuen/three_columns?selectedItemId=31059&rootItemId=29569&sectionId=6873)

The study programme MSc in Hydropower development has a major concern of planning. The programme consists of foundation courses, compulsory advanced courses, group projects and a thesis. Further, this programme refers to international practices and experiences through which Norway has developed competences at the highest international level within environmentally friendly development and operation of hydropower plants<sup>14</sup>.

During my data collection period, two Sri Lankan students had been selected for this course under the NORAD fellowship. These students have both negative and positive feedback about their study programme.

*‘Though this was a well organised programme sometimes I feel the programme itself should cover more ... we did not go into very deep mathematics, we are doing with simple maths .....I think maybe this is mainly considered planning so we cannot really find drawbacks and also this a bit wide area.....’ - S6*

This feeling was perceived when the students compared the course standards with their expectations. However, it is said that this course has interdisciplinary subjects designed especially for professional engineers engaged in planning and implementation of water resources projects or hydropower development<sup>15</sup>.

*‘Usually by doing MSc, we are expected to specialise on a particular field but this is a kind of generalised course again. We are studying all the subjects including social impact assessment, environmental impact assessment, and hydraulics so on. Through this we are learning all fundamental aspects.’ -S7*

It was found that the main objective of the programme is to offer education to produce future project managers and engineers in hydropower development and planners in the hydropower sector. Further, a civil engineer should have knowledge of a wide range of fields such as social, economic, and environmental issues rather than being a specialist, thus a civil engineer is the person responsible for organising the activities and coordinating the work of all

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[http://www.ntnu.no/portal/page/portal/ntnuen/three\\_columns?selectedItemId=30219&rootItemId=29569&sectionId=7380](http://www.ntnu.no/portal/page/portal/ntnuen/three_columns?selectedItemId=30219&rootItemId=29569&sectionId=7380)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ivt.ntnu.no/ivm/vis.php?groupid=196>

specialists involved in projects<sup>16</sup>. As far as they are concerned, this master programme is only offered by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

By contrast, Sri Lankan students who followed the master's in Management of Natural Resources and Sustainable Agriculture at UMB had very positive views about their study programme.

*'I came to Norway only with the knowledge of biology but here my programme was interdisciplinary one and now my knowledge and my views are totally different. I feel this is a well integrated study programme'*.  
-Respondent A2

In addition to this, students indicated that this programme provided them with a wider and comprehensive practical knowledge because of its interdisciplinary courses. Thus, it was said they enjoyed their particular programme. Their expectations further reflected positively in the next section on course content and comments.

Unlike in master programmes, doctoral degree programmes are interpreted differently by candidates.

*'In PhD, knowledge has two parts which is research and dissemination. Dissemination is not expected that much at master level but in PhD, it needs wider audience. Therefore, it is motivated through workshop and international conference. Though I have funds for this in quota programme, the special funding is provided by the department to prove that I am doing the particular research at geography department by participating in these conferences....'*

-Respondent T5

From the above statement, it was found that doctoral students had many opportunities to develop their knowledge, particularly in their field of study. The resources and support are also sufficient and encouraged the students to develop their field. Further, it was discussed, at the PhD level, that Sri Lankan students had great opportunities not only to disseminate their findings of research but also the chance to meet different international researchers and academics through conferences and thus have access to networks and links.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ivt.ntnu.no/ivm/vis.php?groupid=196>



### 5.2.2. Courses CONTENTS; interdisciplinary

As mentioned already, at UMB and NTNU, the study programmes are made up of courses, course groups and thesis work. Some courses and thesis work which include field work are compulsory, while elective courses can be chosen freely. In addition to that, interdisciplinary courses are offered through different departments to meet students' interests. Further, the thesis is considered a very important part of a master degree and it is carried out individually. Usually theses of international master programmes are linked to projects or problems relevant to the student's home country. In this way, study plans are prepared in terms of their choices.

Sri Lankan students at UMB and NTNU have different perceptions of their courses and their content. One respondent stated,

*' I have never considered other discipline than biology in Sri Lanka but here there is a link between social science and agro science I think this is good exposure to me both subject wise and knowledge wise. We do not have this opportunity in Sri Lanka. If I am in one field, I have to continue the same field for the rest of my academic life. For instance, if I study science I cannot have chances to know about economics. While I am here, I took the full advantage of this system of education'. – S3*

According to the above commentary, the students had positive thoughts about learning interdisciplinary approaches to the courses. Further, it was mentioned that these interdisciplinary approaches are becoming more popular than before.

At UMB, the master in Development studies and the master in Management of Natural Resources and Sustainable Agriculture together offer a field course in rural development and project management at Makerere University in Uganda. Sri Lankan students have the opportunity to visit Uganda and do research in a different cultural context. It was commented that this field course gives a deeper understanding of the links between rural environment and its people, their resource base, causes for poverty and environmental degradation. One of my respondent stated that even though they learned and understood poverty in Sri Lanka, he was able to find different dimensions of poverty and its issues during his visit to Uganda. Thus, the course, indeed, gave very many hands-on experiences with the application of theories and methodologies in the field.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.umb.no/1565>

Although Sri Lankan students are feeling confident in the academic preparation that their home universities gave them, a few students who followed Development studies at NTNU (previously known as social change) indicated that a few subjects were totally new to them.

*‘Subjects such as geographical history and thought were difficult for us because we did not have serious back ground or basic on that so we struggled’ –S 10*

While Sri Lankan students were in Norway for their master most of the students took courses that they would not have taken on their home campuses. It was stated that they had the possibility to choose courses to develop new areas of interest and broaden their academic and cultural background.

*‘I wanted to follow courses what were not offered in Sri Lanka. Before I came, I went through websites and looked for the subjects that I want to take during my master’s. So I already decided and planned what I was going to do both on subject wise and research wise’ –S11*

Further, it was noted that both the compulsory and optional courses not only provided better guidance to carry out research for the thesis but also gave very clear contents and structure through their reading lists, seminars and group work as well as assignments.

### *5.2.3. Method of teaching; friendly way*

Through Sri Lankan students’ experiences, it was portrayed that the methods of teaching include different resources in Norwegian universities. Compared with Sri Lanka, the way lectures were taught and students were treated during the lectures in Norwegian universities was totally different. Sri Lankans have realised that there are ways of learning which are more important in their higher education.

*‘In Sri Lanka we are afraid of asking questions from lecturers in the lecture hall’ - S3*

*‘We cannot get up and ask questions’ –S2*

The above statements were retold by most of the Sri Lankan students in my study. In fact, talking in lectures was strongly discouraged in Sri Lankan universities. I feel this is mainly because students have stereotyped idea that they might be punished or treated differently in exams and assignments if they show that they have abilities to discuss issues related to the subjects in front of lecturers. In Norway, lecturers and their way of providing lectures are different than in Sri Lanka. Usually during lectures hours, we have time for discussion and questions.

Another perspective that was experienced was the relationship between students and teachers. Sri Lankan students mentioned that the relationship they maintain with their supervisors, subject teachers, and other staffs in the department was entirely different from in Sri Lanka. The following story lines are captured to express the relationship with academic staff.

*'In Sri Lanka we have always very polite and obedient to our professors, lecturers, and teachers' –S2*

*'But here lectures are very friendly and we feel free to move with them'. –S3*

*'Here we are treated differently than in Sri Lanka. Norwegian staffs help to develop our personality and they have very rational thinking towards us. Concern is more on personal development and capacity development'. –S1*

According to the above statements, it was noticed that the Norwegian lecturers' thinking strategies are very innovative and their perceptions of international students or Sri Lankan students are positive. It was further said that the methods of teaching are not hierarchically structured in Norwegian universities and lecturers are able to teach effectively with compendiums, recommended textbooks, internet sources, and interactive teaching methods.

Another interesting aspect was expressed with regards to addressing academics in Norway compared to Sri Lanka

*'We students used to address our teachers and lectures and professor as 'sir' or 'madam' in Sri Lanka but here we call professors or lecturers or whatever staff by using their name' –S5*

One of my respondent stated that this was a kind of shock for him at the beginning. In Sri Lanka, in the schools and universities, students are used to calling academics 'Sir' and 'Miss' in a polite way by putting our arms together (whether we like it or not). Further, he said that the very first day in the international office at UMB, he started to communicate by using 'Sir' and a member of the staff of the international relations office responded 'in Norway people are not used to being called Sir'.

Most of my respondents in both Trondheim and Ås commented that due to their cultural practices they treat everyone equally in their education system. Hence, it was believed that Sri Lankans' tendency to obey and respect educated people was embedded in people's religion, social status, and colonial mentality. According to Peiris (1996), in Sri Lanka prior to the colonisation, education was mainly confined to religious establishments and teaching

was performed by clergies and reverends. During the latter part of 19th century, Sri Lankan education entered into the sphere of modernity where schools were influenced by economic and social status. For instance, in urban areas, admission to the school was considered with respect to economic and social backgrounds. Further, education was geared towards the production of highly qualified professionals, so called 'white-collar' workers, with the concern developed by the British.

Apart from the above, the Norwegian system of thesis supervision and group studies were highly appreciated:

*' In Sri Lanka , as an undergraduate, my thesis work was viewed twice by my supervisor, with that background I could say in Norway we were directed with proper guidance and the system is very good.'* -S10

A master or PhD thesis is an individual research project that covers many credits. Most students have to choose a topic that is related to issues in their home country and go there for the fieldwork for few months between the first and second year to collect data. Each student is under the supervision of a teacher. Sri Lankan students suggested that the supervisors are very approachable hence; students have feelings of flexibility and independence with the thesis work. In addition, it was mentioned that Norwegian teachers who are in charge of the programmes have long and varied work experience from research and teaching in the South<sup>18</sup>.

There are also possibilities to write the thesis in connection with projects abroad but comments suggests that students did not support the idea. As already mentioned, students decided on their education plans prior to their arrival and had the feeling that they were being encouraged to choose topic within the ongoing projects related to a particular department or faculty.

*'Students are not treated according to whether they are doing master's or PhD. The difference is, in PhD, you will submit your proposal with the time plan, so according to that you have to do your work .Usually we have meetings once a month. At the meeting you have*

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[http://www.ntnu.no/portal/page/portal/ntnuen/three\\_columns?selectedItemId=31059&rootItemId=29569&sectionId=6873](http://www.ntnu.no/portal/page/portal/ntnuen/three_columns?selectedItemId=31059&rootItemId=29569&sectionId=6873)

<http://www.umb.no/1675>

*to present, what you have done related to your research. You have to show your progresses.’*  
–S5

Here, students are allowed to work as an independent researcher under proper guidance by professors. Furthermore, the findings of their doctoral or master’s research are according to their own analysis and work rather than the professors’ wish, whereas in Sri Lanka, supervisors always have particular expectations of the results of research. Thus, students are expected to perform according to those expectations.

In my experience, my supervisor always said that ‘you will be a master in your topic once you finished your thesis’. I realized this while I was talking to the students who had finished their thesis at the time of my fieldwork. They indicated that writing and reading related to their topics gave them wider knowledge.

Next, Sri Lankan students from NTNU and UMB widely accepted that group work and group studies are a very innovative and comprehensive part of their master degree in Norway. It was perceived that this is a better strategy for studying higher education and they had the feeling for an international environment during their group work.

*‘Compared to Norway, we did not have group work at Sri Lankan universities’-S1*

*‘I have never been familiar with these group discussions before the exams in my student life in Sri Lanka’ – S11*

Besides this, at NTNU and UMB, the method of teaching is provided through an online system called ‘It’s Learning’. This is a user friendly learning platform that can be used to communicate between teachers and students through discussion forums and projects related to their courses and subjects. Thus, the online system supports learning activities and new forms of independent learning technology. Apart from this, the “It’s Learning” system can be an effective and powerful tool for administrative purposes and for updating learning resources<sup>19</sup>.

*‘Here we have much access to very advanced technology. For example, if we take internet, through this we can update whatever necessary things. We can get information on education or on other matters within a few minutes’ –S2*

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.itslearning.com/help/en-GB/ApplicationHelp.htm>

There were some other ways of teaching also suggested by Sri Lankan students as appreciated methods of teaching. For instance, the duration of lectures with include a break, and having food and drinks during lectures. Personally, I feel this is due to the independence or freedom students have in Norway. In Sri Lanka, if I feel tired during lecture hours and want to refresh myself, I have to think a lot whether I can drink water or eat something in front of my lecturer. It does not mean that students never have freedom in the lecture hall; instead, we were used to practicing and maintaining manners and respecting particular people in particular situations.

#### *5.2.4. Method of exam and grading; Flexible*

NTNU and UMB are following a system of quality assurance of teaching and learning. This system guarantees that students are receiving high quality education and spend time effectively during their study period and also bring about improvement and adjustment through feedback. Sri Lankan students mainly addressed the issues of methods of exam, grading and course evaluation under the system.

In this sense, the method of examination and grading is new and different for Sri Lankan students. Generally, Sri Lankan students are used to do examinations for a maximum of three hours at university or the secondary school level in their home institutions. In Norway, students are used to having exams for four to six hours.

This is applied to all including international and domestic students. When I was informed about the examination regulations by our coordinator, I was wondering about this long six hours and thinking that I had to write a pack of paper as answers. Later I realised that we were granted six hours, but were allowed to relax with a cup of coffee and smoking. With regards to the Norwegian exam method, Sri Lankan students have both positive and negative comments.

One respondent said that the exam method is very reliable because a copy of the answers is given to students. When students are not satisfied with the grades they have the right to an explanation about their performance thanks to the copy of the answer. This is unlike students in Sri Lanka who do not have that much independence and rights in universities with regard to the exams.

Another respondent commented on the exam method:

*‘Either duration of exam should be reduced or standards of question should be upgraded’-S7*

Students discussed that the method of take home exams is very new to Sri Lankans.

Generally, core courses and electives have written exams and assignments but the thesis is also evaluated by an oral exam based on the thesis work. However, the grades depend mostly on the thesis itself not on the oral exam. The students from the hydropower programme responded that their thesis performance is evaluated at the presentation given by each student, whereas in Development studies, the thesis is evaluated by internal and external examinations. In Doctoral studies, once the thesis is submitted, a public defence will be decided by a special committee consisting internal and external members related to the discipline<sup>20</sup>.

With regards to grading, it was observed that Sri Lankan students are not quite explicit on it. Grades do not contain numerical values, alternatively, it is described by letters of A, B, C, D, E and F. Each letter has a description for evaluation of the students’ performance during an examination (table 3)

**Table 3 Norwegian grading system**

Grade	Description	Criteria for evaluation
A	Excellent	An excellent performance, clearly outstanding. The candidate demonstrates excellent judgement and a high degree of independent thinking
B	Very good	A very good performance. The candidate demonstrates sound judgement and a very good degree of independent thinking
C	Good	A good performance in most areas. The candidate demonstrates a reasonable degree of judgement and independent thinking in the most important areas.
D	Satisfactory	A satisfactory performance, but with significant shortcomings. The

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.ntnu.no/eksternweb/multimedia/archive/00013/PhD\\_regulations\\_13755a.pdf](http://www.ntnu.no/eksternweb/multimedia/archive/00013/PhD_regulations_13755a.pdf)

		candidate demonstrates a limited degree of judgement and independent thinking
E	Sufficient	A performance that meets the minimum criteria, but no more. The candidate demonstrates a very limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.
F	Fail	A performance that does not meet the minimum academic criteria. The candidate demonstrates an absence of both judgement and independent thinking

Source: <http://www.ntnu.no/degree>

The performances of students are graded as follows, A is the best 10%, B is the next 25%, C is next 30%, D is next 25%, E is next 10% and F is unsuccessful and further work is required. Norwegian universities are following the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which is based on a workload of 60 credits for each academic year.

However, the students who wish to continue higher education were afraid of their grading and the credit system:

*‘The grading system has A to E but the thing is ‘E’ is not recognised as pass in the outside world. Even in the internet, nowhere you can find ‘E’ is a pass grade. Even ‘D’ is not a pass grade... the new American system has A+, A, A-..Like that’ – S8*

In my experience with this grading, I would say that grades were mainly depended on the field of study and the selection of courses. In addition, this varied and was determined by teachers, individual examiners in the departments and universities over time. Therefore, obtained grades should not be expected as very objective.

*‘Each course has an evaluation after that course is finished. They give more priority for students’ ideas and concerns. Also, we are asked to recommend lecturers that are the best for particular subject during evaluation’. –S2*

According to the above statement, it was said that students receive an evaluation form after they complete a course to assess the quality of the course and its composition, teaching



method, teachers, tools and aids provided during the course to make improvements and adjustments on that particular course for the next academic year.

Further, it was noticed that this evaluation system shows the work responsibility of teachers and course coordinators to achieve the objective of the course. This is impossible in Sri Lanka based on the assumption that there are fewer resources in academics and there will not be improvements through student evaluations.

I personally experienced the continuous evaluation through participating in the reference group for one my subjects. We were selected among different groups to represent international students, exchange students and Norwegian students and we met our subject teacher twice during the semester and addressed the feedback from classmates related to course structure, exercises, needed areas to be improved, expectations from students regarding course content and teaching and overall ideas about the course. Ultimately, it was realised the evaluation generated ideas to develop alternative methods of teaching and assessments of that course immediately and for the next academic year.

### **5.3. Other academic aspects: benefits and challenges.**

Besides the above, Sri Lankan students experienced with other aspects relative to education and its benefits and challenges.

#### **5.3.1. Benefits**

All the students in my study perceived that academic standards are very high and sophisticated in Norway. The perception was compared with the Sri Lankan education system at the university or tertiary level. According to my respondents' view, Norwegian universities are doing updates every academic year, while the Sri Lankan education system is not being updated, mainly because of these two factors; limited resources and a long term civil war.

*'In Sri Lanka I applied very few knowledge of my engineering education but after started my master's only I realised that I have a lot to learn in my field'- S7*

*'Impact of war made many drawbacks on our education system'- S2*

With the limited resources and access to technology, we did not have opportunities to apply everything but by doing the master's abroad, students have learned and experienced to apply different techniques in different contexts. Further, it is believed that the civil war has a profound effect on education and its development. This might be either a barrier to or a

challenge for the efforts needed to upgrade the system by the government and the academic personnel. But in Norwegian universities knowledge is provided by qualified and well experienced professors and lecturers with the use of highly advanced technologies and innovative teaching methods along with a scope of internationalisation of higher education.

It was found that knowledge has been offered to international students through interdisciplinary and practical applications. As mentioned earlier, the students at UMB followed fieldwork courses in another developing country. It was stated that this field experiences gave insights and skills to analyse the theories in a practical setting.

It was widely appreciated that learning with other international students also led them to build an intercultural understanding, friendships, and a network which is a great advantage. Sri Lankan students suggested that these opportunities should be offered to other Sri Lankans in the future.

One respondent proposed that

*'Like us, more academics should come abroad and learn new things and get experience in their field' –S2*

Through this exposure, Sri Lankan students believed that they achieved their ambitions and explored issues related to their field of study thanks to the opportunities given by Norwegian universities. Further, student life in Norway helped them to develop personally and gain a capacity as a functioning individually, making decisions, and solving problems by their own.

Another impression of academic life was regarding library facilities. Sri Lankan students at NTNU and UMB stated that modern library facilities are a major resource for their studies and research. They offer wide range of facilities such as a network and a shared library system called 'BIBSYS', access to electronic journals and other documents, services including searching, ordering, renewing and reserving as well as the facilities including reading rooms, group discussion rooms with audio and video devices, computers and printing and photocopying machine services. Not only did they have access to the above facilities but were also able to buy new edition books through the internet on websites such as amazon.com, which is very fast and cheap.

*'Still I think, when I go to Sri Lanka, I will feel that I am 100 years back with regards to this library and internet facilities' -S10*

In addition, Sri Lankans experienced comforts in their student life with high speed internet networks, social gatherings, student trips and events with student unions like ICOT, SIU. This all helped the Sri Lankans to feel a sense of relief from the loneliness, stress of exams and family matters in Norway and back home.

### 5.3.2. Challenges

As mentioned earlier, though Sri Lankan students have different achievements and benefits in their field of studies and with the exposure to the international environment, student life is not always perfectly satisfying. Students must balance the successes with a lot of challenges. In that sense, for Sri Lankans language proficiency is a big challenge.

#### 5.3.2.1. Language

Although Norway is not an English speaking country, there are numerous master degrees taught in English in the universities and colleges, and English is spoken and understood by the host community (Sam 1995).

In order to satisfy the academic requirements for higher education in Norway, Sri Lankan students had to document their English language proficiency prior to the admission procedures. However, among the Sri Lankan students, English seemed either a barrier or a challenge in their academic experience in Norway.

*' I studied in Tamil medium and my subjects also related to social science so here I needed more English knowledge, but comparatively I would say that I am not very competent in English proficiency so this was a big challenge for me.. ..*

*Sometimes, during the lectures, I would not understand all the matters and words. Then I came to my room and look it up in the dictionary what those words mean.*

*Though I did not fully understand the English, I was able to understand a lot of things through the way they taught us and explained.'* –S1

As the above respondent indicated, Sri Lankan students who follow social science programmes did their previous studies in their mother tongue. Thus, exposure to English had been very limited for these students. This is mainly due to the education system. In Sri Lanka, up to the late 1950s, all the students had to sit the university entrance examination in English, but in the early 60s, there were changes implemented in education including the expansion of

facilities in education and a switch from English to the local language (Peiris, 1996). This has made a profound impact on ordinary Sri Lankan students who go abroad for higher studies.

In the above story line, though the respondent acknowledged that he is lacking in English proficiency, he was in position to explain how he learned subjects with the aid of a dictionary and from the way of teaching. It shows that the above student had the intention to learn new things abroad.

Another Sri Lankan student expressed the following,

*'At the beginning, I found difficulties medium wise. Comparing with other students, I thought that I had the minimum level in English. However, I worked hard and did well. After obtained the grades I felt in a very positive way. But I still have the feeling that language is a kind of barrier and challenge in our performance' - S11*

This respondent too stated that whatever we achieved, in fact the level of achievement somehow is determined by English language. As mentioned already, though Sri Lankan students believed that they received academic preparations at their home universities as a basis to face an international system, language wise they have challenges with their abilities to perform well.

*'We are not native speakers of English and also we are not practising English. As academics, we are less practicing in Sri Lanka. When we compare ourselves with others, we are very poor in English language proficiency. I think this lacking was mainly due to our education system. We are ok now but think about the coming younger generation, still, the Sri Lankan government is insisting not to develop English at university level.*

*In our case, both in biology field and management field everything must be in English but student are not practising these subjects in English. The importance of English is realised when they go out for higher education. Even, here there are few students who are suppressed by language difficulties.' - S3*

Based on the above respondent's commentary, it was suggested that the Ministry of Higher Education of Sri Lanka should not put much emphasis on implementing the English language as a medium in local universities, and further it was noticed that the respondent indirectly blamed apathy among Sri Lankan students with regards to English.

From the study, it was found that the scale of proficiency in English varies from place to place. For instance students who were able to manage with speaking and writing abilities in Sri Lanka have been facing difficulties in English (academic) in Norway. This was faced by me too, though I used to work with an NGOs in English, I was not able to compete in the academic field during my studies. We always had to get assistance to correct our English.

#### 5.3.2.2. *Re-entry challenges or challenges back home*

A few of my respondents have addressed that they would, indeed, face such challenges when they go back and apply the knowledge and experiences gained through their higher education in Norway. The students have realised, to some extent, that there is a need for some meaningful changes in some aspects of education and research in Sri Lanka -and these are inevitable. For instance, changes in methods of teaching, evaluation and research and methodology as well as attitudes towards students.

*'We think that how we can modify the system' – S2*

As we discussed already, at UMB, through student evaluations, teachers are given awards for the best lecturer and best interdisciplinary lecturer. A few Sri Lankan students were impressed with this and stated that they really wanted to introduce these systems in Sri Lanka.

*'We wish to adapt our new attitudes and plans to fit Sri Lankan university education system'-S1*

But the same students indicated that this is not an easy task because the education system relies on different actors, structures and authorities. In addition to this, the Sri Lankan education system is bound culturally too. The following narrative lines explain that teaching as a profession somehow relates to culture (academic) and its practice.

*'Sometimes my subject teacher explained the unclear matters for me sitting on the floor while I was sitting on chair but if I do this in Sri Lanka, I will be looked at as a mad person '-S11*

Teachers and lecturers are expected to behave according to their professional criteria. This status has to be understood in relation to the structure of academia, including the formal and informal hierarchy of power and position, domination over student and difference in discipline.

*'My challenge is going to start when I go back to Sri Lanka. How my knowledge and doctoral degree will make impacts both on my department and NTNU.'* –S10

But the above respondents, academic professionals from Sri Lankan universities, intend to adapt and apply such strategies in their institutions after being as a master or doctoral student in Norwegian universities. As academics, their profession holds a monopoly over the service (teaching and research) they provide and it is often accompanied by a doctrine of free choice (Martin, 1980). However, their plan of actions would be determined by the academic hierarchy that is vested in a line of power which is comprised of the senate, a vice-chancellor, deans, professors and heads of departments.

However, the students who want to search for a job after their higher education suggested that their challenges depend on the work they look for.

A few stated that due to our country's unstable political situation, they cannot transfer the skills and knowledge they gained in Norway, thus one of the foremost challenges is how they are going to apply and use this knowledge

My challenge too depends on my country's situation. When I came to do my higher education in Norway, I was very interested in working with NGOs and community based organisations to serve at the grassroots level, but in the current situation, it seems that working in this field can lead to uncertainties, a lack of independence and threats. However, I believe that I can be creative and adjust to the reality, and I can reflect upon my foreign experience through some extracurricular opportunities like writing essays for journals.

By all accounts, however, Norway is perceived as a positive place in relation to higher education.

## 6. Discussion of findings

The discussion deals the findings from the study which directly connected with research objectives with research questions of the study. The first analytical chapter of the study was organised under three heading: meeting new culture; meeting the new place; and meeting new people. It is plain that these are not easily separable and tend to mingle through the analysis.

The first question that the study seeks to answer was: **How do Sri Lankan students perceive the culture, place and people where they live in Norway?** The following subchapters attempt to answer the questions.

First, the study reveals that Sri Lankan students' perceptions about new culture while in Norway play as a significant experience in their student life and life afterwards.

It was noticed that meeting the new culture was experienced in different dimensions according to the time and place. Firstly, most of the respondents of this study had the feeling of loneliness, homesickness, worries, anxieties, excitements, and impressions at the very beginning of their arrival. These feelings were meant as 'culture shock'. Though it is stated that this culture shock is common among the students go abroad, evidence gathered from the study showed these experiences of culture shock vary according to Sri Lankan students' individual characteristics, socio-cultural background and inter cultural experiences and understandings of Sri Lankan multi ethnicity. therefore, Sri Lankan students' , experiences of culture shock and its dimensions actually determined by meeting new behavioural patterns , unfamiliar social rules of host society, ethnocentric views of their own culture, new systems of education and day to day life such as transport and banking as well as unfamiliar physical condition(weather) in the new place. Thus, the culture difference between home and host heavily influenced them in learning the new culture in the new place with problems and challenges. Because one person's culture starts early in life and continue throughout childhood, so when he or she in situation to meet and cope with a new culture requires the learning of such knowledge, skills, values of that particular culture at the stage of foreigner. This new cultural learning might be possible by socialisation with peer group, forming social relationships with host community, capability and cognition. This difference between home culture and host culture, as refer culture distance, is the base for socio- cultural adjustment

problems of Sri Lankan students. As a result, ethnocentric views also were found as a stumbling block to integrate with host society and its culture.

Successful integration depends on individual characteristics and situational factors, because their extended stay direct them to accept the host societies social values and customs.

The study found that cultural experiences also vary with time. Sri Lanka students' (almost all the respondents) extended stay in that particular place led them to identify positive and negative perspectives on people and place with related to culture. In other words, Sri Lankan students identified what they 'like' and 'dislike' about this new culture (Norwegian Culture) during their student life. It means that Sri Lankan students' cultural awareness had been developed over period of their stay. These 'dislikes' may be the factors of inhibiting to accept and adjust to the host culture and people. Through the stories, it was noticed a few Sri Lankan students made adjustments without adaptation; thus, they perceived that they did not want to adapt any new things in the new place.

However, it was observed that not all the respondents of this study were facing these cultural distance, alternatively few were impressed by the new cultural norms and values as well as social rules, and thought meeting these new cultural values is a golden opportunity in their student life for personal and future development. For instance, particularly the respondents at Ås mentioned that they learned good moral behaviours during their student life. They started to learn and adjust not only with Socio-culture but also educationally and economically as well as physically.

Further, it was found out that there were two contrast views and perception emerged regarding adaptation among Sri Lankan students lived between UMB, Ås and NTNU, Trondheim. The attitudes towards adjustment and adaptation is very positive among students lived in Ås than Students lived in Trondheim. This was observed mainly because of the following reasons; the Sri Lankan students living in Ås had many chances to integrate with different culture and people through trips and cultural evenings; opportunity to learn intercultural context through their study programmes, for instance, Sri Lankan students in UMB had to go to Uganda for a field work credit course during one semester. Through stories, it was realised that they started to experience intercultural learning process during their visit to Uganda with other international students; and the objective and the subjective feelings towards place and people where they lived. Although there are different situational



factors, successful adaptation and integration is determined by the particular functions at different place and by its people and culture.

With regard to meet the new place, the study revealed that the new place has physical, social, and emotional dimensions. In this sense, the new place has the power to cause effect in Sri Lankan students' life experience in Norway. The study found, the places are attributed by students' 'location experienced'. Narratives from the stories about students' life experience describe what the place meant to them. In other words, how Sri Lankan students perceived sense of place as positive and negative. Further, it was noticed that Sri Lankan students' 'sense of place' varying with time and conditions. Therefore, the findings reason out the perceptions between being an 'insider' and 'outsider' in during their sojourn period.

First, the study identified why and how the Sri Lankan students' attachment to the new place as an 'insider'. As a result, following factors reflected students' close attachment to this new place. Experience and the relationship between the environment and self based on their familiarity and memories of their previous lived spaces in Sri Lanka, particularly the rural beauty of their landscape in Sri Lanka, preparation, and collection of information about the new place and its characteristics prior to the arrival through friends and internet and by comparison with other places. These three factors are making a few students to feel intimacy with the new place and therefore, they had sense of intimate in the place where they lived. Furthermore, the present study found out the satisfactions with provided facilities (not all) in the apartment, spending most of their life time in student village and its surroundings and affinities developed with the physical substances portrayed as a 'sense of belonging'. In addition, the study noticed, some Sri Lankan students, experienced the new place as 'sense of freedom' with different dimensionalities based on gender ideologies of Sri Lanka, positive intercultural understanding about the new place and previous experience with war and insecurity.

Second, the present study found out the factors related to the Sri Lankan students' perception to be an 'outsider' or 'placeless' of the new place. The study found out the following reasons to be an 'outsider' in the new place. Those are transcendent memories of life in Sri Lanka, feelings and conscious about family sets up and family ties back home, spouse's participation during student life in Norway and their professional identity and lack of preparedness to being in the new place and the new culture prior to their arrivals.

Further, the study observed the position between an 'insider' and an 'outsider' either replaceable or remained the same. Due to continuity of place for long time, achievements and well being by both educationally and economically, concern about future life and spouses' contributions both to family and education, particularly for married students' life, Sri Lankan students perception to be an 'insider' in the new place were developed. Like this, due to individual's background and characteristics, playing multiple roles during study period as mother or father and a full time student also perceived to be in this new place as an insider. However, while they face challenges and problems related to student life, students received negative perceptions about the new place. Further, lack of facility, financial crisis, also made a few Sri Lankan students to become an outsider of this new place. The present study noticed that the feelings and experiences in-between these two positions are constantly changing. However, if the feelings of 'insider' exist for an extended period then there may be possibilities for adaptations.

Regarding meeting new people in the new place, the study identified that Sri Lankan students had opportunity to meet the following three categories of people during their life in Ås and Trondheim. They are Norwegians, international students and Sri Lankan community live in these places.

First, with Norwegians, Sri Lankan student who followed masters integrate mainly by their sharing apartments and attending the study programmes with them in their day-to-day life in the new place. Beside this, PhD students had opportunity to interact through their department and teaching activities and supervisors. The study observed Sri Lankan students' integration with Norwegians is in a limited ways. This is because of the following claims that students cannot accept all customs, behaviours and life style pattern of their culture during this sojourn period, thus students have choices. These choices are influenced by individuals' characteristics and their understandings of the host culture. This was already discussed in the section under meeting the new culture through 'dislikes'. Thus, the perception of Norwegians as 'sense of integrity' developed through particular relationships and behaviours of Norwegians in the new place.

Second, with international students, 'sense of stereotype' found as a main perception of Sri Lankan students. This stereotyped perception was mainly towards African students and Asian students. Because, comparing with other international students, Sri Lankans had more opportunity to integrate with this group of students through their courses and study

programmes. The study found both negative and positive stereotyped perceptions among Sri Lankan students regarding international students and their behaviours. Towards Africans students, Sri Lankans had 'sense of false stereotype' through media while they were in Sri Lanka but that was replaced in the new place as positive after interact with them. Through observation and evidence gathered for this study found that Sri Lankan students had very positive stereotyped perception towards Asian students. It seemed Sri Lankans are likely to teaming up with south Asian students because they are perceived as a homogeneous group through such cultural connectedness among Sri Lankan students body. The study found when Sri Lankans failed to find suitable peers group or community from Sri Lanka, Asian; especially south Asians are the next closest people and location to them. Thus, positive 'Sense of group stereotype' was perceived.

Third, with 'others', the study found that Sri Lankan students had 'sense of alienation' with varying intensities according to the new place and its people. The study noticed this feeling of alienation emerged among Sri Lankans from their participation, relationship, and reaction with 'others'. There are many student organisation and societies for international students such as international students union; however, a few single status Sri Lankan students are only participating in these societies. for instance, in Trondheim it was observed Sri Lankan are participating only in ICOT and rest of them pointing out the reason for not participating due to the family and lack of time availability. From analysis, the study highlighting the following factors for this sense of alienation during sojourn among Sri Lankans: attached to one sub culture or collectivity, religious, gender and political ideologies, ethnocentric views, consistent values and customs and maintain the status quo and quoting family reasons. These all factors identified based on Sri Lankan students' perceptions regarding meeting new people in the new place.

The present study was also carried out to answer the question: **How do Sri Lankan students perceive the higher educational system of Norway?** The study was noticed that Sri Lankan students experienced the new educational system in the Norwegian universities by comparing the Sri Lankan higher education system what they went through. Further, through evidence and analysis, the study found Sri Lankans' reflections on the new system based on their cultural understandings. Basically the study focused on experiences of academic aspects and its benefits and challenges.

First, with regards to educational experience, Sri Lankan students perceived the new education through the following aspects of the: study programme; teaching method; course contents; method of examinations and also through the challenges and benefits in the new education. The findings reflect that Sri Lankan students came to Norwegian universities not only with very high motivation of doing higher education but also they achieved those through their study programme. It was found that experience of achievements mainly through high standard educational supplements such as interdisciplinary courses with field work, innovative and effective teaching methods, and flexible as well as reliable method of examinations. The study found out the positive perceptions regarding study programme emerged from the Sri Lankan students who followed Management of Natural Resource in UMB and Development Studies both in UMB and NTNU. However, on the other hand, the Sri Lankans students who followed MSc in Hydropower did not get what they expected before joined this course content and students' expectation were not fitted.

Evidence of the study showed that interdisciplinary courses, field work and field trips, choice of elective courses, recommended reading list, seminars and assignment work all are almost different from Sri Lankan system. These differences were easily identified by the students because most of the students used to work in the universities of Sri Lanka and therefore they knew how effective the education provided in Norwegian universities. Some students were not used to such courses and systems of this course content.

Another important finding that study found was the method of teaching and exams which were very impressed by Sri Lankan students. The main reason for this is the relationship between the students and teachers in Norwegian universities which is totally different from Sri Lanka. Thus, Sri Lankans perceived this a very positive in this new education system through feeling of how they are treated in the lecture halls, how they are responded by lectures, how they are supervised through the thesis work. Further the study found Sri Lankans experienced the methods of examination as very flexible, but regarding the grading, Sri Lankans students are not clear about whether the system is commonly followed by all Norwegian universities or the grading is varying for different courses.

The study wanted to answer the question: **How do Sri Lankan students cope socio-culturally, educationally and professionally in the context of 'new' challenges and benefits?**

From analysis the study found the benefits Sri Lankan students received in Norwegian universities. The study showed that the Norwegian education is being updated and using very highly advanced technologies and methodologies. Thus, students perceived that this updated knowledge would help to build their research capacity and their professions.

Regarding challenges in education, the study found that the major challenge among Sri Lankans was language, in addition re entry challenges also concerned.

The study found that Sri Lankan students found language as a big challenge. This is not for all Sri Lankans. The language challenge depended on their course and contents. A few students who followed social science subject like Development studies and Resource management found it difficult, and students who followed technical related courses like Hydro power and Physics did not find English as a barrier for their grade achievements. Another aspect the study found was a few students who were confident for English reading, speaking and even writing in Sri Lanka found English as a challenge and barrier in Norway academically. This lack of proficiency found mainly due to the present Sri Lankan education system.

Challenges regarding Socio- culturally, study found that transport and its cost made a kind of restriction on their movement to know the other places and people. It was observed Sri Lankans are not very much willing to be good travellers while they are student both locally and internationally, however, this was not by all, a few used transport as regularly and used to went on trips internationally too.

Professionally, not all Sri Lankan students mentioned that they are engaged in minor jobs which were totally a different identity from Sri Lankan cultural and social context. however, they wanted to do this type of job for some reasons like responsibilities back home, financial constraint for students who had family depended on educational loan and scholarships, future plans after return home, and to make use of this opportunity of work permit to earn high wages compared to Sri Lanka. However, it was observed, they are facing challenges by do this types of jobs both mentally and professionally.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1. List of respondents (table 1)

Respondents	Sex	Age	Course & University	Arrival year	Previous foreign experience	Duration of stay	Marital status	University back home	Native place in home country	Under which scholarship programme	Study status at the time of field work
S1	M	33	Msc, UMB	2005	no	Up to now, extension	S	Eastern	Batticalo	Tsunami	Not finished yet
S2	M	34	Msc, UMB	2005	no	2007	S	Eastern	Batticalo	NORAD	Finished
S3	F	33	Msc, UMB	2005	no	2007	s	Eastern	Batticalo	Tsunami	Finished
S4	M	36	Msc, UMB	2005	no		M	Jaffna	Jaffna	Tsunami	Not finished yet
S5	M	34	PhD in Floriculture, UMB	2003	Did Msc in the same uni	Up to now	s		Jaffna		Second year of PhD
S6	F	36	Msc, NTNU	2005	Yes but to asian countries	2007	s	Peradeniya	Jaffna	NORAD	Finished
S7	M	33	Msc, NTNU	2006	Yes, for work purpose	Up to now	s	Peradeniya	Jaffna	NORAD	Currently Following
S8	M	34	Msc, NTNU	2005	no	Up to now	M	Peradeniya	Kurunagala	Self finance	Currently Following
S9	F	33	Msc, NTNU	2005	no	Up to now	M	Peradeniya	Kurunagala	Quota	Finished
S10	F	36	PhD in Development studies, NTNU	2004	Yes, to do Master in Norway	Up to now	M	Peradeniya	Kandy	Quota	Final year of PhD
S11	F	30	M.Phil, NTNU	2006	no	Up to now	s	Peradeniya	Jaffna	Quota	Currently Following

### 8.2. Interview guide

#### A. Background Information

1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Course and field of education: Master's/PhD
4. Previous foreign experience?
5. Which part are you from in Sri Lanka?
6. Civil status: single/Married
7. If you live with your family, provide details

How many members?

Whether wife/husband is studying or working or at home?

#### B. About the place

1. What are the reasons for choosing Norway for your higher education purpose?
2. What did you know about Norway while you stayed in Sri Lanka? How did you know?
3. How would you describe your experiences or feelings about you stay after moved to this place? (Ways you feel whether settled in or not?)
4. How about your social life experience here?

5. What were your expectations? How would you describe
6. With what are you satisfied here (at this place)
7. How do you feel different from what you expected?
8. How did you find yourself coping with different situations you had to deal with here?
9. Any important things that you have learned while you were here (may be about yourself or about others, feel any changes in your life ....)

### **C. Socio cultural aspects**

- 10 How do you spend your spare time apart from studies?
- 11 Any kind of entertainments or activities you have here (for you / family)
- 12 How do you find people in the host society?
- 13 Do you have friends here?
- 14 Do you think that you can make friends easily here or have any barriers to make friends?
- 15 Do you have chances to move with other communities?
- 16 How are you perceived by the people living here, differently from those you know at your home country?
- 17 What do you know about Norwegians
- 18 What do you know about the Norwegian culture?
- 19 How do you represent your country and culture
- 20 Can you tell about your student life in student village
- 21 How do you manage yourself through acting different roles in Norway?
- 22 Challenges regarding student life, How do you accept or adjust to it?
- 23 Any unexpected experience you have had

### **D. About Education**

- 24 What do you think about international setting of your study programme and expectations
- 25 Are there any New? What kind of knowledge and expectations, Explain  
Regarding study programme  
Course content  
Exams and grades  
Teaching method

- 26 In what ways this international study programme help to develop your knowledge, yourself, and to see the world?
- 27 How do you experience the social settings among your study programme  
About fellow students  
  
About teachers and staff
- 28 Any different from what you are used to in your country, in what ways? Explain
- 29 What kind of knowledge is important for your country's development? How did you find this.
- 30 What are the other opportunities that you have while you as a student in Norway?
- 31 How do you make use of those for your personal development?
- 32 How would you describe your educational achievements during your stay?
- 33 Apart from this, how do you see yourself in one/ two/ four years from now?
- 34 Any challenges regarding your study programme, how do you accept or adjust it?
- 35 In what ways it affects to develop your knowledge and experience.
- 36 Tell me about any experience changed your perspective regarding socio culturally and educationally during your stay here
- 37 What else do you plan to do in the future regarding your studies and professional ?
- 38 Your overall idea about this talk. What did you find most important?