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International Student Mobility to Berlin

A qualitative analysis of migration motives and people-place relationships

Master's thesis in Globalisation and Sustainable Development

Supervisor: Nina Gunnerud Berg

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the migration stories of international students that have relocated to Berlin. With this thesis, I aim to answer the following two research questions: *What are the students' motivations and expectations before they move to Berlin and how are their migration stories linked to their motivations? What kind of experiences have the students gained, and how have their experiences impacted their lifestyle and wellbeing?*

The research questions have been approached by a qualitative method inquiry. In-depth interviews and oral history have been applied following thematic analysis to obtain a comprehensive picture of migration stories. The examination of individual experiences and perspectives points out the highly individualistic migration patterns in addition to common themes within the data material. I have applied concepts of people-place relationships, wellbeing and lifestyle migration to the study. Due to their interrelation, a combination of these concepts served as a tool for analysing and discussing the findings.

The study reveals diverse motivations deriving from previous experiences and personality traits. Dominant themes have been a desire to gain new experiences as well as an escape from previous restraints and a search for a better way of life. In addition, the study highlights the impact of place attachments on people's wellbeing. In terms of the perception of Berlin, the students have experienced Berlin as a diverse, international and accepting place with opportunities for self-realisation and comfortable life.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines international student mobility using the example of international students in Berlin. The focus is on native English speakers, and the sample for this study includes students from the USA, UK, and the Republic of Ireland. A qualitative approach is used to analyse the migration motives, expectations, and experiences of these students. By examining individual migration stories and linking them to the decision-making process and its effects, a comprehensive picture depicting various dimensions of migration emerges. The aim is not only to present single aspects of migration processes but also to analyse connections in terms of personal backgrounds, motivations, and outcomes. Thus, the study aims to illustrate the migrants' development process and show differences as well as similarities and themes within and between individual experiences.

CONTEXT

Globalising forces

Nowadays, the world is changing rapidly through several processes of globalisation. As communication, transport, and economic structures are constantly evolving and developing, global consciousness and interconnectedness are growing as well (Shani, 2011). These developments are impacting societies and cultures in different ways. For instance, human and economic mobility processes, along with communication and technological systems, blur the lines between cultures and ways of living in various places in the world (Shani, 2011). For cities like Berlin with global importance, this means that global influences are shaping, amongst others, culture, society, and infrastructure. A good example is migration processes, as they signify impacts and changes in a place through the arrival of people with different backgrounds, which can ultimately lead to the implementation of new lifestyle practices in the destination (Appadurai, 1990).

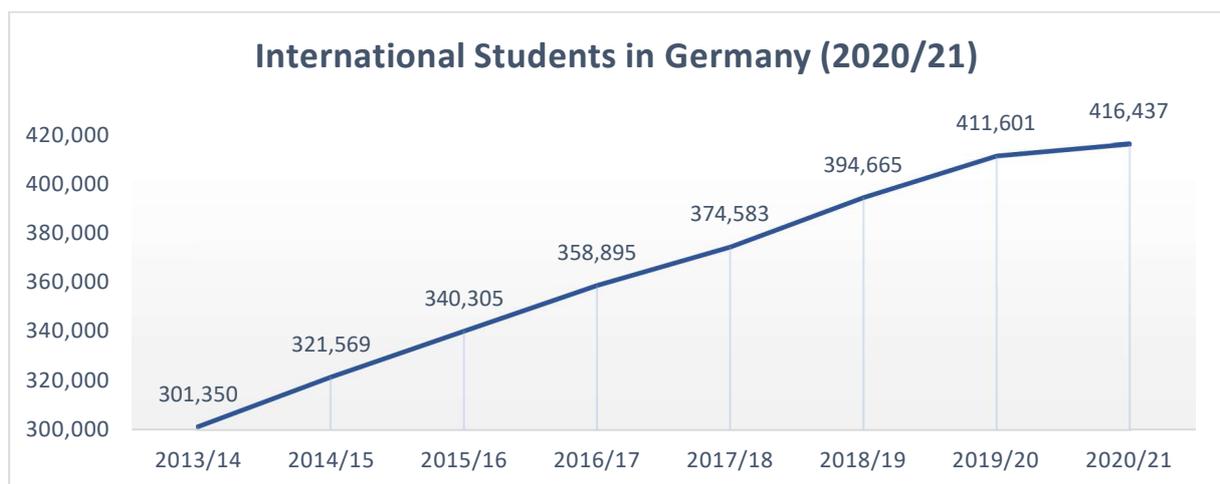
International student mobility

The focus of this study is on international student mobility. It can be seen as a result of these global processes and growing global consciousness and interconnectedness. Access to information about different cultures, opportunities, and lifestyles in places around the world is creating new desires in terms of consumption, ideas, identities, lifestyles and so on (Appadurai, 1990; Salazar, 2014). Thus, globalisation aspects play a significant role in the perception of the world and specific places. These created imaginaries of places form expectations for different people, differing from person to person (Salazar, 2014). The influences and expectations are

highly dependent on social and cultural backgrounds as well as information channels (Maile & Griffiths, 2012). These channels are again created or influenced by different actors such as the media, politicians or individual social networks and their experiences (Appadurai, 1990). In this regard and with a focus on urban spaces, Cochrane & Jonas (1999) mention the “power of imagination” (p. 146) on urban development and the attraction of a city. Imaginaries and created expectations can be superior to reality and consequently signify increasing importance for a place and its marketing in a global context (Cochrane & Jonas, 1999; O’Reilly, 2014).

The growing importance of international student mobility is evident in the case of Germany. As of the autumn semester of 2020/21, more than 400 000 international students were enrolled in higher education institutions in Germany ("Germany International Student Statistics 2022", 2022). Figure 1 gives an example of the rapid growth of international student mobility to Germany, which increased by 38.19 per cent between 2013/14 and 2020/21.

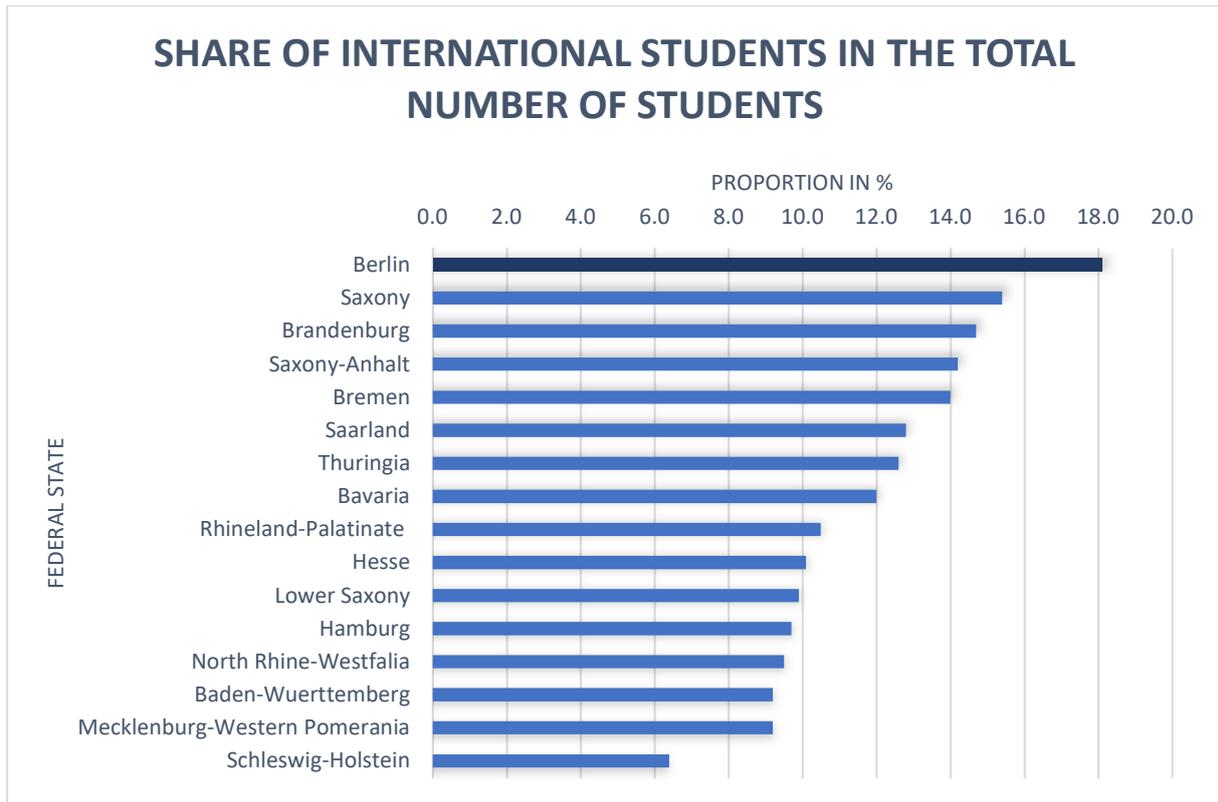
Figure 1: International Students in Germany



Source: Germany International Student Statistics 2022 (2022) (created by author)

In the case of Berlin, it is interesting to observe a high share of international students in the total number of university students (see figure 2). With 18.1 per cent, as a capital city and a federal state, Berlin holds the highest share compared to the other fifteen states ("Data – Wissenschaft weltweit", 2021). Since Berlin is the third smallest German state, this indicates a highly international and diverse environment within the city.

Figure 2: Share of international students in the total number of students



Source: Data – Wissenschaft weltoffen (2021) (created by author)

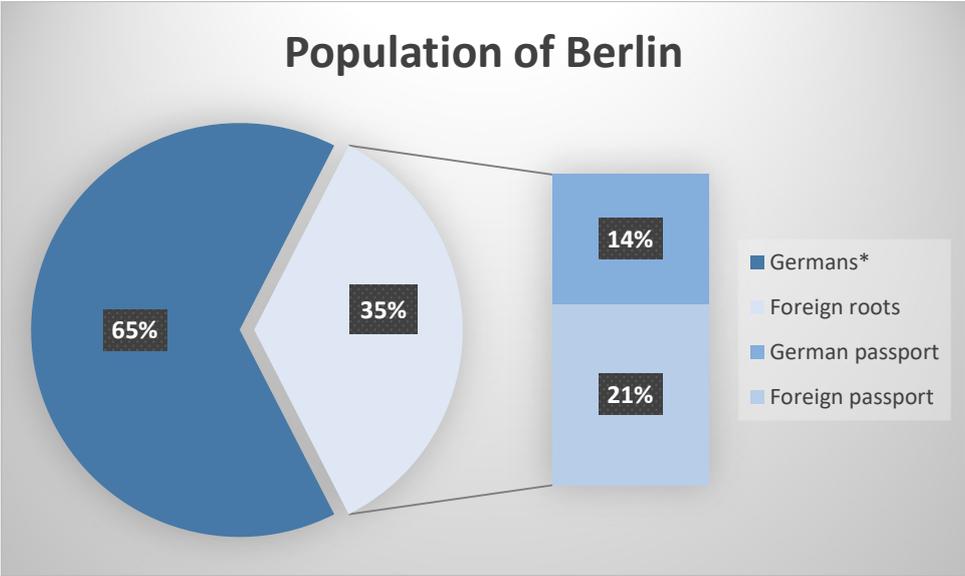
Berlin: A dynamic city

In connection with globalisation, Berlin is often seen as a growing global city in the heart of Europe (Griffiths & Maile, 2014; Merkel, 2016). Its importance does not only originate from its geographical location on the European continent, nor the fact that it is the German capital. The city also possesses relevance in political and historical terms (Merkel, 2016). Especially from a historical point of view, the city has frequently been imagined as a constantly changing place, and that it has been challenged in its existence, structure, and identity throughout time (Merkel, 2016). From its status as the capital of Nazi Germany, Berlin then became divided during the Cold War before it was declared the capital of a reunified Germany in 1990. Therefore, the city has long been a place of change and significance, although with positive and negative connotations. However, not only the past has contributed to the city's ever-changing character. A place is always influenced by a set of factors and flows (Anderson, 2021). For Berlin, diverse culture is another crucial aspect that has contributed to the fact that Berlin as a place is always in a state of transition (Merkel, 2016).

As mentioned above, globalisation processes have various influences on society and places. In the case of Berlin, these influences can be observed in different areas. For instance, the city represents a highly international and diverse place with residents of around 190 different

nationalities ("Demographic data about Berlin's population", 2021). The German capital has approximately 3.7 million people, as of 2020, and is growing annually ("Demographic data about Berlin's population", 2021). Figure 3 shows the high share of people with a migration background in the city. Around 35 per cent (1.32 million) have foreign roots, which may contribute to the perception of Berlin as a diverse and international-friendly place. It is also represented as a “cosmopolitan and young city” ("Demographic data about Berlin's population", 2021), with the youth attribute originating from the high amount of young people living in the city.

Figure 3: Population of Berlin



*Without migration background
 Source: 35 percent of Berliners with foreign roots (2020) (created by author)

In connection with this study, statistics have shown that US and UK citizens are among the 20 most represented nationalities within the foreign population in Berlin ("Demographic data about Berlin's population", 2021). This fact makes it even more interesting to look into the motives and expectations of these nationals to move to Berlin for their studies.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study uses secondary literature on concepts of people-place relationships. Additionally, it focuses on lifestyle migration and the concept of wellbeing to explore individual migration stories, motivations, expectations, and experiences. The migrants’ reasons for moving to another place are incredibly complex. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse their stories in the context of individual living situations and backgrounds, as many factors play into the decision-making process to migrate.

The primary resource for the analysis is data from in-depth interviews with international students, which is discussed in connection with the theoretical framework. This study aims to canvass the following research questions:

1. *What are the students' motivations and expectations before they move to Berlin and how are their migration stories linked to their motivations?*
2. *What kind of experiences have the students gained and how have their experiences impacted their lifestyle and wellbeing?*

The study aims to draw a comprehensive picture of migration stories, motivations, and effects on the migrants. I am interested in the reciprocal relationship between the migrants and Berlin, particularly in terms of experiences, identity formation and wellbeing.

Furthermore, I use the concept of lifestyle migration as an analytical tool to critically assess the applicability of this concept to the study's case and the data material. The central questions, here, are if Berlin can be examined as a lifestyle migration destination, to what extent international students share characteristics and motivations within the lifestyle migration framework, and consequently, if they can be regarded as 'lifestyle migrants'.

Motivation

As demonstrated above, international student mobility appears to be an ever-growing phenomenon. In light of that, it is essential to not only look at statistics about changing numbers of international students in a place. It is also interesting to examine this phenomenon on an individual level to understand migrants' motivations, expectations, and how they experience places differently.

Migration research

The field of migration studies has become highly multifaceted and interdisciplinary. Migration patterns and specific aspects are studied in various perspectives (King, 2012). Researchers seem to focus on different approaches and objectives depending on the field. However, there is no clear distinction between these disciplines in terms of migration research which calls for an interdisciplinary approach towards this topic (King, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to approach the topic of international student mobility to Berlin in an interdisciplinary way. This pursues the goal of comprehensive insight into individual motivations and impacts on people and environments. I primarily use a cultural geography lens complemented by environmental psychology and sociology. This approach looks at people-place relationships, especially the

relationship between the students and different places, for instance, their hometowns and Berlin. This helps understand the impact localities and traces within places have on the students and their lives. It also demonstrates possibilities of how the students affect the places they live in. The study focuses on aspects such as opportunities for various lifestyles, as well as identity formation and self-realisation through experiences in a place. In this regard, the migrant's well-being and their perception of quality of life in a place also play a significant role.

Migrants are often categorised or labelled, and there are various forms and understandings of migrants and migration (King, 2012). However, there is no official list of categories to identify and analyse migrants in one specific way, as categories often overlap when it comes to individual migration stories and motivations. Additionally, the categories assigned to a person can change in the process of time (King, 2012). International student mobility to Berlin could be labelled as 'voluntary migration' or, in some cases, 'temporary migration', which could also turn into 'permanent migration'. As lifestyle migration is used as an analytical tool to examine the students' migration stories in this study, I will refer to the students as 'lifestyle migrants' to situate this group in the context of migration studies. However, this choice serves mainly as a simplification for a better reading experience and does not mean an exclusion of other migration labels for these cases.

I have observed a lack of research on student mobility and migration to urban areas in terms of lifestyle migration research (Salazar, 2014). However, the understanding of 'lifestyle migrants' does not exclude this group of people (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Additionally, I have noticed an interest from researchers for further examination of this group during my studies. Therefore, I want to explore the field of lifestyle migration further in this aspect. As I mentioned above, many young people are living in Berlin. In this context, students are also considered part of this group, and thus, my study aims to explore the attractions of Berlin for young people.

Regarding the limitations of this study, I want to mention the subjective experiences and perspectives of the students who have informed this study. As I am conducting a qualitative analysis of individual migration stories, my study does not aim to the representativeness of student experiences. Still, it aims to broaden the understanding of relations between different aspects within individual migration histories. Additionally, the chosen sample and destination constitute another factor that may lead to different research outcomes than other migration studies. The complexity of migration theories and approaches suggests that the same case can be studied within migration research in various ways.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

My study is organised into six chapters. I begin with a presentation of the theoretical framework, which includes concepts and understandings of people-place relationships, lifestyle migration, and wellbeing. It follows a chapter about methodology and justifications for the choices I have used to approach my study objective. Chapter four presents my findings which are discussed within the theoretical framework in chapter five. The study concludes in a final chapter with a summary of the research outcomes and some outlooks for future research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study. It is divided into three parts and focuses on people-place relationships, lifestyle migration, and wellbeing. In addition to common definitions and understandings, different conceptualisations and perspectives are outlined and put in the context of this study. As mentioned in the introduction, I use an interdisciplinary approach in my research. Thus, the concepts in this chapter are informed by various disciplines engaged with these concepts.

The first part of this chapter illustrates different concepts of place. I demonstrate how people and places constitute each other and how their relationship impacts identities – both of places and people. In this context, three aspects are of particular importance: the meaning of places for individuals, emotional connections to places, and the sense of belonging within a place.

The second part gives an insight into the conceptualisation of and discourse on lifestyle migration. As an analytical tool for this study, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the migrants' motivations and expectations before their relocation. In addition, I aim for an examination of links between the complex migration stories, motivations, and experiences.

Moreover, the concept of wellbeing and its understandings and uses in research is presented and serves this study to approach individual migration stories and experiences. It demonstrates the impact of different stages of migration stories on the migrants' identity creation and self-realisation, as well as their happiness and satisfaction in the destination. Thus, the concept of wellbeing focuses mainly on the second part of research question 2: *how have their experiences impacted their lifestyle and wellbeing?* However, one bear in mind that the research questions are greatly intertwined. Therefore, a clear distinction between the questions or a focus on only one research question in the analysis is nearly impossible and also not the aim of this study. Instead, the objective is to illustrate the complexity of life stories and their relation to life decisions and experiences.

PEOPLE-PLACE RELATIONSHIPS

This part presents different concepts and understandings of people-place relationships. I explain the main conceptions and ideas about places and their relationship with people relevant to this study. This part is mainly informed by Anderson (2021), Cresswell (1996) and Massey (2008). The two latter have greatly influenced the field of cultural geography in terms of understanding and examining people-place relationships.

Concept of Place

The interplay of primarily cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions plays a significant role in understanding how places are shaped and constituted. During a constant change process, places are influenced by people, while people are also being affected by places (Anderson, 2021). In this part, I examine the reciprocal relationship between people and places.

For an initial understanding of how places generate their own identities and how they impact people's identities, a clarification of the term place is necessary. Anderson (2021) describes places as "ongoing compositions of traces" (p. 9). This understanding highlights two aspects: On the one hand, a place consists of many traces or, to put it another way, a place is a complex of various influences that interrelate in a space. These traces can both be of a material or non-material nature (Anderson, 2021). On the other hand, the definition of places indicates a dynamic characteristic of these complexes of traces. That places are in a constant state of change due to the influence of re-emerging traces, points out this feature. But not only new traces are changing the character of a place. According to Anderson (2021), interactions between new and old traces and changes within the so-called trace-chains form individual identities of places which are continuously in transition.

In terms of the perception of places, multiple perspectives and definitions understand places differently (Anderson, 2021). How a place is perceived or experienced may also be dependent on factors connected to individuals, the context, and the place itself. Below, three main concepts are outlined, regarding how places can be perceived in different ways:

First, places can be understood as a *location*, meaning a place is seen from an objective perspective. This conception highlights the geographical aspects of places but does not include a more subjective perspective on a place's identity and its interplay with people and their identity formation (Anderson, 2021; Cresswell, 1996). However, for a comprehensive examination of places and their identities and power to influence, the following two understandings are more suitable.

The conception of place as a *locale* describes a place's "unique character" (Anderson, 2021, p. 50). Hence, this understanding turns the attention specifically to how social and cultural aspects, which emerge through the interplay between traces, build a place's identity. The concept of *locale* "provides the setting for everyday routine and social contact" (Anderson, 2021, p. 48), and, as Cresswell (1996) states, it "refers to a broader context for social relations" (p. 156). However, it lacks another aspect: people's emotional connection with places. This is considered

in the third and last concept presented in this part: a sense of place. The focus on the sense of place is significant as this subjective approach considers the influence of human beings on places (leaving traces) and the effect of places on individuals, their identities, and their emotional bonds with places. Both Anderson (2021) and Cresswell (1996) refer to the reciprocal relationship between places and people and explain how both constitute each other and their identities. Moreover, Massey & Jess (1995) argue that “identities of places are a product of social actions and of the ways in which people construct their own representations of particular places” (p. 134). For this study, the sense of place and its understanding of interactions between places, people and identities will be one of the primary conceptions.

Concepts of people-place relationships

I will focus more closely on four core concepts within people-place relationships: *a sense of place, place identity, place attachment, and place belongingness*. I have already introduced an understanding of a sense of place in the context of place conceptualisations. This concept and three more specific concepts of people-place relations are presented in more detail. These concepts are mainly oriented toward the conception by Berg (2020), who understands “these concepts as related and to some degree overlapping, but also as increasingly specific in the order” (p. 440) in which they are mentioned above.

Sense of place

First, I want to elaborate on *the sense of place* as the broadest of the four concepts. Doreen Massey has greatly influenced the discourse on a sense of place. Like Anderson (2021), she also argues for places' changing and dynamic character. According to Massey (2008), the sense of place varies, and people experience places differently. The difference can originate from two factors. First, individuals experience a place differently due to their individual life stories. Here, a complex set of aspects such as context, relations, and personality traits, can influence people's sense of place (Massey, 2008; Rose, 1995). Second, the sense of place for individuals changes over time as well. Since places are dynamic constructs that change, people have different experiences in the same place, which impacts their relation to this place (Massey, 2008).

Another interesting aspect that Massey (2008) adds is the reference to globalisation processes and how these have led to a decrease in geographical relevance in terms of sense of place. She argues that the perception of place and its relationship is changing. Regarding David Harvey (1990) and his idea of time-space compression, she argues for a shifting understanding of social and spatial relations. For instance, technological innovations and communication systems cause

a growing global consciousness. Moreover, the improved global connectedness reduces the relevance of geographical distance to, for example, social networks (Massey, 2008).

Place attachment

Concerning *place attachment*, Devine-Wright (2020) understands this concept as “emotional bonds that people form with particular places” (p. 506). It is closely connected to the meaning of place for people, and the term ‘emotional bond’ in this context implies a relationship with a place. Manzo and Devine-Wright (2014) highlight the dynamic character of place attachment. This understanding is in accordance with the perception of places as continuously changing and thus, impacting people’s experiences, as I have demonstrated above in connection with the concept of place. Thus, meanings for and impacts on people by places are also changing, affecting their place attachment.

Berg (2020) understands place attachment as a broader concept compared to place belongingness, which will be elaborated on below. For her, place attachment includes a variety of factors that play into a person’s attachment to a place. This attachment can be experienced positively and negatively (Rose, 1995). In this context, Devine-Wright (2020) mentions the impact experiences in a place have on people’s wellbeing. As I will elaborate on the concept of wellbeing later in this chapter, the connection between place attachment and wellbeing shows the strong interrelation between the different concepts presented in this study.

Place identity and sense of belonging

The concepts of *place identity* and *sense of belonging* are closely connected and, to some extent, overlapping (Berg, 2020). Place identity refers to both identities of place and identity with a place (Berg, 2020). For the analytical framework, I use and understand the identity of place in conjunction with a place as locale (see the concept of place). Hence, it will be used concerning the focus of Anderson (2021) regarding the character of a place as well as the socio-cultural context it provides (Cresswell, 1996). On the other hand, identity with a place is understood in terms of people’s connection with a place and is closely related and in part overlapping with a sense of belonging (Berg, 2020).

Compared to place attachment, a sense of belonging is a more specific concept and refers to “an affective and strongly embodied experience” (Berg, 2020). As mentioned above, people give meaning to a place and develop emotional bonds to this place depending on different aspects and traits. As identities are “to some extent [characterised] by our geographical and cultural context” (Anderson, 2021, p. 51), people may not fit into a place that does not offer to

match cultural features for their self-identification and desires. Thus, this understanding implies that places impact an individual's feeling of belonging or not belonging in a place.

A common term used in the context of both place attachments and belongingness is in place/out of place. This term and understanding of belongingness in a place was introduced by human geographer Tim Cresswell (1996) in his book *'In Place / Out of Place'* concerning the relationships between people and places. He focuses on the sense of belonging in a place and, in this regard, the high importance of societal influences. He argues for the reciprocal relationship between societies and places and emphasises that both spatial and social dimensions always affect and exist in a place. His work has greatly influenced research in terms of people-place relationships. This understanding of relationships shows that different influences in a place – or the complex compositions of traces in a place – impact individuals and can determine whether someone fits into this cultural construct or develops a feeling of belonging in this place (Anderson, 2021; Cresswell, 1996; Del Casino, 2009).

Furthermore, Del Casino (2009) emphasises an additional aspect that may contribute to a sense of belonging in a place. He mentions the importance of social relations in the context of belongingness. He argues that a “community in its simplest sense is about belonging” (p. 126). Thus, he sees social networks as a critical factor for integrating a person and the emergence of a sense of being in place. This shows a similar understanding to Cresswell (1996), who also highlights the importance of social relations regarding the feeling of belonging. In addition to Cresswell (1996) and Del Casino (2009), Massey (2008) and Schultze (2020) pick up on the aspect of community and highlight the geographical disconnection between communities and places. In the context of Massey's (2008) consideration of global changes, they argue that communities can exist throughout places and are not necessarily tied to a specific place.

LIFESTYLE MIGRATION

This part explores the phenomenon of lifestyle migration which gives some insight into motives and imaginaries migrants have of their destination. I also elaborate on some aspects of people-place relationships as they are relevant in lifestyle migration studies for a comprehensive understanding of migrants' motives, expectations, and experiences in their migration stories.

Conceptualisations

Benson & O'Reilly (2009) define lifestyle migrants

as relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life. (p. 621)

The understanding of this migration trend covers a multiplicity of migrant groups, which shows how diverse and thus, difficult to frame, these migrants are. As a result of globalisation processes and particularly, social and economic transformations in modern times (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014), an increasing number of people is shifting the centre of their lives to a new place. This is leading to greater cultural variety in many destinations.

Benson & O'Reilly (2009) introduced lifestyle migration to the field of migration studies as a sociological phenomenon in 2009. It is meant as an analytical tool that provides a different approach and way of thinking about migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016). The authors see a limitation in other research and categories such as counterurbanisation or retirement migration, as they claim that many forms are often insufficient in terms of examining impacts on both people and places (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). The focus mainly lies on different aspects of the migration process. Therefore, the purpose of lifestyle migration studies is to introduce a different lens on the topic within migration research to focus on different aspects and connections, especially within individual life stories.

Many dimensions are involved when it comes to understanding complex migration stories and identifying individual motivations and experiences. Central aspects of lifestyle migration research are themes like *escape*, *freedom from prior restraints*, and the *search for a better way of life* (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Research often shows that lifestyle migrants report about negative experiences in their place of origin and that their migration process is often founded in a sense of escaping and searching for a better place with the opportunity for improvement of their quality of life (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). These motives demonstrate a very subjective view, as the motivations are very individualistic and include a variety of factors. Moreover, *quality of life* in this context does not necessarily mean economic improvement. On the contrary, it is characteristic for lifestyle migrants that economic factors do not constitute the primary reason for the decision to move (Maile & Griffiths, 2012). Later research additionally highlights the understanding of lifestyle migration as a process and thus, not a single and finished event (Salazar, 2014). In fact, the understanding of lifestyle migration as an ongoing search for

improvement and development, implies flexibility and is mirrored in the initial definition as well since migrants may move permanently or temporarily for a better life (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009).

In 2009 the authors understood lifestyle migration as “the relocation of people within the developed world searching for a better way of life” (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, p. 608). Later, critics concentrated on the predominant focus on counterurbanisation and the representation of this trend as a Western phenomenon (Salazar, 2014; Croucher, 2015). Research has shifted from cases which only focus on migration within the developed world to a variety of cases like migration to the developing world. For instance, Croucher (2015) studied the case of North American migrants relocating to South America. In addition, it is often understood that lifestyle migrants are “relatively affluent individuals” (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, p. 621) that hold a certain level of privilege. Critics claim that this description is not entirely accurate and often misleading as it implies that rich people of a country migrate for lifestyle reasons (Korpela, 2014). In fact, lifestyle migrants often come from the middle class (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014; Korpela, 2014). Privilege in this context rather means that an individual has the freedom or opportunity to migrate, or is able to mobilise the resources necessary to move to a freely selected destination.

Identity and self-realisation

For lifestyle migrants, the issue of identity is particularly crucial. Improving one's *quality of life* does not always imply a better economic status or a higher safety level. It can also refer to a perceived improvement in one's life as well as "the opportunity for self-realization" (Ibrahim & Tremblay, 2017). Migrants may be seeking a new identity or a different way of life. This can be accomplished by either relocating to a place that already has an alternative lifestyle they can adopt, or by searching for a place that permits them to create their own ‘new alternative lifestyle’. As a result, this type of migration is viewed as a process of reorientation, in which people seek to enhance their own *quality of life* and pursue personal goals, resulting in a variety of lifestyle and identity constructs (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). These approaches and foci towards lifestyle migration are particularly important for the understanding of the highly diverse and individualised reasons to migrate. They also show the connection between concepts of people-place relationships and lifestyle migration, particularly *identity with place* as it refers to the impact of places on people's identity development (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014).

Furthermore, the perspective on relocation and reorientation in terms of self-realisation, identity formation, and lifestyle choices emphasises the privilege aspect again. It implies the ability to choose freely – at least to some extent. In this context it is important to consider that there are

always some restraints, for instance created by structural conditions (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014).

Korpela (2014) argues that “[t]he goal of lifestyle migration is happiness and individual satisfaction” (p. 41) and links this to the development of *individualism* which includes aspects such as freedom, control and responsibility. This refers to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and their understanding of modern society and its endeavours towards self-fulfilment and the production of new lifestyle forms. They claim that this is especially evident within young generations in urban areas.

Social imaginary

Another relevant concept in the context of lifestyle migration research is the *social imaginary*. It refers to assumptions which are socially and culturally created and shared. In connection with migration, social imaginaries inform and influence migrants and their choices of destination (Maile & Griffiths, 2012; O’Reilly, 2014; Salazar, 2014). Researchers understand social imaginaries as a powerful factor as they influence how a place is imagined and perceived while their presentation of a place does not have to match reality (O’Reilly, 2014; Salazar, 2014). As O’Reilly (2014) states, the social imaginary “is of central importance to lifestyle migration” (p. 211) due to its influence on migration decisions and individuals’ emotional bonds with a place. Hence, it also impacts place attachments which I presented in the preceding part about people-place relationships. Again, these attachments play a crucial part in lifestyle migration. The search for a better way of life is closely tied to people’s feelings about their lives and their connection with their everyday environment (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009).

WELLBEING AND PLACE

Wellbeing is a highly debated concept and applied in various academic disciplines. Generally, it refers to a person’s or community’s “state of feeling healthy and happy” (“Well-being”, 2022). While it originated from philosophy, it is influenced by many dimensions such as cultural, geographical, environmental, and emotional aspects (MacKian, 2009). These “complexities of wellbeing” (Atkinson, Fuller, & Painter, 2012, p. 7) contribute to the variety of understandings and uses of wellbeing in academia. I supplement this study with the concept of wellbeing in order to highlight the effects places have on people on an emotional level. Therefore, it is critical to give a more comprehensive understanding of the concept, how it is used, and what its value is for this study.

Subjective wellbeing

One specific form of the concept is subjective wellbeing (Rentfrow, 2018). Subjective wellbeing is often defined as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Rentfrow, 2018, p. 2). Hence, the subjective element refers to individual perceptions regarding life satisfaction and happiness. Within the literature on subjective wellbeing, we observe that instead of subjective wellbeing, the terms *happiness* and *quality of life* are used repeatedly as researchers tend to use these three terms interchangeably (Mashadi, Bhattacharya & Kawsar, 2016). Furthermore, the concept “refers to how people *experience* and *evaluate* their lives and specific domains and activities in their lives” (National Research Council, 2013, p. 15). These definitions demonstrate the personal and highly emotional level on which people engage with this concept. It also suggests great variety and complexity in the construction of subjective wellbeing by an individual and shows the close connection to feelings towards one’s own life – both in general and towards specific aspects of daily life (“What is Subjective Well-Being? Understanding and Measuring Subjective Well-Being”, 2010). In this context, the focus often lies on both positive and negative feelings about life that can influence subjective wellbeing. Thus, researchers tend to concentrate on the three main components of the concept: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect (“What is Subjective Well-Being? Understanding and Measuring Subjective Well-Being”, 2010).

While the influences on subjective wellbeing are very complex and individual, I want to mention one aspect that I put emphasis on in my analysis, as it appears to be relevant for this case: social networks. Research has shown that social life and a social network is important in terms of happiness (Rentfrow, 2018; Wang & Wang, 2016). In the context of wellbeing studies, researchers have found a positive correlation between social interaction and life satisfaction of people (“What is Subjective Well-Being? Understanding and Measuring Subjective Well-Being”, 2010). Therefore, this aspect is also examined in my analysis of the students’ lived experiences in Berlin, and how they feel about their situation in terms of social relations.

Geographical variation and context

Furthermore, research has shown that geographical influences on emotional features need to be studied further, as this relationship has not received enough attention for a long time. This shows the relevance and importance of interdisciplinary approaches to complex topics such as wellbeing. MacKian (2009) states that

[g]eographical variations in interpretations, cultural experiential factors, and the uniqueness of individual subjectivity all ensure that the difficult task of nailing this nebulous concept will continue for sometime yet, and geographers should be playing a key part in that undertaking. (p. 240)

Moreover, many authors argue for the consideration of environmental and spatial contexts in wellbeing research, since they greatly influence people's everyday lives and their emotional state (Kearns & Andrews, 2010; MacKian, 2009; Pain & Smith, 2010, Rentfrow, 2018). The different aspects of living and being in a place also show a connection to the concept of people-place relationships. Wellbeing highlights the emotional dimensions of these relationships and puts feelings in the centre of attention, as it focuses on individual perceptions of one's own life (Kearns & Andrews, 2010; Pain & Smith, 2010). In this context, researchers investigate experiences in places and their effects on people's wellbeing (Devine-Wright, 2020).

Furthermore, Mashadi, Bhattacharya and Kawsar (2016) also highlight the importance of geographical context in wellbeing research and add another aspect to the discourse. They argue that expectations and desires in relation to what a place can actually offer, influence people's life satisfaction, both positively and negatively. In other words, the gap between expected and experienced aspects of geographical context leads to different wellbeing outcomes. This can also be connected to the social imaginary and its power to influence people's decisions, perceptions, and expectations concerning a place.

Identity creation and wellbeing

Atkinson, Fuller & Painter (2012) emphasise an interrelation of identity creation and wellbeing and argue that both constitute each other in form of an ongoing process (p. 9). In addition, some researchers highlight place attachments or emotional attachments to places and show how these are closely tied to wellbeing and identity creation (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter, 2012, p. 7; Jack, 2012, p. 90). As I mentioned both in connection with people-place relationships and lifestyle migration, these attachments are understood as feelings towards places that, in some cases, can create a *sense of belonging* (Jack, 2012, p. 90; Rentfrow, 2018, p. 7). This perspective shows an understanding of place attachments as a factor that can lead to an increase or decrease in wellbeing and hence, demonstrates the impact of geographical context on a person's wellbeing and identity *with* a place.

Moreover, Rentfrow (2018) argues that wellbeing depends on different personality traits and preferences which is also connected to identities. This implies that wellbeing in one place can appear heterogenous within the population as individuals experience a place differently which again, impacts their wellbeing. In this regard Mashadi, Bhattacharya and Kawsar (2016) add

that the influence of geographical context on people highly depends on “whether a place fits citizens needs” (p. 30).

Moreover, it is suggested that being able to decide where to live and thus, finding a place that ‘fits’ one’s own preferences and identity, affects wellbeing positively (Rentfrow, 2018). This includes a freedom aspect which connects the concept of wellbeing to lifestyle migration. As mentioned above, lifestyle migration also focuses on the freedom of choosing a place to live in terms of self-realisation and lifestyle choices. Therefore, the concept of wellbeing should be considered in the context of lifestyle migration research. It is an important factor when it comes to decision-making processes and lived experiences of migrants and their connection to places and is given emphasis in my study.

Approaches in research and in this study

In many studies I have observed a quantitative approach towards wellbeing. For instance, research often focuses on the correlation between happiness and predetermined factors such as income, but lacks detailed consideration of geographical context or emotional factors (see: Mashadi, Bhattacharya & Kawsar, 2016). It thus, tends to be limited in terms of detailed knowledge about personal motivations and individual experiences.

Furthermore, I argue that a qualitative approach can give further insight in the construction of and influences on an individual’s perception of their wellbeing or happiness. For this purpose, I focus in this study on research question 2: *What kind of experiences have the students gained and how have their experiences impacted their lifestyle and wellbeing?* The analysis results provide information about individual experiences in the place and how they are connected to aspects of wellbeing. I examine what the participants need in order to feel happy in a place, what they were expecting from Berlin, how they eventually experienced the life in this city, and what impact these aspects have had on their wellbeing.

I focus in my study on finding connections and meaning in the migrants’ experiences and attachments to Berlin. I focus in particular on connections to people-place relationships and lifestyle migration within the theoretical framework. I do not aim to accurately measure wellbeing. Instead, I am looking into migration reasons, expectations, and lived experiences within individual life stories to find patterns and connections regarding wellbeing development and changes. Within research on wellbeing, the focus often lies on health and its effects on wellbeing (Berg, 2020; Kearns & Andrews, 2010; MacKian, 2009; Rentfrow, 2018). However, my

primary focus is not on wellbeing in terms of health, but it may constitute a factor in some migrants' motivations or experiences that affect their wellbeing.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines and critically discusses the chosen methodological approach in this study. The research design is clearly presented, including a brief description of and justification for a qualitative approach regarding the aims of this study and with contrast to quantitative research in this field. Next, the selection of the research sample is outlined, and the applied method is presented. A description of data generation and analysis is provided, and it then follows a section about challenges in terms of methodology. Additionally, ethical considerations are discussed and the position of the researcher in the interview and analysis process are addressed as well.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative approach

For this study, I chose a qualitative approach in order to examine the highly subjective topic of migration experiences and motivations. The aim was an illustration of selected migration stories and how these stories and experiences have influenced individual perceptions and life choices. Therefore, a qualitative methodological approach was most suitable for my research. It provided the necessary methods to gather more detailed information from participants regarding their background stories and socio-cultural aspects of their migration processes. It was promising in the way that it provided a deeper insight into, and comprehension of the complex processes and influences connected to human everyday lives and experiences. According to Winchester and Rofe (2016), qualitative research methods offer valuable outcomes in terms of studying human experiences. By contrast, a quantitative approach often focuses more on larger samples in order to achieve representativeness. Thus, this approach would have been more suitable for an illustration of, for instance, migration flows and perhaps some dominant influences on migration decisions. However, regarding my research objectives, I did not aim for representativeness but a thorough examination of subjective perceptions. I wished to gain a comprehensive understanding of the connections between various aspects of an individual's life story. While quantitative research outcomes would have remained limited in regard to my research questions, a qualitative study could provide answers to questions like 'why' people are migrating and 'how' they experience their lives, the migration process, and their environment (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

In human geography, qualitative research is most appropriate for the examination of individual experiences (Winchester & Rofe, 2016, p. 3). In my study, a smaller sample was used to

illustrate how different experiences have influenced life stories and how individuals have experienced their environment differently depending on their stories (Winchester & Rofe, 2016, p. 7). In this regard, it is important to understand that qualitative research does not aim for one correct answer but can have various meanings and outcomes. Therefore, in this study I did not aim for generalisation and argue that this is nearly impossible for such an individual and complex topic. Benson and O'Reilly (2016) also argue for a qualitative approach in lifestyle migration studies, as the goal is to examine motivations. Researchers are looking for “qualitative and subjective understandings of migration, rather than [...] social and/or economic characteristics that are ordinarily measured by survey and census data” (Winchester & Rofe, 2016, p. 25).

Research sample

The first step towards data collection was the familiarisation with the research and literature on the topic. Sufficient knowledge about both theoretical and methodological area is important in order to define the target group of international students and select participants (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 123). A comprehensive understanding of conducted research, goals, and practices as well as different methods and their potential output served as orientation. It showed that qualitative research, including in-depth interviews, was required for a deeper understanding of the complex processes within migration stories.

The familiarisation with research on lifestyle migration, migration studies in general, and qualitative research methods was important for the creation of an interview guide for semi-structured in-depth interviews. For the interview guide, I created six main categories with questions. The purpose of these different categories was to cover as many aspects as possible of the individual stories and different stages of the participants' lives. I started the interviews with some general questions about the participants such as their age, origin, year of migration, and their field of studies. This introduction helped to start the conversation and to get to know the participants. This part was followed by some biographical questions which aimed at more personal information about their past, for instance, their migration history, characteristics, family, and networks. The next category focused on the time before the participants moved to Berlin. The aim here was to examine expectations, motivations, and other aspects of the decision process. The participants were asked to try to remember their perspectives from the past. The next category contained questions about experiences after their arrival in Berlin. The focus lied on different aspects of their lives as well as connections between their experiences and expectations. The last two categories aimed to expose how the participants perceived Berlin compared to

other places they had lived in, and how their experiences had influenced their lives. Therefore, an outlook towards future aspirations was covered in the last part as well.

A small research sample (seven participants) was chosen to specifically focus on some individual migration stories. As the main emphasis in this study was to analyse individual patterns and experiences within migration stories, a larger sample would have made it difficult to focus on details that might have been critical for a better understanding and a thorough analysis. The migrant group of international students appeared to be understudied in this field. Thus, this constituted my motivation to focus on these migrants in this research project. While the aim of the study was to focus on a small amount of individuals and their stories, a range of different individuals with different perspectives and migration stories was desired as well. Therefore, the sample selection focused on finding participants with different experiences but also some degree of similarities – such as their origin - which would allow for a comparison in some respects. As mentioned in the introduction, the focus lied on native English-speaking students. This focus was chosen in order to compare experiences in terms of using English (their native language) for communication and networking in Berlin, and how this might have impacted the students' experiences, decisions, and wellbeing.

Recruitment

For an ensurance of some variety within the research sample and thus, the provided information, purposive sampling was applied which is a method for the selection of participants (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 124). In this study a short survey was shared on Facebook, for instance in university groups for students in Berlin. The survey included questions regarding age, gender, and origin. The purpose was to ensure that participants had the necessary characteristics for the research. Purposive sampling with the support of this short survey was used to select a sample with some degree of variety within key characteristics (age, gender). The aim was to achieve variety in the provided information and thus, a probability for both variety and similarities in terms of experiences and patterns in the data set. The survey comprised the following questions:

1. *How old are you?*
2. *What is your gender?*
3. *Are you an international student living in Berlin?*
4. *Where are you from?*
5. *Do you want to participate in the research project?*

Reaching out to potential participants and conducting digital interviews was relatively easy as university students are expected to have access to internet and necessary equipment for digital interviews. Even though the interviews were originally planned to be conducted in person in Berlin, the form of conduct was changed to zoom interviews in an early stage of the project. This decision resulted from the global situation during the pandemic, particularly in terms of travel restrictions and the geographical distance. After an evaluation of possibilities for digital data collection, I concluded that data loss could be kept to a minimum as the research participants were familiar with digital tools and had good access to these tools and equipment.

Selected sample

For this study, seven participants have been interviewed. As Stratford and Bradshaw (2016) state, “sample size differs from study to study within qualitative research” (p. 125) and depends on the specific aims, questions, and the applied methods. It is rather about meaning than about quantity and representativeness (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016).

The study is about student mobility to Berlin and thus, to an urban area. There is some variety within the data regarding gender, age, and place of origin. The sample includes an age range between 20 and 29 years which gives some insight into migration stories with varying experiences from the past as well as different life stages at present. For instance, some participants had been away from home for the first time, while others had lived in other countries or travelled a lot in the past already. Additionally, one participant was already married and had a child and thus, stood at a different stage of life than most of the other participants. Furthermore, diversity in terms of place of origin is given as some participants come from smaller towns or cities (rural-urban migration) while others originally come from bigger cities (urban-urban migration).

Table 1: Research participants

| | Participant | Gender | Age | Place of origin | Migration year |
|----------|--------------------|---------------|------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Anthony | Male | 29 | USA | 2021 |
| 2 | Hyacinth | Female | 24 | UK, England | 2021 |
| 3 | Eloise | Female | 20 | USA | 2021 |
| 4 | Benedict | Male | 26 | USA | 2021 |
| 5 | Francesca | Female | 24 | USA | 2016 |
| 6 | Daphne | Female | 21 | UK, England | 2021 |
| 7 | Violet | Female | 28 | Republic of Ireland | 2014, 2022 |

Information for participants

During the whole project, only email addresses of the participants were collected in order to communicate project-related information such as information letter and consent form. An outline of these documents can be found in the appendix. The information letter contained information about the project mainly in terms of title, purpose, research area and scope. It was important to provide enough information for the participants to make sure they knew what they would be partaking in (Dowling, 2016). Simultaneously, value was placed on not giving too much information about research aims in any form that could direct the participants towards specific answers. In other words, influencing the research outcomes by means of communicating expectations was to be avoided.

Confidentiality

The method of informed consent was critical to this study as it ensured confidentiality and privacy for the participants. Information letters and consent forms were sent to participants before the interviews. At the beginning of each interview information was repeated, in particular about the interview procedure, recordings and the use, storage, and anonymisation of the data. It was crucial to check that all participants had understood their part in the project and how their information would be managed and used. Referring to Dowling (2016), this procedure of 'informed consent' is highly important in ethical terms regarding confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Since the interview guideline included some personal and sensible questions about life circumstances and family relations, it was a main objective to clearly state from the beginning that the participants were free not to answer a question if they did not feel comfortable with it.

Anonymisation

In terms of anonymisation, potentially identifying aspects have been changed in the data material. In this study some names of hometowns have been excluded if it was a very small village. Additionally, pseudonyms have been applied to each participant. As I was analysing complex migration and life stories, it was considered more appropriate to use names instead of terms like migrant 1, 2 or 3. I found that this would make it easier for the researcher and reader to follow and compare stories throughout the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Data management

The interviews were conducted digitally through zoom. Recordings had been saved on a protected internal server at my university to ensure the participants confidentiality and privacy.

They have only been saved for the period of the project for the purpose of transcribing the data. All recordings and other data material were deleted by the time the project was finished. The transcribing process was conducted with the method of verbatim transcription in order to lose as little information as possible for the analysis.

During the interviews and while transcribing the data, taking notes was essential for the research process. The notes served as support for the analysis later as they comprised, for instance, additional information or ideas for potential different perspectives or connections to theories. They also included reflections on the research process and the researcher's position and involvement in the study.

Applied Method

In-depth interviews

I chose to conduct in-depth interviews to gather data for my study. These individual interviews took approximately one hour and were conducted with seven participants. For the research purpose of examining individual migration stories, including subjective perspectives and experiences, interviews, including storytelling, constitute a great method to gather data (George & Stratford, 2016). In-depth interviews can capture complex stories, connections, and different perspectives and meanings of a topic (Dunn, 2016).

As discussed before, quantitative methods are less applicable and have limited outcomes regarding this study's specific aim. Surveys are often another applied method to get access to opinions within society. However, for this project, information would have been confined compared to interviews.

One advantage of interviews is, for instance, the opportunity to ask open questions or follow-up questions. The latter allows for clarification of posed questions and given answers which ensures correct understanding from both sides. It also ensures respect towards the participants as the researcher can make sure that the participants' opinions and stories are analysed and presented in the desired way. Moreover, interviews give the possibility to ask for elaboration and thus, contribute to the maximisation of information relevant to the study (Dunn, 2016).

Forms of interviewing are often divided into three main categories: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews (Dunn, 2016). I applied a semi-structured method to this study. An interview guide gave some structure and guidance for the interviews while it was crucial to be flexible in terms of questioning. As individual stories were told, it was of great importance that I, as a researcher, was familiar with the topic, aims, and questions. On the one hand,

flexibility and familiarity made it easier for me to add a question from another part of the interview guide if it fit the context. On the other hand, I tried to ask relatively open questions to get as many aspects and perspectives on the topics as possible. This also required some degree of flexibility and familiarity with the research project as open questions and thus, longer storytelling often led to new questions that arose. (Dunn, 2016)

Thematic analysis and oral history

Thematic analysis is one of the most common methods in qualitative research and belongs to the category of pattern-based methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I found this method most appropriate for my study to explore meaning and patterns within individual experiences and feelings. I considered a combination of thematic analysis and oral history as an appropriate approach as oral history allows me to capture information about individual experiences and perceptions over time (Tjora, 2012, p. 104). Thus, I was able to gain a deeper insight and a comprehensive picture of life stories and individual experiences (George & Stratford, 2016).

Analysis process

In a first step towards analysis, I familiarised myself with the data through transcribing and re-reading the material and taking notes on initial impressions. The next step was to generate initial codes throughout the data set. During the coding process it was important to focus on data segments that appeared relevant to the study's research questions in order to not get lost in the amount of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In an effort to identify themes, I started organising and categorising my codes which helped to discover "some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). I used primarily a 'top-down' approach and thus, explored my data with a focus on and the help of my theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013). After identifying themes, I reviewed my codes and themes, compared them and put them in relation to each other. Through this process subthemes evolved and positioned my set of themes and codes in the context of my study and the theoretical framework.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Finding participants appeared to be more difficult than expected due to the physical distance. Since the recruitment process as well as the interviews were conducted digitally, I was reliant on responses on Facebook. Some research on how and where to find participants and contacting some friends that were living in Berlin helped to get some ideas on how to get in touch with people within the target group. The research was reliant on the willingness of people to participate in relatively long interviews – approximately one hour long – and to speak to a stranger

about a personal topic. It seemed to be an advantage that the chosen migrant group consisted of students. As some of them had been or would soon be in the same situation as me – writing a thesis –, some of the participants knew how challenging it could be to find research participants and therefore, wanted to help.

Another challenge was the language as the interviewees had different accents. The participants came, for instance, from the US East coast, the south, from different parts in England and from Ireland. For me as a non-native English speaker, this partly made it more difficult to understand some parts of the interviews immediately, and contributed to some extra time for the transcription process.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When it comes to human geographic research, we often notice the need for cross-cultural considerations due to the focus on “other people’s constructions of place, [and] other people’s ways of reading their cultural landscapes” (Howitt & Stevens, 2016, p. 46). In the context of my research topic, it is often assumed that people within the so-called ‘Western world’ are relatively similar in cultural terms. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are fundamental cultural differences which create varying expectations from, for instance, personal interactions as well as views on a specific topic. Therefore, it was important to me to approach the contact and conversations with the participants with cultural consideration and sensibility.

According to Dunn (2016), it is crucial to create an “interpersonal climate” (p. 160) during the interviews in order to maximise the relevant information that is gathered. During the whole interaction with the participants – the initial contact via social media and email included – priority should be given to making the participants feel comfortable. Providing comprehensive information about the project helps the participants to feel relaxed which again, increases the amount of information the participants are sharing (Dunn, 2016, p. 162). For my study, I aimed to keep both a professional and personal communication to increase the willingness and ability of participants to share their thoughts and feelings during the interview. I believe that a well-informed and professional handling of the research combined with an eye-to-eye conversation helped this purpose of gathering as much information as possible.

I also observed differences between the interviews in terms of length. However, this does not necessarily mean that shorter interviews provided less data. I noticed that the amount of relevant information in some shorter interviews was comparable with longer ones and often depended on the way an individual communicated and reflected on the topic.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER AND CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY

As a researcher I was involved in the topic as I am a German citizen and know the city of Berlin as well as the German culture. Additionally, I am myself an international student in another country. These are all factors that contributed to the proximity I had to the research participants. Knowledge about the place and culture made it easier to plan and conduct the research and follow the participants' stories, particularly when they were talking about specific aspects or locations within the city. It greatly helped and saved time in terms of familiarisation with the place of study and the context. However, this position as an insider to some extent can also lead to prejudices or expected answers and research outcomes. Therefore, I paid specific attention to my role within the research and reflected on that throughout the process of data management and analysis. Re-reading the analysis, analysing the own role constantly and thus, being self-critical and aware of influences on understandings aimed to identify subjectivity in the research. As Dowling (2016) emphasises, critical reflexivity is crucial as qualitative research includes social interactions and, by interpreting and giving meaning to data, the researcher influences the research. Thus, being critically-reflexive during the research process was an important goal to identify subjective aspects and become aware of how they might have shaped the research. Braun and Clarke (2013) also state in this context, that subjectivity is not to be understood as a negative aspect of qualitative research. However, it "needs to be thought about and considered" (p. 36) during the process and hence, reflexivity should be a fundamental part of the research process.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability are crucial aspects of every research. The researcher's positionality and interpretations during the analysis process require rigorous work in order to achieve trustworthiness (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016). I aimed to make the research consistent and reliable and thus, ensure the quality of my research. My aim was to make the analysis process plausible and comprehensible for the reader and show the process towards conclusions. According to Crang and Cook (2007) this results in credibility and authenticity of the research outcomes which is key to successful research.

4 FINDINGS AND RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the findings and results of my research. As indicated in chapter three, thematic coding has been applied. During the coding and analysis process, categories have been created to reveal important findings and themes relevant for the study's aim and research questions. This analytical approach aims for an illumination of the different lived experiences and perceptions by the students that have migrated to Berlin. I explore individual migration histories to demonstrate connections of experiences within the stories and how they have affected the migrants. Additionally, the findings show connections between the individual stories. Thus, shared patterns across the data set are presented in this section as well. The different angles and connections are further discussed in chapter five which helps understand how varied perceptions and experiences derive from different contexts. This also includes a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

This chapter has not been structured after the main theories and concepts presented in this study. Since the aspects discussed in chapter two are greatly interrelated, I believe that separated analyses would lead to limited research outcomes. Hence, this chapter is structured in the way that it presents dominant themes and aspects found in the data. I chose these aspects as they appeared relevant for my research problem. This allows later for a discussion of the findings in the context of the theoretical framework in a combined and relational way.

To begin with, I present different feelings the migrants have expressed about Berlin in terms of how welcoming the city is and what aspects of the city's geographical context seemed important to their everyday lives. The second part explores the theme of freedom in the city and focuses primarily on how the migrants have observed the lifestyle opportunities in Berlin. I also present some migration stories with a focus on the theme of escaping prior restraints which can also be understood in the context of freedom of choice. The last part reveals the importance of social networks, both at home and in Berlin for the migrants and their everyday lives.

FEELINGS ABOUT BERLIN

Welcoming and accepting place

I firstly focus on the arrival in the migration destination. It is interesting to look at the first experiences that people have made in a new place, particularly in terms of how welcomed they felt at that time. The feeling of being welcomed is evident in the data. The interviewees express

feelings about two main aspects regarding how welcoming Berlin is as a place for foreigners. Based on their experiences, the participants' first perception concentrates on social and cultural aspects. Most of the interviewees have perceived the people in Berlin as very friendly and nice (Anthony, Benedict, Eloise, Violet, Hyacinth). Anthony, for instance, expresses a feeling that especially non-German speaking people are welcomed in the city due to its international and diverse culture and atmosphere. Eloise sees a reason for this in the high amount of foreigners in the city which she believes has resulted in most people having become used to foreigners. While migrants like Anthony, Eloise or Violet state that they have felt “*culturally-wise welcomed*”(Anthony) due to the international and diverse atmosphere, other migrants have perceived the culture differently and less positive. For Daphne, for instance, the German culture has felt “*strange*”, and she describes German people as “*straightforward*” which was scary for her in the beginning. Concerning the German culture, Francesca expresses similar emotions:

German people are very cold compared to what I'm used to, so it's harder to get to know them. I mean, I did end up making friends, you just have to put a lot more effort in and you have to actually try really hard [...] I mean there's just like this whole formula basically, so I mean it's hard to feel welcome at first.

As she experiences German people as being cold, she describes differences between the American and German culture. The cultural difference makes it difficult for her to get to know people which made her feel less integrated in society and thus, less welcomed in the beginning. In this sense, I will come back to the importance of social relations in this chapter and present social relations as a main factor for wellbeing of the migrants in the context of place.

I also want to present a different experience gained by Anthony. While Daphne and Francesca talk about the German culture and in this context, German people being difficult to get to know, Anthony's experience differs in some ways. He states that he has heard about these “*stereotypes*” of German's. However, the people he met during the first weeks in Berlin were very open and welcoming and hence, surprised him positively.

Aside from social and cultural aspects, the migrants also express feelings in terms of being welcomed regarding aspects of bureaucracy and accommodation in Berlin. Here, it appears to be consensus among the migrants that these aspects have a negative effect on their feeling of belonging in the city. Anthony, for instance, describes the process of registering as a resident as very difficult and states:

I felt that there were so many restrictions in terms like bureaucratic needs, you know, there was a lot of paperwork that needs to be done before you actually can even remotely think of actually saying: hi, I live in Berlin, or I live in Germany.

This statement and especially the last part of it clearly highlights the connection and influence between the registration process and the sense of belonging. Other migrants express similar feelings about the registration process. Daphne uses words like “*frustrating*” and “*confusing*” while Francesca states that this “*was one of the most stressful things [she’s] ever done in [her] life*”. Others describe the experience similarly as “*extremely chaotic and stressful*” (Benedict) and “*very complicated*” (Hyacinth).

Another aspect that has contributed to their perception of the registration process is the language barrier in terms of government appointments. I elaborate more on the migrants’ experiences regarding language use in general in Berlin later. However, it seems that the language for the registration is a critical aspect for the migrants in terms of feeling welcomed in this context. Most of the migrants (Anthony, Daphne, Benedict, Violet, Hyacinth) state that government employees seem not to be willing to help in the process as they only speak German. During the moving process, this affected the migrants in the way that they felt excluded and neglected as foreigners. Violet, who moved to Berlin twice in the past, gives insight into two different experiences that she has made within the registration process. As she describes the process back in 2014 when she only knew little German, she explains that she perceived the government employees as unpolite and not helpful. Whereas her experience in 2022 was completely different. During the second registration process she was almost fluent in German and could communicate much better with the people who then seemed to be extremely “*friendly*”, “*helpful*” and “*patient*”. This example shows that the language in this context has a huge impact on the integration process and particularly feelings about being welcome in the new environment.

Furthermore, the migrants express similar feelings about the housing market situation in Berlin which constitutes a huge negative aspect, especially in the beginning of the migration process (Francesca). An example for how difficult the situation has been experienced gives Anthony who says that he “*lived in many cities but ha[s] never experienced having so much difficulty in terms of finding a place to live*”. This statement is comparable with Francesca’s feelings about the bureaucracy. Her negative experiences with the registration process seem to be influenced even more negatively by the contrast to the “*easy*” process in the US. For Anthony, a similar influence can be observed regarding the housing market. He compares the housing market situation in Berlin with previous experiences in other places which appear to have been less challenging. Hence, the comparison leads to an extremely negative perception of his experience and seems to have affected his feelings towards the city in this respect.

As Anthony's feeling of not belonging in Berlin due to the registration process, Benedict's experience with the housing market shows some similarity as well. He describes the search for housing while already studying in Berlin. He talks about not feeling settled due to the short-term stays in different locations. He expresses negative emotions about the constant search for a new place and adds that he did not expect it to be that difficult.

To sum up the experiences made by the migrants in terms of feeling welcomed in the beginning, the statement by Violet gives a good indication of the overall perception: "*I wouldn't say the city is welcoming but in other ways I would*". It perfectly describes the experiences the migrants have made during the first time after they moved to Berlin. It can be understood both in terms of different aspects of the city and regarding varied individual experiences. For instance, I have shown that social and cultural aspects can be experienced positively and welcoming while other aspects such as bureaucracy and the housing market situation are experienced negatively. On the other hand, individual experiences in Berlin as well as previous experiences seem to influence and shape the feelings that the migrants develop. Here, I refer to differing individual experiences in the city such as Daphne's and Francesca's negative contacts to German people and Benedict's positive experience with German's. Regarding previous experiences, the stories by Anthony and Francesca show how their experiences in terms of bureaucracy and the housing market have impacted their perception of the situation in Berlin. In their cases, it appears to have even increased their negative perception.

Concerning the perception of acceptance apart from the beginning process, the migrants express mainly positive impressions of Berlin. All participants have described the city as a "*very diverse and accepting place*" (Hyacinth) for different groups of people. The aspects of diversity and acceptance in terms of little judgement are also elaborated in the following part about the theme of freedom. In this connection, lifestyle opportunities and escape from prior restraints show the perception by the migrants of Berlin as a city that is open for change and new ways of life.

Apart from welcoming and accepting components of Berlin, the migrants have expressed overall feelings about Berlin and emotional bonds with the city. Francesca, for instance, describes Berlin as her "*second home*" which shows a close emotional bond with the city. The development of feelings towards the place over time is interesting in this respect. As we have seen in the example of Francesca, she mentions that it was difficult for her in the beginning, and she did not feel welcome at first. However, during her stay, she has become more integrated, and she explains that, even though it took her some time to get used to the cultural differences, she now expresses positive emotions about her life in Berlin.

Language in Berlin

In terms of language, experiences with using English in their everyday life is perceived mainly positively by the interviewees. All migrants state that they are learning German. Francesca and Hyacinth, for instance, mention the feeling of being integrated in the city and society as a reason for learning the local language. This indicates the importance of language for the sense of belonging, as already shortly mentioned in the case of the registration process and experienced communication issues.

However, regarding English speaking opportunities in Berlin, the migrants mention positive experiences in this connection. Eloise states that she feels *comfortable* as an English speaker in Berlin since most German's speak English and there are a lot of Internationals living in the city. Anthony adds that it has been helpful for him to be able to speak English especially in the beginning while he was still learning German. He feels that it made the process of settling in during the first month a lot easier for him. Hyacinth shared these positive perceptions of Berlin's English-speaking environment and describes it as "*a real privilege that everyone often speaks very good English*". She also sees this as a big advantage for native English speakers compared to other Internationals. She expresses her opinion based on experiences she has made in Berlin:

I think, if you are not from an English-speaking country and you don't know German as well, it can be quite difficult to make yourself known; [...] they just anticipate that people are coming from an English background; so, if you are from any other non-English speaking country, I can imagine that would be very challenging.

In this context, she also shares an experience she gained with roommates from Germany and France, whom had difficulties understanding each other because of their different accents. She expresses a feeling of being fortunate to be a native speaker and not having these difficulties herself.

Geographical context

There are some geographical factors and conditions that appear to be important for the migrants as they are mentioned repeatedly in their storytelling. Therefore, I will present the thoughts shared during the interviews on the following aspects: Geographical and cultural variation of Berlin's districts, the cost of living, public transportation, perception of safety, and climate conditions.

Districts and neighbourhoods

Francesca mentions the different neighbourhoods in Berlin and in this connection, describes the geographical variation as impacting people's connection with the city. On the one hand, she talks about getting to know people in her own neighbourhood, for instance owners of a nearby coffee shop. These connections and experiences have created a feeling of a "little community" that have made her feel "more comfortable" and thus, integrated in her everyday environment. On the other hand, Francesca and some of the other students describe different districts and their unique characteristics and attractions for differing groups of people. For instance, areas like Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain or Neukölln in east Berlin are mainly described as "hipster" (Benedict, Francesca), "young" (Benedict, Daphne, Eloise, Hyacinth) and areas "where all the clubs tend to be" (Anthony) or with "more of a nightlife" (Benedict). In contrast, the south and west of Berlin with their districts is mainly perceived as "green" (Daphne, Francesca), "quiet" (Anthony, Daphne, Francesca) and "family-friendly" (Anthony, Daphne, Francesca). I want to use a statement made by Benedict to illustrate his understanding of the relation between the different districts and people:

I think the stereotypes of the districts are fairly accurate probably because the people who are deciding on where to live look up the stereotypes of the districts and pick one which fits them and so they move there and then they kind of fulfil the stereotype.

In this regard, I found an example in the data material that concerns the characterisation of Berlin as a "young city" and certain east Berlin areas attracting especially young people. Eloise mentions the wish to live in one of these areas and she adds that she "definitely think[s] this is a city for [her] as a young person". This expression indicates how she has developed an emotional bond with Berlin as a young person and, in some way, identifies with these specific areas.

Cost of living

In terms of living expenses, Anthony mentions that it is difficult to compare overall costs. For instance, there are some things in Germany like health insurance that some of the migrants did not have to pay for in other places. Additionally, while some things are perceived as cheaper than in the migrants' homes, other things are regarded as more expensive. Therefore, many of the stories are informed by experiences of different aspects in terms of living costs and some participants try to give an overall evaluation about their combined costs.

The seven migrants describe their lives and cost of living in Berlin as "reasonable" and "affordable". Two cost factors are mentioned repeatedly in the storytelling: rent and groceries. Even though the housing market or the search for housing is experienced extremely negatively,

the price and quality is perceived mainly positively. The experiences in this regard appear to be mostly influenced by comparisons with either previous places of residence or other capital cities in general. Anthony, for instance, compares Berlin to New York and New Zealand as he has lived in both places before. He says that rent is much cheaper in Berlin compared to these places. Benedict, on the other hand, describes the prices as affordable but slightly more expensive than in the US. He has lived in other places in the US, but mentions that he would probably give another answer if he were to compare the costs with bigger cities like New York.

Concerning groceries, most of the migrants perceive the costs as cheaper than at home (Anthony, Daphne, Francesca, Violet). However, Benedict states that the prices might be a bit more expensive, but he has also perceived a better quality of the products. This impression of higher quality is also shared by Anthony.

Furthermore, some migrants (Daphne, Eloise, Hyacinth & Violet) compare the costs of living to other capital cities and evaluate Berlin in this regard as extremely positive. Hyacinth and Daphne, for instance, compare different aspects of living expenses with London and hence, assume Berlin to be a very affordable and cheap place as a capital city.

As mentioned before, it appears to be difficult to evaluate the cost of living in general due to its complexity. Hence, Anthony and Violet try to give an overall feeling about their expenses which turns out to be positive. Anthony says he is “*comfortable*” even though he has to pay health insurance. He feels that it is still cheaper and affordable for him since he pays less for other things like housing. Violet mentions childcare in Germany as a huge saving point. As a parent, this appears to be a main objective for her, and she compares it to very expensive alternatives in her and her husbands’ countries of origin. She also adds the high housing prices in these places. Thus, even though she mentions public transportation to be more expensive, it does not outweigh the other cheaper factors.

Public transportation

As already presented in the preceding part about living expenses, public transportation is a factor that is mentioned by several migrants as well. I want to shortly demonstrate the two main aspects that impacted the migrants’ perception of Berlin in this respect. Firstly, the price factor is repeatedly mentioned in a negative sense as it is perceived as expensive compared to other locations (Anthony, Daphne, Violet). However, as the example with Violet has shown, other positive factors may be more important and thus, contribute to a positive feeling about overall living expenses in Berlin.

Another aspect about public transportation is the infrastructure or accessibility in the city. Eloise for instance, states that *“it’s nice to have the accessibility of the city with like public transportation”*. Hyacinth and Violet express similar feelings and also compare it to their homes which have been more *“isolated”* (Hyacinth).

Safety

Another dominant aspect mentioned by the migrants in terms of Berlin’s geographical context is safety. Berlin is mainly perceived as a very safe place to live. Again, this perception is often influenced by a comparison with previous experiences in other places. For instance, Eloise feels much safer compared to Chicago and even her small hometown outside of Chicago. Additionally, Benedict states that *“compared to many other cities [he’s] lived in or visited, crime seems much more managed”*. Francesca and Hyacinth also add the positive perception of Berlin as a safe city for women. Francesca feels *“safe 99% of the time”*, even at night. Moreover, Hyacinth compares the situation to her home in the UK as she says that she would never walk home by herself as a woman at night there. By contrast, she has always felt *“incredibly safe”* in Berlin.

However, there are some negative perceptions concerning different districts of Berlin in terms of safety which demonstrate some geographical variation in this respect. One example is the case of Francesca. Even though she has mentioned that she feels safe 99% of the time, she also had some negative experiences. Nevertheless, she perceives these experiences as a problem of some specific districts and neighbourhoods such as Neukölln. Violet also expresses different perceptions regarding safety in the various districts. She compares, for instance, Neukölln (unsafe) with Prenzlauer Berg (safe), the latter her current place of residence. Moreover, she also mentions crime rates as a reason not to be in Berlin in the future. This thought seems to be influenced by her perspective as a parent. She expresses mixed thoughts about Berlin’s safety here as she sees crime rates as a risk for her son when he becomes older.

Climate

A final aspect that I want to mention is the climate and seasonal darkness which constitute a negative influence on some of the migrants’ perception of their lives in Berlin. For Benedict, the colder weather and darkness during winter has impacted him very negatively. He states that he misses warmer weather which he connects to his previous hometowns as well as the regularity of sunrise and sunset. Additionally, Francesca states that *“if you have any sort of mental illness or any sort of seasonal depression [...], it’s very difficult during the winter here because it’s dark so early”*. The aspect of seasonal depression that she mentions here is interesting as she mentions mental health in connection with her past experiences at home as well. The aspect

of mental health connected to seasonal darkness suggests that mental health is an important issue for her and her everyday life.

FREEDOM

In this part of the chapter, I will elaborate on the theme of freedom that has repeatedly been mentioned during the interviews in different contexts. The participants have observed, and experienced different aspects connected to freedom, for instance in terms of diversity and culture. Here, I will focus on the themes: lifestyles and the escape from prior restraints. The findings show that the perceived aspects of freedom are often informed and influenced by previous experiences in other places, and in some cases, they have even been part of the motivation for the move. The research participants for this study have predominantly perceived the freedom aspects in Berlin positively.

Lifestyles

Variety of lifestyles

In this part I will present some aspects in terms of lifestyle opportunities and how the participants have observed the culture in Berlin. This appears to be closely connected to identity creation as the participants' statements suggest an understanding of lifestyle practice and change as a form of self-realisation. Hence, some patterns highlighted here will be revisited and further discussed in relation with the theoretical framework in the next chapter.

To begin with, all seven migrants express a positive perception of Berlin's diversity in terms of cultural activities and lifestyle opportunities. For instance, they use words such as "exciting" (Hyacinth, Daphne), "lively" (Eloise) and "alternative" (Eloise, Benedict) in their descriptions of Berlin's environment, all with positive connotations. The factor of having many opportunities is expressed through narratives like "I feel there's always something to do" (Daphne) or "it feels like there's always something going on and there's always something to go out and do" (Hyacinth). Moreover, the latter description is even stated as a main reason for the move to Berlin and thus, clearly shows the positive perception of this aspect of Berlin's environment. This theme and its link to the motivation for the migration is evident in more than one story. Daphne's feelings towards lifestyle opportunities show similar thoughts:

It has such a wealth with like history. There's so much to do whether it's museums or galleries or places to eat or to go clubbing. They have everything, it's very diverse like, whatever your interests are I feel you would find something in Berlin which also actually drew me to quite a lot.

Like Daphne, also Benedict, Hyacinth and Eloise mention history and the art scene in Berlin as an aspect that has contributed to their positive feelings towards the city. In this context, they mention enjoying either going to museums, art galleries, and other cultural events (Benedict, Daphne, Eloise, Hyacinth), or just feeling the flair that it gives the city (Benedict, Hyacinth). Regarding the city's past, some of the migrants also mention the sense of the former divide of the city, which, according to them, is still noticeable in terms of geographical lifestyle differences (Hyacinth, Anthony, Daphne, Francesca). An example for this is Hyacinth's description:

It still feels like there's quite a divide in cultures between what was east Berlin and what was west Berlin [...] anything that's kind of seen as a young thing, it's almost always over in the east... it's definitely got more of a reputation for like being a kind of cooler place. [...] I think it's interesting how you can still see that kind of old divide of like there's the really rich, posh area and then there's the cooler, younger area.

Her understanding of the different areas and characteristics highlights again the youth factor presented before in connection with Berlin's geographical variation and the different lifestyles in the districts. Hyacinth also mentions, like many of the other migrants (Anthony, Daphne, Francesca, Benedict), the nightlife as a huge positive aspect. In terms of freedom, Anthony mentions the long opening hours of clubs and bars and the possibility in Germany to drink alcohol outdoors. He perceives this as a positive factor that allows for social gatherings and a social atmosphere. This understanding suggests that especially young people see freedom in terms of nightlife as a big plus since they presumably constitute a main target group for these activities and offerings in Berlin.

Another dominant aspect in the context of freedom and lifestyles in Berlin is fashion. Freedom in terms of fashion is here often connected to the understanding of Berlin as an accepting place (as presented above). Benedict feels that “*people are much more accepting of alternative fashion [...] it feels like there's much less judgement for dressing and acting differently*”. Other migrants (Francesca, Anthony) mention the freedom of dressing and lack of judgement in society as well. In their view, the influence of previous experiences and comparisons to other places is evident. Furthermore, the narratives about fashion show a first indication of the aspect of less judgement in the city. This theme reappears in the part about escape from prior restraints and will be elaborated on in connection with its meaning for the individuals' lives and wellbeing in the discussion chapter.

Lifestyle preferences

In terms of the migrants' own lifestyles and changes in Berlin, the following aspects have shown importance for the migrants and are shortly presented in this section: travelling and gaining new experiences, living comfortably and having a balanced life.

The aspect of travelling and experiencing different environments is evident in many stories that have been told by the interviewees. On the one hand, the statements by the migrants suggest that opportunities for travelling are a priority in their lives. In this context, the geographical location of Berlin on the European continent is perceived as a huge advantage (Anthony, Eloise, Violet, Daphne). For instance, Anthony perceives it as very “*convenient*” and “*easy*” to travel around Europe from Berlin and Eloise says everything is “*much more accessible than when you're in the States*”. On the other hand, the experience of living in a new country and cultural environment is perceived as a positive influence on the own personal development in terms of confidence and independence (Daphne, Eloise, Francesca, Hyacinth). Daphne says that she likes a challenge, which is the reason for the move to Germany. Similarly, Eloise states that she likes to leave her comfort zone and adds: “*I think you learn a lot more about yourself*”.

Balanced lifestyle

In consideration of their own lifestyles in Berlin, many migrants also mention a balanced lifestyle as a positive factor. Benedict and Anthony mention that they live a “*comfortable*” life in Berlin, linking to different aspects such as cost of living and social and cultural environment. Eloise mentions that she has a balanced lifestyle which she enjoys compared to her live in the States. According to her, she had to work a lot more at home and did not have enough time for hobbies and friends. She expresses positive feelings about having more time and balance between studying, going out and socialising as well as hobbies. Francesca describes herself as a relaxed person who likes balance between different things in her life. She enjoys the exciting sites of Berlin but also staying at home or getting a coffee in her neighbourhood from time to time. Violet also experiences Berlin as a city with a great work-life balance which she mentions as a priority in her choice of residence. For her, the combination of high salary and cheap food, rent and childcare contribute to a better lifestyle compared to her home in Ireland. She experiences Berlin as very family-friendly and states:

It is a great city for young people but also for families. You can really have a great work-life balance. You can actually be there and watch your child grow up and be with them.

Escape from prior restraints

I observed two different patterns in the seven migration stories in terms of motivation to move to Berlin. First, some stories show a history of mobility such as moves to different places or many travels (Anthony, Benedict, Hyacinth, Violet). Their motives for the move seem to be predominantly influenced by the wish to gain new experiences and explore different cultures and lifestyles.

Second, the stories by Eloise, Francesca and Daphne show a theme of escape from home and also show much less mobility in their past. I will shortly illustrate their stories in the following to show differences and similarities.

Eloise

Eloise moved from a small rural place to Berlin. For her, politics is a very important aspect in her life, and she also studies this subject at university. She describes her hometown and community as very “*conservative*” and states that she “*felt a little placelessness*” and did not feel she belonged there. She expresses a feeling of not identifying with the place in terms of the mindset of the people that are living there. Furthermore, this aspect has impacted her relationship with her family as she mentions disagreements on political topics. For her, the move to Berlin has been necessary as she feels that she “*needed to get a lot of distance between [herself] and that community*”. She also mentions that the distance has helped her to get along better with her family. She clearly mentions that she is open to live anywhere but that she does not want to go back to the US. By contrast, when she talks about Berlin, she particularly expresses positive feelings about the city for being accepting and judgement-free:

Especially contrasted to where I come from where there is not a whole lot of diversity, there's not a whole lot of leniency with how you choose to express yourself.

In this context, she also mentions the anonymity of the urban environment as positive, as people do not pay attention to others that much.

Francesca

Francesca's case shows a lot of similarities to Eloise's story in terms of escaping home. She states that she also comes from a conservative place and that she experiences her life in Berlin as “*easier*” since she put some distance between herself and the people at home that she has a difficult relationship with. On the one hand, she also mentions differences in political views between her and the community. This also applies to her family and is expressed as a negative

influence on her relationships which has created some tension. On the other hand, she refers to the aspect of judgement and expectations by others and how this has impacted her lifestyle and identity development. She states that she has *“learned that it’s okay to cut family out of your life and cut people out of your life that aren’t beneficial to you”*. In this respect, she stresses the accepting character of Berlin and that this had helped her a lot in terms of expressing herself.

Daphne

Daphne’s story is mainly informed by a sense of escape from her home in terms of size and activities. She mentions that she does not miss the place itself but the people. However, she states that she always wanted to *“move as far away as possible”*. In this connection, she mentions that she wanted something different as her hometown is small which, according to her, makes life there boring. The aspect of small places being perceived as boring is mirrored by her positive impression of Berlin as a big city where she can always find something to do. Here, she also describes Berlin as a *“busy”* city which she sees as a positive attribute.

The three stories all show the pattern of escaping from a place. The difficulties that the three migrants experienced in these places differ slightly. However, it is interesting to see that all three migrants come from small places and regard Berlin as a destination to improve their lives in different ways.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

This last part presents findings regarding social relations of the migrants, both at home and in Berlin and how these have influenced their migration stories.

Network at home

To begin with, Hyacinth’s and Violet’s narratives demonstrate a good relationship with their families. They both state that they visit people at home frequently and that the UK and Ireland are well connected to Berlin which is a huge advantage for them. On the other hand, the stories by Eloise and Francesca, as mentioned above, have shown complicated relationships with people at home. For them, geographical distance appears to be a positive aspect of their move as they were able to reduce their contact to people that have influenced them negatively. Moreover, Francesca mentions a good relationship with some people at home but does not regard the geographical distance as a negative factor in terms of staying in contact with these people. Similarly, Anthony’s story shows another example for the indifference towards geographical

distance to the social network. He mentions a good relationship with his family but adds that, at the same time, they do not feel the need to be in touch regularly.

Concerning reactions to the move to Berlin, the stories show some differences as well. For the migrants that have moved or travelled a lot in the past, the social networks have reacted positively and supportively (Benedict, Violet, Hyacinth). By contrast, Eloise's and Francesca's families appeared to be less supportively. In Eloise's case, for instance, she had planned to move to Berlin one year earlier. However, since her family did not support her decision, she stayed and worked in order to save money and go without support.

Network in Berlin

When the migrants moved to Berlin, most of them did not know anyone in the city. Only a few knew people, but they state that this was not a reason to come to Berlin (Benedict, Anthony). However, meeting people, finding a community, and feeling integrated appears to be a high priority for all migrants. For Violet, the community feeling represents a high priority for her in a place. She repeatedly mentions that she misses the community in her hometown in which she was very integrated and active. In Berlin, she values the huge Irish community and the possibility to connect with people from home. She also mentions the Jewish community from her husband's side, with which they are also very engaged.

The neighbourhoods constitute an additional aspect in the migrants' perception of community feeling and a good social network. Hyacinth mentions a feeling of belonging in her neighbourhood through getting to know people, such as shop owners. Similarly, Benedict feels integrated in his neighbourhood due to the international community living there and Violet mentions the importance of a good neighbourhood feeling in connection with deciding where to live in Berlin. However, for Daphne, it appears to have been difficult to get to know people and she expresses feelings about not being well-integrated. As her story in terms of escaping her home has shown, she did want to leave her home because of the location. However, she does miss her social network that she has left behind there. Hence, her story shows that her wish to leave for a better location is conflicting her need of a good social network that she has at home.

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter I discuss my findings presented in chapter four in the context of the theoretical framework. This discussion aims to answer my research questions which were the followings:

1. *What are the students' motivations and expectations before they move to Berlin and how are their migration stories linked to their motivations?*
2. *What kind of experiences have the students gained and how have their experiences impacted their lifestyle and wellbeing?*

To approach these questions, I first discuss the experiences in Berlin with a focus on place attachments and the sense of belonging. After discussing experiences, the impact on the migrants' wellbeing by different factors is demonstrated. In the following part, I present and discuss aspects of identity formation and its relationship to place. This part primarily focuses on opportunities for new lifestyles and self-realisation. Lastly, I give an overall conclusion regarding the outcomes of my research for the research problem. I discuss whether international student mobility to an urban area can be studied in the field of lifestyle migration, and present the research outcomes with a special focus on Berlin as a research object.

EXPERIENCES

Varied experiences and place attachments

As my findings have shown, the feelings about being welcomed in Berlin vary within the participants' narratives. This is in accordance with Massey (2008) and her understanding that experiences in a place differ. First, the influence of previous experiences is mirrored in some of the migrants' stories about their arrival in Berlin. For instance, Daphne's and Francesca's negative perceptions of German society (*strange, cold*) indicate a comparison of German and native cultures. Hence, their narratives represent a negative perception originating from cultural differences that are informed by their past. Another example are Francesca's and Anthony's experiences with the registration process and housing market. They compare these aspects to other places they have lived in before. The comparison appears to have impacted their perception negatively as their previous experiences are presented positively.

Second, Massey (2008) refers to the changing relationship between people and places over time. One example for this phenomenon is Francesca's statement that Berlin has become her second home. It shows a close emotional bond that she has developed with the city while she states that she did not feel welcomed in the beginning of her move. This changing relationship can be

understood in the context of place attachments. As place attachment can imply both positive and negative feelings (Rose, 1995), Francesca's feelings in terms of being welcomed show a negative emotional bond in this sense. However, the dynamic character of place attachments (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014) becomes evident through her perception of Berlin as her second home. This statement does not only show how she has given meaning to the place but also how her experiences over time have influenced her feelings. The positive perception of Berlin as her second home indicates belongingness and identification with the city.

The experiences with the registration process constitute an example for negative feelings in terms of belongingness. Anthony's expression of not feeling part of the city due to bureaucratic needs indicate an outsider feeling which can be connected to Cresswell (1996) and his understanding of being *out of place*. The aspect of language highlights the outsider feeling even more as the perception of language barriers and the desire to learn the local language for a better integration in society have shown.

Another example for influences on place attachments are the aspects of freedom and social networks. As my findings have shown, the perception of freedom is often influenced by previous experiences. It is often observed and experienced in comparison with previous places of residence. The cases of Eloise and Francesca, for instance, have shown a migration motive of escaping restrictive and judgemental communities and a search for opportunities for self-expression. While they perceive their homes negatively, they understand Berlin as an accepting and judgement-free place which indicates a positive emotional attachment to the city.

Meaning of Place

As mentioned above, Francesca's emotional bond with Berlin (home) has shown how she has given meaning to Berlin as a place. I also want to connect the importance of language to how people give meaning to a place (Anderson, 2021). Due to the negative experiences during the registration process, the migrants seem to have given Berlin negative meaning in this respect. This is expressed by their description of German government employees as *unpolite* and *not helpful*. At the same time, Violet's second experiences with the registration process represents another example for different feelings towards a place over time (Massey, 2008). Her new experiences in the same place have led to a change in how she perceives the government employees and the registration process – *friendly, patient, helpful*. In addition, the positive experiences in terms of using English in other parts of everyday life and living in an international environment indicate positive attachments to the city. These experiences have produced meaning of Berlin for the migrants as an *international, diverse, and accepting place*. In connection to this,

the freedom aspects such as opportunities for self-expression, alternative lifestyles, and less judgement demonstrate what the city means for the migrants.

IMPACTS ON WELLBEING

Language

The negative feelings about the registration process, housing situation, and language barriers show the impacts that experiences in a place and place attachments can have on people's wellbeing (Devine-Wright, 2020). In terms of language, the negative impact during the registration process as well as the positive impact of the opportunity to use English in everyday life, are evident in the data. While the German language barriers demonstrate negative expressions of wellbeing in the city, the use of English is expressed as a positive aspect that contributes to higher wellbeing and a sense of belonging in Berlin.

Social influences

Furthermore, social influences on wellbeing are evident in the migrants' narratives. In this connection, Wang & Wang (2016) state that "people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by those around them" (p. 4). The feeling of not being welcomed or integrated due to people being *cold* or not willing to help, can be understood as a negative influence on the migrants' wellbeing. It results in an outsider feeling in society originating from how people interact with and around the migrants (Cresswell, 1996). Francesca's narrative in terms of a community feeling in her neighbourhood and her description of her life there as being comfortable highlights this aspect. Her positive experience in her everyday environment shows the relevance of social relations for wellbeing and a sense of belonging. This is in accordance with Rentfrow (2018) and his understanding of belongingness in a place as a factor that increases a person's wellbeing.

Del Casino (2009) mentions the importance of communities for integration. In this context, I understand integration in society as a positive influence on wellbeing. This is also reflected in many of the migrants' storytelling. For instance, Eloise's and Francesca's escape from their home communities constitutes one examples. They do not feel belongingness due to the conservative and judgemental character of the communities. On the other hand, they express positive feelings towards their lives in Berlin and a feeling of belonging due to the accepting and diverse character of the city.

The community feeling and sense of belonging seem to constitute a motive for the move for Francesca and Eloise. For other migrants, the sense of belonging also suggest a higher wellbeing in the city. For instance, Benedict feels integrated in his neighbourhood community due to its diverse and international flair. On the other hand, Daphne's feeling of not being well-integrated and her longing for her home community represent another example of the impact of social networks on wellbeing. Her case shows a negative emotional bond due to a lack of belonging which results in a decrease of wellbeing in Berlin. The importance of a community feeling is also mirrored in Violet's narrative about the Irish and Jewish community which she experiences as a huge advantage of the city for her life satisfaction. She also adds the aspect of neighbourhood communities and that they have served as a main factor in terms of choosing a neighbourhood to live in.

The nature of relationships to social networks at home are also impacting the migrants' wellbeing. The example of Francesca and Eloise have shown how their negative relationships with their home communities have impacted their wellbeing in these places which ultimately led to the decision for relocation. Additionally, the lack of support and understanding for their migration decision by their family appears to have impacted them negatively as well. However, the geographical distance to their social networks at home is expressed as a positive change in their live and thus, have impacted their wellbeing in a positive way.

While geographical distance serves as a means to escape negative influences from social networks, it is also observed in connection with positive relationships at home. While Daphne misses her home community which has impacted her negatively on an emotional level, Francesca and Anthony experience geographical distance differently. Francesca, who mentions some positive relations to people at home, as well as Anthony mention geographical distance as not important to stay in contact with people at home which indicates that it does not impact them negatively. This is in accordance with Massey's (2008) understanding of changing perceptions of geographical distance due to globalisation processes. In the context of lifestyle migration, Benson & O'Reilly (2009) also mention time-space compression and innovations in communication and transportation as factors that make it easier for the migrants to "keep in touch with friends and family" (p. 619). Another aspect that is shown here is the idea that communities and places do not necessarily are the same (Massey, 2008; Schultze, 2020). Spatial proximity has become less important for the notion and sense of belonging to a community which is also connected to Anderson's (1991) idea of imagined communities.

Gaps between expectations and experiences

Another crucial factor for wellbeing outcomes is the gaps between the migrants' expectations of a place and the experiences they eventually have made (Mashadi Bhattacharya & Kawsar, 2016). The case of Anthony has shown that his contact with German's and his perception of their friendliness surprised him. As he knew about the negative stereotypes of German culture that were reported and experienced by other migrants, his expectations had been influenced in this way. Since the negative expectations did not take place, he was surprised positively which impacted his wellbeing in Berlin. This example shows not only the impact on wellbeing but also the power and influence of social imaginaries on expectations (O'Reilly, 2014).

Another example is Benedict's case and his comparison of the housing situation to other places. His narrative shows how expectations can derive from previous experiences. It also demonstrates the impact on wellbeing as his experience in Berlin appeared to be more negative than he expected it to be. This gap resulted in an increase of the negative perception and thus, his wellbeing. Another example for the influence of previous experiences on expectations is the case of Violet, regarding the housing situation as well. While her experiences with finding accommodation in her place of origin have been worse, her perception of Berlin's housing market appears to be less negative and impacting her wellbeing way less negatively than Benedict.

The three examples show that gaps between expectations and experiences can impact the migrants' wellbeing both negatively and positively. It has also shown that both social imaginaries and individual previous experiences have an impact on the migrants' expectations of their destination.

Geographical context

Referring to Wang and Wang (2016), geographical context greatly impacts wellbeing. They mention in particular cultural differences, housing conditions, weather conditions, safety, accessibility, and neighbourhoods as main sources of influence. As the examples of comparisons in terms of Berlin's welcoming factors have shown, the migrants and their wellbeing have been influenced negatively due to cultural differences as well as the registration process and the housing situation.

The aspect of accessibility that Wang and Wang (2016) mention, is evident in my findings as well. This is demonstrated by Eloise's and Hyacinth's positive observations of the accessibility within Berlin in terms of transportation. Their experience with good connections within the city seems to have impacted their wellbeing positively and contributed to a feeling of being *in place*

(Cresswell, 1996) as it is, for instance, contrasted to isolation at home (Hyacinth). Another aspect regarding accessibility that has contributed to higher wellbeing for some of the migrants, is Berlin's geography and access to the airport. This is mirrored in the migrants' lifestyle preferences in terms of travelling as well as Violet's and Hyacinth's perceptions of being able to visit their home easily.

Moreover, weather conditions are also mentioned in connection to the migrants' wellbeing in Berlin. Here, I observed a negative impact as the darkness and cold weather in winter is clearly mentioned with negative emotions as Eloise's consideration of negative impacts on people's mental health has shown.

In terms of safety the findings have shown a predominantly positive influence on the migrants' wellbeing. In this context, the impact of comparisons with previous experiences in other places is evident again. It also shows how wellbeing can be connected to lifestyle migration and the choice of destination. Lifestyle migrants seek to improve their quality of life – wellbeing – through relocation (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Most of the migrants expressed negative experiences in terms of safety in their previous places of residence which implies an improvement after their move to Berlin. In addition, the impact on migration decisions is evident in Violet's concerns about safety for her child as a teenager. These negative feelings about safety in the future indicate influences on a possible decision to move again in the future. The aspect of safety also shows the impact of geographical variation on wellbeing. For instance, the different perceptions of safety regarding various neighbourhoods imply an impact on the choice of neighbourhood in the relocation process.

A final aspect contributing to the migrants' wellbeing is the cost of living. As the findings have shown, it is perceived mainly positively but also complex and dependent on different aspects. Different preferences seem to impact the migrants differently. For instance, Benedict's observation of slightly higher prices does not impact him negatively as he states that the better quality makes up for the price gaps. Violet's comparison of different aspects shows a similar balance between the costs which prevents higher costs, for instance for transportation, to affect her negatively. The comparisons of prices in different places shows the impact of the migrants' previous experiences on their wellbeing again. Comparisons with other capital cities highlight the impact of social imaginaries on expectations and wellbeing (Daphne, Hyacinth, Eloise, Violet). For instance, the cheapness of Berlin is not only compared to costs at home but also positively perceived in contrast to imagined costs in other capital cities the migrants have not lived in

before. This shows the connection to lifestyle migration as the influence on choice of destination by social imaginaries is a critical aspect (O'Reilly, 2014).

IDENTITY FORMATION AND PLACE

Sense of belonging, lifestyles, and identity creation appear to be closely connected in the migrants' narratives. As the perception by Benedict of different stereotypes of Berlin's districts has shown, people seem to choose neighbourhoods based on lifestyle impressions or expectations. This perception can be understood in the context of self-expression and the power of social imaginaries of a place on people's identities. People search for a place that's identity seems to match their own or support their identity development (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016). Simultaneously, as Benedict states, orienting oneself towards stereotypes may lead to the fulfilment of these in a place and thus, impacts the identity of this very place as well. The example of Eloise's preference to move to one area considered particularly suitable for young people shows her desire to identify with or through her environment. This shows a form of place attachment to these areas which "is [...] understood to be part of a person's overall identity" (Jack, 2012, p. 90).

The meaning of Berlin for the migrants as judgement-free, accepting, and diverse place helped some of the migrants in their self-development (Francesca). It demonstrates the environment's impact on the migrants' identity formation and opportunities for self-realisation (Bauman, 2007). Moreover, the migrants' positive perceptions of the presented freedom aspects of Berlin show the connection to Cresswell (1996) and the impact of common sense on people's behaviour and feelings in a place. He understands common sense as the expectations from society in terms of behaviour which impacts a person's sense of belonging in a place. My findings have shown that the migrants value Berlin's accepting and judgment-free character due to its diversity and openness to difference. This appears to create fewer expectations in terms of behaviour and lifestyle practices in society which increases opportunities for self-realisation combined with a sense of belonging. The ability to "learn about yourself" (Eloise) and gain confidence and independence (Daphne, Eloise, Francesca, Hyacinth) is a factor both for the decision to move to Berlin and the higher wellbeing.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research questions

The findings have shown the high complexity of migration stories and influences on motivations and expectations. Dominant motivations have been a desire to gain new experiences as well as an escape from previous restraints and a search for a better way of life. Previous experiences and wellbeing in the students' homes have led to expectations, motivations, and comparisons which again, have influenced experiences and wellbeing in Berlin. While the dominant aspects show some similarities between migration stories, the derivation of motivations and expectations from previous experiences show the close link between aspects within one's own individual life story.

Another critical aspect in terms of expectations and wellbeing, have been social networks. A community feeling and sense of belonging constitute a priority for the migrants and their life satisfaction. Additionally, motivations and expectations have shown shared imaginations of Berlin as a diverse, international, and accepting place, particularly attractive for young people with a desire for self-expression and experimentation with alternative lifestyles.

However, differences of experiences have originated, on the one hand, from different experiences in Berlin and, on the other hand, from influences of previous experiences. In this regard, gaps between expectations and experiences have also resulted in different wellbeing outcomes – both positive and negative ones.

Lifestyle migration research

Some researchers argue for the application of lifestyle migration to urban spaces (Griffiths & Maile, 2014; Salazar, 2014). The study by Griffiths and Maile (2014) shows that a city can act “as both an enabler of independence and freedom and as a source of constraint and limitation” (p. 154). The authors claim that urban space can be perceived positively and not only as a place that people want to escape from. It is crucial to notice that the notion of a place is always dependent on previous experiences in other places (Massey, 2008). Therefore, I argue in this context for the possibility of a desire to migrate to an urban space or escape from different places – including rural areas – to urban space. Urban space can be negatively perceived as overwhelming, busy, or anonymous, and people may wish to move to a quieter place. However, a rural area can also contain negative aspects for some people. As my findings have shown, the rural hometowns of Francesca and Eloise were perceived as places with restraints by, for instance, societal expectations, lack of spatial offerings and differing mindsets within social

networks. These were reasons for a desire to leave these places. In these cases, an urban environment can possibly be experienced as a space that opens up opportunities for self-expression and less societal judgement. Francesca and Eloise express positive feelings about the freedom aspects of Berlin, such as acceptance, less judgement, and a better balance between various daily life activities. Another interesting aspect of their narratives is the positive perception of an urban space's characterisation as "busy" and "anonymous". In connection with societal expectations and judgement at home, Eloise perceives urban anonymity positively, which shows that urban space can be a destination for an escape. Similarly, Daphne's contrasting view of Berlin as a big and busy place versus her small and boring hometown shows the possibility of a positive feeling towards busy places. These examples demonstrate the importance of previous experiences and their impacts on new experiences and differing perceptions between individuals.

Furthermore, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) state, "[t]here is hardly a desire more widespread in the West today than to lead 'a life of your own' (p. 22). They claim that this is particularly visible in urban areas and among young generations. This desire to gain control over one's own life and have new experiences, which is characteristic of modern society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), is a crucial aspect of lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Korpela, 2014). It also includes elements of freedom, particularly in terms of destination choice and escapes from prior restraints, which is also mirrored in the findings of this study. Benson & O'Reilly (2009) state that the migrants' choices tell us about their personality, preferences, and aspirations. This is evident from the migrants' narratives, as mentioned above. Daphne's positive feelings about Berlin being a big and busy city show her preferences regarding destination and lifestyle, while these attributes are often perceived negatively in other migration research (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Griffiths & Maile, 2014). In the context of individual preferences, the importance of self-realisation is also evident in the findings. Berlin's opportunities for diverse, alternative lifestyles and self-expression are connected to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and their understanding of modern society and urban environments. The migrants' perception of Berlin as an accepting and young city shows how they identify with the city. In addition, this highlights the subjective character of understanding of improvement of quality of life and individual preferences.

My findings have shown motivations for relocation and reorientation in making new experiences, searching for opportunities for self-expression and unique lifestyles, and escaping prior restraints at home. These themes are connected to lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly,

2009) and the desire to improve one's quality of life. The findings have also shown that economic aspects are not a priority in the decision process (Maile & Griffiths, 2012). The migrants express positive experiences and partly also reasons for the move in connection with low living expenses. However, these aspects are only a part of a complex of factors that have influenced their migration decision and their perceived experiences in the city.

The case of Berlin

The findings of this study have shown how people perceive Berlin and its “unique character” (Anderson, 2021, p. 50). Particularly its socio-cultural traces seem to have impacted the migrants' experiences in the city as well as their own self-development. In the context of belonging or not belonging, Berlin appears to be perceived as a place that signifies freedom. The city with its various social and cultural dimensions creates a feeling of multiple opportunities. As a city that is always in a state of change and with a multicultural environment, Berlin stands for less societal judgement and expectations (Griffiths & Maile, 2014). Instead, it means experimentation with alternative ways of life for many people. This is also a matter of power as some places restrain people's freedom to express themselves while others may promote them (Griffiths & Maile, 2014). This is especially evident from the migrants' stories in the context of escape from prior restraints. Maile and Griffiths (2012) argue that Berlin “is regarded as a city that opens up possibilities” (p. 47), particularly in terms of “individuality and self-expression” (Griffiths & Maile, 2014, p. 155). They add that “the lack of pressure and the ability to feel accepted” (Maile & Griffiths, 2012, p. 44) has been a critical aspect that increased the quality of life for some of their research participants which is similar to my findings. For many migrants, these aspects of freedom and change have constituted a main attraction and motivation to move to Berlin as well as a significant influence on their wellbeing.

Impacts on Berlin

Massey and Jess (1995) state that “*identities of places are a product of social actions and of the ways in which people construct their own representations of particular places*” (p. 134). This implies that people who migrate to or experience the city are not the only ones affected in various ways. The city itself is changing as a result of its interaction with individuals. Part of the reason for Berlin's reputation as “a place which is always in a state of becoming and never fully formed” (Griffiths & Maile, 2012, p. 46) is the city's engagement with many cultures and people. When Maile and Griffiths (2012) discuss the relevance of relationships and connections for migrants, they reference British organisations and networks in Berlin. The existence of these

cultural organisations has an impact on the city. They contribute to Berlin's multicultural landscape by bringing British culture to the city.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates that migrants do not totally abandon their previous lives and cultures. Regardless of whether they accept new cultural habits, they always bring a piece of their original culture with them to their new place of residence. "I still had [...] a 'parallel life' in the UK and maintained frequent contact [...] and kept up-to-date with British popular culture" (Maile & Griffiths, 2012, p. 46), said one of the study's interviewees. I have observed a similar example in my findings with the growing Irish and Jewish community in Violet's storytelling which presumably contributes to the multicultural and international vibe of the city as well.

When applying these conceptions of place to the example of Berlin, the composition of traces and the city's unique character and identity become evident. Berlin's history signifies an essential trace that impacts the city and how people perceive and experience the city. Due to the separation of the city into two parts, the city did not only develop two political regimes, but also two cultural systems (Merkel, 2016). These differences from the past are still visible throughout the city as also the findings in this study suggest. Therefore, the past still impacts the city's development and, to some extent, contributes to its characteristic and perception as a city of constant change and in a process of self-identification. My findings have also shown the ongoing perception of Berlin as a still divided city in some respect. These city attributes are experienced positively and appear to constitute an attractive and interesting factor in the migration stories.

As the example of the neighbourhoods' stereotypes and their fulfilment has shown, the meaning of Berlin for people is influenced by socially constructed imaginaries of the city (). The imaginaries and their fulfilment through people's decisions to move to certain areas can be understood as an impact on these neighbourhoods' identity. Maile and Griffiths (2012) mention in this context that "the city name itself and certain locations within it such as Prenzlauer Berg, Mitte, Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg function as brands for a lifestyle associated with countercultural chic" (p. 38). In addition, Schultze (2020) reaches a similar conclusion in his study about Prenzlauer Berg which has become symbolic for "an attitude of nonconformity, criticism and different alternative lifestyles (p. 286). My findings have shown that many migrants have perceived the mentioned neighbourhoods as attractive for young people and freedom in terms of, for instance alternative lifestyles and fashion. This result shows the power of prevalent social

imaginaries and how people's orientation towards these imaginaries impact both Berlin's identity as well as their own self-realisation through identification with the city or parts of it.

6 CONCLUSION

The thesis has attempted to examine international student mobility to Berlin and answer the research questions concerning connections between various aspects of the students' life stories. The qualitative analysis of individual migration histories has revealed motivations, expectations, and experiences as well as relations to wellbeing and lifestyle practices.

The globalising forces and growing global consciousness and interconnectedness appear to have influenced the city of Berlin and the phenomenon of international student mobility in multiple ways. One reason for the increase in the number of international students could be the changing perception of geographical distance to social networks (Massey, 2008). As this study has shown a decrease in relevance of proximity to social relations at home, this could constitute a reinforcing factor for mobility trends such as international student mobility. Berlin and its perception as an international, multicultural, and liberal place attract a variety of individuals with different aspirations regarding lifestyle practices and self-expression. The international aspect, in this respect, seems to contribute to an increase in wellbeing for international students, particularly for native English speakers.

Moreover, the city attracts especially young people as life in Berlin is imagined and experienced as exciting, diverse, and accessible in terms of opportunities for the development of and experimentation with alternative lifestyles. Additionally, I have argued in this study that Berlin can be considered a destination for lifestyle migrants. The study has demonstrated that preferences and motivations are highly individualistic and dependent on life histories and previous experiences.

Furthermore, the study indicated that migration to Berlin impacts the city through the interactions with people. In this respect, a growing international population contributes to Berlin's dynamic and diverse character. It would be interesting to look at the impacts on the city in more detail. Further, influences on 'locals' in terms of their everyday lives and wellbeing and how they experience changes in the city would be objects of interest for further studies as well.

The findings have demonstrated the high complexity of migration stories and their impacts on experiences, attachments and life satisfaction. They have also shown the connection between place attachments and wellbeing, particularly in terms of feeling in place or out of place. In this respect, social networks and freedom have been essential aspects for the students. In addition, the complex compositions of the city, such as the socio-cultural context, but also living

expenses, safety perceptions, and accessibility, represent critical influences on the migrants' quality of life.

Different experiences in the past appear to affect the migrants' everyday life experiences. At the same time, differing experiences among the migrants lead to different perceptions and well-being outcomes in the same place. These impacts can be both positive and negative, depending on, for instance, the relationship between expectations and experiences.

Aside from differences, the study has illuminated some similar patterns connected to background stories. An example has been escaping from prior restraints, such as outsider feelings in the home community. Social networks and a sense of integration have represented a dominant aspect in the expectations, place attachments, and wellbeing narratives.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Information

- Gender
- Age – How old are you?
- Studies – What do you study?
- Since when have you lived in Berlin?

Life/Past – Biography

- Where are you from?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
 - How would you describe your relation to your family, friends and your home town?
- Can you tell me about your educational background?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Have you lived in other places before?
- Have you been traveling a lot in the past? Do you like to travel?

Before the move – Expectations & Information & Reasons & Decision

- Have you been to Berlin before you moved there?
 - If yes, how did you experience the city back then?
- Motivation for decision
 - What were your reasons to move to Berlin?
 - Was it an easy or difficult decision?
 - Did you have alternative cities/places in mind?
 - Did you know anyone in Berlin before you moved? Did you move on your own?
- How did your family & friends react to your decision?
- What were your expectations of the city and the life before your move?

(After) Arrival – Experiences

- Mobility process
 - How would you describe your move to Berlin?
- Experiences
 - How did you experience the city when you first arrived? Was it different from what you had expected?
 - Where in Berlin do you live?
 - Do you like it there?
 - How would you describe your neighbourhood?
 - Can you tell me something about the different parts of the city?
 - Can you tell me about your social network in Berlin?
 - Lifestyle, free time, activities etc.

- How would you describe your life in Berlin?
- Do you have any hobbies/interests?
- What kind of cultural attractions etc. have you experienced?
- How would you describe the cost of living in Berlin?

Comparison to other places

- Do you miss your home town/country?
 - How is it different?
- Do you keep in touch with people from your home town?
- Would you rather live somewhere else? Or stay in Berlin?
- How would you describe Berlin?

Positive/negative aspects

- Can you think of any positive or negative aspects of Berlin?

Future

- Are you happy about your decision to move?
- Do you have plans for the future?
 - Do you see yourself living in Berlin after your studies? Perhaps directly or coming back later?
- Do you think that the experience of living in Berlin will influence your future? If yes, how?

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

Are you interested in taking part in the research project ”International student mobility to Berlin”?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to understand the reasons for International university students to move to Berlin. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The main objective of the master's thesis is to understand the reasons for International students to move to Berlin. By conducting interviews and using thematic analysis, individual experiences and migration motives will be analysed. Lifestyle migration, wellbeing and people-place relationships provide the conceptual framework for the project.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The Norwegian University of Science and Technology is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

For this research project 7-10 participants are needed to gather research data for the project. The participants have to be 18-30 years old International university students that are living and studying in Berlin.

What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in an online interview. It will take approx. 60 minutes. The interview includes some background questions about yourself as well as questions about your expectations before the move and your experiences in and feelings about Berlin now. The interview will be recorded and I will take notes. The recording will only be used for the purpose of creating a transcription and will be deleted after the project is finished.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be deleted. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Only the Master student and their supervisor will have access to the personal data. Name and contact details will be replaced with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

The participants answers will be made anonymous in the final thesis.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end *18 May 2022*. After this date, all data will be made anonymous, and recordings will be deleted.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Master student: Dana Julienne Jankowski (danajj@stud.ntnu.no)
- The Norwegian University of Science and Technology via Nina Irene Gunnerud Berg (nina.gunnerud.berg@ntnu.no)
- Our Data Protection Officer: Thomas Helgesen (thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no)
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project 'International student mobility to Berlin' and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 18 May 2022.

(Signed by participant, date)

