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Trondheim and the NTNU Campus as Places in a Mobile World

Exploring Senses of Place Among International Degree Students

Master's thesis in Globalisation and Sustainable Development
Supervisor: Nina Gunnerud Berg
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Abstract

The Norwegian University of Science (NTNU) aims to be a university that is attractive for students from all over the world. Every year, many international students make the choice of moving from other countries to Trondheim to pursue their degrees at NTNU, although they may never have been to the city before. Their choice of study place does not happen in a vacuum, but instead largely revolves around preconceived perceptions of both Norway, Trondheim and NTNU as places.

This thesis explores the notion of a sense of place, understood as peoples' experiences and bonds with and within particular locations and environments. By examining the experiences of eight international degree students, acquired through qualitative interviewing, this thesis examines how students' senses of place have developed over time, from before they moved to Trondheim to the present. This research is regarded a contribution to the body of student-centred research and to the literature on intersections between mobility and people-place relationships within geography.

A central argument to this thesis is that place is relational. This is highlighted by the fact that students appeared to construct their senses of place in relation to previous experiences with other places. Findings suggest that international degree students construct imaginative geographies of place prior to moving to Trondheim, which in some cases were significant for students' mobilities. However, expectations of a place do not always align with experiences of the place. As for NTNU and the campus, it appears that students value certain campus spaces over others, which illustrates the existence of relational senses of place in context of NTNU's campuses. Furthermore, findings suggest that students' feelings of home may be multiple, and associated with both places and people. While some students seek home experiences in Trondheim, it is not necessarily important for students associating their mobilities with a change of environment. Finally, students wishes of staying in Norway or not after their study period seemed connected to their experiences with places here. While some did not initially plan to stay but had changed their mind over time, others had experienced the opposite. Overall, students' senses of place are dynamic and multifaceted, and shaped by a combination of physical environment, interpersonal relations and intrapersonal emotions.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

EEA	European Economic Area
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ISM	International Student Mobility
NIDP	NTNU's International Development Plan 2022-2025
NTNU	The Norwegian University of Science and Technology
TA	Thematic Analysis

1 Introduction

The Norwegian University of Science (NTNU), guided by the strategy "Knowledge for a better world", promotes itself as internationally oriented university. Internationalisation, regarded as a tool to increase the quality and relevance of NTNU's core missions of education, research and innovation, is highly integrated in the activities of all academic groups (NTNU, n.d.-c). Through NTNU's International Development Plan 2022-2025 (NIDP), NTNU works to implement internationalisation-related policies that follow up on Norway's national strategies. One of the goals is to increase the international student mobility (ISM) to NTNU, and thus be a university that is attractive to students from all over the world (NTNU, 2022b).

This thesis focuses on incoming ISM and the international students who come to Norway and NTNU. International students can be considered an umbrella term encompassing two sub-groups which represent fundamentally different principles of ISM. *Exchange students* are commonly enrolled at a Norwegian higher education institution (HEIs) for a limited time as part of a study programme they follow in another country, thus having their primary affiliation with a foreign HEI. On the other hand, *degree students* come to a Norwegian HEIs to take a complete degree and thus have their primary affiliation here (Diku, 2019). Although this distinction is not always clear in policy and literature, this thesis mainly focuses on the latter group.

Through examining the narratives of eight international degree students, the main objective is to investigate in which ways they express senses of place within their term-time locations. In short, sense of place refers to "the emotive bonds and attachments people develop or experience in particular locations and environments, at scales ranging from the home to the nation" (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009). A reason for focusing on degree students is that they more often commit to staying in Trondheim for a longer period of time. Therefore, an early hypothesis was that degree students may have better conditions for forming relations with and within their term-time locations, and consequently develop senses of place. However, I have learned that scholars have questioned whether length of residence in a place has as much importance as previously attributed (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002; Lewicka, 2011), which is something that will be further addressed.

This research is regarded a contribution to the body of literature on connections between mobility and people-place relationships with special attention to the experiences of international students. Furthermore, it is a contribution to the larger research project "Campus som sted og et sted i Trondheim by" [*Campus as a Place and a Place in Trondheim City*]. By using the theoretical and conceptual apparatus of the geography discipline, this project addresses factors that will make the NTNU campus a good and important place for students, staff, and Trondheim's population overall (NTNU, n.d.-d). The project, as well as this thesis, is supervised by Professor Nina Gunnerud Berg from the Department of Geography at NTNU. Accordingly, this thesis is mainly rooted in human geography, but also draws on research within other disciplines due to the interdisciplinary nature of the master's programme in Globalisation and Sustainable Development to which this thesis is subject.

Continuing with this chapter, I will first present the relevance of internationalisation within the Norwegian higher education system and for NTNU. Furthermore, I will address ongoing legislative changes in Norway which are likely to impact the landscape of internationalisation. Moreover, I will discuss the importance and relevance of studying the experiences of international students, seen in connection to the purpose and research question of this study. Finally, I will present how this thesis has been structured.

1.1   Internationalisation of higher education

Internationalisation became a key theme in higher education policy and research in the 1990s (Enders, 2004). Unlike globalisation, often used as a collective term for forces and processes that "make the world smaller" by weakening nation-states and national borders, internationalisation refers to deliberate and desired cooperation between countries where nation states play a central role (Duncan, 2014; Enders, 2004). Nevertheless, these processes both respond to and facilitate each other, as internationalisation refers to measures taken by national authorities and HEIs to meet the challenges and opportunities resulting from increased globalisation. (Duncan, 2014; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). In a white paper on internationalisation of education, the Norwegian Parliament [*Stortinget*] refers to the following definition of internationalisation that applies to the entire education system in Norway:

> Internationalization is the exchange of ideas, knowledge, goods and services between nations across established national borders and consequently has the individual country as its point of view and perspective. Within education, internationalization will be the process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into goals, organization and action (Meld. St. 14 (2008-2009)).

In Norway, internationalisation of higher education entered a new phase after the 2003 Quality reform. The reform reflected the government's wishes to position higher education at the forefront internationally and promote cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange. After this point, the question was not whether higher education should be internationalised, but to what extent and how (Diku, 2019; Meld. St. 27 (2000-2001)).

1.1.1 International student mobility to Norway

ISM can be considered both a driving force and benchmark for the internationalisation of higher education (Détourbe, 2018; Duncan, 2014; Smith & Babich, 2021). Over the past years, NTNU has experienced an increasing flow of international students. In 2022, 4062 (9.4%) of NTNU's total 43,422 registered students were international and came from 122 different countries (NTNU, n.d.-b). Marit Reitan, current Pro-Rector for Education, has confirmed that the increase of international students is in line with NTNU's strategic goals (Moe, 2022). Figure 1 shows how the number of "foreign students" (i.e. students with foreign citizenship) registered at NTNU has developed since the new millennium, based on data from Direktoratet for høyere utdanning og kompetanse (n.d.) [1]. The figure

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[1] The figure was created by me and is based on numbers retrieved from the database for statistics on higher education as of June 17th, 2023. I used the section "Utenlandske studenter" [*foreign students*] and adjusted the table to show all years between 2000-2022. Then I chose "Universiteter" [*universities*], NTNU specifically, and downloaded the data to Excel. The table is based on the total figures of foreign students registered in the database. The Directorate notes that the reporting of student numbers has changed over time, and there may therefore be deviations in the data.

provides an impression of the relatively steady increase in incoming student mobility, except for a decline during the covid-19 pandemic due to self-explanatory reasons.
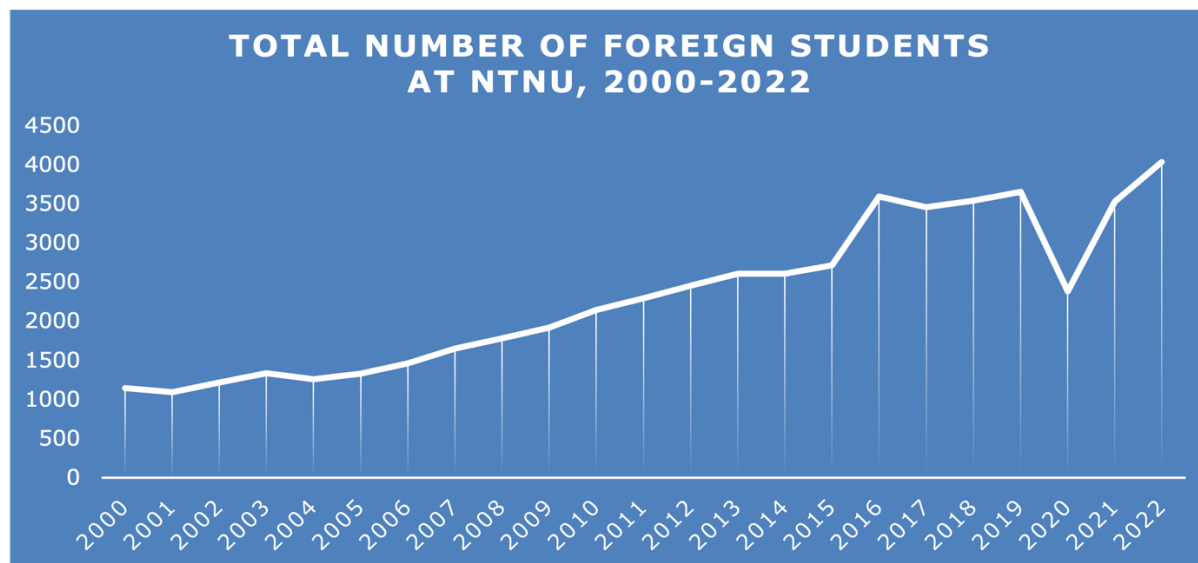
Figure 1: Total number of foreign students at NTNU, 2000-2022. Based on data from Direktoratet for høyere utdanning og kompetanse (n.d.).

International students represent a valuable asset for Norwegian universities for several reasons. The recruitment of international students is a driver for international cooperation, which is helpful in forming a basis of comparison to identify areas of improvement at national universities. Furthermore, the presence of international students is important for what is known as "internationalisation at home"; The idea that all students in Norwegian higher education should become "active, attractive and responsible students in the international society" (Diku, 2019, p. 8). NIDP emphasises that students shall develop international competence, which "involves knowledge of other societies, cultures and languages, as well as the international dimension in one's own disciplines" (NTNU, 2022b, p. 17). A diverse student body therefore important, and internationals students contribute by adding an international dimension to the university campuses (Moe, 2022). Although NTNU values the growing international student body, Reitan recently expressed that there is still work to be done to rig NTNU's support apparatus in line with this trend (Moe, 2022).

1.1.2 Changing landscape of internationalisation in Norway

In December 2022, the Norwegian Parliament adopted a bill stating that from the autumn of 2023, all new students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland must pay tuition fees if they choose to study in Norway (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2023). Until now, students at NTNU have only paid a semester fee of NOK 600 to be registered as students. As of the coming semester, it is estimated that most of the master's programmes aimed at international students will cost NOK 254,950 per academic year (Bjerva, 2023). The bill may seem counterintuitive to the government's desires of attracting more international students to Norway. Nevertheless, the current Minister of Research and Higher Education believes that Norwegian universities should be well equipped to recruit international students because the education is of high quality, and not because it is free (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2022). At the same time, the Ministry estimates that Norway will lose around 70% of

non-EEA students after school fees are introduced (Fanghol, 2022), and it is likely that NTNU will be among the universities noticing more competition than before.

The bill has triggered strong reactions and nationwide protests, and international students who are currently studying at NTNU have spoken out in the media. Based on statements from a newspaper article, it seems like principles in Norway like openness, equality and diversity are valued. Some described the opportunity for free education as "winning the lottery", and wished for future students to have the same opportunity. Others argued that international students are an important part of the professional environment, and do not only "come here to take" as some politicians may think (Javorovic, 2022). NTNU early expressed concern about the consequences of the bill and stated that the time to adjust was unreasonably short, both for the university and for the newest applicants (NTNU, 2022a).

This changing landscape of internationalisation is interesting to consider in the context of this research. Among future international students, their motivations for coming specifically to Norway and their perceptions of the country, Trondheim and NTNU might look different compared to the students who are currently enrolled. Furthermore, students who are already here may also be affected in personal and affective ways. In addition to reflections such as those highlighted from the media, the bill will likely impact the composition and diversity of the international student body during their study period. These changes might thus influence how currently enrolled students perceive Norway as a place of study, and have significance for their relations with and within Trondheim and NTNU.

1.2   Relevance and purpose of research

The experiences of international students, shared on their own terms, are important to consider for several reasons. Recent reports about international students at Norwegian HEIs acknowledge that these students' experiences might represent an underutilised resource, as knowledge about their encounters with Norwegian host universities is valuable for systematic improvement efforts of the institutions (Diku, 2019; Meld. St. 7 (2020-2021)). Furthermore, Holton and Riley (2013) highlight how the introduction of tuition fees in the UK sparked ideological debates, and some students felt "betrayed" in different ways. They argue that such debates act as reminders of not to overlook the geographies of students themselves, which are often hidden within broader discussions of higher education. Therefore, they advocate for more research *with* students to gain insights on how they feel about their student experience. Although literature has overlooked the experiences of international students in the past (Gargano, 2009), international students are increasingly treated as active interactors with a certain amount of agency (Page & Chahboun, 2019).

Holton (2015) notes that despite increasing interest in the geographies of higher education students, particularly in terms of mobility patterns, there has been a tendency to focus solely on students' transitions into university rather than their experiences *throughout* their degree pathway. Furthermore, he argues that "little is understood about how they establish any type of attachment or 'sense of place' within their term-time University location" (p. 22). It also appears that international students in particular have received little attention in literature concerning people-place relationships and the intersections between mobility and place, although these topics are widely studied. During my literature review (notably within a limited time frame), I have come across very little research addressing international students and ISM within such frameworks.

There are, however, many studies dealing with tourism practices, labour migrants, refugees and so on. Furthermore, Morén-Alegret (2013) note that there have been few studies fully achieving the analytical potential of the sense of place concept, as far as the study of migratory movement is concerned. A major reason has been due to "difficulties in capturing and evaluating the relevance of 'place' for migration processes" (p. 777). However, as the aspect of mobility illustrated by migratory movements among international students adds a complex dimension to studying their senses of place, I argue that it is highly interesting to do so.

1.2.1 Purpose of research and research questions

This thesis is a contribution to the trend of increasing student-centred research that utilises international students' own experiences, acquired through qualitative methods, as the basis for analysis and discussion. Furthermore, it is an attempt at integrating research on international students in research on mobility and people-place relationships within geography to a greater extent.

The main focus is on the notion of sense of place, a conceptualisation of people-place relationships. As such, the research question guiding this project is the following: "In which ways do international students develop and express senses of place in Norway, with particular regard to Trondheim and the NTNU campus?". Special attention has been given to how these students' senses of place develop over time, from before they moved to Norway until the present semester.

Examining how international students construct senses of place can give valuable insight into how they experience their student life within their term-time locations. Furthermore, it is useful to identify factors which motivate students to move to Norway and Trondheim in the first place, and which have significance for whether they choose to stay or move to other places.

1.3   Structure of thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each with its own sections and sub-sections. This current chapter 1 provides background information and actualisation of the research topic. Chapter 2 introduces theory on place and mobility in geography, as well as the notion of sense of place and other related concepts. Chapter 3 explains the qualitative methodological framework of this thesis. This includes semi-structured interviews as a method for data construction, a combination of thematic and contextual approaches to abductive data analysis, as well as ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the research findings, while applying theory and analytical concepts from chapter 2 in the analysis and discussion of these. Chapter 5 summarizes the main arguments and findings of this research, as well as reflections on how the findings can be applied and suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical perspectives

This chapter introduces a selection of concepts and theoretical approaches that are considered relevant for approaching the research question. Research within human geography is mainly in focus, but the discipline tends to combine ideas from other disciplines and intradisciplinary debates, and is in general "profoundly influenced by a number of impulses from a rapidly changing world" (Ira & Matlovič, 2020, p. 525). Therefore, literature from other disciplines is present in this chapter as well.

This chapter begins with a clarification and contextualisation of two fundamental concepts in this thesis, namely "place" and "mobility". Furthermore, conceptualisations of people-place relationships are introduced with further immersion in the notion of sense of place. Finally, the intersections between mobility and place are discussed to examine how senses of place can emerge and develop in a "mobile world".

2.1 Definitions

This section presents the notions of place and mobility based on understandings derived from human geography.

2.1.1 Place in geography

Although "place" is a word that is often used in everyday speech, it is also a technical keyword considered among the most important and defining concepts in human geography. "Place is one of those concepts that is simple enough until you begin to think about how people create, perceive, and transform actual places; only then does its commonsensical nature begin to melt away" (Hoelscher, 2016, p. 245). There have been various longstanding debates both within and across disciplines about what place really means. While some have viewed place in contrast to, or interchangeably with, other significant geographical concepts like space, landscape, location or territory (Cresswell, 2016), others have argued that it is unjustifiable to completely distinguish all such concepts as they highly complement each other (Agnew, 2005). A factor that has been considered distinct about place is that it implies *meaningful* centres of human experience (Cresswell, 2008). As such, place has often been described with words like "real", "grounded", "everyday" and "lived". At the same time, it has been questioned whether places are *always* meaningful as they can also be sites of (often conflictual) negotiation (Massey, 2004). Although place has a history of objections, I will highlight some ideas that appear to have gained foothold in geography and which form the basis for how place is understood in this thesis.

In 1987, as more attention was directed towards post-structuralism, spatial science and globalisation, John A. Agnew identified three primary uses of place in geographical literature; Place as location, place as locale, and the humanistic sense of place (Baldwin, 2012). In a simple manner, Agnew (2015) describes these dimension as follows:

(1) Location as the specific geographical area which constitutes the basis for economic and societal activity, reflecting the "macro-order" in a place.
(2) Locale as the setting for everyday, routine social interactions, which can be informal or institutional.

(3) Sense of place as the subjective experiences and feelings that can be induced by a place.

The different approaches reflect one of the most central questions in debates about place; Whether place is something *given in itself*, characterized by the people and things that fill it, whether it only becomes a place when it is *experienced* as such, or whether place must be seen as an *integral part* of social interaction. Rather than viewing such understandings as competing, Agnew proposed a complementary three-part definition of place that incorporated all these aspects, thus uniting understandings of place as objective/material ("location"), as intersubjective/contextual ("locale"), and as subjective/existential ("sense of place"). Based this conceptualisation, place can be said to encompass the dimensions of materiality, practice and experience. Subsequent contributions to the place debate have largely revolved around how these understandings could be synthesised and updated rather than rejected (Berg & Dale, 2004). It can thus be said that Agnew's framework has "stood the test of time" (Cresswell, 2016, p. 235).

Berg and Dale (2015) argue that understandings of place as *relational*, largely influenced by the work of Doreen Massey, have been dominant in contemporary debates on place. When Massey first introduced the idea of a "global" or "progressive" sense of place in the 1990s, it was a time when increasing globalisation challenged established views on places. As she wrote, "an (idealized) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption" (Massey, 1994, p. 146). Massey questioned previous humanistic conceptions which suggested that places have bounded identities rooted in history in more or less linear ways, and rather argued that places are products of multiple mobilities intersecting (Cresswell, 2008). The following arguments derived from Massey (1994, 1995) highlight some key understandings of place as relational:

(1) Places are open and without boundaries, as they are interlinked with the "outside". Although societies draw lines to serve particular purposes (e.g. "countries"), these lines do not embody any eternal truth of places.
(2) Places are dynamic and processual rather than static, as the social interactions tied together by place are not frozen in time.
(3) Places are mutually dependent on each other, as their characteristics are formed, in part, through their links with one another. Notably, these links can be unequal and mirror uneven power relations.
(4) People and places are mutually constitutive.

In her book *For Space*, Massey elaborates that places must be understood as "events" and that they are characterised by their "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005, p. 141). Her work has stressed the importance of "rejecting false nostalgia for pre-modern singular and coherent places, and embracing instead the culturally multiple, dynamic and connective aspects of place in a globalizing world" (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013, p. 763). Essentially, a relational conception of place involves seeing place as constituted by relationships; As a product of its connections in time and space, and not as a product of its essential self (Baldwin, 2012; Berg & Dale, 2015, p. 33).

Anderson's (2021) more recent approach to place is useful to understand how places are also shaped by culture and context. To clarify, context refers to the fact that nothing takes place in a vacuum; Things, ideas, practices and emotions all occur in context of a broader world that influences, values, and regulates particular activities and objects. Culture is considered as the things humans *do*, including material things, social ideas, performative practices, and emotional responses that people produce, participate in,

7

celebrate or deny. Together, context and culture produce "traces"; Marks or residues produced and often left in place by cultural life. These can be material and visible (e.g. graffiti, statues, buildings), or non-material and thus sensed in other ways (e.g. events, activities, emotions). Anderson argues that such traces are what constitutes "places", and as traces are constantly produced, they continually influence the meanings and identities of places. Places could thus be understood as "ongoing compositions of traces" (pp. 7-9).

Based on these ideas, I will establish some points in context of this research. First, places are understood as constituted by all factors proposed by Agnew and Anderson; Existing not only as physical entities, but as results of culture and context. People's various interactions within and experiences with places, both positive and/or negative, are what give them some form of meaning. Second, this research is mainly concerned with international students' interactions *with* place rather than the "identities" *of* places themselves. Hence, most attention is directed towards concepts and theories dealing with human experience, with a primary focus on the notion of "sense of place". Third, this research adopts the notion of place as relational, which is particularly relevant when examining the intersections between place and mobility. Finally, both Norway, Trondheim and NTNU are understood as places in themselves although they represent different and overlapping territorial scales. This understanding is also reflected in the mentioned project this thesis is part of; "Campus as a Place *and* a Place in Trondheim city".

2.1.2 Mobility in geography

As this research is concerned with ISM, a closer look at the mobility concept is appropriate. Although all forms of movement have long been topics of research within geography, "the conceptual emphasis on mobility is a more recent and important development within the discipline" (Cook, 2018, p. 137). While previous approaches were more concerned with "push" and "pull" factors prompting movement in the first place, more recent conceptualisations of mobility investigate "the nature of physical movement, its meanings and representations, as well as its non-material, affective dimension" (Anderson, 2021, p. 111). Contemporary understandings commonly reject understandings of mobility as something "in-between" places, devoid of its own effects and simply producing geographies elsewhere. It is rather perceived as a geographical agent in its own right that can produce places, social relations and phenomena (Cook, 2018). Mobility research is concerned with both human and non-human movements, and spans across a wide range of scales, forms and practices (Blunt, 2007), covering everything from everyday practices like walking to broader topics like ISM.

I believe Tim Cresswell's holistic analytical framework of mobility is a useful starting point for understanding different ways of approaching mobility. This framework encompasses three theoretical aspects which are interwoven in practice, namely movement, representation and experience. Cresswell (2010, pp. 19-20) explains these as follows:

(1) Movement as the fact of physical movement, getting from one place to another, considered the "raw material" for the production of mobility. This aspect alone does not explain what mobilities are made to mean or how they are practised.
(2) The representations of movement that give it shared meaning. For example, different mobilities can be figured as "adventure", "freedom", "threatening" and so on in literature, media, policy etc.
(3) The experienced and embodied practice of movement. Mobile practices can be voluntary or forced, which affects our experience of them. There can also be a

dissonance between representation and practice. In the end, it is at the level of the body that human mobility is produced, reproduced, and occasionally transformed. Essentially, this approach rests on thinking about mobilities as produced (Cook, 2018).

Up until now in this thesis, ISM has been used as a backdrop to explain the fact that many students move from other places to Trondheim. However, this research is mostly concerned with the last of Cresswell's aspects; How international degree students enact and experience their mobilities, mainly highlighted through the larger process of moving to Trondheim. To gain a deeper understanding of how these mobilities may be related to their experiences with Trondheim and NTNU, it is of interest to explore the feelings connected to moving, and how this mobility is shaped by themselves and through interactions with others (Cook, 2018). Worth noting, the distinctions between movement defined as mobility or as migration have been blurred in more recent years, and work on these topics has become more interrelated and interconnected (Brown & Gilmartin, 2020). King (2012) suggests that migration has been redefined as a subset of spatial mobility. Therefore, this thesis will mainly rely on the mobility concept while also drawing on relevant migration studies.

2.2 People-place relationships

All humans are in some way tied to particular places, or to some extent defined by their connections to them (Anderson, 2021, p. 50). Due to the complexity and diversity of human experience, a variety of models and conceptual frameworks have been developed to study people-place relationships (Erfani, 2022, p. 452). The phenomena has been approached in quantitative manners, emphasising joint community experiences, as well as in qualitative ways, emphasising subjective experiences of place, deep emotional ties, and individually constructed place meanings. (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Furthermore, several conceptualisations of people-place relationships like "sense of place", "place attachment", "place belongingness" and "place identity" have emerged. These concepts appear to be highly related and to some degree overlapping (Berg, 2020), and consequently, they often appear together in literature.

Questions of identity are often made relevant in literature on people-place relationships. Just as place, it has been argued that the identities of people (and places) are relational as well. In consequence they are not rooted nor static, but rather mutable and ongoing productions constituted through practises of interaction (including non-relations, absences and hiatuses) (Massey, 2004). They may also be strategic and positional, meaning that they can be enacted in particular localities where interactions occur (Gabriel, 2006). From this perspective, peoples' identities or sense of selfhood could be regarded a geographical thing that to some extent is characterised by geographical and cultural context (Anderson, 2021, p. 51).

2.2.1 Conceptualising sense of place

Sense of place could be described as the ways in which people attribute meaning to places through their actions and experiences; The process where "space", understood as generic abstraction, is transformed into "place" (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013). It results both from involvement between people, and between people and place (Pretty et al., 2003). As a result, some places become perceived as distinct from other (Cresswell, 2016), meaning that they can be compared. In emotional terms, certain places may also become "special" for certain people (Meier, 2013). Senses of place could materialise through kinship, frequent visits, everyday rituals, key events in life and so on (Anderson,

2021, p. 50). Furthermore, peoples' senses of place, built upon subjective feelings and everyday life experiences, can play an important part in the formation of their identities (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013). For example, people often introduce themselves to others through geographical notions such as the places "they are from", which illustrates how we often "explicitly define ourselves in relation to places" (Anderson, 2021, p. 51).

Some points are important to note. First of all, sense of place is not necessarily only an individual process, as feelings towards place can be shared and experienced on a social level as well (Hawthorne et al., 2022). Furthermore, if place is acknowledged as adaptive and transformative, so must sense of place. "Senses of place may be felt on many scales, and there is thus no single 'sense of place', but rather embedded interconnected feelings that may be seen in particular 'settings'" (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013, p. 778). The capabilities of place can then be influential in creating multiple senses of place (Holton, 2015), both for individuals and within a society. As such, not all places will prompt the same sense of place to all people (Anderson, 2021, p. 50). Senses of place may also be mediated, as people are capable of attributing meanings to places regardless of whether they have physically been there or not. For example, some places are constantly represented in particular ways to seem appealing or deterrent to potential visitors. This means that individuals' sense of place may change when they actually visit the place (Cresswell, 2016). Lastly, although the terms "place" and consequently "sense of place" have generally been represented with positive connotations, the possibilities of negative or ambivalent feelings towards place should not be overlooked (Shamai, 2018). Both "topophilia" (positively charged feelings) and "topophobia" (negatively charged feelings) are terms that have commonly been used to describe contrasting human emotions towards place (Munoz Gonzalez, 2005).

Notions of place attachment and belonging have often been included among specifications of concepts subsumed under sense of place (Shamai, 2018), and I will therefore make a brief clarification of these concepts. Place attachment can be understood as the affective "bonds between individuals or groups and one or several places" (Gustafson, 2001, p. 668). As for belonging, two broad meanings can be identified in general usage: Spatial belonging and social belonging. The former defines belonging as attachment to a particular place, thus overlapping with place attachment. The latter defines belonging as attachment to a particular social group. Both forms of attachments can vary in size and scale. For example, places could be both homes and states, and social groups could be everything from family to transnational communities (Gilmartin, 2017).

I will attempt to summarize how sense of place is understood in this research. First of all, places are largely (but not only) constituted through human experiences, but can also play a role in shaping them. Furthermore, humans are capable of experiencing and attributing some kind of meaning to their surroundings through involvements with other people and with places. Such meanings can emerge in both individual, collective or imaginative ways, and manifest as positive, negative, or ambivalent human experiences. In simple terms, such experiences with and within particular places are what can be termed "sense(s) of place".

2.2.2 Studying sense of place

As an analytical tool, sense of place can be useful to get under the (material) skin of places and interrogate how and why some places are important to particular people and

cultures (Anderson, 2021, p. 50). However, the inquiry and application of sense of place is as varied as the proposed models and conceptual frameworks to map people-place relationships. On one hand, sense of place has been approached in positivistic (behavioural) manners, and some scholars have attempted to quantitatively "measure" sense of place within precisely defined dimensions. Within human geography, the concept has traditionally been associated with non-positivistic (mainly phenomenological) views which do not make such attempts (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013; Shamai & Ilatov, 2005). This research thus joins the latter approach.

Furthermore, Van Patten and Williams (2008) argue that studies on people-place relationships have differed in their focus on "place attachments" versus "place meanings", where the latter is considered the same as sense of place. The authors note that although these ideas may be explored simultaneously, sense of place has commonly been operationalized through measurement approaches that are conceptually better suited for measuring place attachment. Although the present study does not resort to measurements, such issues highlight the importance of being consistent in how the phenomena are studied in relation. Acknowledging that some scholars have viewed place attachment and sense of place as separate constructs, I believe this research is best served by approaching sense of place in a holistic manner. As such, this concept is regarded the overarching phenomena that may encompass theoretical components such as place attachment and notions of belonging. Continuing with this chapter I will investigate the intersections between place and mobility, highlighted by a selection of themes regarded relevant for studying senses of place among international students.

2.3   Senses of Place in a mobile world

Place and mobility have often been considered incompatible concepts, especially among scholars viewing place as fixed or bounded in some way (Cresswell, 2008). However, contemporary theoretical understandings commonly emphasise that mobility does not "wipe out" places. As highlighted by relational conceptualisations of place, mobility and place could be seen as intertwined and mutually constitutive. Consequently, the interest in studying the relationship(s) between mobility and place has grown in recent decades. In a world where people, things and ideas seem to become increasingly mobile, places can even seem to become extra important, or important in new ways (Berg & Dale, 2015; Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013). While much literature investigates how places themselves are affected by mobility, this section focuses on connections between the practices of mobile people and their relationships with places. "Mobile people" is undoubtedly a vague term, but this means that the research presented mainly revolves around different groups of transnational migrants. The selected readings were used to highlight certain points that have appeared as relevant in literature dealing with sense of place among international students, as well as in my own research.

As the world changes, there have been significant developments in how scholars address the importance of place. In classical works from the 1970s, geographers Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph argue that the "stillness" of place is crucial for peoples' development of meaningful relations with them (Lewicka, 2011). Hay (1998) focuses on residential status and temporality as indicators for sense of place, arguing that high level levels of residential mobility in the modern society leads to tendencies for people to develop more partial or personal senses of place. To some extent, studies like the above suggest that mobile people are less likely to develop strong bonds with the places in which they are temporarily residing. This has generally been a common theme in literature, where it

may seem like peoples' attributions of meaning and significance to specific places often coincides with the formation of deep emotional attachments or bonds (Van Patten & Williams, 2008). However, more contemporary literature suggests that neither "deep rooted" connections with place, nor rejecting notions of place as dynamic, are necessarily prerequisites for people to form strong senses of place. As Holton (2015) notes, "superficial, partial or personal connections can also reveal a burgeoning sense of place for those who may have attachments in other locations" (p. 22). Gustafson (2001) argues that place attachment and mobility do not necessarily need to be regarded as opposite or mutually exclusive phenomena. In Gustafson (2013), cited by Berg and Dale (2015, pp. 34-35), he highlights four aspects of place attachment in a mobile world that illustrate the dynamism of sense of place:

(1) Both mobile and immobile people can develop emotional ties to places, but the content and meaning of these are likely to be different.
(2) In a mobile world it is becoming more common to feel connected to several places ('multiple belonging').
(3) The significance of mobility for place attachment varies with geographical scale, but empirical research is not clear as to how. However, there is much evidence that mobile people are more likely to feel connected to larger places than their hometown/village, without the connection to the latter becoming any less prominent.
(4) New information and communication technology challenges traditional understandings of both mobility and place. For instance, *virtual mobility* can lead to bodily immobile people being able to bond with places they read about or see pictures of on the internet, and *virtual places* can appear as "real" and important.

Scholars have explored the multiple attachments migrants may have with more than one nation or locality by using concepts such as transnationalism, transmigration and translocality (Skaptadóttir & Wojtynska, 2012). The term translocality describes how communities in one place can become extended through the geographical mobility of their inhabitants (Conradson & McKay, 2007). This could for instance happen in cases where migrants retain close ties with their home countries including the culture and people there, meaning that they are "embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind" (Levitt & Schiller, 2004, p. 1003). As a result, individuals may become "multiply located and placed, with strong senses of attachment and responsibility to family, friends and place" (Gilmartin, 2008, p. 1845). Importantly, this does not rule out the possibility that they may feel senses of attachment or belonging within their new places of residence, as the translocality term "recognises that localities continue to be important as sources of meaning and identity for mobile subjects; at the level of human experience, the distinctiveness of place is retained rather than eroded by global migration flows" (Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 168).

2.3.1 Imaginative geographies

As mentioned, people may develop senses of place without having set foot in that place, for instance through mediated senses of place (Cresswell, 2016) or in virtual manners (Berg & Dale, 2015, p. 35). The notion of imaginative geographies thus becomes relevant. Imaginative geographies could be described as representations of other places and their people, landscapes, cultures and 'natures', as well as the ways in which these images reflect the desires, fantasies and preconceptions of their creators (Johnston et al.,

2000, p. 372). In other words; People create representations of places based on their imaginations and/or experiences with them, and this knowledge is shaped by social, political and ideological factors such as peoples' sociocultural attributes, feelings and prejudices (Yu, 2018). Over time and as these imaginative geographies spread, these representations may transform into an expected reality and even become the "true meaning" of individual places for some people, although they do not always fully and accurately reflect life in those places (Beech, 2019, pp. 180-181). Both before and after physically experiencing a place, imaginations of that place may become "internalized and translated into people's social, cultural and spatial identity, sense of place and belongings at different scales" (Yu, 2018, p. 229).

Beech (2019) considers the role of imaginative geographies and perceptions of place when seeking to understand how places both frame and shape international student mobilities. She argues that "how students build an understanding of place and the emotions and attachments inherent within this is a key facet of international student mobility" (p. 172). A main point in her work is that international students build up complex imaginative geographies of the locations in which they will be based, even before arriving there. Several factors can play a role in facilitating and influencing these constructions. One example is internet mediated social media, which offers prospective students access to a wealth of information that may spread imaginative geographies further. Popular culture such as music, film and literature can also play a mediating role. Furthermore, past experiences may also be significant, as some students project their experiences with some places onto entirely different places. Imaginations of their future place of study may therefore be coloured by expectations created by comparing it to other places, which can become an issue when trying to reconcile the differences between these locations. Imaginative geographies can be mobilised in students' process of deciding where they wish to study, as this choice does not happen in a vacuum but is influenced through exposure of different media.

2.3.2 Encounters

The term "encounter" can be defined as "moments of geographical proximity and interaction" (Liu et al., 2020, p. 1288). However, "encounters are not only about the coming together of different bodies but are about meetings that also make (a) difference" (Wilson, 2017, p. 464). Again, the aspect of meaning is made significant. Valentine (2008) argues that geographical proximity does not necessarily produce "meaningful contact" between people, or "contact that actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respects for - rather than merely tolerance of - others" (p. 325). There may often be a paradoxical gap between values and practice, as people may behave in courteous and kind ways without it necessarily meaning that they have respect for difference. This can probably apply the opposite direction as well. Nevertheless, encounters between people are relevant to consider as they may influence people's senses of the places in which such encounters are experienced. Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) exemplify this through the experiences of a Syrian refugee in the Netherlands, who states that he really likes his town where people are talkative and nice to him, while he doesn't like other places where people are not interested in him or in speaking to him (p. 313).

University campuses have been explored as significant places of encounters. Andersson et al. (2012) explain how university campuses "have the capacity to bring very disparate groups into contact with each other". However, their findings suggest that the campus can be experienced in both empowering and exclusionary ways. As certain practices

become normative in particular spaces, students with lifestyle choices that are in line with these are often privileged as campus "insiders". Moreover, such positions frequently involve positioning others as "outsiders". The existence of such positions, although not defined explicitly by the students themselves, can lead to limited interaction between people with contrasting beliefs and practices. This study highlights how sharing a campus space does not necessarily lead to meaningful interaction between students. Students may experience both positive and inclusive encounters on campus, but also limited interactions with particular groups. How and to which extents students experience such encounters may in turn influence how they sense the campus as a place.

2.3.3 Notions of home and home-making

Butcher (2010) writes that "Whatever the theoretical position, it appears that mobility has changed the relationship between self and place" (p. 23), showing how mobility undoubtedly adds a new layer of complexity when examining these notions. She notes how the emergence of different types of mobility has brough into question whether concepts related to identity and belonging can be said to have static meanings. For instance, citizenship is not necessarily bound to affective attachments to a particular territory, and being embedded in a particular place does not guarantee a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, Gilmartin (2008) writes that the concept of belonging has offered geographers a way to ground the relationships between migration, identity and place, and been used to illustrate the complexity of migrant experiences in the contemporary world. Many scholars have explored how migrants often employ various strategies to construct senses of belonging within their places of residence. Among these, "topographies of home and homemaking" have gained much attention (p. 1842).

The concept of "home" mirrors the complexity of place. Home can for instance be material, manifesting as a physical location. It can also be imaginative, or a matrix of "shifting cultural associations and ideal meanings" (Gorman-Murray, 2007, p. 196), and a metaphor for belonging to a place (Butcher, 2010). Staeheli and Nagel (2006) describe home as a bundle of contradictions. It can conjure feelings of safety, belonging and connection, but also be a site of oppression and alienation. It can be firmly rooted in place but also an abstraction extending beyond the walls of a house. It can be fixed and bounded, but also mobile and open. Home may carry particular ambiguities for migrants who must make a new home and "negotiate the contradictions of both homes, even as they may feel they are part of neither" (p. 1599). Nevertheless, as a variety of social and special practices are carried out in the places people call home, "the embodiment of the home is highly influential in establishing a 'sense of place'" (Holton & Riley, 2016, p. 626)

Places like home may provide a secure anchor for those who are in a state of flux, and some mobile people may wish to replicate the connections they had in previous locations (Holton, 2015). Butcher (2010) illustrates this by explaining how transnational migrants "were engaged in home-making strategies deployed in an attempt to re-establish points of comfort or cultural fit, that is, to re-place home" (p. 33). She explains that such strategies were a way of managing affective responses to difference that migrants experienced in a new cultural context, which challenged their subjective understandings of identity. Although not all migrants may wish to re-place home, Holton (2015) explains that "home experiences" may still be influential for developing place attachments in new locations. Addressing student experiences, he highlights how some students construct their sense of place in their term-time location as a reaction to their home environment, by essentially making comparisons between the two places.

Some have described students' transitions from one place (their familial homes) to another (university) as a "between homes" identity or "betwixt space" (Holton, 2015; Palmer et al., 2009). As students may realise new identity developments after leaving home, they may also re-evaluate the significance of places. As a result, some students assert less dependence on home and realise that "the notion of home (and significance of place) is itself open to interpretation" (Chow & Healey, 2008, p. 371). Hence, belonging and identities can be "intricately tied to complicated relationships between mobility and place attachment and, in particular, through their changing relationships with the place(s) they call home" (Easthope & Gabriel, 2008, p. 174).

3 Methodology

This chapter discloses the methodological framework of this research. First, I describe the appropriateness of a qualitative research and clarify the philosophical assumptions that have guided the entire research process. Furthermore, methods for sampling and data construction are explained before proceeding to the methods and procedures for data analysis. Finally, ethical considerations concerning the research project, my positionality as a researcher and the trustworthiness of this research are accounted for.

3.1   Qualitative research design

Qualitative and interpretive methods have emerged as a useful way of understanding the complexities of sense of place among mobile people. Quantitative scales are simply "not as well suited, nor necessarily intended, to identify complex patterns or social construction of meanings assigned to place by individuals or groups". (Van Patten & Williams, 2008, p. 449). This study has thus adopted a qualitative approach to gain a more nuanced understanding of how international students develop and express senses of place within their term-time locations.

Before proceeding, I wish to propose some reflections on my philosophical beliefs and assumptions as a researcher, as these essentially influence every step of a research project. As a result of varying ontological and epistemological beliefs, several schools of thought within human geography have debated how the relationships between people and places should be approached (Creswell, 2013; Kitchin & Tate, 2013). I believe one of the most important things a researcher can do is to clarify their position and choices of theoretical and methodological frameworks. My approach to research has been primarily shaped by my study background in the field of social anthropology, and more recently human geography. My perspectives could be described as anti-realist in nature, meaning that I challenge notions of an omnipresent "real" world. These assumptions are embedded within an interpretive framework of social constructivism, which assumes that individuals develop subjective, varied and multiple meanings of their experiences, formed through interaction with others and the historical and cultural norms surrounding them (Creswell, 2013). This research thus values and acknowledges individual experiences while paying attention to how international students' senses of place are constructed and experienced within complex contexts.

3.1.1 Sampling and participants

Due to the scope and time limit of this study, my initial aim was to recruit between five and eight research participants. Participant selection occurred through purposive sampling and criterion sampling, two forms of non-probability sampling considered to be appropriate for qualitative research (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2021). The target population was international degree students who were currently enrolled in a full-time degree programme at NTNU in Trondheim, and who felt comfortable communicating in English or Norwegian. Initial recruitment was done by advertising the project on informational posters across different NTNU campuses and on social media. Two people made contact after seeing the poster, and among these, one person met the criteria and was selected as a research participant. Due to the low number of inquiries after some time had passed, I decided to apply snowball (or chain) sampling (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021). I asked fellow students to inquire with people they knew who might be interested in

participating. This proved to be effective as I soon later had established contact with a satisfactory number of students who met the criteria for participation.

The final participant sample consisted of eight international master's degree students. Their most relevant background information is listed in table 1. One participant was a first-year student in his second semester, one had extended his study period and was currently in his sixth and final semester, and six of them were second-year students in their fourth and final semester. They were all enrolled at study programmes affiliated with campus Dragvoll or campus Gløshaugen. In two cases, participants were enrolled in interdisciplinary programmes associated with both. To ensure confidentiality, all participants have been anonymised with assigned fictious names. Their nationality, generalised to a world region for the sake of anonymity, was considered relevant to include because it to some extent reflects the geographical and cultural context participants have lived within before moving to Trondheim.

Table 1: Participants' profile

Pseudonym	Nationality (world region)	Semesters in Trondheim (including current)	Main campus(es) of study programme
Angela	West Africa	Four	Dragvoll
Bilal	South Asia	Four	Gløshaugen
Claudia	Central Europe	Four	Dragvoll
Gerben	Central Europe	Four	Gløshaugen
Hannah	Central Europe	Four	Dragvoll/Gløshaugen
Jusuf	Southeast Asia	Two	Gløshaugen
Matias	Central America	Six	Dragvoll
Omar	South Asia	Four	Dragvoll/Gløshaugen

3.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Data was constructed through the method of semi-structured interviewing, which is the most common technique used in human geography to study sense of place (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013). Interviews can provide insights into differing meanings, opinions, and experiences within a group, and also reveal consensus on some issues. This method can also have an empowering effect if carried out correctly (Dunn, 2021), which was important for the goal of respecting participants' own views of the world.

All interviews were conducted in person by me with a single interviewee at the time. They lasted approximately between 49 and 80 minutes, with an average of 65 minutes, and were audio recorded. The interview questions were based on an interview guide (see Appendix 2) with open-ended questions. Although participants' responses were not constrained to pre-defined categories, the topics of the interview guide naturally played a guiding role for our conversations. Nevertheless, a hope was that open-ended questions would better reflect their own thought processes (Kitchin & Tate, 2013). The guiding questions were inspired by themes I identified during my initial literature review of comparable research. In the guide, these questions were organized under five overarching themes:

1. Background information
2. Mobility experiences
3. Notions of "home"

4. Social and study habits
5. Being an international student

The themes were structured in this order to somewhat resemble a life-course approach, where participants first talked about experiences from their home country before moving towards their first encounters with Trondheim and NTNU, and then more recent experiences and reflections about their student life at present. Participants were briefly informed about these topics just before the interviews began to get an impression of what we were going to talk about. However, as semi-structured interviews are open to flexibility, this structure only served its purpose as a guide. To encourage participant engagement, I asked them to focus on the topics they found interesting or relevant themselves. There was also given room to pursue follow-up questions that naturally arose during our conversation. At the same time, all topics from the interview guide were ultimately covered. This increased the comparability across interviews, which was beneficial when conducting the analysis.

All interviews were carried out at one of NTNU's campuses in Trondheim, by agreement with participants. Except for one case, it ended up being each of the participants' "main" campus (i.e. the campus which their study programme is primarily affiliated to). Apart from being a practical meeting place, my wish as a researcher was to be situated in one of the environments discussed in the interviews. Qualitative researchers have emphasised the significance of place when conducting interviews, suggesting a dialectic relationship between places and individual's constructions of knowledge and identities that constitute everyday social practice (Anderson & Jones, 2009; Elwood & Martin, 2000; Sin, 2003). An aim was therefore to potentially facilitate participants' thoughts and reflections concerning their student lives and the NTNU campus, although this only covers one aspect of this research.

3.2 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is not merely about presenting "data as pages of transcribed interviews, but to condense, synthesise, and restructure it into meaningful information, so that the reader can visualiser and comprehend the theoretical and practical implications of the findings" (Thompson, 2022, p. 1410). By deconstructing data material into its constituent components, revealing its characteristic elements and structure, researchers add a more logical and rigorous dimension to the analysis instead of relying solely on impressions and intuitions of the data as a whole (Dey, 1993).

3.2.1 Thematic and contextual analysis

Van Patten and Williams (2008) explain how some scholars have regarded sense of place research as overly burdened individualistic perspectives thinking about sense of place as a quality of the individual mind. Certain analyses of place meanings have received critique for being reduced to "overly mentalistic statements aggregated within statistically produced categories (i.e. survey work) or researcher-defined themes (i.e., in interpretive studies) that ostensibly reveal the *real* meanings of a place" (p. 450). The scholars advocate for an approach that "acknowledges the social basis of meaning yet recognizes and focuses on how individuals appropriate and use interpretive frames to explain their relationship to place" (p. 448). Such an approach is considered in line with the social constructivist framework of this study. Many contemporary studies with a similar approach have favoured thematic analyses of narratives to interpret place meanings and values, or senses of place. These studies have provided "insights about how individuals develop place meanings and strengthen place attachments, particularly

as people form long-term, emotional relationships with places (Derrien & Stokowski, 2014, p. 110). An aim has been to maintain focus on individual students' own expressions of senses of place, while also paying attention to their surrounding social context, as this is considered an influential factor for how personal thoughts and emotions are shaped and expressed. I have therefore chosen to combine elements from thematic and contextual approaches in the data analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2006) write that TA is, in short, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (p. 79). It allows the researcher to organise and describe the data in rich detail as a minimum. TA is described as flexible in nature, but Braun and Clarke (2019) note that specific iterations of TA can be more or less theoretically bounded. TA involves a number of choices which need to be explicitly considered before embarking on data analysis, and continuously reflected upon throughout the analysis process. One choice is the epistemological approach, which has been clarified as anti-realist and social constructivist. Furthermore, an aim has been to provide a nuanced account of sense of place as an overarching theme. The identified groups of themes are therefore not a reflection of the entire data set, but of themes considered to be relevant for examining sense of place (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, Thagaard (2018) presents "contextual analysis" [*kontekstanalyse*] as a method focusing on the meaning of contents in texts produced from the research project, in this case interview transcripts. This can also be described as a "holistic" or "ecological" approach to organising data. Such an approach aims at developing a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena by analysing it in the context of which they are part. (pp. 151-152).

Overall, thematic analysis has been useful to identify patterns across the data to extract themes appearing as significant for participants' senses of place, and to present the results in a comprehensible manner. Contextual analysis has encouraged a more detailed examination of how participants construct and present their experiences. Combining these methods has been an attempt at acquiring a more nuanced understanding of how participants experience and express senses of place in Trondheim and at NTNU.

3.2.2 Procedures for analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that themes or patterns in the data can be identified inductively (bottom-up, data driven) or deductively (top-down, hypothesis-driven). Although many non-positivistic researchers seem to rely on inductive approaches, I discovered that this was difficult to strictly maintain in practice. After all, existing theories and research themes have played a guiding role both in the design of questions for the interview guide and in the analysis. I therefore chose to adopt an abductive approach, using theoretical understanding as a basis for interpretation to avoid discoveries that are irrelevant to the research question. At the same time, an abductive methodology means that the researcher is not compelled to fit empirical data within established theoretical frameworks through hypothesis-testing. "Instead, abductive research aims to find the most logical solution and useful explanation for phenomena" (Thompson, 2022, p. 1411).

The abductive approach was inspired by Thompson's (2022) guide to abductive thematic analysis, which provides "a transparent, rigorous and demarcated structure to the analysis" (p. 1412). The following explanations thus reflect the steps mentioned in this guide. The first step was to transform the audio-recordings of interview into transcriptions. To make the presented findings more comprehensible for the reader, I

have corrected some minor grammatical errors and omitted certain filler words deemed insignificant, while still aiming to retain the meaning and tone in participant's original statements. I then familiarised myself with the data by actively reading it and taking notes while transcribing, as well as before and during the coding process. A code is defined as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2015, pp. 3-4). After several reviews of the transcripts, several "good codes" that encompassed the richness of the phenomenon had been identified (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The codes were further sorted into different code groups based on their characteristics, and developed into latent themes that reflected important aspects of the data. When examining relationships between themes, I found that most of my findings could be explained through existing theoretical knowledge. This research could be considered confirmatory, and I have attempted to actively use material from the presented theoretical framework to illustrate these connections.

Overall, coding was useful for summarizing large amounts of qualitative data (Thompson, 2022), for organising the material, and for extracting key themes across the narratives of participants. Furthermore, it gave me a better overview of whether participants had similar or contrasting views and experiences. Recognizing that coding may seem like a "step-by-step" procedure, it was also a highly interactive and reflexive process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For example, I often had to reconsider my recognition of "good codes" and constantly reflect on the connections between theory and empirical data.

3.3   Ethics and methodological reflections

All measures taken to ensure ethical implementation of this study were reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, which approved the research project on January 21st, 2023. The data was processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and NTNU's guidelines for data collection and storage. Before interviews were conducted, all participants received an information letter (see Appendix 1) with details about the study, how data would be processed, and their personal rights in connection to the project.

3.3.1 Reflexivity and positionality

Throughout the research process, it has been desirable to produce data in a neutral fashion with the purpose of increasing understanding of how international students express senses of place. However, as discussed, a researchers beliefs will necessarily affect the research approach as well as the conclusions that are drawn (Kitchin & Tate, 2013, p. 2). This sub-section is an attempt at clarifying my positionality beyond philosophical assumptions.

I identify as a Norwegian student who has completed her entire education at NTNU, except for the semester prior to commencing this thesis. As part of my study programme, I spent four months as an exchange intern at a Tanzanian university where I got to experience how it is to be a foreign student in a then unknown country. I believe the fact that I am a student myself, and that I had this experience fresh in my mind, meant that I to some extent could relate to the participants' situation and experiences. This made it easier to establish rapport and mutual understanding during our conversations. However, the fact that I am a Norwegian student doing research in Norway means that I am in a fundamentally different position than my participants. I had therefore prepared to approach participants with an open mind and cultural sensitivity by

acknowledging that people have varying worldviews. Furthermore, I did not have any preconceived notions that I would be a "heroic" researcher "giving voice" to a student minority, which is a somewhat naïve mindset typical for "colonialist" researchers (Dunn, 2021). However, I found myself asking certain questions that to some degree might reflect such a mindset. For instance, when asking "how it feels like to be an international student" in connection to different aspects, some participants pointed out similarities with domestic students rather than differences, in the sense that we are all "just students" in the end. This made me more aware of my position and caused me to reconsider how some questions were phrased when proceeding with interviews. Regardless of this, I have, as far as possible, tried my best to not let my personal experiences influence the data analysis process. Although the participants' own words are in focus, it has ultimately been my task to interpret them, and some assumptions might therefore have been brough into the research at some point. This is perhaps more likely considering that I had no prior experience with planning and conducting a larger research project, nor collecting data through interviews.

3.3.2 Trustworthiness and methodological challenges

As the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis, it is imperative that qualitative research is conducted in a rigorous manner to yield meaningful and useful results (Nowell et al., 2017). Like Mansvelt and Berg (2021), I prefer the term "trustworthiness" to "rigour" as it speaks more directly to qualitative geographical research as a reflexive practice. While quantitative studies may use statistical methods to ensure trustworthy research, the same mechanisms "do not apply in most qualitative research due to the context-specific and ephemeral nature of qualitative social data" (Cope & Hay, 2021, p. 10). Positive researchers may argue that findings from small-scale qualitative research are not representative for larger populations, and that engagement with participants may imply bias in questioning and answers. Although the findings of this small-scale research can indeed not claim to be representative for all international students at NTNU, such issues may be considered irrelevant by qualitative researchers aiming to promote a detailed understanding of socio-spatial experiences. Nevertheless, a relevant flaw associated with interviewing is that may be difficult to capture movement and flow (Mendoza & Morén-Alegret, 2013). I must recognise that the presented findings only represent the thoughts of participants that were shared in the exact context of the single interview. Furthermore, a potential limitation is that all interviews were conducted in English, even though it is neither mine nor any of the participants' native language. This decision was helpful to avoid potential translation errors when rendering participants' formulations. Although I did not experience any prominent language barriers in conversations with participants, this might still have limited both mine and the participants' abilities to fully express ourselves in the ways we could have done in our native language.

It can be argued that no theoretical nor methodological framework is inherently unflawed in any way. Trustworthy qualitative research depends much on the transparency of the research process and the reflexivity of the researcher (Cope & Hay, 2021). The present chapter is devoted to addressing these points. Furthermore, as adviced by Stratford and Bradshaw (2021), I have regularly checked my process and interpretations with my thesis supervisor throughout the research process. As she is a highly experienced qualitative researcher, her advice has been of great help when attempting to ensure trustworthy research. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that more measures could have been taken to increase trustworthiness. It would, for example, have been desirable to check

my text with the research participants to enhance the credibility of this research (Stratford and Bradshaw, p. 102). Unfortunately, it was challenging to implement more measures in practice due to time constraints.

4 Exploring senses of place

This chapter integrates the research findings, analysis, and discussion, seen in connection to the theoretical framework. As anticipated prior to conducting interviews, international students' senses of place are multifaceted and influenced by a variety of interconnected factors. The findings presented represent only a few aspects which do not fully reflect this complexity. Nevertheless, this chapter provides an impression of how international students' senses of place have evolved over time, and of some factors that have emerged as significant in shaping their senses of place. This is to a large extent highlighted through students' own spoken words.

The relational understanding of place is fundamental for this thesis, and documented by research findings throughout this chapter. To avoid repetition, I wish to establish a main argument here; International students' previous experiences with other places appear to be significant for their senses of places here, as this is often used a basis of comparison. Comparisons are made to highlight similarities and differences between places, as well as the feelings and emotions experienced within and induced by places. In many ways, this reflects how places are "open", interlinked with the "outside", and mutually dependent on each other as they "they gain, and have gained, their character by links with elsewhere" (Massey, 1995, p. 68).

As previous experiences are significant, and senses of place may be highly individual, I will highlight a few points that are relevant to consider further in this chapter. First of all, as all students in this research were at the master's level, they all had previous experience with being a student and with at least one university different than NTNU. Furthermore, some students had never travelled outside of their home countries before moving to Trondheim (Angela, Bilal, Omar). Others had primarily lived in their home countries, but; Some had experience with living in other countries through for instance exchange stays (Claudia, Hannah, Jusuf, Matias), and one had been on shorter travels outside of his home country (Gerben). Finally, only two students had previously been in Norway, although for a limited period of time (Bilal, Hannah). To some extent, this information reflects how much and what kind of experience students had with Norway and other places prior to moving.

4.1 Imagining Norway, Trondheim and NTNU

All students had in common that they did not know too much about Norway before deciding to move abroad for studies. Most students had never been in the country either, except for Bilal who had been in Oslo for a day-trip and Hannah who had travelled to various places during two shorter holiday trips. However, it seemed like these travels only contributed to limited impressions of certain places due to the short length of stay. As Hannah expressed: "It was super exciting moving to a country you do not really know, I think. You have heard of it a lot, but you do not really know it. And yeah, you do not know people on the place." Nevertheless, it seemed like most students, regardless of having been here before, had in different ways established senses of Norway, and even of Trondheim and NTNU specifically, before moving here. This means that most students' first encounters with these places were in imaginative ways. This section will focus on the various ways in which students appear to have constructed imaginative geographies, and how these constructions may relate to their mobilities and senses of place.

4.1.1 Influences from other people

Some students had seemingly acquired their initial impressions of Norway and Trondheim through the first- and second-hand experiences of other people. As such, their senses of these places were initially built on mediated knowledge. Common for all these students was that they were considering different countries in which they could pursue their studies, but not looking at Norway specifically. Although not everyone explicitly talked about their own perceptions of Norway before moving, they talked about how they had heard good things about Norway from relatives and friends. It seems like the impressions gained from these people influenced their imaginations of the place in different ways.

As a first example, Claudia stated:

> I have never been to Norway before, but I have always heard it is super nice. And I have heard so much of like… from friends who have been here before and everyone is like 'yeah, I think you could really like it there'. So I was like yeah, you know, just give it a shot and see if I like it or not.

These mediated impressions thus appear to have made her more inclined to move to Norway. In a similar manner, Bilal stated:

> My family, they wanted me to move to Norway, so.. that is why I am sitting here, I would say […] Actually, we do have like family friends in Oslo, they have been there since the 1980's. So they have been living there for quite a while, and we got to know.. My mother, she always heard good things about Norway, so she was too much interested for me to move to Norway. So yeah, that is why I came to Norway. Because I had options either to go for Germany or Italy as well for my master's, but then I opted to come to NTNU.

In his case, the decision of moving here was seemingly more directly influenced by other peoples' perceptions of Norway. For Angela, her first impressions of Norway were acquired through her cousin who studied here. Although she initially did not know in which particular country her cousin was, she reached out to hear about her experiences with living abroad, knowing that she herself wanted to move from her home country. Learning that her cousin was in Norway, she asked how the country was like. "She told me it is free here and then.. this and that, 'it is a very peaceful country'". It appears like her initial sense of Norway emerged at this point, based on positive impressions mediated by her cousin. This seemingly had an impact on her motivation for moving to Norway, as she shortly after this conversation recalls telling her partner that "Now I know the country, I want to go to Norway". Angela immediately looked into Bergen, where her cousin was residing, and applied to a university there. However, her cousin later told her about other optional study towns such as Trondheim, and also specified how she felt about Bergen in particular. "My cousin, who had encouraged me to choose Bergen, was now telling me 'It rains the whole day in Bergen, Bergen is so boring'. And I was like 'Why did you let me choose that?' [chuckles]". She then got connected to an acquaintance who was studying at NTNU in Trondheim.

> I called him, and he was like 'Bergen and NTNU, I advise you to take NTNU, honestly, because NTNU has a lot of partnerships', you know. And 'Trondheim itself has been named as like an international city'. He felt I would feel more at home in Trondheim, you know, because you are among other international students like yourself. So.. more than in Bergen, even though Bergen has international students, but in Trondheim there's more of it. That's what he said. […] And then I chose NTNU.

After learning more about Norway and people's experiences with different tows, it seems like her initial sense of Norway at this point evolved into more localised and ambivalent

senses of place based on mediated impressions that were no longer exclusively positive. Although her sense of Norway as a whole seemed to be somewhat unaffected, she became more inclined to move to Trondheim versus Bergen. An emotional dimension was also involved, as she got the impression that she would feel more "at home" in Trondheim.

The presented examples illustrate that positive senses of place can be acquired in imaginative manners through mediated experiences of other people. Furthermore, these accounts suggest intricate connections between imaginative senses of place and students' motivations for moving to Norway or Trondheim specifically, although it must be noted that the places in themselves were not necessarily their only motivation for moving. However, it is evident that many students have confidence in other people's opinions and knowledge, meaning that this can be influential for their decisions of moving to Norway. As such, ISM can be closely tied to imaginative geographies of place. Furthermore, Angela's case illustrates how different types of mediated experienced may contribute to a more nuanced sense of Norway, as she developed a negatively charged sense of Bergen compared to a positively charged sense of Trondheim, which again made her opt for the latter.

4.1.1 Technology and media

In some students' cases, it seemed like technology and media had also played important roles in their constructions of imaginative geographies of places.

Omar explains how he ended up doing his master's in Norway based on his fascination for Scandinavia:

> I wanted to do my master's abroad, and I was like, OK, but where am I really interested in going? And I decided that it would be in Scandinavia. Because I had this huge, I don't know, obsession for Scandinavian culture. I think it started because of my favourite band, Opeth, which is a Swedish band. So that gave me like a lot of.. interest in to going to Sweden. So I kind of worked for the scholarship they have in Sweden.

Unfortunately he did not qualify for the scholarship, and continued:

> So I was like, OK, Sweden is out of the picture, what other Scandinavian countries can I try? And then I was like, OK, let's try Norway. And that's how kind of my.. you know, my Norway story began.

Although Omar stated that "there are other countries that I could have gone to, but I was never interested in any of them", he specifies that a reason for choosing Norway specifically was based on the free tuition, as he would no longer need a scholarship by coming here. Other than his interest for Scandinavia in general, it does not seem like he had many impressions of Norway from before. He proceeded to do thorough research online to find out where he wanted to go, reading about every major city and universities in Norway. At this point, it appears like his senses of places in Norway emerged.

> I wanted to go to University of Oslo really badly, because that is the capital city. But then the more I looked into it, the more I realized that Trondheim is a better city for students. I was initially very disappointed that I could not go to University of Oslo that year, because I had to graduate first before I could apply, and I did not graduate yet, so Oslo was out of the picture. So I had to convince myself that, OK, I will try for NTNU. But then the more I looked into it, the more I realized that OK, NTNU sounds perfect. Like, the programme is perfect for me, the city sounds amazing. And then I was like, OK, just.. I was kind of like slowly building up myself to it.

When asked why he chose NTNU, he said one reason was that "the [study] programmes at NTNU seemed way more appealing than the programmes in the other universities", among other things that factored in. Overall, it appears that the positive impressions he gained through researching Trondheim and NTNU online made him eager to move and pursue his education in these specific places.

While looking for where to study abroad, Bilal was scrutinising his universities preference online, and then learned about NTNU:

> Then I got to know about NTNU as well. So I just applied for NTNU and other universities as well, and I got admission to NTNU. […] I read online that NTNU has a very good reputation for engineering and technology degrees.

He also had the impression that NTNU had a very good history and was among the most popular universities in the country. Later he explained how going to a reputable university made him feel a sense of pride, and this factor thus seems like an important motivator for him. Since the impressions he got from NTNU through online research fulfilled this criterion, he chose to apply there.

Angela also talked about how she and her partner went online to do research after she initially gained a good impression of Norway by talking with her cousin who studied here. She also explained:

> [My partner] also went online to research and he was like 'Norway is really cool. I researched, it's one of the best countries for family and everything. I think you should go to Norway'. And yes, I think I had Finland too. But he preferred Norway over Finland. He showed me a whole lot of these, you know, these people that research about countries, the ranking and all that. You know, it was topping up in everything, and we just wanted a country that was very peaceful. And so I think that was one of the reasons how I got to know [Norway], yeah.

As she read good things about Norway which seemingly fuelled her expectations, it is not surprising that she was eager to study in that exact place. After getting admission to NTNU, she prepared for the move by continuing her research on Norway online:

> When I got the visa, I was now reading about how the country was, I was watching YouTube videos. How to dress in Norway, you know, the layers, what to help you with the weather. And I was looking at the food, some of the food they have. I was looking at the culture. How are the people, how is it like.. you know, how receptive they are with foreigners and all that. So I was just reading around and also trying the language here and there, you know, some few things I could know.

All these examples illustrate how technology and media, just as people, are also arenas for mediating imaginative senses of place. In Omar's case, his love for music triggered a fascination for Scandinavia that made him want to move here, although Sweden was originally the preferred destination. Nevertheless, for all these students, reading positive things about Norway, Trondheim and/or NTNU made them eager to move to these exact places instead of other.

4.1.1 Expectations of similarity

In contrast to the examples above, some students had not really researched Norway before moving here. Their imaginative geographies rather seem to have been based on expectations that Norway would share similarities with their home countries.

For instance, Claudia stated the following when asked whether she thought Norway and her home country in Central Europe were similar:

> I actually did not even think about that too much when I came here, because I was like, yeah, you know, it is Norway. Like, how different can it be, kind of? [chuckles]. So I did not really read up on anything or whatever. Maybe other international students would do if they come from further abroad.

Similarly, Gerben expressed that he expected Norway to resemble his home country in some ways:

> I came to Norway thinking that Norway, just like [Central Europe], was a.. like, a hyper modern or hyper organised country. It's not organised at all [chuckles], I am sorry. […] I think like, organisation wise, [Central Europe] is really strict and bureaucratic, and Norwegians are a bit more loose.

This was mentioned in context of an issue he had encountered during the university admissions process where he struggled to get in touch with NTNU to resolve it, as well as other experiences he had after arriving in Norway.

For these students, it seems like some aspects of their imaginative geographies of Norway were constructed in relation to their home countries by using these as a basis of comparison. This also appears to coincide with the fact that they came from countries that are geographically and to some extent culturally "closer" to Norway as compared to other students in this study. Interestingly, the students referred to in the previous sub-section came from countries "further abroad" in Claudia's terms. This may suggest that students who feel more "distant" to Norway, or generally have little prior knowledge of the country, may construct their imaginative geographies of the place in different ways than those who are "closer". The fact that the latter group sensed Norway in relation to their home country to a greater extent is perhaps not surprising, as it is relatively common to expect that countries that are geographically close to each other share more similarities than countries that are further away. This is likely a reason for why students coming from other continents did not make comparisons in the same way, but rather relied on other sources in their constructions of imaginative geographies.

4.2 Encountering Norway and Trondheim

This section mainly focuses on students' encounters with Norway when first arriving. Where applicable, students' initial experiences are seen in connection to their current impressions to provide a better picture of how their senses of place have evolved.

4.2.1 Geographic characteristics

Geographic characteristics encompasses students' experiences with the broader physical characteristics of the place and environment, both natural and man-made. Several students highlighted factors such as nature, climate and weather conditions in recollections of their first impressions of Norway. Jusuf noted that Norway was "very pretty" and that "the air is very nice". Omar stated that "the sun was setting at ten o'clock at night or something, that is unheard of for me". Not surprisingly, Bilal experienced Norway as "quite cold" compared to his home country in South Asia. In contrast to Bilal, Omar and Claudia appeared surprised at how warm it was when they arrived. This element of surprise could be connected to a common assumption that Norway is a sort of "winter wonderland", which could be explained as part of widespread imaginative geographies of the place. Furthermore, Norwegian nature was also a factor

that stood out for many, in different ways. Omar talked about when he arrived in Norway via plane, and that his first impression of the country stood in stark contrast to what he experienced earlier on the trip:

> I transited through Istanbul and I saw that Istanbul is just like full of buildings. And then when I flew over Oslo, I am like okay, just forest everywhere. I am like, you know, 'what village is this'? [chuckles] That was very strange.

On the other hand, Hannah stated that she was impressed by the nature, elaborating that:

> Just the bus from the airport to Trondheim, I was like 'Oh wow, there is a river. Oh wow, there is a small valley'. And I was like just super impressed by everything, because we do not have that back home. […] Norway was pretty green, and the fjord was nice. So it was cool. And that you could go outside, just for a hike, and you are still next to the city, but you are.. It is more nature than I am used to.

Although she was initially impressed, she also talked about how her view had changed:

> And not I am like 'what, come on', it is just.. It changed. The view, how you see things […] You get used to it. I mean, I still appreciate a lot of things and I know that it is not what I am usually used to back home. And I also see it every time that friends or family visit me, like they say 'oh, the houses have so nice colours!'. And I am like, 'okay.. like, this is normal, that they are blue and red and yellow'. And they are like "Noo, it is not" [chuckles]. So, for example, all those things that kind of create this typical stereotypic Scandinavian life, and how Scandinavia looks like. But you get used to things of course. But yeah, sometimes I still do realise that it is not normal. And that, yeah, it is nice to live in this.

Some students talked about surprises related to infrastructure as well. While Hannah was taking the bus from the airport, she noted the following:

> I was so surprised by the roads. That they.. like the concrete of the roads was so damaged [chuckles]. I saw it and I was like 'huh, am I in South America? What is coming?'. But then after the first winter, I realised aaah OK, makes sense how they look. But I remember this thought, and yeah, I was shocked first, but now it's just a super fun fact.

Gerben arrived to Norway by car, and remembered being lost soon after driving off the ferry:

> Like, your motorways are apparently underground in big cities. We don't have that, so that was a bit of a surprise, I could not find it. But other than that.. It was really crowded in Oslo, it was very hard to drive through Oslo.

This was stated in connection to his expectations of Norway being "hyper modern" or "hyper organised" just like his home country, and it appears that these assumptions led to some initial surprises. This was also the case when he encountered the Norwegian bureaucracy, which made him "stress in the beginning a lot". It appears that Claudia experienced a similar gap between expectations and encounters, as she stated:

> Coming here, I noticed a lot of things are different. I think it is not very like, you know, obvious things, I think it is just smaller things you sometimes cannot even really describe. But I think in that way I was like oh yeah, I see Norway is very different from the way in [Central Europe].. uh, like in [Central European].. like, yeah, places. […] I was surprised actually of how different I think sometimes life was here, because I did not really consider it.

4.2.2 Social and cultural environment

Although both Claudia and Gerben noticed some differences between Norway and their home countries in Central Europe, which led to initial surprises, they both emphasised how social and cultural differences were not very prominent. Claudia stated:

> People wise it is just.. a different vibe, I guess, or people have different.. I mean, if you want to talk in stereotypes, but they are just slightly different, it does not mean that it is like better or worse.

Gerben suggested that geographical and cultural distance between places plays a role when it comes to experiencing culture shocks:

> If I were to come from a country as Pakistan, Bangladesh or Indonesia, I think I would find a lot of differences with Norwegian culture. But as to [European] countries […] I do not think there is a lot of difference between the two except for funny quirks.

Jusuf, Bilal and Omar described their first impressions of Norway as "great" (Jusuf), "good" (Bilal) and "exciting" (Omar). They all spoke about the social and cultural differences they experienced in relation to their home countries in Asia, and it appears like some things were significant for their senses of place. For instance, Jusuf stated:

> I got here on a Sunday, and I was not aware that all stores were closed on Sunday. So that was interesting [chuckles]. Fortunately, I found Bunnpris, it was open in Moholt, so I had something to eat [chuckles]. It was an interesting experience, because I decided to "oh, this is my first day, I will take a walk through and look at places", but nothing was open.

This surprising local custom thus prevented him from exploring Trondheim as much as he wished when first arriving, and was perhaps a factor limiting his initial sense of the places here. The topic was brough up again when he was asked about challenges with being an international student, as he pointed out that he felt "very limited in things to do on Sundays, in terms of places to go".

When moving to Norway, both Bilal and Omar initially landed by plane at the Gardemoen airport right outside of Oslo. As mentioned, Bilal had also been in Oslo one time before. The fact that they first encountered these places seems to have impacted how they later perceived Trondheim and life there. Bilal described Oslo as "lively" just as his home city in South Asia, which was contrasted with how he initially and currently perceived Trondheim as "very calm" and "quite different" compared to Oslo. Omar's was initially struck "by the fact that Norway is so empty", as there were "so few people, especially in Gardemoen". He stayed at a quarantine hotel for the first ten days, stating that "I was super excited to be there. Like.. just exploring the whole place, everything seemed so strange". When he later arrived in Trondheim, he noted that the city was quite different from Oslo, but not too different from Gardemoen "in terms of the view and scenes". Still, he was "a little startled when [he] got here for the first time", as there were suddenly a lot more people and he needed to "get to know another place all over again". However, he "got used to it super fast".

Angela spoke about how she was happy when arriving, and stated that "I was just admiring the country and, you know, making comparison from where I'm coming from. I was like, why can we not be like this?". Elaborating on how she felt about coming to Norway, she referred mainly to social factors that were perceived better in Norway than in her home country:

> When I moved.. initially, it was just come to study and go back home. But when I moved here, I saw a whole lot of difference. I mean, the peace. The regard for family. The social

support system for children. You know, here you even see a five year old child going to school alone. And I mean, nobody cares. But back at home, you can't let your child go to school alone now. He might not come back. Yeah, so.. When I got here, I was like, 'No, I love Norway'.

Furthermore, she stated that her encounter with Norway was better than expected. This was because she early connected with people from her home country in Trondheim, who had shared their own impressions:

The impression they gave, even before I started, was like.. you know, 'These people will never accept you'. Unfortunately, that is the impression they were given. 'No matter how hard you try, they will never accept you. It is better.. you just come and focus on.. if it is money you are coming to find, focus on it'. I am being very frank and plain, that was the advice I got from those that I met at that time, the very first people. […] So, I was so confused because it is totally different from the impression I got. So I was like, OK, it is fine. I mean, they shared their opinion. But it was not aligning with what I wanted, because that is not why I came here.

She decided not to listen too much to these people, but rather give it a chance. She later came in contact with another person from her home country who denied these claims and provided some good advice. Based on this along with her choice of remaining open-minded appear to have prevented these negative impressions from impacting her positive sense of Norway. This account shows that mediated experiences with place do not always translate to peoples' own experiences, as these are highly individual. Nevertheless, findings have previously shown that mediated experiences of other people can be highly influential for peoples' sense of place, at least in terms of imaginative geographies. Experiences like the one Angela shared could therefore have significant impacts on some people.

4.3   Experiences with NTNU and the campus

The students shared many thoughts about being an international student at NTNU, NTNU as an institution, and the NTNU campus. Many of these experiences might have had significance for their senses of place at different scales, especially considering that NTNU as a whole was sometimes referred to as a place by students. Nevertheless, I have chosen to mainly focus on students' perceptions of and experiences with NTNU's campuses. As these are rooted in specific locations, factors related to students' senses of place unfolded more clearly in these accounts.

4.3.1 Use of campus

It was evident that all students had spent quite a lot of time on at least one of NTNU campuses during their study period. Although the frequency had varied for some due to different reasons, all students appeared to have some form of relationship to the campus. Since NTNU has ten campuses in Trondheim (NTNU, n.d.-a), students naturally spent more time on some campuses than others. In most cases, the campus that their study programme was associated to was used the most. An exception was Matias who more often than the others changed which campus he used, stating that he got "anxious when it has been too long in one place".

The ways in which students utilised the campus proved to be varied. In terms of studying, some expressed that they preferred to be at campus rather than at home (Angela, Claudia, Hannah, Matias, Omar). One reason was to separate work and leisure time (Angela, Matias, Omar). Another was that students felt better able to focus on campus because they "feel like [they] are a student" (Angela) or get "in a mood for

studying" (Matias), as well as the fact that one "can see other people around doing the same thing" (Claudia). Other students preferred to study both at the campus and at home, depending on the task they needed to accomplish (Bilal, Gerben, Jusuf). These students felt more comfortable or effective when working alone in a quiet place, which did not preclude that fact that they enjoyed working with fellow students sometimes as well. Furthermore, the students were asked about whether they perceive the campus to be a place for work or socializing, which also led to differing interpretations. Gerben stated that:

> I never hang out at campus. I go for lunch with people, just to make sure I see them every once in a while. […] But no, I would not even know where you could hang out on campus. […] If I go to campus, it is mostly for school.

In a similar manner, Bilal expressed:

> I do not recall that I have spent any social time on campus […] I am social in a sense with my class fellows and with my colleagues, I would say. But for activities, if you are talking about activities, I very rarely come to campus. But otherwise I am just here for, you know, my work and that is it.

Meanwhile, some students appeared to place more equal emphasis on the social and study-related. Jusuf stated that having people around is nice, as "it is a good balance of socializing and studying". Similarly, both Hannah and Matias stated that they enjoyed meeting up with people on campus, while at the same time appreciating the campus as a place for work. The same applied to Omar, who also noted that the fact that his friends are also on campus makes it easier for him to meet them during breaks and such. Claudia, who spends "quite a lot" of time on campus for studies, seemed to have the same opinion. She expressed:

> It is just very easy, because.. especially having one campus where most people go to, it is like, you know, you can.. even if you have like different things to do, you can always meet up for some breaks. So I think that is a very nice place to be social at.

Based on these accounts, it seems like the majority of these students value the campus as a suitable setting for work, but also its ability to facilitate social encounters.

4.3.2 Perceptions of campus spaces

Although most students usually spent most of their time on one campus, they had all been to others as well. Experiences with a variety of campuses made them able to identify certain places, both campuses overall and places within the campuses, that were perceived as preferred or not preferred. This fact highlights the existence of a relational sense of place in context of NTNU's campuses. I have used this as a starting point for examining factors which may be significant for students' positive, negative or ambivalent evaluations of these places.

During interviews, I asked the students if they had a preferred campus. In some cases, their answer corresponded with the campus that they used the most (Angela, Claudia, Gerben, Jusuf, Matias, Omar). However, answers were also more complex. For instance, many students highlighted different qualities of various campuses, both when answering this question and in other parts of our conversations. As an example, Bilal stated that "every campus is good, regardless of being my preferred one". He explained that he liked the architecture of Kalvskinnet and Dragvoll but highlighted that Gløshaugen is the largest and oldest campus, and that in terms of time spent, "Gløshaugen is the best one". Also pointing out that Gløshaugen is a large campus, Gerben explained how he

liked certain buildings on campus but not others. Nevertheless, five main factors emerged as significant for students' evaluations of campus spaces: (1) Practicality; (2) Surrounding environment; (3) Campus facilities, and; (4) Social environment, and; (5) Sense of belonging. Noting that some factors are interconnected, and that not all factors were relevant to all students, I will further explain what these entail.

The first factor was identified as all students talked about convenience, or used the word "practical" (Claudia, Jusuf, Matias), when describing why they preferred certain campuses. Familiarity also played a role for some, as most of their study-related related activities such as lectures had occurred on a particular campus. Therefore, they knew these places better than other (Bilal, Jusuf, Omar). Accessibility was also highlighted, as some students seemingly preferred going to campuses that were close to their accommodations (Angela, Hannah). Furthermore, some explained that they valued easier access to necessary facilities (Jusuf), including study-specific spaces such as Department offices and reading rooms (Claudia, Gerben, Hannah).

The second factor was made clear when some students emphasised the significance of the environment on and surrounding the campus. Comparing Dragvoll to Gløshaugen, Hannah described how "the vibes are really different". She always felt "super chilled" at Dragvoll, and more pressured to work in Gløshaugen among all the natural scientists and engineers "who are super clever", noting that she appreciated both sides. Similarly, Claudia felt that Dragvoll had a "chilled atmosphere" that was "not as stressful" compared to Gløshaugen, which she enjoyed. She also appreciated the fact that Dragvoll is located a bit away from the city centre and closer to nature, as she was able to "go for a walk in the breaks and just being out in the forest around the fields". Omar also appreciated Dragvoll's proximity to nature, and explained how he could not process academic material unless he goes for a walk. He stated that "that little walk clears up my head and I can actually think of different ideas and be creative […] And that does not happen at Gløshaugen". On the contrast, some preferred the campuses that were closer to the city centre, namely Gløshaugen and Kalvskinnet. Matias liked these campuses because "when you go out, you feel like you are still in the city", and "there is more movement, there is people, there is life". Reflecting on his preference, he stated:

> I feel Dragvoll is way too far. [...] I like organic spaces. And for me, going so far away and going out and there is absolutely nothing around.. it is, like, bizarre. So, I do not know, I do not enjoy it. [...] Like, it is just surrounded by forest. Maybe it is because my uni was not like that back home. Maybe if I started going to uni here, I would not feel it is so weird.

Previous experiences with other places may thus also influence personal preferences.

The third factor addresses the campus layout and available facilities, which were also reasons for why students preferred to be in certain places. At Dragvoll, Claudia felt that it was "easier to overlook everything". This was supported by Omar, who stated:

> Dragvoll feels like one single unit, so that I would say it is easier to bump into more people, because everyone is in the same building, and there is like one central place to eat, one central place to chill, and I prefer that.

In contrast, Gløshaugen has a very different layout. Omar explained how his view on these two campuses had shifted:

> I would say I was drawn towards NTNU because of Gløshaugen. And I was super disappointed when I realised that my main campus was Dragvoll and not Gløshaugen. But then when I came to NTNU, I realised that Gløshaugen is very separated into random

buildings. So it does not feel that big, because you do not really have any reason to go to all the other parts of the building.

This made him feel that he missed out on many connections or opportunities. It seemed like Bilal was of another opinion, as he stated that "there are so many different buildings in one place [in Gløshaugen], and you can see a lot of people there". Nevertheless, challenges with the campus layout was also addressed by Gerben, who expressed that both Dragvoll and Gløshaugen felt like confusing "mazes". He explained how a probable reason for this opinion was that his previous campus in Central Europe was more easily navigable.

Certain facilities within the campus seemed to be of special significance for most students, either because they regularly spent much time there or because they were valued in different ways. Some that were commonly mentioned were private study rooms, labs, cafeterias, libraries, social spaces and co-working spaces. Angela expressed how this made her value the campus in a positive way, as she stated: "We have everything here [on Dragvoll], what do we not have? We have everything, we have our canteen, the library.. So I love Dragvoll". Similarly, Claudia had the impression that Dragvoll had "a lot of facilities" compared to other campuses. Hannah stated that she appreciated many facilities at NTNU, and especially highlighted coworking spaces and places where students socialise and "just chill". This made her "really feel that the university cares about you as an individual, and not just a student who is here supposed to study". For the students on Gløshaugen, lab facilities appeared to be of special importance. Bilal explained how he enjoyed working at his lab because he does not "clash with other people while working", as everyone had their own space and equipment. He noted that he did not feel attached to any places in Trondheim except for this particular lab, which he thought might be connected to the fact that he spends much time there. He stated that "I know I have to work there, actually, to get my thesis. So yeah, I think I am a little bit attached to my lab, or my working space". Furthermore, several students used their previous experiences with other universities as a basis of comparison. Some expressed that NTNU has facilities they really appreciated, especially since their previous campuses did not have similar offers to the same extent (Angela, Bilal, Hannah, Matias). On the contrast, Gerben perceived his previous campus as "way better" because it had a more "organic structure within" with many seating areas in common spaces. Although he specified that this was not completely lacking at NTNU, he typically needed to book a room instead of "just sitting down somewhere", which he felt was counterintuitive to the "Norwegian spirit". At the same time, he was the only student who seemingly did not have any pronounced places of preference on campus. He stated: "I do not think I have spent enough time here to have a favourite place. I just spend my mandatory hours here, which I need to do for my study, and then I go back home". This highlights how temporality might have significance for some students' senses of place. Time spent, or not spent, on a campus or certain places on campus might be connected to students' senses of place attachments, which was made clear in Bilal and Gerben's accounts. It is also illustrated by the fact that many view the campus they use the most, and know well, as their preferred one.

The fourth factor was made clear as many students appeared to prefer campuses that facilitated meaningful encounters. Omar stated that although he knew many people at Gløshaugen, he did not meet them as often as in Kalvskinnet or Dragvoll because people are too separated. Therefore, he preferred going to the campuses where it was easier to meet people. On the contrast, Bilal explained that although his friends were spread

across different buildings at Gløshaugen, he often met them when walking in common areas outside. Therefore, he was able to "always have interactions at Gløs". Claudia, Hannah and Jusuf also explained that most of their friends mainly went to one campus. Because of this, Jusuf felt that there was "not much of a reason to go to any other campuses". For Claudia, being in the same campus as friends meant that did not have to "do breaks all by [her]selv". She added:

> I think that was also something at the beginning, when I came here to study, I think just coming here every day and seeing everyone every day, I think helped me also to kind of grow closer with those people, than not showing up.

Furthermore, some students explained how certain factors might have limited social encounters on campus. For instance, Hannah explained how it felt like being enrolled in a study programme that spanned across campuses:

> What is super sad is that we are kind of divided in our programme, [some students] are down at Gløshaugen and we are up here [at Dragvoll], so that is kind of separating the whole programme. And it is not supposed to be like that.

She seemed divided in her opinions as, on one hand, she could sometimes wish that she could be at Gløshaugen with the other students and that they could all be at the same place. On the other hand, she liked Dragvoll because it was easier to "bump into some friends". Matias talked about cultural differences between Norway and Central America, and explained that he missed certain social practices on campus that he did not perceive as common here. He explained how "coffee time" was important him, and stated:

> I feel that people here just see coffee like an energy drink. Like, back home, my class mates and I were finishing a class and then we were all going to get coffee together. And here it is like, we finish the class and everybody is like "okay, goodbye". So there is not that culture of getting together a little bit after class and drink something. It is more like, if you have to do something, then you go get coffee. If you need to do like an assignment or read something with your friends. […] I feel that is how people here see it.

Furthermore, the significance of meaningful encounters on campus extended to university staff as well. Hannah stated:

> I felt that.. just in the first week, professors or the study advisor, they care about you as a person. Like, all of them were like "Whatever you have, it doesn't have to be 100% related to your studies, you can come to us and talk with us". And I was just like, 'What? Why do they care about me?". And.. oh, and this like "Yeah, you should also party, you should have a life besides your studies" and everything. I was so surprised. […] But that was nice, and I was impressed. It made me happy and be like OK, this is a nice place to be where they care about me as a person, and not only about me and my grades.

On the contrast, Omar noted that he often needed to schedule a meeting or send an e-mail to be able to have "a little chat" with professors. At his previous university, professors had offices with glass windows so that students easily could see when they were available, which is something he missed at NTNU. Similarly, Matias often felt that it was difficult getting through to staff with questions, and that there was more guidance for students at his previous university. Overall, most students appear to seek out campuses where they can experience some form of meaningful encounters, which mainly involves regular meetings with people they know. The general importance of social relations is evident as some students expressed frustration when these were limited in some way. How relations to fellow students and staff are perceived also seems connected to how they evaluate different campuses.

The fifth and last factor addresses students' sense of belonging on, or identification with, certain campuses or NTNU overall. For some students, this factor appeared to be significant for some students' senses of place and choices of where to study. For others, this factor was not as pronounced or important as the ones that have been previously addressed. Matias explained that he liked going to campuses where he feels that he "kind of belongs in a sense", in terms of familiarity or affiliation with his study programme. At the same time, he generally spent more time on campuses that were practical to go to and close to the city centre, like Kalvskinnet and Gløshaugen, although he felt that Dragvoll was "his campus". Other factors thus seemed to be more important when choosing where to study. However, he explained how he recently started spending more time in a place that he felt connected with:

> Recently I started going to the main building in Gløshaugen, the old one, and I feel that since that is like the general library, like the old building and everything, I feel that... maybe I feel kind of connected to it, so to say. This is the main building, everyone goes there, there is not a distinction of this study programme goes to this library. It is like for everyone.

Feeling a sense of belonging seemed to matter for Claudia and Jusuf and their perceptions of campus spaces. Claudia stated: "Whenever I am at Dragvoll, like I feel more like I'm fitting in than when I am around Gløshaugen for example, because it's just very different people and different vibes down there". In a similar way, Jusuf stated:

> If I go to Dragvoll, it feels like I am an outsider in comparison to coming here, and especially in the [building of his study programme on Gløshaugen]. Because I am just so familiar with everything, and with the people there as well. It is just a lot more comfortable there.

Both Hannah and Omar expressed that they felt a sense of belonging on NTNU in general, but that this feeling was not comparable to how they felt at their previous universities. They attributed this to the fact that they had spent more time on their previous campuses. For Omar, this meant that he knew "every corner", and Hannah emphasised how she knew a lot more people on campus before compared to now. The fact that both were enrolled in cross-campus study programmes also played a role. Hannah stated:

> I belong here, but not as much as it was in my bachelor. But I guess it's due to the time. And due to the fact that it's splitted, because I know people at Realfag, I know people here. And if both of them would be together, I would.. be more like yeah, I can just go to campus, do work wherever and meet all of them, you know.

Omar addressed the same issue:

> I could never say that I'm a Dragvoll student or I'm a Gløshaugen student. Because I was too sciency for Dragvoll, but I was too artsy for Gløshaugen. So I could never really call myself.. at home at any of the campuses.

At the same time, he expressed that he felt more attached to Dragvoll than to Gløshaugen, when comparing between campuses in Trondheim. Hannah's sense of belonging was not connected to a specific campus, as she could "work from wherever". This illustrates how senses of belonging may also be relative depending on the geographical scales used as a basis of comparison. Furthermore, these accounts illustrate how temporality may matter for students' senses of belonging, or lack of it. This applied to Gerben as well, who stated that could have studied wherever and it "would not really have mattered to [him]", same as Hannah. He explained that he often had to go to new

places on campus for study-related activities, and that he had not spent enough time on NTNU yet to know any places well or feel a sense of belonging on campus.

To round of this sub-section I argue that overall, it seems like students' senses of NTNU and the campus as places are shaped by a combination of the physical environment, interpersonal relations and intrapersonal feelings. Therefore, I believe all factors that have been addressed in this sub-section must be seen as mutually constitutive.

4.3.3 NTNU and personal development

When asked about their current feelings towards NTNU overall, several students implied that their student experience may have had positive implications for their senses of self and professional identities. For example, Omar explained how he initially was disappointed with the education style, because he was used to a very dense study schedule where they "learned a lot of stuff". However, he continued:

> Looking back at it now, I realise that OK, this is just teaching you to be more independent in what you do […] So master's is teaching me how to be a bit more independent. So I was disappointed in the moment, but I am not anymore.

Bilal and Angela also highlighted how being at NTNU has encouraged personal development. Bilal stated:

> I think being here is just like I am being.. I have got a very good opportunity to represent myself. And there are so many good people, they are very competitive and you feel like you are studying in a place where you have so much good competition in a positive way. Where you can, you know, improve your skills, and you can get your personality, your technical skills, more polished here. So yeah, I think it is good to be at NTNU, from a technical point of view at least.

In a similar manner, Angela stated:

> NTNU has been a wonderful place for me. And it's been one of the very good experiences that I have had. It has been a door opener for me. I have been able to achieve quite a lot in the space of my one year. I think it has boosted my morale, everything. So for me, I do not regret making the decision to be here.

Interestingly, they both referred to the institution NTNU as a place, suggesting that some senses of place are not necessarily tied to specific locations such as campus buildings. Furthermore, their positive evaluations of NTNU seem connected to the fact that this place has facilitated the development of personal qualities considered valuable by the students.

4.4   Relationships to home

Mention of "home" was prominent in conversations with the students. The concept was used in a commonsensical way, mainly when students referred to their home country or their specific place of residence in Trondheim. However, as we talked more in depth about what students perceive as home, a paradoxical gap appeared; It is not given that the places referred to as home are truly experienced as such. Furthermore, what students truly view as home and which meanings, emotions and identities they attach to it appears to be highly variated and ambivalent for some. Nevertheless, I believe that examining international students' relationships with what they call home and whether they feel "at home" or not in their term-time locations could potentially tell us much about their senses of place.

4.4.1 Feeling "at home"

Students were asked to reflect upon the meaning of home, and the answers were varied. While some considered relations to people as more important than specific places, others associated home with particular places, and some implied that both people and places mattered. Some also emphasised subjective feelings and senses of belonging to a place or culture. Furthermore, students were asked to describe what they perceived as home at the moment. While some expressed a single sense of home, others seemed to have developed multiple senses of home after moving.

Matias explained that his home was in Central America his home. He stated: "I mean, Trondheim is like the place where I studied. I have good memories, good friends, fun times. But yeah, it is not my home." This may suggest that he did not feel any strong sense of attachment towards Trondheim.

On another side, Gerben stated that his home was "definitely" in Trondheim at the moment. However, this sense did not seem to be connected to the city itself, but rather his accommodation. He considered home a place where he "lives and sleeps", and explained that as long as he had his own stuff and space, it takes him about a week to settle before the space becomes home.

Bilal clearly felt that his home was in South Asia, especially because his family was there. He explained that he normally got attached to people and not places. Furthermore, he explained how he felt about his accommodation in Trondheim:

> I would not say that I am living in a home right now at [accommodation]. It is just like a room for me, where I am staying. It is not my home. My home is in [South Asia] right now. […] Just like, student housing.. If I am done with my study, I have to move out, right? So yeah, I have to change places with time. […] So I do not want to, you know.. be emotionally attached to just one room, because I do not.. It does not make sense to me, I would say.

Although it appeared to be more of a choice, feelings of uncertainty about the future seemed to be barrier for forming attachments to this place. The same feeling was evident in Angela's case as well, as she stated that: "I cannot say this is my home, because I do not know what is next". However, she also acknowledged the transformable capabilities of home:

> This place can also be a home. Once you establish here, it is your home. […] For example, If I decided to fully.. if I get maybe a job and I know that now I am fully established here, I can make here a home. I could build my house, I could bring my family here, I could live literally all my life here and just go home for maybe holidays and come back. […] So for me, the necessity for me.. I can call this a home when I know that, OK, this is where I am now and I have settled.

This suggests that Trondheim may become a home for her in the future. For other students like Claudia, who felt like she had already settled and thus did not express feelings of uncertainty, Trondheim did feel like a home. While she considered her home country a home in a sense, this was not bound to a specific place but rather the overall sense of belonging. However, her account suggested changing relationships to home, as she stated:

> The longer I spend in Trondheim, like, the less I miss things, or I do not think I have any things at the moment that I really miss. Of course, sometimes family and friends, but I think that is something you can.. you know, you can talk to them via phone, you can visit

them from now and then. But I think in terms of things and structures, I do not miss anything.

Other students expressed ambivalent feelings towards their home countries too, which made it challenging for them to define home. Jusuf explained how he had a love-hate relationship with his home country, and that he primarily considered it a home because of his family. He also stated that the concept of home felt vague, as he had lived in his home country his whole life, but also studied both here and in another country during an exchange period. Of all these places, he enjoyed living in the country of exchange the most because it was "a good balance between Norway and [Southeast Asia]", and because it did not feel as "isolated" as Norway. His feeling of isolation was partly due to his student accommodation, which he described as "jail cell like", "empty" and "lacked character". However, he explained that this place could feel like a home when his friends were there, as he defined home largely by the people he interacted with. This suggests that negative feelings towards places like accommodations could limit students' sense of feeling at home. Omar also expressed ambivalent feelings towards his home country in South Asia, but had a very different experience with his accommodation, stating that he felt "very attached" to this place. Furthermore, he explained: "I never related with my own culture. So, I never really felt at home, at home". Although he considered the house he grew up in a home in a sense, he was very happy that everything was different in Norway, and stated that he absolutely loved it here because he felt "right at home". He explained that he thought this was because of his personality, suggesting that his preferred lifestyle choices were easier to fulfill in Norway. He enjoyed hanging out with friends and being outdoors, which was not part of the culture in his home country to the same extent. Therefore, he often felt "stuck" inside the house. His account suggests that his sense of home in Trondheim was connected both to a sense of cultural belonging and attachment to his accommodation, which he did not experience in his home country.

4.4.2 Home experiences in Trondheim

It may seem like students who did not feel "at home" in Trondheim to a greater extent sought out people or things that reminded them of home, which could be considered strategies for re-placing home. This was particularly evident when students talked about how they related to communities of people from their home countries in Trondheim.

Bilal explained that he mostly spent time with people from South Asia, and that he felt "a little bit attached to them" as a friend. He stated:

> Ultimately, if you are facing some kind of a problem, or you are having some difficult time, you normally call your friends. So yeah, it is good to have someone around you from your country. It just gives you peace of mind, that you have someone from back home.

For Angela, the community was important for different reasons. She explained that relatives had encouraged her to spend time with fellow West Africans to "feel at home". Although she was hesitant because her reason for coming to Norway was to experience unfamiliar surroundings, she established connections with people in the community. However, she soon experienced that they had "different ideologies", and she therefore did not feel very close to them. Nevertheless, she described the community as "very necessary", and elaborated:

> I like it when I showcase. Showcasing what you have, your culture, where you come from. That is me. […] If my assistance is needed in any way and I am capable, for me, I like to do it. Whether being a [West African] here or anywhere. […] So for me, I just told them that any time they need me to participate in anything, just let me know. (p. 12).

In another part of the conversation, she suggested that she currently associated home with her "own people" and the familiar setting of her home country. Nevertheless, it appeared that she strategically positioned herself so that she could both explore a new country and not "hang out 24/7" with people from her home country, but at the same time practice her home culture which she was proud of.

Matias explained that he had not met any people from his home country in Trondheim, although he wished he had. He explained how moving to Norway was similar to his previous exchange period in a foreign country, where he experienced it difficult to not be around people with similar geographical and cultural background as him. Although he had "learned a lot", he stated that it was "definitely challenging" as "it was kind of tough to share your experiences with people that did not understand you". Furthermore, the fact that "Norway is a foreign country" and that "Norwegian people are more reserved" made him experience the same challenges here. The lack of a community thus appears to have significance for experiences with and within Norway.

Omar explained that there was a large community of people from South Asia in Trondheim, but that he did not regularly spend time with them. Similarly, Jusuf stated that he tended to hang out with people from other countries more than his own country, and that he did the same thing here. For both, this appeared to be connected to the fact that they did not identity much with their home countries and/or the culture there, and therefore perhaps did not attempt to seek home experiences here. Jusuf had also stated that he regarded his stay in Norway as a chance to experience something new and make new friends instead of relying on old friends. Similarly, Claudia explained that a motivation for moving to Norway was to get out of her "[Central European] bubble" and experience new things. Perhaps because of this, she did not actively seek out people from her home country, but stated that she did not try to avoid them either.

Overall, it seems like some students may value home experiences and re-place home in the sense of being around people from their home countries for different reasons. Bilal and Matias, although he did not have a community in Trondheim, felt that it provided a sense of security and familiarity. For Angela, feeling connected to her home culture was more important than connections to the people she had met in Trondheim. Nevertheless, some students did not appear to actively seek home experiences in Norway, as they moved here precisely to experience a change of environment.

4.5 Looking ahead

Students were asked about their plans after studying, and the answers mainly illustrated whether they wished to stay in Norway or move to other places. Generally, it seems like these wishes are connected to their evaluations of the places they have experienced while studying here.

Matias expressed that he missed his home country and doubted whether he wished to stay. Before moving here, he intended to use his period of studying as "a jump start to move to Norway". This was encouraged by his family who believed there were better opportunities for education and upward social mobility in Norway compared to Central America. However, he had lately doubted if he wished to stay because he "really missed [his] own place". Based on previous statements, it seemed like cultural differences and not having people from Central America around were factors that influenced how he felt about Norway. However, he noted that he would "weigh the pros and cons" of staying if he received a job offer here. Furthermore, he proposed some interesting reflections:

I feel also that some of the internationals, they also come with the idea of staying here. Becausee maybe their situation back home is a little bit like.. not as good. I have met some people and they are like yeah, I never want to go back to my home. And I am like wow, that is though, because like I do not know if you actually like it, or you do it out of a necessity. So I would say that I am lucky to not have that like obligation, or like, I do not feel forced to go away. […] I bet that if those people could have the chance to stay in their own country, and have like better career opportunities, they would stay. [...] I think it takes a very special person to like, just move away from their country and never look back.

These points are valid to consider. The fact that something is perceived as better in Norway than in students' home country can indeed be relevant for students' evaluations of Norway and wishes to stay. For instance, Angela explained that her initial plan was just to come for studies and then move back home. However, she stated:

When I moved here, I saw a whole lot of difference […] When I got here, I was like "no, I love Norway". I really wish to get a job here and then stay. […] I do not regret coming to Trondheim, because Trondheim is a very beautiful place, I mean.. very peaceful.

Apart from peaceful, she also felt that Norway overall was very "safe" as compared to West Africa. Before moving, she was actively seeking a country that was peaceful and found Norway to match this requirement based on mediated impressions and own research. Therefore, correspondence between expectations and experiences of a place may also be significant.

Some students referred to the fact that they had settled in as a motivation to stay, suggesting that familiarity with the place was an important factor. Furthermore, it may seem like some of these students to some extent had developed attachments to Trondheim during their time here. Omar stated:

I do not really enjoy moving all that much. That is why I never applied for exchange myself. Because I would like to hang on to something. And if I have to move away from Trondheim to a different location.. then that would be me starting all over again, and that is something I am not looking forward to. […] I was having this discussion with a friend of mine, and she told me something that was very revealing, and a little sad at the same time. She said that once you move from one country to another, you belong to neither. And that line has stuck with me, like, the whole way basically. So it is a lot of self-discovery in me coming into terms of.. you know, where I am and who I want to be. So that is why I want to stay back in Trondheim.

As he expressed difficulties with coming to terms with where he "belonged" after moving, it seems like Trondheim was a form of "secure anchor" where he could further explore his identity. Claudia expressed similar thoughts in terms of time invested in Trondheim:

I really feel like I have settled in here. I really enjoy being here in Trondheim and I could even see myself being here for a little bit longer than the study programme. So that's a success so far. […] I think in the last year.. like half a year or so, I really feel like I have settled in here and I really feel home. Like, I've spent so much energy in like making this all work, and getting all those networks and.. having this, like life I want, so what is the point of not enjoying it once I build it up? And also I have been trying to learn the language, like.. there is just a lot of effort I have put in. So I thought it could be nice to stay here for a little bit longer to kind of.. yeah, benefit from all this effort.

Such feelings were experienced by Bilal as well, who stated:

I have already spent two years of my life here and, you know.. Now I understand the community around here, the people around here. I have understood how things work here.

So, I think it would be easy for me to just adjust, you know, my life here. That is.. I would say best for me, just to get a job here, or to stay here.

Hannah explained that she had considered moving back to Central Europe, but that it would be hard at the moment because there are many things here she would have missed. Furthermore, she stated: "It takes a lot of time just to get used to the country, to the place. And sometimes, you know, this feeling of… Now I know how it was working, I cannot leave now." She also stated that the time to move away was not over yet. Similarly, Gerben explained:

I think I have not seen everything I want to see of Trondheim yet. And I think I want to live here a little longer. I am not sure how long that is going to be. I hope I have a little bit more time in the future to actually see stuff of Trondheim. I am also applying for job positions which have a location here in Trondheim. Just trying to find something nice and see some more of the city. And then.. where I'll go after that, I don't know.

At the same time, he was looking at jobs in other cities and countries as well and stated that he was not "really bound to a place". Jusuf expressed that he did not have a particular wish of staying in Norway. Still, he planned on finding work either here or in the country where he had previously been on exchange, suggesting that familiarity may still have mattered. However, he addressed challenges with the fact that many jobs here require Norwegian language skills, which he had not yet fully acquired. A noteworthy point is that he had been in Norway for a shorter period of time compared to the other students, suggesting that temporality may be significant in this context as well. Although several students explained that they initially did not wish to stay, it seems that they have become more inclined to the idea after spending some time here and learning to know different places.

5 Conclusion

This research has aimed to answer the following research question: "In which ways do international students develop and express senses of place in Norway, with particular regard to Trondheim and the NTNU campus?". This had been done by highlighting a selection of themes that emerged when students talked about their experiences with moving to Norway to pursue their studies.

Throughout all sections in the analysis, it was evident that students made comparisons between different places they had experience with to highlight similarities and differences between places. This included physical characteristics of places, social relations within the places and feelings induced by places. This underlines the role of past experiences for students' senses of place in their term-time locations, and highlights some of the relational aspects of places. Therefore, this thesis adheres to the understanding of place as relational.

Before moving to Norway, students had built up impressions and expectations of their term-time locations and thus constructed imaginative geographies of place. These were constructed in different ways and through different means. The findings suggested that students from countries with geographical and cultural proximity to Norway commonly imagined that the countries would share similarities. On the other hand, students from countries located further away commonly constructed imaginative geographies based on own impressions acquired through technology and media, or based on the impressions or experiences of other people like friends and family members. Furthermore, imaginative senses of place had different significance for the students. For some, preconceived perceptions of place were seemingly influential for their mobilities and choice of whether to move here or not. For others, such perceptions did not seem to directly impact their motivations to move here. Nevertheless, all students appeared to have positive perceptions of either Norway as a country, NTNU as a university or Trondheim as a student town prior to moving, which ultimately may have influenced their motivations to move here in some way.

When encountering Norway and Trondheim, several students recalled that they initially reacted to elements like climate, nature and infrastructure, as well as social and cultural life. Some experienced feeling surprised at first, both in negative and positive ways, partly because their imaginative senses of place did not accurately align with their experiences of the place. After a while, most students seemed to become accustomed to things that stood out at first, illustrating how senses of place may become adapted and change over time as students get to know the places better.

All students had generally spent much time on at least one of NTNU's campuses during their study period. The campus was valued both as a suitable setting for work, but also as a place for socialising. The ways in which students experienced campus spaces, and identified preferred campuses and places on campus, was connected to several factors connected to the physical environment, interpersonal relations and intrapersonal feelings. Furthermore, finings suggested that NTNU as a place had significance for some students' identity developments.

The concept of "home" was explored as students often referred to their accommodations or home countries as such, although they did not necessarily experience these places as home when reflecting upon it. For some students, connections to people could be just as important as places when defining home. Some students expressed greater attachment

to their home countries than Trondheim, and did not feel at home here. Feelings of uncertainty was also a barrier to feeling at home. On the other hand, students who felt that they had settled regarded Trondheim as home. Students' accommodations were also significant in some cases. While some experienced their accommodation as isolating when it was not filled with people, others felt quite attached to these places. Furthermore, while some employed strategies to re-place home in different ways, this did not seem to be important for students who moved to Norway to experience a new environment that was different from their home countries.

At last, most students expressed that they wished to stay in Norway or Trondheim specifically after their study period, suggesting that they had overall positive experiences with these places. Familiarity with and attachments to place also appeared to be factors influencing this wish. On the other hand, some students did not express any great wishes of staying in Norway specifically, although it was an option. Although this did not necessarily imply negative experiences with place, a lacking sense of belonging may have been an influential factor.

5.1.1 Application and future research
If applied, I argue that the findings of this study and similar research in the future might benefit both NTNU and the many international students who are currently studying here, or will study here in the future. The first-hand knowledge and experiences of international students could be useful to consider in, for instance, further work with internationalisation and socially sustainable campus development to ensure rewarding outcomes for all parties. Although not all individual interests can be taken care of in larger developmental processes, general impressions could be highly valuable. The rapid introduction of tuition fees might make this argument even more relevant, given that NTNU wishes to continue attracting international students. It would therefore be interesting to carry out comparative studies that pay greater attention to how the changing landscape of internationalisation might have affected international students. Nevertheless, this research provides valuable insight into international students' thought processes and experiences with and within their term-time locations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information letter to participants

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Are you interested in taking part in the research project *"The NTNU Campus as a Place for International Students"*?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project that explores which factors shape international students' experiences of Trondheim and the NTNU campus, both as physical structures and as places for community. In this letter you will find information about the project's purpose, what your participation will involve and your rights.

Purpose of the project

This project is a master's thesis in *Globalisation and Sustainable Development* at NTNU. The purpose is to investigate which factors shape international students' experiences of NTNU and the campus by using geographical concepts about the relationships between people and places. Through looking at individual student's migration backgrounds and encounters with NTNU, the aim is to get an impression of which factors might be important to consider in the university's work with campus development to secure inclusive spaces that preserve the interests of an increasingly international and diverse student body.

The overarching research question is: "Which factors shape international student's experiences of the environment and sense of belonging on NTNU's campuses in Trondheim?". Further questions include:

- Are the experiences entirely individual, or is it possible to identify collective opinions?
- Are the experiences based on shared characteristics (such as demographic; Length of residence in Trondheim; Field of study etc.) or entirely different factors?
- To which degree is NTNU successful in securing socially sustainable societies on campus that are inclusive for both international and local students, and what measures can be initiated or further developed?

The thesis is a contribution to the ongoing project "Campus som sted og et sted i Trondheim by" [*Campus as a place and a place in Trondheim city*], which is part of the research and development program "Fremtidens campus" [*Campus of the Future*].

Who is responsible for the research project?

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

- The project manager is Professor Nina Irene Gunnerud Berg (Department of Geography).
- The responsible master's student is Maria Victoria Silva (Department of Geography).

Why are you being asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate based on the following criteria:

- You are an international student from another country than Norway who is currently studying for a degree at NTNU in Trondheim.
- You can effectively communicate in English or Norwegian.
- You have seen the project announcement and shown interest.

The project aims to include between 5 and 8 participants.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to participate in the project, this will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes.

- The interview will have a semi-structured nature including questions about your experiences related to migration and student life, and your relationship to the NTNU campus.
- At the same time, you will have the flexibility to focus on the topics you find important within the projects' scope.
- It is desirable to conduct the interview physically on your preferred NTNU campus, but a digital interview can be arranged if necessary.
- The interview audio will be recorded and transcribed as part of the data collection. You will find more information about data storage and use further down in this document.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose 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 chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

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

Your personal data will only be used for the purpose 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 responsible student and project manager will have access to your personal data.

Data storage:

- Your personal data will be classified and stored in accordance with NTNU's guidelines for data management. The data will be stored in the Office365 account connected to the student's NTNU user, where the files will be labelled through Azure Information Protection (AIP) which triggers encryption and access control.
- Your name and contact details will be replaced with a code and stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

Sound recordings:

- Physical interviews will be recorded through the mobile application *Nettskjema-Diktafon* operated by UiO, with which NTNU has a data processing agreement.
- Digital interviews will be recorded through *Microsoft Teams* and stored safely in Office365 as indicated above.

In the final publications your personal data will be anonymized and/or generalized so that you are not recognizable.

- Your name will be anonymized and replaced with a pseudonym that you may chose if desired.
- Your nationality and/or countries you lived in before Norway will be generalized to the region (e.g. "East Africa").
- Your age will be generalised to a larger age-group (e.g. "early twenties") or altered/removed if it has potential to lead to your identification.

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

The project is scheduled to end 15.05.2023. All data will be anonymized, and personal data will be deleted after the completion of the project.

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).
- 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 written and oral consent.

Based on an agreement with the project manager and responsible student at NTNU, Data Protection Services 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, you can contact:

- Maria Victoria Silva (responsible master's student at NTNU)
  - E-mail: mariavsi@stud.ntnu.no
  - Telephone: +47 94 89 69 88
- Professor Nina Irene Gunnerud Berg (project manager and thesis supervisor at NTNU)

- o E-mail: nina.gunnerud.berg@ntnu.no
  - o Telephone: +47 73 59 17 96 / +47 91 53 55 26
- Thomas Helgesen (Data Protection Officer at NTNU)
  - o E-mail: thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no
  - o Telephone: +47 93 07 90 38
- Data Protection Services:
  - o E-mail: personverntjenester@sikt.no o Telephone: +47 53 21 15 00

Yours sincerely,

Nina Irene Gunnerud Berg

Project leader

Maria Victoria Silva

Master's student

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *The NTNU Campus as a Place for International Students* 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, approximately 15.05.2023.

_____

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Introduction:
- Present myself.
- Ask if participant has read and signed the information letter. Explain more about the project, emphasise the value of their contribution.
- Confirm that participant is OK with an interview that lasts approximately one hour.
- Inform once again about consent and that participation is voluntary. Confirm that participant is OK with audio recording.
- Ask if there are any questions before we begin.

1. Background information
Personal data that may be relevant to capture.
- Which degree are you currently pursuing?
- Which campus does your study programme belong to?
- How long have you studied at NTNU per now?
- How long do plan to study at NTNU?
- What is your nationality?
- What is your age?

2. Mobility experiences

Life before Trondheim:
- Where have you have lived before coming to Trondheim?
- Can you tell me a bit about your life in that/those places?
  - Interests, hobbies, activities
  - Where and how did you live?
- Have you studied at another university before?
  - If yes: How did you experience that?

Motivations for moving:
- Was there a point where you figured out that you wanted to move from where you lived before? If so, can you describe when and how that was?
- What were your reasons for moving to Norway?
  - Why Norway versus other countries?
  - Why specifically Trondheim?
- What were your reasons for pursuing studies at NTNU specifically?

The process of moving:
- Can you tell me about the time between finding out you wanted to come to Norway, and arriving in Trondheim?
  - How was the journey?
  - How did you experience this process?

Arriving in Trondheim and at NTNU:
- What were your first impressions of Norway and Trondheim?
- What were your first impressions of NTNU? How did you experience beginning your studies?
- How has your life in Trondheim been since you moved?
    - How have you settled in?
    - Where and how have you lived?
    - What hobbies and activities have you been pursuing?
- How do you feel about your life in Trondheim/NTNU right now?

Plans after studying:
- Do you have any plans for what to do after completing your studies here?
- What do you most wish to do after your studies?

3. Notions of "Home"
- What does the concept of "home" mean to you?
- Where do you consider to be "home" at this moment?
- What makes that/those place(s) feel like home?
- Do you miss something from the place(s) you consider "home"? If so, what?
- Have you continued pursuing activities/interests you had in your previous "home"?
- Do you keep in touch with people from "home"?

4. Social and study habits

Social habits:
- Which people do you spend the most time with in Trondheim?
- Where do you prefer to be social with friends? Why there?
- How have you experienced connecting with Norwegian people?

Study habits:
- How do you prefer to study?
    - Alone or with others?
    - Do you find studying to be a social experience as well?
- Where do you prefer to study? Why there?

Use of campus:
- Which campus(es) do you spend the most time on? Why there?
- Of the campuses you know, which one do you prefer? Why?
- How much time estimated time do you spend on (any) campus during a "normal" week?
- What do you see as your main reasons for being on campus?
- Are there times when you spend more or less time on campus than usual? Why?
- Are there places on campus where you prefer spending time? If so, why?
- To which degree do you feel a sense of belonging/comfort on campus?
    - Do the places/people you spend time around contribute to this feeling? In which ways?

5. Being an international student

- How do you experience being an international student in Trondheim/on NTNU?
    - What is the best?
    - What is the most challenging?
- What do you believe is important to consider when welcoming international students at NTNU?

Final words:

- Is there anything more you would like to talk about? Do you have any final thoughts?
- Do you have any questions or feedback for me?
- As you will be anonymized, is there any particular name you would like me to use as your pseudonym?
- Thank you for your participation.