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**Sociocultural Adaptation of South Asian Students at Vilnius University Community:
Processes and Challenges**

MASTER THESIS

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Abstract

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Master thesis delves into the processes and sociocultural challenges of South Asian students at Vilnius University community. The core aim of this research thesis is to outline the main adaptation stages and sociocultural challenges shaping integration to host academia and its environment. There are several tasks in the research context: emerging theoretical frameworks (Berry, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990; Wilson, 2011) on international peer adaptation and identifying sociocultural challenges documented in European papers; underlining bureaucratic and administrative processes that arise at Vilnius University in the beginning period; analysing intercultural competences in interactions (students, staff & academic system) that cause challenges; identifying coping mechanisms and support systems that are available at the institution and host society. Empirical research was conducted from seven interviews using applied thematic analysis. Interviews revealed three core adaptation stages: Arrival & Starter Phase, Relationship Forging Phase, Individual Adjustment Phase. Key challenges reveal bureaucratic barriers, linguistic exclusion in peer lives, and constrained affecting social integration. Although, Vilnius University developed strong support organs, sample size identifies several gaps in accessibility, communication aspects and academic responsiveness. These findings benefit comparative studies on adaptation experiences across European Universities and embark essence for future longitudinal research tracking South Asian student adaptation over time.

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Abbreviations applied in the research thesis:

SAS – South Asian students;

SA – Sociocultural adaptation;

TA – Thematic analysis.

Introduction

The internationalization of European higher education has gained speed since the beginning of the 2000s. The South Asian students (hereinafter – SAS), representing India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives, are one of the most culturally diverse groups in this trend, with a rich set of communal values, multilingual repertoires, and religious customs that come into play in a complicated clash with the normative cultural contexts of European universities. The question of how these students negotiate their new social and institutional environments is an issue of increasing social, cultural importance in academic and broader frames (employability, residency etc.). Kansal et al., (2022, p. 174) suggest „significant cross-cultural challenge for students studying in other countries resides in the differences in teaching and learning styles between their home and host countries, and they are not well prepared to face the ‘gap’ between their expectations and reality,“ reflecting that there is a growing number among academic staff in teaching higher education pupils from India, which is esteemed by many institutional barriers and hardships to integrate more fluent systems for all.

At Vilnius University there is increasing number of SAS that often face hardships in academic ground due to lack of available support and ethnically complex conditions to adapt (academia does not provide support for students that come in late due to migration delays, free healthcare sectors are not available for third country students unless they purchase health insurance etc.); not only SAS come to health risks due to not thoroughly adapted conditions, certain regions like Nepal or Bangladesh do not even have embassies that would consult on regional context the academia and its responsible staff for inclusion. This means that country academia invites students but does not consider the hardship to adapt to a new culture without appropriate system that would ethnically aid newcomers to become integrated part of host society; quite the opposite third country

newcomers are left independently to solve out the integration – this point was escalated during psychological crisis support strategy meeting in 2025 august by community psychologists¹ at Vilnius University Community Well-being Division, issue was raised due to difficulty to find financially friendly options for SAS when crisis requires need for medical experts like psychiatrists or family doctors (lack of free medical healthcare); to this date issue resolves around discussions as academia is not empowered to make governmental changes. Nevertheless, Vilnius University community has alternative methods of aiding SAS like equal rights strategy 2021-2025² which aims to create a study and work environment at the University that promotes individual, social and cultural diversity and ensures equal opportunities for members of the University's community; Thanks to it Vilnius University became more inclusive over the course of few years and is the only Lithuanian University that sparks diversity and inclusion to such level; system wise this strategy allows more opportunities for more successful SA processes.

Historically, theoretical literature on adaptation among international students has been dominated by psychological frameworks that pathologize culture shock or adopt an individual coping problem to understand adjustment to a new environment (Zhou et al., 2008). This applies to SAS, when they arrive to academic communities like Vilnius university and begin a path of trial and error to learn, feel and slowly adapt into academia. Current research thesis reflects and argues on theoretical application on how minority groups (SAS) adjust to a new environment. Additionally, present research thesis considers the effect of new environment and potential impact from global world events (global economic crisis, pandemic, war-crime relations around the world etc) that may impact current generation of SAS and display unique themes not revealed in theories. What this refers to, the research thesis utilizes the social, cultural aspects of the acculturation model

¹ [vu.lt/en/students/services-for-students/emotional-wellbeing](https://www.vu.lt/en/students/services-for-students/emotional-wellbeing)

² <https://www.vu.lt/en/university/equal-opportunities>

proposed by Berry (1997), the sociocultural adjustment theory suggested by Searle and Ward (1990), and the grounded theory of international graduate students fitting in proposed by Wilson (2011), this thesis prefigures the structural, cultural, and relational forces that influence the introduction of SAS into, and their reception by, the community of European universities and relativity to the community of Vilnius University; It is analysed in the framework of three theoretical perspectives, and then specific areas of sociocultural experience are looked into: language and communication norms, religion and visibility, social network formation, and institutional barriers and more. In the second part of master's thesis, the analysis of the empirical data will be presented, collected via the interview method at Vilnius University. Alternatively, it embeds the thematical patterns SAS experience during sociocultural adaption (hereinafter – SA) at Vilnius University community; preliminary research can enable to rethink social worlds to enable more equitable modes of belonging and perceive relevancy for new incoming waves of international students from South Asia and encourage Vilnius University staff to be more mindful of certain outlined topics when working with SAS.

SAS of Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives have a wealth of cultural resources to contribute to European universities-resources that are too frequently viewed as obstacles to adaptation instead of rich sources of intercultural learning. The sociologically informed approach to adaptation, which has been formulated within the context of three frameworks discussed in this thesis, demands that the SA challenge be a collective institutional issue, rather than a personal burden. European universities that do so will not only enrich the experiences of SAS; they will enrich the intellectual and social life of their communities in general. Vilnius University is (Eastern) European University and it cannot negate or neglect importance of understanding SAS in current time. The aim of this work is to identify the main

stages and sociocultural challenges in the adaptation of SAS at the Vilnius University community. Figuring primary themes (crucial keywords) that relate with the processes of initial SA period (relationship with new host society, academic life, study and outside environment, new culture etc.). Considering social and cultural challenges and available support tools that bestow a helping hand to secure successful SA for SAS at Vilnius University. To discuss and break down this problem question research thesis seeks to fulfil several tasks in with the Literature Review part and Empirical study part:

- (i) To review theoretical frameworks on international student adaptation (Berry, 1997; Searle and Ward, 1990; Wilson, 2011) and underline outstanding sociocultural challenges documented in European academia on SAS adaptation conducted in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries;
- (ii) To examine SAS bureaucratic and administrative processes that are experienced when beginning life at Vilnius University community;
- (iii) To analyse the challenges related to situations that need intercultural competences and enhance understanding of what happens in SAS interactions with peers, staff and study programme at Vilnius University;
- (iv) To identify coping mechanisms and support systems available to SAS at the academia ground (Vilnius University resources) and social ground (family, peer networks, community facilities, and individual strategies).

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Sociocultural Adaptation: Theoretical Perspectives & Research Application

1.1.1. Berry's Acculturation framework

The acculturation model developed by Berry (1997) offers a sociological and psychological vocabulary background to comprehend the negotiations of individuals and groups during encounters between different cultural systems; The framework was initially placed in cross-cultural psychology, but it acquired much sociological salience when a shift in concentration was made towards the external conditions of affective states, that is, to the manifestation of cultural participation and also to the sustenance of cultural identity. Berry (1997) defines acculturation as the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. The chief focus sociologically is not the psychological consequences of such a contact but the social circumstances that limit or facilitate various acculturation approaches.

Acculturation orientations outlined by Berry (1997) include integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, each reflecting a different approach to two fundamental questions: should one preserve their cultural heritage, and should one participate productively in the host society? Acculturation among the SAS in European universities is complex. Integration-keeping South Asian cultural values but being an active participant in European social and academic life- is considered to be the most socially functional orientation (Sam and Berry, 2010). Nevertheless, not all of the European university social conditions equally support integration. Once the SAS are racialized, socially excluded, or institutionalized in regard to cultural difference, the separation or marginalization could be formed not as desired orientations but as a structurally enforced consequence (Gu et al., 2010).

The acculturation paradigm, in social sciences is used, focuses on the inequality of power in intercultural interaction and development of intercultural competencies. The norms of the host culture, manifested in pedagogical practices, modes of assessment, the practice of academic socialization, and informal social codes, are seldom neutral in European universities. Students who are of South Asian descent and who are part of more collective part of societies, high-context communicative traditions often find themselves in institutional settings that reward individualism, overt argumentation, and specific types of academic English (Hofstede, 2001). The framework by Berry allows examining how these structural asymmetries direct students to specific acculturation consequences, which in many cases have nothing to do with personal preferences.

SA refers to process through which individual, a moderate or larger scale of human sample adjust to the social environment, aligning their behaviours, values, and expectations with the norms and conditions of the surrounding new culture and environment; The term first originated in Latin literature ... “adaptatio” ...³, meaning adjustment, and in social sciences it encompasses the direct connection between individual needs and the realities of social context, cultural context, ethnic context & environmental context according to Berry (1997). According to recent finds in monograph of Kasatkina & Leončikas (2003): “Lietuvos etninių grupių adaptacija: kontekstas ir eiga,” not only adaptation is a multifaceted process that includes adjustment but also alleviates a broader interaction between diverse ethnic groups and the native (or host) societies that take dominating sample of population. Dominating sample of population refers to the country residents which are faced by migrating and migrants are individuals who go through SA to integrate in the host country. Kasatkina & Leončikas (2005) supports that SA lies in balancing

³ c. 1600, "action of adapting (something to something else)," from French adaptation, from Late Latin adaptationem (nominative adaptatio), noun of action from past-participle stem of adaptare "to adjust," from ad "to" (see ad-) + aptare "to join," from aptus "fitted" (see apt). <https://www.etymonline.com/word/adaptation>

personal aspirations or expectations with available opportunities, realities and processes of the social environment. Such concept includes admitting recognition of existing barriers and potential development trends within minority ethnic individual (or group) and host society, giving enough space to develop intercultural competencies. From this standpoint, successful adaptation is achieved when minority ethnic individuals (or groups) manage to align their goals with the structural and cultural criteria of the host society.

Berry's acculturation framework and model display foundation to cultural psychology, social sciences, however, there are also several limitations and concerns when examining contemporary processes of migration and adaptation, Schwartz et al (2010); priorly theoretical frameworks do not draw lines or barriers between different migration countries, instead keeping them in one sample (not separating different aspects of ethnicity and more). Berry's (1997) paper steps over complexity in interplay of demographic, socioeconomic, cultural minority and context – based aspects that manifest individual acculturation experiences. Individuals that come in with migration status to host countries do not acculturate in isolation (Ward, 2013); the essential patterns that manifest such influence are structurally constraining by language proficiency, social economic status and the cultural ethnical barrier overcoming.

1.1.2. Sociocultural Adjustment model of Searle & Ward

Searle and Ward (1990) analytically distinguish two aspects of cross-cultural adjustment: psychological well-being and SA. Although the former refers to states of affect, the latter (and the one we are interested in) deals with the development of culturally relevant behaviours and skills that allow successful operation in a new social setting. According to Searle and Ward (1990), SA has to do with the capacity to fit in, to learn culturally appropriate skills, and to negotiate interactive

dimensions of the new cultural environment. It is fundamentally sociological and culturally competent, not a medical disorder and treatment issue.

Searle and Ward (1990) in their original research showed that the level and quality of contact that people have with members of the host culture are strong predictors of SA. This discovery has far-reaching consequences on SAS in the European universities. The available ethnographic and survey-based studies have always indicated that SAS and East Asian students indicated smaller amounts and quality of social interaction with domestic European students as compared to their North American or Western European counterparts (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). Many European universities, such as housing segregation, culturally homogenous social spaces, and non-Western knowledge, marginalize curricular structures that are actively inhibitory of contact opportunities, which the model by Searle and Ward identifies as central to SA.

In the term of ethnic relations, adaption is influenced by numerous aspects that shape the relationship between the titular nation and ethnic minorities living within the same state following Ward (2022). The experiences of ethnic minorities are not mild to successful adaption or assimilation and fitting in; Like a control pattern ethnic minorities go through processes such as cultural integration, differentiation, identity preservation and sense of belongingness. Henceforth, is not singular variable process but a continuum that reflects varying several variables of adjustment and acceptance (Kasatkina & Leončikas, 2003).

The further operationalization of the SA construct by Ward and Kennedy (1999) proposed particular sets of intercultural competencies, specifically managing language, making friends, managing hierarchical relationships, and understanding academic conventions, which are specifically relevant to SAS on the way to European educational settings. Students of India and

Sri Lanka used to a formal, authority-based relationship with faculty, such as with their first name, can be disoriented by the informal, first-name-basis norms of most Northern and Western European universities. Likewise, the Bangladeshi or Pakistani students who are bound by the daily prayer schedule are forced to compromise on the institutional schedules and social practices that have been historically structured along Christian or secular European patterns.

Searle & Ward's theoretical approach towards SA priorly creates a grounded understanding of theory and how can we learn it through culturally appropriate skills and behaviours, required to adapt with a new host environment. Such framework directs an arguably both dispositional and situational aspects about what exactly shapes SA outcomes (Ward, 2022). Wilson et al., (2013) meta empirical approach displays that language proficiency and contact with host environment (communication of people, areas and culture) positively foresee SA, while negative impact on it increases from cultural distance and perceived discriminatory cases. Individualistic traits such as extraversion, openness, low neuroticism along with culturally shouldered and accepting personality differences like cross – cultural phenomena and empathy, furthers and enhances SA. Nevertheless, despite theoretical openness, the framework is edged to limitations; major concern is the scarcity of longitude behavioural data, which forms bias understanding of causal relationships and the dynamic nature of SA in approximate period of time. Searle & Ward's theoretical framework approach is based on self-reported measures which ignore ecological validity and obscures the behavioural enactment to adapting culture. There are strong documentations on SA, however, the final outcome underexplored, Jee (2025). Referring to existing research, SA is often targeted as pattern of lower stress and greater life satisfaction,

however, these findings are widely used for multiple scientific fields and lack context specificity (Handrianto et al., 2025)⁴.

1.1.3. Wilson's 'Fitting-In' framework

This doctoral research conducted by Wilson (2011) at Johnson and Wales University provides a grounded and qualitative explanation of the process through which international graduate students negotiate and experience the acculturation process, including how they fit in the environment of the North American universities. Even though the empirical context of the study is not that of Europe, it can be clearly applied to the South Asian context of European higher education. According to Wilson (2011), fitting in is a multidimensional social process, which entails academic acclimatization, cultural involvement, and the development of social relationships-processes that occur in concrete institutionally-based settings and are mediated by identity negotiations instead of a straightforward process of assimilation.

The most useful aspect of the Wilson (2011) framework to this review is the sensitivity in the role that institutional culture plays as a facilitator and inhibitor of student belonging. The international graduate students in the study by Wilson did not just adapt to their university settings; they negotiated, resisted, and selectively participated in aspects of the host culture and maintained significant attachments to their cultural identities. SAS in European settings find this dynamic resonant with the experience of straddling the social worlds of co-ethnic student networks, which offer both cultural familiarity and emotional sustenance, with an experience of more open campus communities that may not be open to authentic cross-cultural exchange (Andrade, 2006).

⁴ Despite its strengths, this study has limitations, including its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias. Additionally, although efforts were made to include diverse participants from multiple universities, the use of purposive sampling at the final stage introduces limitations to the representativeness of the sample. (Handrianto et al., 2025, pp. 274-275)

Another way in which linguistic competence can influence the sociocultural positioning of the students is also predicted by Wilson (2011). This is especially important in the case of SAS, many of whom are highly educated in academic English, yet when their accented or nonstandard versions of English are used, they find themselves being the victims of social stigmas in European peer settings. Fitting in is not, therefore, only a question of language proficiency but also of manoeuvring sociolinguistic hierarchies, in which some accents and communicative forms are privileged over others.

Wilson's (2013) framework outlines that SA is a type of skill that enforces one to manage their own academic responsibilities during acculturation and fitting – in phase. Approached theoretical framework entails that SA serves as satisfaction antecedent; It's crucial pattern for international students that perceive their behaviour as more culturally competent in their new SA and academic environment, their satisfaction within the institutional program overall life increases the higher it is (Malota & Mucsi, 2025). It displays tendency to privilege behavioural conformity as the primary aspect of SA, potentially missing the emotional / psychological and identity related complexities that guide students through transitions; focusing not only risks that equate 'fitting – in' with successful SA, but also neglecting the possibility that individuals may maintain cultural distinctiveness while still functioning effectively in the host environment; for instance, not all SAS follow identical cultural values and this differs ethnic minority context like a student who prefers goth culture and coming from middle class family and a student who prefers religious culture and also coming from middle class family. Following, theoretical framework motivates self – reported measures to evidence hypothetical approaches, this can constrain the capacity to entail observable, contextual behaviours and experience that truly reflect intercultural competence. Additionally, it is open to cultural biases that inherit self – perception and social willingness to avoid sensitive or

dislikable information to one (avoiding to share private point of views or evaluating anything that doesn't fit person's liking like talking about traumas and other). Lastly, the theoretical approach of Wilson's framework does not separate effect of situational constructs like discrimination, power asymmetries, and global world events (global crisis, war, pandemic etc.) – which shapes people's well-being and can indefinitely impact one's SA as outside harm / risk which will affect satisfaction and stress levels.

1.1.4. Sociocultural Adaption patterns in research thesis

Searle & Ward (1990) segregates between two forms of adaptation: psychological & SA. Psychological adaptation validates individual's emotional and mental well-being as well as the capability to maintain balance while moving-on with a new environment. However, it is limited to one being's condition not considering its relation with surrounding. Therefore, Berry (1997) introduces⁵ SA as a crucial ability of the migrating minority ethnic individual or migrating minority ethnic group to function effectively, evaluate according, include independently in a new cultural or social context. SA involves learning sociocultural norms, social interaction aspects, behavioural expectations that motivate participation in the host society. Berry (1997)⁶ speculates that SA infinitely entails change in both minor ethnic individuals (or groups) and host societies as two different environments interact. Wilson (2011) integrates elements from Berry's and Ward's frameworks while foregrounding the concept of "fitting in" as a multidimensional process that extends beyond social or bureaucratic integration; the author examines how minority groups navigate their incorporation into host communities through language practices, cognitive

⁵ These issues are: cultural maintenance (to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important, and their maintenance strived for); and contact and participation (to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves) Berry (1997) pp. 9

⁶ However, there can also be variation according to one's location: in more private spheres or domains (such as the home, the extended family, the ethnic community) more cultural maintenance may be sought than in more public spheres (such as the workplace, or in politics): and there may be less intergroup contact sought in private spheres than in the more public ones. Berry (1997) pp. 12

frameworks, and interpersonal interactions, thereby adopting a broader sociological and ethnological approach to understanding adaptation; it is softer and allows more transparency. All three frameworks entail important key points and research thesis will integrate them to evaluate SA patterns. These patterns will serve argumentation links in thesis discussion.

SA in the research context will evaluate several spheres: identity in the group, family commitments, and social conventions, religion, visibility, and campus life, language, communication, and academic culture. These sphere can be evaluated with consistency of SA during migration when matching activities related to: making friends, using the transport system, making oneself understood, getting used to the pace of life, going shopping, going to social events / gatherings / functions, worshipping in one's usual way, talking about oneself with others, understanding jokes and humour, dealing with someone who is unpleasant / cross / aggressive, getting used to the local food / finding food one enjoys, following rules and regulations, dealing with people in authority, dealing with the bureaucracy, making oneself understood, adapting to local accommodation, communicating with people of a different ethnic group, relating to members of the opposite sex, dealing with unsatisfactory service, finding one way around, dealing with the climate, dealing with people staring at one, going to coffee shops / food stalls / restaurants / fast food outlets, understanding the local accent / language, living away from family members overseas / independently from one's parents, adapting to local etiquette, getting used to the population density, relating to older people, dealing with people of higher status, understanding what is required of one's at university, coping with academic work, dealing with foreign staff at the university, expressing one's ideas in class, living with one's host family, accepting / understanding the local political system, understanding the locals' world view, taking a local perspective on the culture, understanding the local value system, seeing things from the locals' point of view,

understanding cultural differences, being able to see two sides of an intercultural competences issue.

1.2. Key Dimensions in SA of SAS Revealed by Literature

1.2.1. Identity in the group, family commitments, & social conventions

The culture of the South Asians is widely described as having a high level of collectivism whereby family honour, community membership, and intergenerational commitments hold a prime social position (Hofstede, 2001); Schwartz (2014, p. 563-564) explains collectivism “The culture of this region emphasizes fulfilling one’s obligations in a hierarchical system – obeying expectations from those in roles of greater status or authority and expecting humility and obedience from those in inferior roles (high hierarchy, low egalitarianism).” Although culturally heterogeneous in most aspects, students of Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have collectivistic social orientations that are often very different from the social norms of Western European university cultures that are more individualized. It’s important to note, culture is not only ethnical it’s far broader context; at Vilnius University academic mind Jurėnienė (p. 23-24)⁷ explains “culture is learnt through understanding that is formed by various factors; the place of birth and growth, the language, surrounding people, the environment, psychological stimuli. There are no two individuals that would see the world identically as they do not get absolutely identical stimuli and do not share the same physical sense preceptors. People know only what they perceived personally and they cannot be sure that somebody else also understood the same object in the same way”. In European universities, cultural values of independence, self-disclosure, and peer-to-peer informality might be perceived as culturally strange by SAS used to

⁷ Jurėnienė, V. National Culture of Lithuania Under the Effect of Massive Culture. <https://europe-nations.estudosculturais.com/pdf/0029i.pdf>

more hierarchically structured and family-mediated social worlds. Even culture in a sense according to Hofstede (2001, p. 861-862) “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”.

This tension between cultures comes into practice. The conflict between expectations of independent academic and social decision-making at a European university and the maintenance of family expectations regarding study decisions, social behaviour, and identity may occur in the SAS. Pakistani and Bangladeshi students, especially women, can find themselves on other layers of gendered cultural demands that interact with European values of gender equality in a manner that demands constant resolution (Gu et al., 2010). Instead of viewing such tensions as a manifestation of cultural backwardness, a sociological reading based on Berry (1997) views them as manifestations of the acculturation dilemma: how to stay culturally authentic and at the same time interact with a new social space.

1.2.2. Religion, visibility, & campus life

The religious identity is a major aspect of the sociocultural life of Muslim students in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Maldives; Hindu students in India and Nepal; Buddhist students in Sri Lanka and Bhutan; and Sikh students in India. The apparent display of religious identity in the form of dress, dietary needs, prayer times, and religious celebrations in most European institutional settings that are largely secular or implicitly Christian presents chances of social conflict or marginalization.

This dynamic could be explained with the help of the model by Searle and Ward (1990). In case it is a question of acquiring culturally appropriate behaviours and negotiating interactive contexts that SA is supposed to occur in, then the observance of religious practices that render students visibly different can serve as an impediment to informal social interaction that adaptation

competencies are generally acquired in. Lack of prayer rooms, the provision of halal food, or even institutional acknowledgement of non-Christian calendars conveys to SAS that their cultures are not entirely readable in the host institutional culture. In the long run, this institutional invisibility can become the norm of separation as a matter-of-fact acculturation strategy because students will flock back to ethnic enclaves where they can be recognized culturally.

Cultural visibility constrains a part of SA dimension, when international students arrive from various regions where religious, ethnic and individual practices differ from host society but try to adopt these practices to day-to-day lives; For instance, Muslim countries that have community members in Bangladesh, Pakistan, or Maldives, or Hindu culture dominated mainly in India and Nepal, often hold visible markers of their identity, including dress (hijabs, turbans etc.), following strict diets (vegetarian, halal etc.) are often seen an exotic to blind eye. The expression of such practices within host European Christian societies can generate social visibility that carry risks of marginalization, misrecognition or dissociation from informal campus networks where sociocultural learning and intercultural competencies are typical negotiated (Tan & Liu, 2014). In long-term, this sociocultural learning and intercultural competencies may manifest into default acculturation strategy, Berry (1997), as students navigate towards, co – ethnic balance where cultural recognition and belongingness in campus with host society are more available. In Wilson’s (2011) terminology, such experiences underscore sense of “Fitting-In” to campus life aspect, weakening perceived academia belongings and limiting the engagement with peers and environment outside campus.

1.2.3. Language, communication, & academic culture

Language is one of the most analytically dense aspects of SA and the aspect in which the three theoretical approaches intersect to the greatest profit. Masgoret and Ward (2006) single out

language proficiency as the most important predictor of SA, and they state that communicative competence is what allows one to be meaningfully involved in the social practices that allow one to acquire and exchange cultural knowledge. The language-adaptation connection of SAS is complex due to the diversity of linguistic resources that they possess. Most are multilingual, having proficiency in regional languages; national languages like Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, or Sinhala; and different levels of proficiency in English.

But English language proficiency, no matter how extensive, does not necessarily equate to communicative fluency in European higher education circles. Fitting in, as observed by Wilson (2011), is mediated by the sociolinguistic dynamics that do not just concern grammar and vocabulary but also involve pragmatic norms, humour, intertextual reference, and communicative styles, which are culturally embedded. SAS might be language fluent and yet socially isolated, capable of writing grammatically correct academic prose and yet not having access to the informal conversations, social media subcultures, and other speak-first-write forms of communication in which domestic students form friendships.

European universities have their own adaptation challenges with regard to the academic culture. There is a strong focus on rote learning, obedience, and reproduction of the canonical knowledge within South Asian educational traditions, especially those at the secondary and undergraduate levels. European universities, on the other hand, often exalt critical argumentation, source analysis, and independent building up of analytical theories. This is not a lack of SAS but a structural incompatibility of various valid educational philosophies, a fact that can be elucidated by the framework of Berry (1997), wherein the emphasis is made on the fact that all social practices are culturally situated.

1.2.4. Administrative hardships, equal rights & gender

Berry's acculturation model, sociocultural adjustment model of Searle and Ward, and Wilson's 'fitting-in' framework do not cover administrative processes, however they are described in Equal rights coordination meeting at Vilnius University (CWD, 2025)⁸. Administrative processes are unpleasantly tangled and often undervalued barriers to SA for SAS at European universities; administrative processes within the research thesis context include migration phases and visa procedures which often draw complex bureaucracy, time-management issues (related to application fillings and arrival to universities on time) and difficulty to adjust with new host country. Unfortunate and emotionally draining delays in visa declaration or acquiring residency and (or) work permit often conclude in late arrivals to host country, it hinders participation in integration / orientation / inclusion programmes before academic life. Such administration hardships can lead to less successful and more struggle raising integration in social communities, most peer relations are shaped during initial orientation weeks. The pressure and stress – related aspects when dealing with unfamiliar, slow bureaucracy systems to arrive to a host country can form devastating sense of uncertainty and social misadjustment.

Equal rights are tightly knotted with administrative processes; however, it has a prior relation to racial inequality and (or) ethnic discrimination. Particularly, SAS in certain parts of Eastern Europe share experiences of dimming racial inequality, both inside and outside of academic infrastructures of universities; these range from miniature aggressions in lecture spaces to discriminatory harassment treatment in housing or public facilities; not only such experiences are unpleasant and disturbing they also impact emotional well – being and sense of belongingness.

⁸ Meeting processed for Community Well-being Division teams: community psychologists, disability inclusion coordinator, equal right coordinators and international administration. Meeting disclosed issues with reaching out to international students in-time and securing prevention in cases when arrival is late. Several risk factors display at start of academic route is affected by quality of emotional and inclusive well-being for international students and SAS is recorded part of international community.

The perception of unequal treatment undermines trust in institutional inclusiveness, openness and readiness to participate and provide support and safety at campus, academic spaces and more; this includes not only students but also non-academic and academic staff.

Aspects of medically recognized gender role (female, male or individual with gender dysphoria), or socially recognized gender identity role (female, male, transgender, non-binary etc.) reveal a far more complex SA process, experiences differ for each group and category. In Eastern European context there is no peer reviewed evidence on SA process for SAS whom consider a non-binary role, however, subsequent evidence exists on SAS female and male SA modality. In existing theoretical frameworks, it suggests that females find it more challenging to have successful SA experiences comparing to male students (Wilson, 2011)⁹; this particularly life involving within campus and academic aspects. However, in Ghuman (2013) paper it is identified that SAS females have a higher rate of success avoiding racially discriminatory encounters in day-to-day life compare to males, as males are exposed to far more frequent abuse. Non – binary students typically experience higher rate of discomfort in Eastern European universities; this can be related with SAS whom identify themselves as non – binary accordingly, due to little open spaces and lesser recognition for identity social diversity acceptance within the regional context (Dau, 2024).

1.3. Social Networks & Community Formation

The underlying fact about international student studies is that international students (and SAS, in particular) are likely to develop a strong social network with the co-ethnic and co-national students as opposed to making a cross-cultural friendship with domestic students (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). This tendency is occasionally viewed through the prism of deficit because

⁹ Women had more difficulty adapting than did men for; total sociocultural adaptation, the social skills factor, and going to social events or gatherings (Wilson, 2011 pp. 19)

it is manifested in the social withdrawal or the insularity of culture. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, however, can be applied sociologically to achieve a more subtle reading: co-ethnic network formation can be viewed as a reasonable cultural survival strategy in the settings where meaningful cross-cultural social contact is not actively supported.

Sociocultural functions are played by SAS associations, such as Indian student societies, Pakistani cultural associations, and Sri Lankan student unions, which are present in numerous European universities. They offer continuity of the culture, shared sources of identity, aid to religious practices, and social insurance in situations when institutional support services might be insufficient or culturally inappropriate. In their culture learning model, Furnham and Bochner (1986) note that cultural co-nationals act as cultural informants and guide newcomers through new social settings, and this role has remained relevant over time for SAS facing the social complexity of European campus life.

The use of co-ethnic networks, however, has its trade-offs in terms of adaptation, which can be brought to light by Searle and Ward (1990). When SA requires contact with an individual of the host culture, then co-ethnic social networks might restrict the acquisition of culturally relevant competencies required to succeed in participating effectively in European academic and professional settings. This tension is encapsulated in the concept of fitting in that Wilson (2011) describes: SAS have to balance between the cultural comfort of co-ethnic networks and the social capital that comes with cross-cultural engagement-a balance that is influenced by how domestic students and institutional actors make intercultural encounters friendly.

1.4. Structural & Institutional Barriers

SA does not come in an institutional vacuum. European universities themselves are cultural institutions that store specific social norms, linguistic practices, and epistemic frames as normative,

a set of conditions that disfavours students whose culture does not conform to these norms. The model of acculturation as proposed by Berry (1997), when read sociologically, focuses on the influence that the acculturation environment, which Berry labels as the multicultural ideology of the host society, has on the repertoire of orientations that are feasible to acculturating groups. Where in European universities there is no policy of genuine cultural pluralism, or, where there is, it is merely rhetoric, integration is structurally challenging, notwithstanding personal inclination.

Zhou et al., (2008) point to several structural issues affecting the adaptation of international students to the host sociocultural context, such as the lack of proper pre-arrival orientation, culturally insensitive pastoral care, the racialized social environment, and the lack of a variety of teaching methods that could authenticate the non-Western traditions of knowledge. Among SAS, other structural obstacles are visa-related fears, which restrict social and geographical mobility; economic strain, which restricts engagement in campus social life; and the unspoken rule, which is held by most European academic cultures, that students are expected to conform to dominant norms without official institutional acknowledgment of otherness.

Andrade (2006) goes ahead to identify academic adjustment as something that cannot exist without social integration, whereby students who feel culturally invisible in their institutions tend to disengage on both academic and social fronts. SAS exposed to curricula where all focus is on the European intellectual tradition, where pedagogical practices take advantage of the low status of collaborative and relationship-based learning, and where assessment systems reward styles of cultural differences to penalize may discover that the process of academic participation demands some kind of cultural self-denial that undermines both learning and belonging.

1.5. Consequences for European University Communities

The above discussion indicates that there are some institutional practice directions in European universities. Using the knowledge of Wilson (2011) that fitting in is not just an individual attainment but a relational and institutional process, it would imply that universities have a big role to play in ensuring that the social conditions that allow meaningful adaptation in an equitable manner are established. This involves offering culturally sensitive induction programs that recognize the cultural peculiarities of the student populations of South Asian background, as opposed to the international students being homogenized as a single group.

The consequences of the Searle and Ward (1990) model are also obvious: when the SA is promoted through the significant exposure to the members of the host culture, then the institutions cannot merely collocate the domestic and international students. The practical interventions associated with the contact-based model include structured intercultural programming, faculty training in inclusive pedagogy, and the purposeful development of mixed social spaces. In the absence of conscious institutional work to create conditions that ensure quality intercultural engagement, the social stratification recorded in research done by Montgomery and McDowell (2009) will continue.

The last model put forth by Berry (1997) postulates that the institutions that are dedicated to the process of integrating, as opposed to assimilating, SAS need to take active steps of demonstrating that cultural diversity is an institutional asset. This demands more than mere multiculturalism. It demands restructuring of food supply, schedules, curriculum development, and social facilities that provide the pragmatic environment for South Asian students to uphold their cultures and be full members of European university life. Integration, according to Berry, is not a gift of the host institution to the acculturating student; it is a collaboratively constructed social accomplishment, which demands change on both sides of the cultural encounter.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Method & Empirical Data

Smith (2024) states¹⁰ that qualitative research becomes more evident as generations of science find cruciality of socially approached methods like interviews and more consistent data communications; Researchers approach matter of study problem and questions seeking how the certain experience is created and what the certain impact leaves after it. In contrast, analytical roots have evaluated the quantitative field where numerical data represents the weight of results, qualitative gathering technique offers concise data collected through a linguistic approach according to Dehalwar & Sharma¹¹ (2024). Constructive approach of such allows a qualitative methodology to understand complexity of how and why in participants certain experiences, memories or even behaviours display certain social responses during interviews. The research will rely on such constructivist approach to gather the root – side of participant thoughts. Ultimately, the research requires an appropriate standard of ethical communication to secure experiences, memories and thoughts are respected; in other words, a research approach moderated with flexible ambiguity and open – mindedness towards the data collection Strauss & Corbin (2006); Motivational interviewing proposed by Levounis et al., (2017)¹² offers such approach – a strategy grounded to consider collective new and social experiences. Important to note, motivational interviewing is wildly used within clinical trials, it is also approached from social sciences and within the research framework it's open-ended questioning formulations will be adapted.

¹⁰ Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality (Smith, pp. 7-8)

¹¹ Qualitative research is a dynamic and exploratory approach that aims to understand the complexities of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024, pp. 10)

¹² Motivational interviewing (MI) is an approach for developing the patient's intrinsic motivation for behavior change by using a style of communication that blends patient centered listening skills with methods directed at eliciting the patient's motivation and commitment for change. (Levounis et al., 2017, pp. 228)

The general aim of this research is to delve and describe SA processes and challenges of SAS at Vilnius University community. The qualitative interviewing method suits research purpose to explore a broad spectrum of sensitivity and can offer more compare to quantitative method (via questionnaires, data experimentation etc.). There is no peer reviewed research that would particularly explore SA of SAS at Vilnius University community in motivational interviewing manner; thus, this thesis will serve important role to contributing in future research methods in set academic framework. Research involves in – depth exploratory aspects which meet criteria for qualitative methods and suit research aim and tasks. Applying motivational interviewing strategies, qualitative semi – structured interviews research method will include context, individual experiences, memories, thoughts and subjective interpretations; at the end of the results no generalizable data will be accessible to secure research interest and reduce not prioritized information.

2.2. Participants

The research has deemed suitability of interviewing method to fulfil set tasks; a subsequent decision was initiated upon selecting participants (Patino & Ferreira, 2018); Research aimed to focus on specific group of sample: SAS of Vilnius University, as it was part of criteria for social inclusion and exclusion; such sampling method is fit according to Filia et al., 2018 thematic analysis¹³ (hereinafter – TA) in order to secure suitability of data selection. Participation involved a randomised / opportunity sampling from Vilnius University bachelor, master, doctoral or exchange (short-term and long-term) study programmes. Participant information will include their consented share of concerns, experiences, thoughts, adaptation processes at Vilnius University –

¹³ Social inclusion is a process that ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making that affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights. (Filia, pp. 184)

all shared ideas are open to be positive, neutral or negative; Such participant data will allow appropriate and fair share sampling for analysis and avoiding bias (Filia et al., 2018).

The recruitment for the research followed the ethical policy of Vilnius University and was approved by Committee on research ethics in philosophy, religious studies and ethnology (November 17, 2025, No. (1.13 E) 250000-KT-243) (see Appendix 1.1.). Research was assigned to conduct initial invitation interviews (about 10 – 15 minutes) before main research interviews, during recruitment no professional relationship should be signed with participants to secure validity and evidenced – randomisation of the research process, Bourdeau (2000). The aim was to collect at least 7 in depth interviewees for minimum criteria conducting enough conscience TA; All participants during invitation interviews had to confirm that they have read several documents: participant information sheet (see Appendix 1.2.), signed consent form (see Appendix 1.3.) and debrief form (see Appendix 1.3.) and confirmed whether they had any questions regarding the research process. Recruitment reached 143 individuals via electronic Vilnius University emails, 26 individuals were invited in contact settings (lecture halls, library spaces). Participants were given from 24 working hours to 72 working hours to respond, giving enough time to read through research details, processes and prepare any questions. The ranged date of initial interviews and research interviews began on 10th of February to 15th of April.

Final recruitment and inclusion for TA is displayed in Appendix 2.1.; A total of 7 participants have responded to recruitment invitation, read participant information sheet, signed consent forms, turned up for initial interviews, asked any questions beforehand, commenced with research interviews and consented to use their interview transcripts for coding phase of TA.

All participants were anonymised to secure confidentiality and security of well-being and meeting high standard for ethicality¹⁴ (Godfrey-Faussett, 2022); since collected data directly related to participants personal memories, feelings and experiences only required information was collected and any excess personal intel (location, people names etc.) was shadowed / removed from the data. Limited demographic data was requested from participants to evaluate differentiation effect; however, demographical scale of the research was not prioritised due to little available sample. 6 female participants and 1 male participant were registered; two participants from Bangladesh, one participant from Pakistan, three participants from India and one participant from Sri Lanka; participants ranged from 21 to 31 years old; 6 participants commended full – time course and 1 participant identified within exchange programme Erasmus +; 5 participants from bachelor level studies, 1 participant from master level studies and 1 participant from doctoral level studies. For further research purposes each transcript was assigned a code name of a flower: Jasmine, Dandelion, Lily, Lotus, Tulip, Zinnia and Peony. Brinkmann & Kvale (2017) regarded the labelling (or encrypting) participant data as suitable and entrusted technique in qualitative research; thus, research followed a similar example; alternatively, Filatov (2024) applied such method when conducting a TA and secured anonymity and transparency of data control over course of the study.

2.3. Materials, Procedure & Ethics

The most essential part of materials is semi – structured interview question plan (see Appendix 2.2.); it referred thematic blocks for the course of research interview and while not

¹⁴ Anonymisation of research data is seen as crucial to maintain the privacy of research participants. In some instances, this may also be necessary as a mechanism to protect them for harm if, for example, the data collected are sensitive or could potentially be used for discrimination. (Godfrey-Faussett, pp. 5)

primarily held a strict structure, it helped interviewer maintain the communication within interview focused on the main topic. There were several physical assets serving core roles during the research and for data collection. All physical materials were evaluated to be suitable for the fluid transitioning in the research¹⁵ Powney & Watts (2018). Physical contact space / room for interviewing was arranged for research purposes by Community Well-being Division, room was borrowed according to the approval of the Head of Community Well-being Division; during work hours this room served psychological counselling services, however, for the research purpose during non-work hours room was borrowed to secure confidentiality and safety of the participants. Participant information sheets, consent forms and debrief were either printed physically or submitted to participant's preference remotely. A device (recorder) for interviewing was borrowed by Community Well-being Division, where all confidential data was kept and only once shadowed (or confirmed for TA) transmitted to locked USB. All data within locked USB is set to be deleted after it serves its purpose for the research; the asset USB is locked with Vilnius University recommended password control.

All initial interviews had two options to be done either remotely or in person, research interviews were only in person; once dates confirmed research semi-structured interviews took place at assigned room; before any voice recording done such environmental patterns like sound, recording audibility, privacy were secured to ensure smooth performance and participant comfort. Research interviews lasted from shortest 56 minutes to longest 2 hours and 16 minutes (average time 1 hour and 30 minutes). During research interview phases (thematic blocks) 5 to 10 minute pauses were allowed if participants needed a short break. After research interview participants waited for shadowed transcript forms, which later they confirmed and gave consent for TA; this

¹⁵ The interviewer needs careful preparation, and practice to develop social and recording skills, and the ability to analyse and evaluate the data collected. Powney & Watts (2018) pp. 9

was necessary in case they wanted to withdraw certain shared experience due to feeling uncomfortable and feeling health risks alleviating (trauma, high-stress memories, panic related memories etc.) after research interview.

The committee on research ethics in philosophy, religious studies and ethnology (November 17, 2025, No. (1.13 E) 250000-KT-243) has recognized the research proposal to commence to empirical study as it met required standards for academic lawfulness, fairness, and transparency; purpose limitation and minimisation; data protection by design & security (integrity / confidentiality) and accountability and storage limitation (see Appendix 1.1). All of the data was enclosed according to Lithuanian general data protection regulation act¹⁶. Research interview elements like time, location and procedure conducted within Vilnius University spaces according to committee's ethical protocol (2025). Throughout the whole recruitment and research process up until coding – all participants were reminded of their withdrawal rights and ethical human rights; this was to secure pathway to draw clear process lines and directions during the research (Oates, 2020).

2.4. Analysis

The research applies TA to explore gathered data – it's ability to capture core data experiences, perception of collected participant codes are suitable for analysis SA of SAS at Vilnius University community. In Braun & Clarke¹⁷ (2012) paper, it is explained that TA has high versatility and adaptability towards qualitative data. TA suits this study for multitude of reasons: (1) it allows fluid process of generating qualitative thematical themes when analysing semi –

¹⁶ Lithuanian GDPR 2019: <https://share.google/95E2yHVAJBVTmskdM>

¹⁷ Linked to the fact that it is just a method, one of the main reasons TA is so flexible is that it can be conducted in a number of different ways. TA has the ability to straddle three main continua along which qualitative research approaches can be located: inductive versus deductive or theory-driven data coding and analysis, an experiential versus critical orientation to data, and an essentialist versus constructionist theoretical perspective Braun & Clarke (2012) pp. 58-59

structured interviews; Braun & Clarke (2021) TA methodology per se flourishes construction of themes by researcher and their engagement with the participant creating a chance to draw codes with more freedom – based speech during interviews; (2) Braun & Clarke’s TA method constructively interacts researcher with moderation and positioning the meaning of questions with categorising data into comfortable blocks for analysis; this allows researcher a more transparent approach when arguing the data.

Several ample papers describe importance of detailing each phase of TA to evidence investigators capability to adapt the analytical method within the study framework (Ando et al., 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2023; Cernasey & Axon, 2023; Filatov, 2024). TA within current research settings part relies on Braun & Clarke’s (2023) later work referring to reflexive analysis, determining the ‘making-conscious-choices’, remaining aware of ‘how-the-researcher-engages-with-the-data.’ As displayed within Appendix 2.3. current TA will ultimately apply six phase staging for coding collected qualitative data:

First phase – all collected data is revised and proof-checked using traditional audio recordings and applying Vilnius University recommended system platforms; data is transcribed using trusted software, following multiple hand checks is performed before transitioning any transcript amp for coding. It’s crucial to secure no verbal misspellings are made, or if speakers decide to cite, express metaphors, share ideas using mother tongue language to translate according to participants consent before concluding coding phase.

Second phase – all proof-checked interviews are marked with initial codes (draft codes) which will serve later on main process of coding. These initial codes help to find repeat keywords within all transcripts and evaluate what main codes could be concluded. Initial codes help to identify unique thematic codes which are not repeated in other cases but spark crucial meaning

within the interview (in context of this research: different ethnicities, regional blocks, religious beliefs, cultural differences and more).

Third phase – after administrating all initial codes in all transcripts process of pooling begins. Codes that reappear in different samples increase their meaning and relevancy as thematic keywords. Initial codes shape into backbone of the analysis and display a smooth transformation from raw data to theoretical unit; then theoretical unit is transformed into themes for TA.

Fourth phase – after conscience level of themes is generated, another reviewal to commence a check for relevancy in the themes, in applied literature in the research. Themes will be waved for their meaning, relevancy and uniqueness for research tasks. This will help to define preliminary crucial thematic topics that involve SA of SAS at Vilnius University community.

Fifth phase – final stage of defining themes and labelling each to create a research story. Involvement of themes and thematic blocks into superordinate (main themes) themes and subordinate (subthemes) themes. This phase helps to shape out

Sixth phase – after all superordinate and subordinate themes are reviewed and finalized all empirical data set for results and discussion; superordinate and subordinate themes will be built into a model for visual demonstration of analysis and each model block derived from themes to specific codes with investigator's commentary.

Chapter 3: Results

Results identified five superordinate themes that underline the SA, its processes and challenges of SAS at Vilnius University community; each superordinate theme will adopt subordinate themes, overall visual illustration and tables are presented (see Appendix 4.1. & 4.2.). First superordinate theme will cover the period before coming to Vilnius University and first month after arrival to it. Second superordinate theme will cover relationship with academia (Vilnius University campus, spaces, general spots, peers, study modules, academic process academic and non-academic staff). Third Superordinate theme will unveil positive and negative factors that SAS experienced outside of Vilnius University campus (the city, general Lithuanian population etc.). Fourth superordinate theme will include individual or personal factors related to change of SAS while adapting in host society and academia, lived challenges or important moments that enabled them to see life in different way. Lastly, fifth superordinate theme will reveal supportive systems, strategies and (or) services that assisted SAS during hardships and frustration while adapting to the university.

3.1. Arrival & Starter Phase

3.1.1. Securing documentation & legalities

“... for the visa application, it was kind of easy for me because I had been to Europe twice before, so I was familiar with the application form. Though earlier I filled, I got Schengen visa because I was in Europe for a short period and for Lithuania I had to apply for a long-term visa.”

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., lines 31-36

From all participants, Jasmine was only one who had pre-existing skills with documentations to ensure successful crossing of continent borders; Jasmine was also the only

participant who has accomplished higher-education in several postgraduate fields and commenced to short-term Erasmus exchange as a doctoral student in Europe; they had certain wait period for Schengen visa¹⁸, reflecting on their past experience they started visa formatting in advance which allowed them to manage all document declarations and residency status acquirement in time. They did not express any pressuring thoughts, nor concerns regarding long-administrative border checks. This evidences, that with several tries exhausting declaration staging phases can be adapted to (Udayanga, 2024).

“... I just did everything by myself, whatever documents I needed help with from my dad, like the bank statements and stuff, he just got them out for me and rest everything. Yeah, I reached out to people because I had to get some documents translated to Lithuanian language for the application. So yeah, that was the main problem. It's just that my visa came very late. It was hard to get an appointment. But once I did submit my passport, I got my visa and my passport back in like three days. So that was a good thing. And then I booked my ticket, I left...”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 37-47

Lily did not have many experience in travelling abroad, while reflecting on attempt to complete all documentations independently, couldn't secure financial statements on own; they needed help from their parental figure due to economic dependency in the time. Additionally, they had a struggle confirming document translations in Lithuanian, which was a mandatory request by border checks. This led to Lily's later arrival later and missing out on integrational international student week; that was massive disadvantage to Lily's adaptation within academic community at Vilnius University. Depicting, importance to start documentations as early as possible.

¹⁸ <https://www.axa-schengen.com/en/visa/schengen>

“... army, he (father) served in Indian and British army or whatever it was called. So like perhaps they were doing background check on my family just before granting me this visa check. Because I do know like anything related to armies are always taking their own drafts...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 70-73

Peony’s administrative visa process was held back due to army records on their family line (father). This implies, that SAS may not pass borders as smoothly, when considering national level documentations like federal checks / criminal records and more, possibly impacting arrival date for the students. In Peony’s case, they had work permit and residency status in United Arab Emirates (Bangladesh citizen), which smoothened system flow and they managed to arrive to campus just in time.

Encompassing the border check impact on initial SA process all participants mentioned that visa acquirements, criminal records and document translations were impacting on their stress and start of academic route, which, to some experience EU citizens don’t need to deal with if studying at Vilnius University. SAS miss out on formal integrations which conduct all course module introduction, advisory links and guides to services of academia and that delays them from learning how institution is working. Additionally, Vilnius University has a deadline for arrival that may increase pressure for SAS to manage border check as quick as possible, otherwise, they are kicked out from the system and need to apply next year.

3.1.2. Settling necessities for survival (accommodations / food / clothing etc.)

“... I had some of my seniors who's been to VU a couple of years back, they told me they received their first instalment after, I think, two or three weeks after reaching governance. So I was

already prepared. I had, I already had money, my personal money with me. So, but it didn't take much time. I think within 10 days, I received the fund. So it wasn't really difficult for me..."

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., line 47-51

After arriving to Lithuanian and Vilnius University it's essential to prepare everything to survive basic finances, food, clothes, housing, medications etc., Jasmine's case was little lighter than others. They had previous travel experience and connections from academic field and had needed information where they should start to ensure fulfilling settlement at academia. Their prior concern to survive was budget and finances. They ensured to apply as early as possible to have a slot for scholarship and available financial aid for exchange students. Meeting all the criteria, they managed to obtain money within first month and avoid starving.

"...Initially, I thought of dormitories. But then, back then, four years ago, the dormitory that's near the medical faculty, I think it was only for Lithuanian students. So I could not get a spot over there. And then everyone, like the university dormitory in charge, whatever, they just kept suggesting Sauletekis dormitory for me. And I had not heard a lot of good things or any nice thing to be very frank. Because first thing, it's very far from the medical faculty. And it's kind of in the middle of nowhere. And from what I've heard, the situation there is not good. Like there are rats in the kitchen, and you know, a lot of drunk people. And it's safe, but overall, not the best. And I live alone. So my safety, my well being is all in my hands. So I was like, no. So I moved to a single studio, one bedroom apartment type situation. Which again, was expensive..."

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 53-64

Lily and several other participants face challenge with finding a stay place at university campus; accommodations either denied application, or in Lily's case suggested corpus that was at

the other end from their faculty. Available housing for academia students next to Lily's faculty was only for Lithuanian students, which raises concerns, why; proposed international accommodations had peer feedback being infested and contaminated with pathogens; that led Lily's decision to invest into a private residency in city centre. The option was expensive and led to Lily's quality of life to decrease due to financial limitations; nevertheless, Lily stayed strong for first year until finding alternative residency, adapting to less food and cheaper clothing; they expressed desire not to live near substance abusing society, while not being mean about it – they valued own position which comes from Muslim understanding. This displays that Lily was passionate and was cautious of her environment not to interfere with one's beliefs.

“... So if it came to clothing, well, when I came here, my suitcase was packed. I had my help from my mom and it was majority of them was food because I didn't know what they had here. I didn't know if I could buy certain things. So I just brought a couple of snacks, some instant food and things I thought I wouldn't be able to find here and some clothes. But in my country, we have like a certain place that's very cold where we go for trips. So we had some clothes for the cold season. Also my mom's, my grandma, she's in Italy. She would send us some winter clothes, not really for the winter here, but I would say for the autumn, it's good. And I brought some of them, some of this, some of that...”

Appendix 3.7. Zinnia., lines 107-126

In Zinnia's case adapting with necessities came in helping hand of relatives (mom & grandma); while focusing available luggage for food and clothes, Zinnia was not sure whether Lithuania will match the seasons where their relatives stay in Europe; food was not a starting issue,

however, facing host country winter was – that also came in financial investment, that lowered available budget option for Zinnia’s first year.

“... about the clothing uh when we got here it was like a cultural shock or something that like stores like Maxima I guess yeah Maxima has like clothes in it like it's a grocery store why there are clothes in there so it was we were like shocked for us sometimes but I came to know that from my university uh colleagues like the locals that there is a place called Humana where you can find the cheap clothes because at the time when we were here like the first year we usually like convert our currency to this currency like if there is like one euro in my country one euro is equal to 320 or 330 currency yeah wow so it's like when you're spending in euros first year is like oh my god that's so expensive we should skip it...”

Appendix 3.2. Tulip., lines 115-123

In Tulip’s instance, socioeconomic balance from their homeland and host society was extremely different. European prices were far pricier than anticipated, which led them to feed on cheap junk food, purchasing worn off clothes and have more budget friendly lifestyle until they found a job in host city.

Participants referred to initial settlement finding certain hardships with host transportation system as well, as it was important life part to travel from accommodation or apartment to campus, however, financial security was main block within this subordinate theme as missing out on enough budget could result in leading poorer lifestyle, like in Tulip’s or Lily’s example.

3.1.3. Initial start in academic life (communication / first lectures / integration to modules and university etc.)

“... So I attended two, three lectures and then I just decided not to go because I didn't think it would be because I at my PhD level, I want something more challenging. So I decided I decided not to go. So then I was left with only Person_3's course. And it was really, really interesting, maybe also because I have never studied anthropology before and everything was new to me. So literally, maybe it could be the basic things, but that was challenging and interesting, new to me. And I had only classes on Friday and remaining days, I would I was still writing my thesis.”

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., lines 297-305

In Jasmine's case academic modules did not meet their interest and academic level, due to which they regarded to study coordination and had approved lectures that could suit the need. Nevertheless, they didn't find the benefit of proposed syllabuses at the beginning besides one new academic field that had different turn on Jasmine. While adapting to new academic standards and new environment, they discovered a new science sphere that allowed them to feel bigger bond with their doctoral project.

“... in the first semester, since I was one month late and the first month of university, you learned a lot of the major subjects like anatomy histology. Um, and I was lucky to have a professor in anatomy. She was very nice. And I told her that, you know, I'm a month late. So I had already missed like three, four tests, like three, four colloquiums. She was like, it's okay. You can do these first and then we can move on. And, uh, she helped me through everything in anatomy. But, uh, again, there were a few professors who were not necessarily rude, but also not super like welcoming whatsoever.”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 299-315

Lily was late due to border check and visa processes, that led them to have a massive gap comparing to their peers. Some academic staff reached out with helping hand, to aid them to manage on missed out material and provide alternative tests that they were delayed on, while some academic staff displayed a neglecting silence. Lily shares that certain academic staff did not consider Lily's situation and thought she was manipulating (openly saying that to them) – that led to Lily's emotional mood decrease; some didn't respond to emails and Lily had to seek for alternative to fill the missed academic gap without ending up in a credit debt.

“... But it was really fun during the lectures All the professors were really helpful. And they were talking just like my friends. Because in my country, professors are like you talking to the gods. So it's a different, even a different language they speak. So it was really fun talking to them, exchanging the ideas...”

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion., lines 18-23

Dandelion experienced a new form of communication between ‘professor & student’ reflecting on their homeland teachers / staff / professors showing less affection and meaningfulness towards students; Dandelion was shocked that Vilnius University staff acted differently and more welcoming, drawing less boundaries and focusing on pupil condition in the module start.

3.2. Relationship with Host Academia (Environment, Staff & Peers)

3.2.1. Bonding with peers / fellow residents / staff

“... In my class, it was kind of okay. Inside the room, we were talking. I was like a scared chicken because it's like a completely different society. Whatever classes I have had in my life before, I

was almost silent because I was scared of the judgement. What if I say something stupid? Because if I say something stupid, I will be judged. And here, I said so many stupid things. I mean, gradually I started opening up. First day of my class, I was silent, but then we started having conversation and then I had a sudden stupid idea about the fact and I just said it to the professor and they appreciated the idea...”

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion., lines 89-99

Creating connections and maintaining bond also impacts the quality of integrating into studies; it can affect the level of positive SA. In Dandelion’s case – they learned a new side of academia – free speech and expression that is not punished or socially harassed by staff. This helped them to open up more to peers and people in host society. Reflecting on their homeland educational experiences, student noted expressing thoughts in classroom environment constrained them not only by worries of potentially be bullied and ruining social image that would have far deeper wounds to family reputation, but also breaching hierarchical structures characteristics of South Asian university background; this background spoke of pedagogical frame where lecturer is a primary speaker while peers quietly listen with little opportunity to answer or conduct a dialogue during lesson (Abbas, 2002). Considering progressive and highly ranked universities in the region like Vilnius University to shift to more inclusive and interactive approaches, the hierarchical system between faculty and students remained a crucial norm that shapes peer prior expectations of sessions, participation in lectures and forges academic intercultural communication competences.

“... I had no whatsoever communication with my family as well during hard time because I didn't want to fail them. I didn't want to become the shame of my family to my father, to my mother, and

my sisters. So I stayed very silent and enclosed. I think my professors tried to help me and chat with me. Even my course representative tried to reach out to me ...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 211-218

In Peony’s storyline they faced massive barrier to talk or trust anyone, mainly due to experience with behaviour from administrative accommodation staff. They had a rough start and missing out on lectures drew them back from their peers; they couldn’t bond with staff nor students or even their relatives about their thoughts and pressuring situation. Surrounding people tried to show sign of help; however, Peony was not secure of it, which led to more painful and exhausting experience later. Talking about their situation to their patterns raised fear that it would risk to shame family’s name and only ruin well-being of their parents. They also didn’t know how much could anyone could help them.

“... we had a WhatsApp group with classmates from my programme before coming here for some reason. I don't know how they made it, but someone made a group and introduced like, okay, this is my name, I'm coming to this course and blah, blah, blah. And after coming here, I met them. So it wasn't the first time meeting them in that sense. So it didn't feel like I'm meeting strangers. So I immediately made some friends because of like, the common hobbies were interesting.”

Appendix 3.7. Zinnia., lines 213-219

In Zinnia’s case, their bonding with peers and staff began through social platforms – before any sessions began their details from application were saved and they were added to chat platform with fellow student’s month before September; this gave them more time to get know each other and when contact activities began, they felt less lonely and lost; Sharing common activities helped

to break iceberg between unknown people. The same friend group Zinnia made has come through a lot of events together with them and that ensured her SA is not abandoned in loneliness.

“... if i have any kind of challenges i have talked to the administration in the university or if i didn't get a chance to directly communicate i usually talk to the class representative person who has direct connection with the coordinators of or maybe the head of studies in our faculty.”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 517-521

Initial integration at academia for Lily came along with more or less independent path. They held high value for boundaries at institution and refer to bonding only when academic work required that. Primarily, they did that because they decided to embrace new them, representing Muslim women community, wearing hijab, respecting own culture laws. This led to lower communication with peers. However, they maintained professional bond between study administration, head of faculty and course representative.

Bonding with peers and staff turned out for all differently. However, it embarks significance of having reliable communication at the beginning of the semester (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023). Peony's example shows that loss of reliability in people can negatively impact the whole course at academia (lesser trust, harder to manage studies, fear to talk about challenges etc.); While others displayed more positive or more confine cases which helped them to adapt with the studies.

3.2.2. Adapting with academic studies

“... writing structures, where the things, are coming from, basic, core, basic things, you can probably, YouTube, find in YouTube, some guy, explaining this stuff, but it's a bit, destructive, when the instructor, is like different, or I don't, know the person, or it's like, they are trying, to

explain something, that I don't need, so, for this course, probably, what can I say, okay, take critical discourse, analysis, which was really, weird for me, because, I had no idea, what's going on in here, so, we are using terms, academic term ...”

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion., lines 428-434

At the beginning of academia, it's important to have strong understanding of presented modules, the keywords and theme blocks; it ensures that one can catch on with academic criteria and standards of university, follow language professors speak. For Dandelion this aspect was one of the tough ones; they missed out on initial week of lectures, so they tried to use social media to learn about module syllabus materials. However, it wasn't the most efficient as learning such information in practice and not on own settings is far more complex. Another barrier that educational systems are very different from host community and Dandelion's native land, this led to additional requirement to learn in European standards (Vázquez-Parra et al., 2025).

“... I watch all my (remote) lectures on 2x uh and it's way faster and I understand the same amount uh uh the lectures I I don't like that they're online um it's not like good for our health and we don't observe anything uh and then it's just like you attend it and you can't do anything while you're attending a lecture so you have to pay attention but nothing is going in your brain so then you have to watch it again ...”

Appendix 3.5. Lotus., lines 136-141

In Lotus case academic start faced doubts and concerns about study methodology; referring to remote lectures that are harmful to their health in long-term exposure; Lotus also compared that international students take subjects remotely, while Lithuanian student groups study same subjects contact; almost as if international students are intentionally held back due to minority groups.

“... I skipped these sessions, but I couldn't do anything else. My personal being, my wellness was affected by many causes. Like I had a very disrupted first semester. Like we had very important lectures. We had the assessment presentations of what we need to do and everything. So my first semester, I ended up with two debts in two different modules, which I reassessed after the summer, honestly, the start of integrating into the academic life was very difficult primarily because accommodations made it very difficult.”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 144-150

Peony shares with their though experience, they experience extreme difficulties on first half of term. Due to lack of support and available time they ended up with 2 academic debts which increased their worries. This was the step where they fought cancelling all studies was the option; they couldn't stop studies to take academic leave due to migration checks; reflecting on their family help to study in university they decided to stay and keep everything shut inside.

Massive challenge for many participants were reflective and more expressive assessment methods at academia. However, with help from social media and small available academic staff guidance they managed to learn it a bit. While not all, but half tried to learn related to modules academic material via online options, and that was some of help, however, academic terms remain a wall that prevent SAS students to fully appreciate academia's tests and assessments.

3.2.3. Spaces within academia (libraries / gardens etc.)

“... issue was probably with accommodations. So while academic side of university confirmed and accepted me with no questions, accommodations had withdrawn my application for the residence stay ... And well, I didn't particularly enjoy that I skipped these sessions, but I couldn't

do anything else. My personal being, my wellness was affected by many causes. Like I had a very disrupted first semester. Like we had very important lectures. ... So my first semester, I ended up with two debts in two different modules, which I reassessed after the summer, honestly, the start of integrating into the academic life was very difficult primarily because accommodations made it very difficult. And even my academic faculty couldn't do anything.”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 76-79 & 144-149

Peony at the beginning of their academic year, couldn't mention whether their specific spaces in university that they could have used to cope or feel study life increase; reflecting that they experienced rejection for stay from accommodations and almost ended up homeless, being a student and maintain well-being was priority over comfort.

“... There's like a cabin place. It's like the confession room in the church. It's so nice. If you're sitting there, nobody can see you properly, and you can have your time. So I love that place as well. I just go there, read, and it's the best place for reading, even better than the library. Yeah, so I like the place. But the timing was a bit weird for me.”

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion., lines 154-161

To manage adapting to the studies Dandelion sought for spaces within the facility that would suit their liking; one of such they discovered quiet or prayer rooms that are rarely used by anyone. To cope with their mental health challenges, they would use these spaces to quietly read and be with themselves. A massive facility, new course and studying structures, new people – created massive pressure for Dandelion, thus, at the beginning and while getting used to host culture and day to day experience, they use silent spaces like the silent room.

“... so I was at the medicine faculty for the whole first year and I actually really like the medicine faculty it's really cosy and it's got good equipment and it's like all updated and everything a lift would be nice but but it's fine we I remember explicitly we had this histology class which was the prettiest it was full of like plants which I love all of the all of the faculties are full of plants and I remember the corridor for histology is full of skulls have you have you been there yeah oh it's amazing I was so I was so fascinated by it it's like the whole thing it's like from ceiling to floor with the skulls and I was like wow this is beautiful yeah ...”

Appendix 3.5. Lotus., lines 113-120

Lotus entails the importance of structure architecture and interior that they were studying in. The design and placement put an effect to their perspective to the studies, a somewhat motivation to attend few lectures a day just to enjoy the old building style. Ultimately, Lotus prefers contact sessions, and while the joy with the space was lesser than the irritation with the remote lectures, they tried to make the best of available time inside real facility.

Suitable spaces within academia have evidenced that it's important to have an area like library, silent room, or general hallway style in main blocks that would inspire people to study. A struggle to this were that certain faculties force bigger part of international students to study remotely, while still being present in the country. This raises concern of equal distribution of space for local students and international.

3.3. Relationship with Host Community Outside Academia (Facilities & People)

3.3.1. Positive day to day experiences

“... So yeah, everything, looking for the best thing which suits my taste. It was a lot of trial and error. Also, while paying, the self-service was new to me. I learned, made a lot of mistakes, got

scolded by so many Maxima ladies. ... They were kind, they taught me, but language was a barrier because I had no idea, even though I didn't know Spite. I had to learn, that wasn't me, but still, there was a language barrier. So yeah, it was just learning step by step. Now I'm a bit comfortable. Now if someone says go to another country, I'll be like, nah, I love it here..."

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion., lines 222-231

Another crucial aspect while adapting in academic environment is the host community and spaces outside the university. More or less positive experiences Dandelion gone through was learning how to use self-paid services at local stores, which was something new to them. At the beginning they had no skills how to use self-paid machines, the staff of supermarkets were there. While they didn't understand each other due to language barriers, they still guided Dandelion and gradually they made it better with less interference from market staff. This demonstrates the issue of host community not knowing English, rather Lithuanian and if lucky grocery store staff will know Polish, Latvian or Russian. English is a less popular option in middle class society; it doesn't change fact that often SAS have to almost in sign language to communicate with the staff in order to settle purchases or any other needs outside of campus; it also helped Dandelion to see more hope seeing that local citizens didn't push them away and attempted to support them knowing there is a clear communication barrier.

"... I don't have a ritual, anything of that sort. But I started doing a ritual from Lithuania. Oh, I started I started drinking coffee, which I never did before, even though I come from a place where we we make coffee like at my home, we had a coffee tree and my grandmother used to make coffee powder out of it. But I but at my home, nobody drinks coffee. ... I see that literally everybody is crazy for coffee when they don't even have coffee at Lithuania in Europe. They don't

produce coffee in Europe, but how can they? I was used to wonder how can they be so crazy over coffee when what if they what if we decide not to export coffee and then all Lithuanians will be dead within a week or two. So I started drinking coffee there. I have because I have seen people because you people have such a coffee culture. I got influenced now every every day in the morning I drink coffee. I start my day with the coffee...”

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., lines 590-604

Unique experience that shocked Jasmine, was learning to drink coffee as part of a small contemporary ritual. While existence of coffee wasn't new to them, quite opposite their country importing coffee to Europe, they never took liking or importance to it until they began living and enjoying life outside of university campus. Observing major part of Lithuania's capital citizens carrying coffee, sitting in to drink coffee, purchasing bags to go to of pure coffee beans Jasmine gave in to the circle. They even began chatting with strangers at international coffee shop, which helped them to meet new individuals outside academic background. This boosted the positive adapting experience as it helped Jasmine to bond with Lithuanian culture.

3.3.2. Negative day to day experiences

“... Though I did experience bullying and harassment in Lithuania so I was beat up, sprayed with alcohol and some fuzzy liquids in the streets closer to the new years. It was my actually the first year as well so I was like going from the store in the old town and then there are like two guys that called up additional two folks and they surrounded me, beat me up, they broke all my groceries so I felt like shit completely. That's where I lost the meaning of my life because I was

literally harassed and police didn't want to take or escalate this event very far because there were no cameras, no evidence captured even though I was physically beaten up...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 321-328

While positive experiences outside academia are crucial to live a more satisfying life and securing fluent SA as international student, another essential block pays attention to negative experiences; these experiences are often what causes stress and pressure for people from abroad. For instance, Peony experienced physical assault, discrimination on festive night eve, no available support was provided to them by legal authorities. This demotivated Peony and ruined their quality of life in Vilnius, also decreased desire to study making them to shut down from everyone even more, increasing mental health risks and reducing motivation to live.

“... Because even in Facebook, there are a lot of posts about foreign people in old town and the street photography. And the comments are very, very bad. People are being like, go back to your country. Don't bring your culture to our culture. Okay. If you don't want all of that, then don't call us. Don't be like, okay, we have opportunities for you. We have jobs for you because we're not coming here to put our culture in your country. We're not coming here to colonise your country whatsoever. We're coming here because we're just trying to find a way to live. We're just coming here for education, for work, for such things to sustain ourselves. So you have to make them feel safe. You have to send the message to the Lithuanian people that they are not all bad people. Not all coloured people are racist. They're not all gangsters. For example, you see a man with a beard. He's not going to be a terrorist automatically. He's just a man with a beard. You can't see a black person and immediately think like, okay, maybe he's selling drugs...”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 611-635

Lily has experienced cyberbullying by host community outside of academia. Living day to day life and sharing experiences with local citizens brought attention to toxic messages like ‘go back to your country’ or ‘don’t bring your culture to our’ which is extremely hostile; Lily was concerned whether country was actually inclusive for international students. Seeing via remote platforms people share discrimination, hate and racism it raised many question can Lithuania even host international students, or whether it was a backlash to draw people to study in it. In sarcasm, Lily expresses that ‘not coming here to colonise your country whatsoever. We're coming here because we're just trying to find a way to live’ as Lithuanian marketing was one to call in people from abroad; sadly, Lithuanian citizens not fully as a host society understands the position of SAS and no existing prevention stops from toxic commentaries. While it is illegal by European law to distribute discrimination – legal authorities are not paying enough attention to it. It is still pestilently flowing and is visible to SAS and other international students (Wang, 2023). Meanwhile, at Vilnius University international students of all backgrounds are protected by equal rights strategy, outside of academia they still witness and encounter unpleasant commentary about own ethnicity or welcomeness in the country; lack of appropriate surveillance increases concern for SAS pupils like Lily, who arrived to pursue carrier but is being pressured by outside society for who they are and that they arrive from foreign region.

“... if you don't know I'm muslim so it's uh pretty much hard for us to find halal options because everything even not recently but like few months ago I came to know that some of the cakes contain gelatin or maybe they mix alcohol in it which was like a really shocking like what what am I eating non-halal food from from like two years so now we have to like translate it before we bought it but it was really hard for us to like find so much halal options ...”

Appendix 3.2. Tulip., lines 126-139

Another negative experience is related to survival, Tulips story entails that it's difficult for Muslim individuals to find Halal friendly options at the start and even later; there are unique identification codes and certain grocery stores but they are not budget friendly and often SAS who identify themselves within Muslim beliefs have to risk buying junk food and reading for hours Lithuanian food product descriptions. This shows, that logistics in food market and more inclusive marketing solutions are not installed in Lithuania and not in Vilnius University canteens; raising concern, why academia is inviting different cultures and not adapting basic survival needs for them and not informing them what is possible and what is not.

“... told me that some Indians when they move to Europe, they discriminate among the new Indians who are coming. So what she told me that it's it's it's kind of a trend. She knows patterns observed among these Indian immigrants in Europe that after living there for a while, they think that they are superior than the new Indians coming. So she told me that could be the reason, but I don't really know what is the reason...”

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., lines 270-78

Unlike other participants, Jasmine, experienced discrimination and bullying from her homeland associate that they were staying in same accommodation hall. While other participants dealt with unfairness of host community, Jasmine discovered that fellow Indians empower and dethrone other Indians as if competitive game and closer one's livelihood city or village the harsher is passive aggression. Jasmine reported it and was relocated to live with another foreign student, however, experienced situation evidenced that even they didn't know everything about their culture. Interestingly, administrative staff of academia knew this behaviour patterns displayed in

minority ethnicities of academic background but no arriving internationals were informed of it and not appropriate settlement scheme is set out to avoid such unpleasant encounters. Jasmine felt that she was not much appreciated due to this and raised question whether Vilnius University has ability to accommodate international students and their needs.

While more negative experiences are covered, selected codes of participants embed unique factors and scenarios that happen to SAS. Such experiences demotivate, distract and disable SAS from wanting to enjoy academic life and raises more individual worries, fear for own safety and even questioning validity of host community academia and what it has done to secure the country is informed and educated to welcome people from specific parts of the earth.

3.4. Individual Changes & Challenges During Adaptation

3.4.1. Discovery of new individual skills

“... Like I started praying more, I was focussing on myself. So I took it on myself as like, okay, you know, I'm growing. I'm transitioning into adulthood. ... As an individual, before I left for university, I was extremely extroverted. I was very, very free-spirited. My parents are very liberal. And when I moved to university, I made the decision that I want to put the hijab on. And my mom was like, are you sure? Do you want to do this? You know what it means? Like, you're going to have to wear a hijab in public. People will know you're Muslim. My dad was also like, you know, what if you get hate crime because people will try to do something...”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 235-236 & 269-279

Biggest effect in the participants was referenced to individual discoveries and challenges that enabled them to evaluate their life and themselves a new. In Lily's case, they decided to come out to world with a new identity that their family supported but never enforced. As a Muslim they

decided to start wearing hijab and embrace the spiritual, cultural and ethnical livehood behind it. Lily's decision played part as soon as they started life at Vilnius University, making a massive shift. While their relatives were concerned for them, the decision they made allowed to become more independent, include themselves into introvert Lithuanian population and shelve the past extroverted Lily until they are ready to bring out her social self.

“... like had to learn to be a lot more independent because my class is not very close knit even though we're like a small batch like we're less than 30 people and in school it was totally different because we were like I mean I had all of my friends there it's basically like us experiencing life together and at university it's totally different because you first come in you don't know these people and then you have all these experiences together ...”

Appendix 3.5. Lotus., lines 336-341

In Lotus instance, they discovered importance of holding together with people they bond with. While in their homeland their close connection with friends and family was constant and they didn't need to think much about maintaining these close bonds because they were always close. When Lotus integrated more into Vilnius University, they realized that is crucial to check up on small bonds they shape with peers, staff and friends outside of academia. The life pace is extremely fast, the further courses become the less time they can arrange for each other, on top of it there is responsibility to work to earn money for rent and food. Lotus began to value any form of meetings they can arrange with friends, it can be bare minimum or last half a day – Lotus will make out most of it, because living in friendly community is what important to them, knowing others can manage time to have leisure time venues to relax and smile and more; Lotus cherishes

these moments and it's something that helps them to adapt with society, the host culture, academic workload and busy employment shifts.

"... that I think I become more polite after leaving Lithuania. Because since I was in India all my life, it's not in our culture to say thank you to us, anybody, even not even our family member, only in extreme, some just very rare occasion you said thank you to a person in India. And if you say thank you to a family member, it's like kind of offensive here, because you don't do that to a very close person. Saying thank you, that seems really formal. So I feel like after living in Lithuania, I have learned to become more formal and polite, especially when I go out in public place. So last week my family was here. So I went out with my nephew and after getting out of the cab, I said thank you to the cab driver. And my nephew asked me, why are we saying thank you to everybody? So he was so shocked. Then I realised, oh yeah, I do say thank you to everybody. It's like now it's become a habit, which I cannot get out of my system, that I just say thank you to any service I get, be it a cab or maybe at a restaurant, anywhere, I just say thank you..."

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., lines 502-519

One of the deepest experience and qualities outlines are recorded by Jasmine, they identified a new side when adapting and living in Lithuania. They identified that they became more 'polite' and developed a phenomenal linguistic pattern to say 'thank you' which is not common for Indian people unless it's a formal query. Jasmine described that she became more grateful to all the services, stores, drivers, friends, academic staff and that encouraged her to view world in more accepting way and when she came back to her homeland, her relatives were confused. Jasmine was also confused but she reflected that even simple two words create a whole new

meaning in own life if applying it in day-to-day life; Jasmine opens that being grateful helps to bond with people better which is crucial to ensure smoother SA.

3.4.2. Conflicts within academia (peers & system)

“... I don't know shit, because my education system is completely different. I literally struggled to complete the basic courses because there's a leap I took. If I took the bachelors in my country and bachelors in here, it would be aligned, and then I had to take the master's. Imagine skipping your bachelor's. That was me. I had no idea how education system works here, how you need to read papers, what things exist, how phonetic things exist. I mean, I had a basic idea, very basic. I had a course. That's why I was able to enrol, but what they teach there is not even related. ... It was I was depressed and I somehow found Person_1 and that saved my life ... Yeah, probably I had the first appointment with Person_2 for by the system but Person_1 called me because I wrote something really disturbing and she was really worried probably She was so she called me like one hour after I submitted it and she was like, do you want a consultation tomorrow ...”

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion., lines 113-116, 505 & 509-512

Heat striking conflicts in academic institution like encounters with staff, peer or even module system can often lead to excess hardships and frustration that raise level of stress and health challenges. In Dandelion's case the conflict with unfamiliar methods and study programmes and completely new academic requirements raise pressure and confusion, in long process affect lowered mood. This implicates, that they faced disinformation which made them worry about their career and future, they were also fell in mental health issues which required professional prevention. The code initiates to question how relevant are academic competitive fields and if they meet job markets, referring that some programmes aren't always revised in time.

“... And when it comes to VUSA, the students association, the students representation, everything in the first year, second year, third year, it was in Lithuanian. So it's hard for international students to get integrated in such societies and such associations. And even if there is an event going on, like for example, there's an event and I'm really interested, I want to go, but it's in Lithuanian. So even if I do go, because I've been to events and I would just have my Google translate on my phone and record it, record the voices that they're speaking and then have it translated and then read, which is an inconvenience for me and also inconvenience to the people over there, because you can see that a person who doesn't understand the language is sitting there and they're trying to integrate. You know, it gets exhausting. Like even though we are trying from our side, what are you guys doing to make us feel integrated? Like, you know, like you, like if you can cannot accommodate international students, don't call us. And if you want to, if you want to have international students, make sure that you have at least the basic stuff for us to feel integrated. That's all I can say...”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 460-478

Lily in their story faces unprofessionalism and lowered inclusion from student association. As a part of international student association VU SA they attended many meetings and events, however, not secured to have English-language events this led Lily to have suspicion that VU SA is not inclusive and friendly for international students. They also were against Lily using translation devices during the meetings, which raises concern for ethicality and friendly policy. Lily's experienced combined discloses general evaluation that Vilnius University did not prepare enough inclusive programmes for international students, often international students are left behind in many interactive events. There are far more events in Lithuanian than there is in English

and if institution is claiming to be inclusive it should consider equal opportunities more. Lily's experience with VU SA lowered their adaptation ability and pushed them behind host members of Vilnius University.

"... (remote classes) you shouldn't admit people if you can't accommodate them no one asks you to accommodate like thousands of students you can keep it you can keep it small because it would increase the quality of education also every time I go to the faculty it's never full so what so how are the classrooms full because like my Lithuanian class or actually every single one of my class there's half the class is empty ..."

Appendix 3.5. Lotus., 150-155

Lotus concern comes with academia's ability to ensure equality for local and international students. Due to unbalanced amount of contact and (bigger) remote lectures for international background students, Lotus felt that there is a hint of discrimination to it; initiating problem that institution should provide just enough spaces for both locals and international students to ensure all can study and not picking one group. Considering medical studies, remote lectures may impact their ability in future career negatively, they are not getting equivalent of what local students receive who attend mainly contact lectures; suspecting inequality and unpreparedness of academia. This lowered Lotus ability adapting in infrastructure of academia as they felt they were not relevant to institution or programme hosts at all.

"... I was doing, it was an accounting class, so we had a lot of calculations, a lot of hard calculations, and I remember I spent 20 minutes working on a huge question, and after spending that time, I got the answer, because they only ask for the answer, I would just put the answer,

and I saw that the girl next to me, she didn't do any calculations, but she was on the same question, and she was just writing the answers, and I was like, I found it quite strange ... , I just went to the lecture, and I said, look, so she's copying my answers, and she's literally looking at my computer, and the lecturer said, to be honest, there's nothing that she can really do at that time, and I can move to another computer, so I don't have time to just escalate the situation...”

Appendix 3.7. Zinia., lines 251-256 & 264-267

Zinnia faced a conflict with fairness conduct in studies. During their assessment session they faced conflict with fellow peer who cheated off exam results from Zinnia and were not punished for it. Lecturer of exam did not consider any equal measures and only proposed to swap seatings, which would consume exam available time in order to relocate, re-enter log in details. Zinnia felt massive demotivation and felt like they were not informed of such possible happenings that impacted their well-being for short-term; nevertheless, it shows that higher education systems raise concern for assessing student capabilities to demonstrate solution process rather than result of solution. Therefore, Zinnia became less communicative with her peers and began to do work more independently creating strategies to avoid being used for academic success, displaying isolation patterns and validated dissociation from community.

3.4.3. Balance between work and academic life

“... but I remember in my second semester ... I got a job at the company and I didn't have time to like talk to them because it's like a not a ritual but it's like after the class there's like 15 minute break or there's no class we usually go out and stand across the street and talk randomly about stuff like for example um classes or about the day about the plans about hanging out or something but I didn't have time to talk to them ... say I don't have time of these things because

as I mentioned I am working also 30 hours so after my after my classes I usually go to work and I usually go home by nine or something 9 30 so I just eat and sleep and do the same thing which is that's why I was like struggling with uh with my mental health...”

Appendix 3.2. Tulip., lines 313-318 & 395-398

Working to earn and survive, while studying often results in lower participation in academia's community. For Tulip it was no different, they experienced heavy workload and packed schedule ever since second semester, working to manage their life and studies. This lowered their ability to hang out with peers and maintain bond with them. For Tulip that was one of the hardest moments because they value tight connections with people; this led them to feel more excluded from the life at Vilnius University community impacting later adaptation phase and missing out on many different community activities and events.

“... I only attended mandatory things in the university and the rest of the time I had to work my ass off. I'm sorry, I'm cursing, but literally, I had to work my ass off to integrate myself financially, to feel the security and manageability that I can live in the university. So I think my first year did not turn out atypical like most students had...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 190-193

Peony's case explains their hardship to even attempt including themselves more than studies at Vilnius University. No socialising, no community groups or clubs – due to work and priority to make money in order to survive, they did not experience the same integration other local or international students could experience. Peony felt that they are missing a lot of experiences, which they did not appear important, however, later on they regretted they could not attend it.

Peony also missed out on multiple of lectures and lessons, earned debts and even had a life risk under all of the pressure.

Overall, individual changes and challenges help people to become stronger and more aware of their environment, however, in cases of Peony, Lily, Lotus and Dandelion there are hints that the challenges raise from institutional organisational skills that require intervention and remodelling to offer more freedom and availability to students.

3.5. Support & Available Services

3.5.1. Family, relatives & close ones

“... the thing I strongly believe is that my mom's prayers protect me, no matter where I am. I know someone, my mom or dad, someone's praying for me to be safe and that's working...”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 683-685

Familial, relative and friend role in student lives is crucial to secure check up on well-being, being heard out and getting motivation to seek help in specific cases (being bullied, being ignored by staff and not knowing what to do etc.). In Lily's story they open up that they never sought any professional help during hard time. They decided to trust the connection that they built with their family member (mom), 'mom's prayers protect me' is what helps them to move on every day and pursue studies even if they face barriers or conflicts. Lily's coping strategy relies on positive bond and belief in their family and their goal to achieve their dreams. Additionally it embeds a strong connection with spiritual belief that underlines Lily's Muslim nature; they share their trust and interpersonal thoughts which demonstrate how bond and religion can boost one's performance and self-esteem in academia.

“... I have told Person_1 that Person_3 is like a father figure to me. And she can't believe this. She's like Person_3. Because, you know, for the I know for everybody, he's like a very funny person, a funny, funny person. But I don't know. I for to me, he's like a father figure. So I think to him also, I'm like I'm like a daughter...”

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine., lines 378-383

Jasmine shares their experience creating a friendly bond with the member of Vilnius University, it became beyond professional and more platonic family-like. Being alone Jasmine received most coaching, life support and being heard out by Person_3, which assisted them and allowed them to get back on legs during pressuring times. This form of support underlines that sometimes in academia contacting and breaking professional boundaries with staff in rational context can aid more than professional aid; Jasmine shares that having a father figure to them helped to know there was someone for them and they were completing their academic achievements in environment with someone who is proud of them. Such bond boosted Jasmine ability to integrate into academia.

3.5.2. Academic support at university

“... Well adapting to physical spaces of Vilnius University I'd say it was roughly interesting. Like I found some spaces in library I like to use. Like my faculty also have like student spaces which I use. So it kind of helps to maybe versatile my experience. So I'm definitely learning my environment the spaces I want to be the cosy the noisy less crowded areas once I learned it. ... I started to see point of it and I gave it a hope and now I'm here I then actually visited the library services so I had certain explanations of how could I abuse data search bases which academically helped me to proof check certain articles...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 259-263 & 355-358

All academic institutions provide academic support which is crucial for SAS allocation to European search engines and other academic aspects. One of such are library services, Peony had opportunity to use them and it provided them with a massive headstart to learning how to format referencing, use search bases, how to cite in approximate way and what alternative sources can guide them through specific assignments. Peony considering having little time was extremely grateful they had at least this sort of academic support that aided them during hard adaptation cycle in the beginning. Peony also referenced that there were academic consultants at faculty, however, they don't help with academic questions only administrate student status and deadline aspects.

“... if i have any kind of challenges i have talked to the administration in the university or if i didn't get a chance to directly communicate i usually talk to the class representative person who has direct connection with the coordinators of or maybe the head of studies in our faculty...”

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 517-521

In Lily's case they receive main support from faculty administrators, course representative and head of studies. Keeping strict boundaries and following clear student role Lily didn't see need to find alternative support lines, main questions were related towards administrative aspects and available additional academic opportunities. Lily had a full help through administrators as well, when they were searching for support with public transport administration sent out all needed apps and guides to adapt in Vilnius. Administration was able to provide information that was in their power and competence level, which came handy for first timers in Lithuania.

Within academic aspect, academic staff (professors & study administrators) are first people SAS would reach out to; thus, their role is really important. Most participants mentioned that their

first contacts include academic staff; Ultimately, it showcases that challenges related with initial adaptation for SAS at academia can be resolved with these contacts.

3.5.3. Non-academic support at university

“... there was this career one at Vilnius University outside obviously there were like additional programmes for Erasmus students so on my year four I did take a little trip which helped me to see another part of the world which was really nice I think I've also found a social platform where I could say I feel appreciated in so it's the one that helped me to socialise with people more...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 366-370

Non-academic services serve a crucial part to help community members at Vilnius University from alternative aspects, often providing alternative competencies, support and opportunities. Peony has used career and Erasmus+ exchange programme to travel abroad Europe for few days, which helped them to cope and let out stress collected in initial semester and come back to Vilnius University a new. It shows that exchange programmes can be beneficial for students to have a brief change of environment. Additionally, Peony found Vilnius University social support platform made by international students and that aided them during challenging times.

“... But thankfully university provides free crisis support and that helped me to stay morally sensible and not legitimately off myself from the roof or a bridge...”

Appendix 3.6. Peony., lines 230-232

Out of all participants, Peony was the only one who consented to share life experience related to lived life risk. They were going through suicidal thoughts. The pressure from accommodation denial, difficulty living on low budget, looking for job and working while missing

important module lectures resulted in person's decline in will to live. However, Peony found emergency helpline at Vilnius University and reached out receiving immediate psychological support which helped them to cope with the risk level.

Non-academic support is essential part of academia that can provide informative or coping support for community members who experience hardships and experience existing life / academic / future risks. 6 out of 7 participants missed out on integration weeks which covers these supports and they only find out about them when they face the challenge itself.

3.5.4. Outside support

"... the Sisters Group in Vilnius, that was a huge help. I definitely don't know what I would have done without them. I would probably have been very lonely as well because it helped me improve myself personally, spiritually, focus a bit more on what, I don't know if I can say this, but what Islam teaches you, um, like it's a religion of discipline. You know, sometimes you don't want to follow, sometimes you feel like you're alone and you feel that when you're in a country all alone. So that was a really, um, huge strength because, you know, it's like, you're not alone. We're here for you."

Appendix 3.4. Lily., lines 221-230

Out of all participants, only Lily has talked about verified outside support 'Sisters Group'¹⁹ that delivered them guidance in order to include into Lithuania, find out necessary food, clothing, housing, leisure activities and cultural venues that were important to Lily. This support was exceptional for Lily, because they adapted in completely new area together with similar individuals, guided and felt care. This was crucial help particularly when Lily felt unfair in academia and felt falling from desire to continue studies at Vilnius University.

¹⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/muslimsistersvilnius/>

3.6. Theoretical Perspectives in Results

Results demonstrate a strong connection to theoretical frameworks covered in the research thesis. Priorly thematic themes and theoretical keywords unite a knot that can better explain what is important to know in SAS community, the processes they undergo and challenges they face while adapting at Vilnius University community. Superordinate & subordinate themes that have relation to Berry, Searle & Ward, and Wilson theoretical frameworks will be interpreted from research position.

“Arrival & Starter Phase” was reflected in: securing documentation & legalities; settling necessities for survival (accommodation / food etc.); initial start in academic life (communication / first lectures etc.). Participants described arrival as variety of processes that are both familiar and unexpectedly time – sensitive. Jasmine described being familiar with European visa procedures, however, noting the complexity of long-term visa the postponed timing and sequence, creating uncertainty (fear of delayed arrival) at any point of transition when transporting to host settings. Lily’s interview particular burden of translating documents into Lithuanian and securing visa appointment way too late. Peony’s story suggests that visa procedures are complicated by additional background checks extending to family lineage, including their parent having relation to military-service, which prolonged decision-making.

In relation to settling necessities, interviewees revealed that it’s unstable and has uneven access to financial and material resources. For instance, Jasmine reported being prepared with individual funds while awaiting scholarship disbursement, which she notes was received approximately within ten days. Lily’s interview described decision to run away from ‘Saulėtekis’ accommodation due to evidenced safety concerns, distance from her faculty and reports of poor

living conditions (e.g., rats, intoxicated residents & unsafe paths), which redirected them towards more expensive and private accommodation. Zinnia reported relying on limited food brought from homeland due to uncertainty of local options and defined using cold-weather clothing provided by relatives from Italy. Tulip reported surprise at grocery stores selling clothing, the subsequent revelation of second-hand shops like ‘Humana’, and persistent currency transition which caused financial anxiety during initial start.

Following, initial start in academia, participants reflect that academic start was shaped by timing, intercultural communication competences and prior disciplinary familiarity. Jasmine shares that in one motion, they attended selective course programme and revealing to oneself anthropology as new, challenging and engaging despite being new to the study area, while simultaneously managing to complete doctoral thesis. Lily was held back (due to visa) one month and missing first colloquiums in anatomy and histology, and experiencing a mix of support and constraint – one lecturer was supportive and aided while the rest stood less mindful and respectful of their situation. In Contrast to Lily, Dandelion experienced more positive treatment among lecturers and professors which enabled them to feel more integrated, comparing traumatic homeland experience where academic staff enforce their hierarchy power over peers.

Berry’s acculturation framework, raises these early-stage requirements and can be entailed as acculturation stressors that shape pupils’ beginning orientation choices (e.g., seeking contact, participating in host settings or withdrawing while stabilizing). Through Searle & Ward’s sociocultural adjustment model, interviews represent precise, culture and system related adjustment tasks in day-to-day functioning (understanding procedures, accessing services, and managing basic living arrangements like food and clothing). Wilson’s “Fitting-In” framework aligns with the interviews, participants work of learning academia expectations, standards between

peers and staff and informal rules of intercultural interaction that enable entry into university and social routines.

“Relationship with Host Academia (Environment, Staff & Peers)” was revealed through bonding with peers / fellow residents / staff; adapting to academic studies; and using spaces within academia (libraries / gardens, etc.). In relation to student bonding within interviews belonging was described as a gradual and dependent on intercultural interactions process. Dandelion reviewed that initially they began remaining quiet in classes and discussions due to concern of being judged for making verbal and theoretical mistakes, however, with staff encouragement they gradually opened up, and thanks to it began to interact more actively with community outside of classes. Peony shared their experience of being isolated during difficult and pressuring times and reluctance to communicate distress to relatives. Zinnia reported establishing connections with peers prior to arriving through a WhatsApp group, which created earlier friendships and received smoothing peer support before studies began. Lily describes that class representatives played crucial role as communicators for international students between staff and course, which was important aid when they tried to better understand academic community or when something was unclear.

In connection to academic adaptation, interviewees marked challenges in navigating discipline-specific language and learning formats. Dandelion reported confusion with academic terminology and completely different university requirements for writing assessments, such as critical discourse analysis and reflective essays. Lotus shared a preference to attend more contact lectures; however, they are dealing with excessive number of remote classes which impacted their well-being and health, and raised concerns for equal student treatment within faculty and lack of

consideration for international students. Peony expressed concern, due to toxic behaviour and neglect from university accommodations they were delayed to find a residential area, which affected their attendance to important lectures and ending with several academic debts causing massive stress and risk to life (suicidal thoughts developed). Dandelion reported discovering quiet-prayer rooms, which were useful to read and study alone, be with oneself and easily accessible.

In Berry's terminology, fellow student bonding and communication with staff can be understood as requirements that boost integration – oriented pathway, where sustained contact supports participation with lesser abandonment risks and risks to negatively impact identity. Searle & Ward's model reflects that academic adaptation reflects to acquisition of certain skills (e.g., intercultural communication with host community, communication in seminars, feedback expectations, and smooth navigation over the course programme). Grasping Wilson's framework, experiences that shape 'fit' by signalling if peers are recognised as members of academic community, and if campus spaces function as accessible sites where one can belong and adapt.

"Individual Changes & Challenges During Adaptation" embarked the discovery of new individual skills; conflicts within academia (peers & system); and balancing employment (work) with academic life. Interviewees proposed different moments of interpersonal conflicts. Lily refers to time when they decided to open themselves to more religious lifestyle than what they had before, such as integrating hijab upon separating from family, completely confident and not minding potential risk of discrimination. Lotus recorded more independent lifestyle, less affected by cohesive peer or relative networks compared to past. Jasmine noted behavioural shift in their day-to-day communication, becoming more 'polite' and encompassing 'gratitude' expressions which are more common to Lithuanian society rather than Indian.

Conflicts in academic environment took several outcomes among sample. Dandelion lived acute distress which grew from educational programme misaligned, completely foreign and requiring academic competences that they never had up until, describing curriculum unadjusted for international peers. Lily expresses concern of being excluded from linguistic side from Student Association and isolation from peer related events that are meant to help them integrate more; they also questioned passive dominance of Lithuanian community ignoring international needs, like providing and arranging accommodation processes due to nationality. Lotus was concerned due to educational formats and underused facilities, arguing that admission count for accepted students does not match actual study spaces in the faculty, this was seen a problem.

Work and study balance emerged a critical stressor for few participants. Tulip shared their weekly duty list of performing 30 hours of work and accommodating it with studies to survive and complete university programme; this impacted Tulip's social life and ability to participate academia's opportunity events, missing out on important parts of academia that could boost Tulip's feeling of belongingness in the community. Peony reported attending only fewer sessions in first academic year due to lack of financial security and need to maintain their residency area (paying bills), finances for food and clothing; that negatively impacted their university performance and dissociated from number of inclusive opportunities – this also impacted their mental health.

Alongside Berry, Searle & Ward, and Wilson frameworks the tied unfolding of new individual skills can be understood as an adaptation outcome, referring to increase in competences, cultural recognition of host society and capacity to endure survival in the host environment. Conflict encountering illuminate acculturation pressure and stress management, Berry's framework refers that as strategy adjustment; also, it is supporting Searle & Ward learning of interactional norms and institutional expectations through intercultural communication

competences. Work and study balance deepens Searle & Ward framework's position because it requires practical adjustment, in Wilson's terms, it shapes the sustainability of belongingness by creating impact whether peers can last participation, relationships and manage their well-being between working outside institution and within it.

Summing all empirical themes that have clear bond with theoretical frameworks, it outlines several remarks in acculturation orientations (Berry, 1997), adjustment domains (Searle & Ward, 1990) and connection to belongingness (Wilson, 2011); Results demonstrate to what level Vilnius University community shapes adaptation opportunities for SAS according to literature, what intercultural competencies arise for peers, what challenges or changes they experience and prompts context that should be considered for future research. "Relationship with Host Community Outside Academia" & "Coping mechanisms & Support systems" show relevance to theoretical frameworks, however, two superordinate themes do not equivalent the previous; these themes are more unique and require more evidence and clear codes in current thesis ground.

Conclusion

South Asian student experiences in host academia can be examined / analysed through sociocultural adaptation and compared relation to theoretical approaches that include both individual and contextual change. In this research thesis, the term sociocultural adaptation is applied to reveal the practical, everyday process through which students learn to live with social norms, academic expectations, and interpersonal interactions in the host environment. To embark these experiences, three theoretical frameworks were employed: Berry's Acculturation Framework, Searle & Ward's Sociocultural Adjustment Model, finally Wilson's "Fitting – In" Framework. Alongside with the research tasks, the research aimed to unravel the key stages and challenges shaping South Asian students' adaptation within the Vilnius University community, based on analysis of in-depth interviews (see Appendix 3.1. Jasmine; Appendix 3.2. Tulip; Appendix 3.3. Dandelion; Appendix 3.4. Lily; Appendix 3.5. Lotus; Appendix 3.6. Peony; and Appendix 3.7. Zinnia). Vilnius University in the master thesis context was as a representation to Lithuanian academic community far broader, grasping its leading position within national higher education and entailed engagement in international academia programmes. In the research thesis, sociocultural challenges presented in Vilnius University context describe and reflect comparable issues faced by other academic institutions where administrative systems, language structures and campus integration practices are similar. The covered literature furthers the understanding that these practices are consistent with challenges recorded in European academic context, therefore, empirical data of Vilnius University members share adaptation factors beyond a single institution.

Literature review reveals that international student adaptation is forged by the interplay of acculturation orientations (Berry, 1997), sociocultural adjustment requirements in day-to-day performance (Searle & Ward, 1990) and importance of "Fitting-In" to local academia and social

environments (Wilson, 2011). Covered theories examined and synthesized how it has been used to include international students' experiences in academic institution communities. Additionally, it underlined multitude of challenges documented in European academia in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including group identity, bonding with society and relatives, commitment to social conventions; cultural and religious impact living in host environment, visibility and campus life; language, communication and academic culture; administrative hardships, equal rights and gender, social networks and community formation; and structural and institutional barriers. These challenges have been shown to influence not only student well-being and academic performance but also the integration and cohesion of European university communities that increasingly rely on international academia programmes. Forging the literature, conducted thematic analysis (see Chapter 3.6.) of seven interviews unravels explanation how theoretical frameworks relate in the South Asian student's adaptation at Vilnius University community.

Addressing bureaucracy and administrative processes at starting phases at Vilnius University community, results reveal that these processes shape important and are tightly related to primary experiences of international peers. Research thematic analysis suggests that students from South Asian background discover hardships priorly due to exhausting and nerve-racking documentation (before arriving to host society), legality and border checks, relating to residency permits, family history and requirement to complete numerous amounts of paperwork. Administrative hardships were putting time consuming efforts and creating difficulty to smoothly interpret into academic system due to fragmented and scattered in various offices and locations information. Interviewees also pointed out concern about equal – rights as many services, clarity of procedures, response rates seemed to differ based on ethnic and racial background. The severity of such unpleasant experiences was raised by academia's structural and institutional barriers that

constrained participants from successful early settlement, delayed sense of financial and social security to begin study cycle productively and experience fulfilling engagement.

To address the research task to analyse challenges in situations needed intercultural competences, this part boosts understanding of what occurs in interactions with students, staff and academia programmes at Vilnius University. Thesis data in thematic analysis reveals that intercultural competences were vital negotiation part to perform in day-to-day communication and interact with campus life. South Asian students referred food practices and availability of culturally accessible options, the need for available silence, or prayer spaces and the broader question how individual and ethnic identity could be included without discomfort. Misunderstandings in communication were often referred to language barriers and to multitude of expectations about directness, politeness, classroom attendance that shaped engagement in academia programmes (participation in sessions and seminars, communication with staff, meeting module syllabus expectations etc.) and impacted perceptions of academic culture and belongingness. Visibility on campus grounds whether through accent, dress or religious patterns had influence to interacting with peers and with academia staff, to certain extent increasing bonding experiences and in certain times dissociating from community, leading to negative encounters. The connection with host academic society (learning environment, administration, staff, fellow students etc.) were recorded as both supportive and challenging. Comparing bonds with the host academia and community outside academia, it was seen more hostile and neglectful towards South Asian students; nevertheless, there were still unique experiences requiring to develop specific communication and sometimes surprises oneself from outstanding in host society to prevent judgment and harassment. That being evaluated, Vilnius University community has softer and more friendly environment for developing intercultural competencies for South Asian students compared with grounds outside of

it. Intercultural communication competencies can be reflected back to theoretical frameworks, Berry's framework address such instances as negotiation of acculturation orientation, Searle & Ward pose this a concrete adjustment tasks; Wilson's "Fitting-In" model displays it a process that shows how belongingness is produced through repeated interpersonal encounters and academia cues.

Last research thesis task was to identify coping mechanisms and available support systems at Vilnius University (institutional resources), social environment (family, peer networks, community facilities) and individual strategies. At Vilnius University ground support included academic coordination guidance related to coursework expectations, feedback on administrative expectations, alongside non-academic assistance with orientation and access to various student service; these resources were consequential during arrival and starter phase in first year of academia. Social environment support within interviewees was deeply anchored in family members, relatives and close fellows who emerged in difficult times to provide emotional assistance (family remotely due to distance), was completed by student networks such as friends, co-nationals and international peer groups, even wider community (involving employers or local facilities like 'Sisters Group') – that aided students interpret norms and build everyday moral endurance and positivity. Individual coping strategies were knotted with deliberate changes in lifestyle, increased self-independence, discovery of new abilities (understanding foreign systems, controlling one's uncertainty, developing intercultural communication competences and revealing oneself to ethnical family roots / religion); additionally, attempts to balance work and academia lives by settling clarity, adjusting time management, fulfilling expectations, paying the price that revolved in reduced peer communication. These points also have certain connection to literature framework, it synthesises with strategy – based adjustment model, coping is manifested by

available resources and control, open institutional structures that provide support for South Asian students.

Sociocultural adaptation at Vilnius University community within the research thesis was mixture of an overlapping, yet distinguishable process of three phases: arriving and starting phase, relationship forging phase, individual adjustment phase. Arrival and starting phase centred around settlement of documentation and legalities, afterwards proceeding to ensure basic necessities for survival (residence, food, clothing etc.) are set, finally understanding initial academic study semester and managing to attend inclusion events before studies commence. Relationship forging phase involves development of ties with host academia staff and peers, host community outside of academic grounds, where language, intercultural communication competences, and opportunities for important contact manifested by students' increase feeling of belongingness though positive / negative everyday experiences. Lastly, individual adjustment phase, reflects long-lasting path that enforces one to develop new skills, managing frustrating and complex conflicts within academia (peers, staff & system), achieving a work-load balance between mandatory academia activities (exams, seminars etc.), employment and well-being that is aided by resources and connections identified to boost coping and support. Summarizing, the three phases of sociocultural adaptation are like consistent adjustment trajectories pictured in thesis literature theoretical framework and empirical data, explaining sequence of adaptation and sociocultural challenges faced within academia.

Considering limitations several points draw attention when evaluating possibility and delivered results. Most notable downside of the thesis, small and randomized sample size; only seven interviews were selected for analysis while over hundreds of individuals were invited for participating in empirical study part; demographic data didn't prioritize specific South Asian

student background but included India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives into one group – this limited possible the uniqueness of various ethnicities / different religious groups / cultural groups and more. Small data sample and limited demographical data limits transferable and potential factors (like whether Muslim students have better (or) worse adaption experience than Hindu, or other way around etc.). Moreover, interview – based results perceive experiences and meanings, which are crucial to interviewee but don't particularly replay administrative academia reality, ignoring certain points not seen by researcher; this possibly would require to have two positions international pupils who arrive to academia as a host community and academic staff who deliver courses or administrate pupil study and maintain main contact with them, in order to maintain least amount of bias. Although, research thesis discloses ample of unique parallels between sociocultural adaptation processes and challenges when South Asian students integrate at Vilnius University community, there is massive need to perform larger scale research project; project that would allow to encompass both a larger number of participants (with longitude methods) and define each demographical data by cultural ethnicity, religion, sex, unique factors and extend literature perspective in more contemporary context to outline the challenge of living and managing life at academia for distant international peers. The topic of thesis serves a great initialization for researchers who aim to study contemporary reality of international peers travelling abroad, small ethnical groups trying to adapt and survive in host societies and other; such research topics are crucial for universities that invite international peers from distant cultural backgrounds into their community; having a better understanding of what South Asian Student lived experience tell us about their adaptation processes and challenges the findings of such studies can ground factors of hardships or frustration that are affecting both host staff / system / host community and international individuals, knowing these factors can enable academia to build and

(or) propose more strategies that increase inclusive, fulfilling and satisfying cultural and lived experience for newcoming students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Ethics & Recruitment Tools

Appendix 1.1 Committee on Research Ethics in Philosophy, Religious Studies and Ethnology



**VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO
FILOSOFIJOS FAKULTETAS**

Alan Filatov

**DĖL FILOSOFIJOS, RELIGIJOS STUDIJŲ, ETNOLOGIJOS TYRIMŲ ATITIKTIES
MOKSLINIŲ TYRIMŲ ETIKAI KOMITETO POSĖDŽIO PROTOKOLO IŠRAŠO
IŠSIUNTIMO**

Siunčiame Filosofijos, religijos studijų, etnologijos tyrimų atitikties mokslinių tyrimų etikai komiteto 2025 m. lapkričio 17 d. (1.13 E) 250000-KT-243 posėdžio protokolo išrašą.

PRIDEDAMA. 2 lapai.

Viešoji įstaiga
Universiteto g. 3
01513 Vilnius

Duomenys kaupiami ir saugomi
Juridinių asmenų registre
Kodas 211950810

Fakulteto duomenys:
Universiteto g. 9, 01131 Vilnius
Tel. (8 5) 266 7600, el. p. fsf@fsf.vu.lt
www.fsf.vu.lt

Išrašas

**VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO FILOSOFIJOS FAKULTETO
FILOSOFIJOS, RELIGIJOS STUDIJŲ, ETNOLOGIJOS TYRIMŲ
ATITIKTIES MOKSLINIŲ TYRIMŲ ETIKAI KOMITETAS**

POSĖDŽIO PROTOKOLAS

2025-11-17 Nr. (1.13 E) 250000-KT-243

Posėdis įvyko 2025 m. lapkričio 17 d. nuotoliniu būdu (el. paštu).

Posėdžio pirmininkė – prof. dr. Rita Šerpytytė.

Posėdžio sekretorė – dr. Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė.

Posėdyje dalyvavo: doc. dr. Mindaugas Gilaitis, dr. Mindaugas Stoškus, doc. dr. Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, prof. dr. Rita Šerpytytė.

1. SVARSTYTA. VU Filosofijos fakulteto Azijos ir transkultūrinių studijų instituto studento Alan Filatov planuojamo vykdyti mokslinio tyrimo „Studentai iš Pietų Azijos Vilniaus universitete: socialinės kultūrinės adaptacijos procesas ir iššūkiai“ atitikimas mokslinių tyrimų etikai.

NUTARTA: Planuojamas vykdyti mokslinis tyrimas „Studentai iš Pietų Azijos Vilniaus universitete: socialinės kultūrinės adaptacijos procesas ir iššūkiai“ atitinka mokslinių tyrimų etikos reikalavimus.

NUTARTA. Komiteto sprendimas apie atitikimą mokslinių tyrimų etikai galioja tyrimo vykdymo laikotarpiu nuo 2025 m. lapkričio 17 d. iki 2026 m. liepos 1 d.

Posėdžio pirmininkė

prof. dr. Rita Šerpytytė

Posėdžio sekretorė

dr. Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė

Išrašas tikras
Mokslo veiklų analitikė
(Parašas)
Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė
2025-11-17

The extract

**FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH ETHICS IN PHILOSOPHY, RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND
ETHNOLOGY**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

November 17, 2025, No. (1.13 E) 250000-KT-243

Meeting date: November 17, 2025, online (by email).

Chairman - Prof. Rita Šerpytytė.

Secretary - Dr. Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė.

Attendees: Assoc. Prof. Mindaugas Gilaitis, Dr. Mindaugas Stoškus, Assoc. Prof. Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, Prof. Rita Šerpytytė.

DISCUSSED. The compliance with the research ethics of the research “Processes and Challenges of Sociocultural Adaptation of South Asian Students at Vilnius University” planned to be carried out by the student Alan Filatov of the Faculty of Philosophy.

DECISION:

1. The proposed research “Processes and Challenges of Sociocultural Adaptation of South Asian Students at Vilnius University” complies with the requirements of research ethics.
2. The Committee's decision on compliance with the research ethics is valid for the research conducting period from 17 November 2025 to 1 July 2026.

Chairperson

Prof. Rita Šerpytytė

Secretary

Dr. Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė

The extract is genuine

Science Analyst

(Signature)

Dr. Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė

17/11/2025

DETALŪS METADUOMENYS	
Dokumento sudarytojas (-ai)	Vilniaus universitetas 211950810, Universiteto g. 3, 01513 Vilnius
Dokumento pavadinimas (antraštė)	FI IR ATSI AMTE KOMITETO POSĖDŽIO PROTOKOLO IŠRAŠAS (ALAN FILATOV TYRIMAS)
Dokumento registracijos data ir numeris	2025-11-17 Nr. (1.5 E) 250000-S-747
Dokumento gavimo data ir dokumento gavimo registracijos numeris	–
Dokumento specifikacijos identifikavimo žymuo	ADOC-V1.0
Parašo paskirtis	Pasirašymas
Parašą sukūrusio asmens vardas, pavardė ir pareigos	Ramunė Kasperavičiūtė-Černiauskienė, Mokslinės veiklos analitikė, Mokslo ir projektų skyrius
Sertifikatas išduotas	RAMUNĖ KASPERAVIČIŪTĖ-ČERNIAUSKIENĖ LT
Parašo sukūrimo data ir laikas	2025-11-17 14:46:21 (GMT+02:00)
Parašo formatas	XAdES-T
Laiko žymoje nurodytas laikas	2025-11-17 14:46:33 (GMT+02:00)
Informacija apie sertifikavimo paslaugų teikėją	SK ID Solutions EID-Q 2024E, SK ID Solutions AS EE
Sertifikato galiojimo laikas	2025-07-06 14:34:01 – 2028-07-05 14:34:00
Informacija apie būdus, naudotus metaduomenų vientisumui užtikrinti	"Registravimas" paskirties metaduomenų vientisumas užtikrintas naudojant "RCSC IssuingCA-2, VI Registru Centras - i.k. 124110246 LT" išduotą sertifikatą "Dokumentų valdymo sistema Avilys, Vilniaus universitetas, i.k. 211950810 LT", sertifikatas galioja nuo 2024-12-18 09:02:06 iki 2027-12-18 09:02:06
Pagrindinio dokumento priedų skaičius	1
Pagrindinio dokumento pridedamų dokumentų skaičius	–
Pridedamo dokumento sudarytojas (-ai)	–
Pridedamo dokumento pavadinimas (antraštė)	–
Pridedamo dokumento registracijos data ir numeris	–
Programinės įrangos, kuria naudojantis sudarytas elektroninis dokumentas, pavadinimas	Dokumentų valdymo sistema Avilys, versija 3.5.89
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Paieškos nuoroda	–
Papildomi metaduomenys	Nuorašą suformavo 2025-11-17 14:47:42 Dokumentų valdymo sistema Avilys

Appendix 1.2. Participant information sheet



**Vilnius
University**

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITY

*Faculty of Philosophy
Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies*

Participant name & surname: _____
Participant contact (VU student email): _____

Process and Challenges of Sociocultural Adaptation in South Asian Students at Vilnius University

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1. What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to understand the lived experience of Vilnius University (VU) Students from South Asia. The research is a part of a master's thesis which aims to understand the sociocultural context of how VU; aims to gather qualitative data that will be used to create themes that will explore process and challenges of sociocultural adaption. The study will delve into the processes and challenges students have encountered when settling in Lithuania and at VU. Lastly, it comes to academic researchers and the Community Wellbeing Division of VU desire to better understand and have a grasp of what international students have to experience during settlement in a completely different environment; collected information will help to enhance and further ideas for the wellbeing programme of international students at VU.

2. Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to partake as you expressed your own interest and diligence in the study. You have met the study's criteria, being over 18 years old, you are a student from South Asian context and you are part of VU.

3. Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. However, you will be asked to attend an on-site interview (not lasting more than 90 minutes). You will be provided with a document giving you details on the study. You will be given the option to provide consent verbally or in writing.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to read a document with information about the study (provide your email details for further contacts). When you meet for the interview, you will be asked to give consent either verbally or in writing. Once consent is given, you will be asked to participate in an on-site interview. The face-to-face interview will be held in the VU meeting room, which is a secure location that ensures confidentiality. Your interview will be transcribed word for word and anonymized. I will delete any data that might make you

recognizable.

5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

No harm or overall risk is expected during the study. However, if memories cause some unpleasant emotions, we will stop the interview and you will be provided with contacts for psychological help

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Voluntary contribution to the growing VU community. You will enable yourself to better understand your experience at VU.

7. What will happen to the results of the research?

The data from interviews in anonymized form will be used in my master's thesis, as well as in discussions at Vilnius University on challenges and good practices that enable integration of students from South Asia to Vilnius University community. The interview data – audio recordings, transcribed interview, oral or written agreement to take part in the research – will be archived at the data container protected with a password until the master's thesis is defended and a discussion on adaptation of students at Vilnius University is held. Later on, the data is deleted. Your data will be accessed only by the researcher, in exceptional cases, by the thesis supervisor. If you want to access your data, you may send a request to the researcher via alan.filatov@cr.vu.lt.

8. Will my information be used for publication?

The study will be only used for a report that will be accessible to only the researcher and supervisor, and it will be used for a single-time meeting held by the Community Wellbeing Department to further the understanding of the lived experiences of international students of Vilnius University. All data is anonymised and cannot be identified. The interviews will also be quoted and analysed in my master's thesis, which is planned to be defended in 2026. However, the data is quoted only in anonymized way.

9. What if there is a problem?

If you experience psychological pressure during the interview, you may:

Register for emergent psychological session, which you will be addressed by the researcher

Contact padek@vu.lt for crisis help. You should receive response in 4 working hours. If you will need psychological support during non-working hours please contact local support services:

Contact local support services:

Youth Line – tel. 0 800 28888 (24/7)

Centre of Mental Health & Wellbeing – 0 5261 7217

You may also reach out to your local clinic for registered psychiatric session.

If you require help with the study, or you have problems regarding the process of the study:

Reach out to study supervisor: kristina.sliavaite@fsf.vu.lt

Reach out to the researcher: alan.filatov@cr.vu.lt

If you have questions regarding data protection rights

Reach out to analytical team of university: dokumentai@vu.lt

10. Data Protection Privacy Notice (mandatory for all studies collecting personal data)

Your contact details will only be used for study. For more information, please refer to the <https://www.vu.lt/en/privacy-policy> You may also read VU data storing and safety protocol at: Ethical Guidelines Following Protocol Acts of Documentation Nr. S-2018-4-4, Vilnius University

11. Further information and contact

Study Team:

Alan Filatov – Researcher: alan.filatov@cr.vu.lt

Doc. Dr. Kristina Šliavaite – Supervisor: kristina.sliavaite@fsf.vu.lt

I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet and consent to given policy. And I understand I will be introduced to it before the interview again with the consent forms.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 1.3. Informed consent form & Debrief



**Vilnius
University**

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITY

*Faculty of Philosophy
Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies*

Participant name & surname:

Participant contact (VU student email):

Researcher's name & surname, status: Alan Filatov, Community Psychologist

Researcher's affiliation: Community Wellbeing Division, Community Psychologist – Central Administration of Vilnius University; MSc Student – Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies

Researcher's contact number: +370 663 63 086

Researcher's contact email: alan.filatov@cr.vu.lt

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

General theme:

Process and Challenges of Sociocultural Adaptation in South Asian Students at Vilnius University

About research: *The study aims to understand the lived experience of Vilnius University (VU) Students from South Asia. The research is a part of a master's thesis which aims to understand the sociocultural context of how VU; aims to gather qualitative data that will be used to create themes that will explore process and challenges of sociocultural adaption. The study will delve into the processes and challenges students have encountered when settling in Lithuania and at VU. Lastly, it comes to academic researchers and the Community Wellbeing Division of VU desire to better understand and have a grasp of what international students have to experience during settlement in a completely different environment; collected information will help to enhance and further ideas for the wellbeing programme of international students at VU*

-

		Tick if you consent	Tick if you do not consent
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the research information sheet "Process and Challenges of Sociocultural Adaptation in South Asian Students at Vilnius University". I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactory.	☐	☐
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from research at any point of it, with no specified reason, and with no consequences.	☐	☐
3.	I am aware of my information being accessed by the researcher and the following: supervisor and Ethics Committee of VU. I am aware that my anonymised information will be available for publication purposes and use for developing new strategies at Community Wellbeing Division	☐	☐

- | | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. | I confirm, I was informed that the research project of Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies was reviewed by Guidelines for the assessment of compliance with research ethics and the research was approved. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. | I understand who will have my data, how my data will be stored. I am aware that my data will be deleted once it serves its purpose for the research. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. | I confirm that data results will be published in the academic thesis and academic report. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. | I am aware of contacts in case of questions. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. | I agree to my interview being <u>audio-recorded</u> | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. | I confirm that I understand how my data will be anonymized for the purpose of the results | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. | I agree that my quotes will be anonymized for the use of the results | ☐ | ☐ |
| 11. | I confirm I want to participate in the research | ☐ | ☐ |

Participant's name & surname

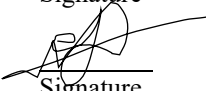
Alan Filatov

Researcher's name & surname

Date

Date

Signature

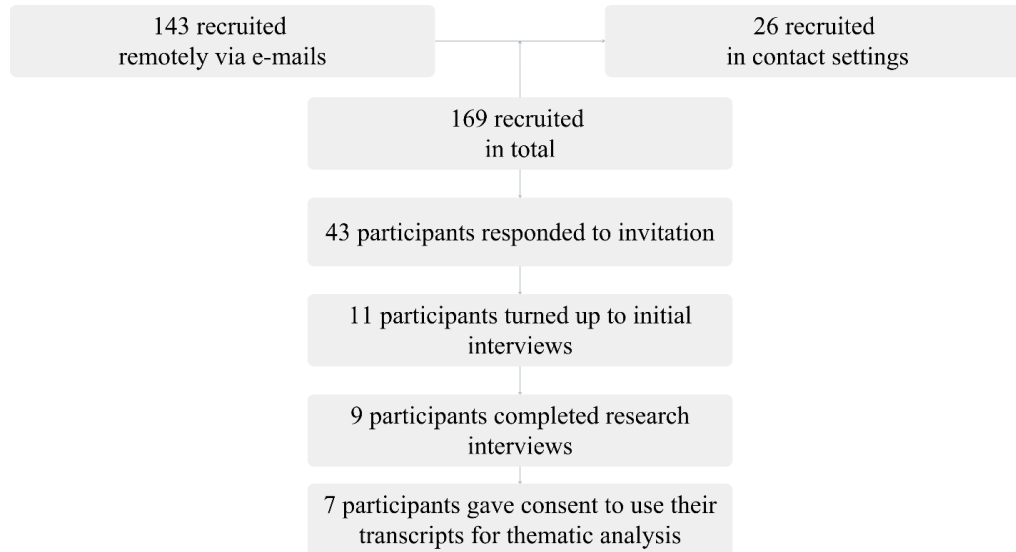


Signature

Appendix 2. Thematic Analysis: Participant Data, Interview Plan & Phases

Appendix 2.1. Research participant recruitment phase for Thematic Analysis

Research participant recruitment phase for TA



Shadowed participant information:

Code	Country	Sex	Study Cycle	Employment	Religion
Jasmine	India	Female	Doctoral studies Erasmus +	Not (phd student)	Hindu (not active)
Tulip	Pakistan	Female	Bachelor studies	Employed (full-time)	Muslim
Dandelion	Bangladesh	Female	Bachelor studies	Employed (full-time)	None (Parents are Hindu, try to force it)
Lily	India	Female	Bachelor studies	Employed (full-time)	Muslim
Lotus	India	Female	Bachelor studies	Employed (full-time)	None
Peony	Bangladesh	Male	Master studies	Employed (full-time, hourly job)	Atheist
Zinnia	Shri Lanka	Female	Bachelor studies	Employed (full-time)	None

(Filatov, 2026)

Appendix 2.2. Interview Question Plan

Priedai:

Priedas 1 – Interviu Gairių planas. Gairės dar bus tikslinamos prieš interviu ir po pirmųjų interviu.

Opening

- A. **(Establish Rapport)** My name is Alan, and I am a student at Vilnius University and a Psychologist at the Community Wellbeing Division. For my Master's Degree Thesis, I thought it would be a good idea to interview you, I would be thankful if you agree to share your experiences with me.
- B. **(Purpose)** I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your experiences when moving to Lithuania, settling in the Lithuanian community, and VU.
- C. **(Time Line)** The interview should take about 40 to 90 minutes. Are you comfortable with the time?

Interview Follow-up questions

I Thematic Block: decision to come to Lithuania and general impressions and challenges

I would like to ask about your transition from your homeland to Lithuania. Could we explore your experience about it?

- E.g., can you please share what was your journey from homeland to Lithuania from the decision making to actual coming, i.e. what were the main moments and challenges?
- E.g., what were the first moving steps you had to arrange before coming to Lithuania? How did you find it?
- E.g., how did you find the transition? What connection or feelings do you express towards it now?
- E.g., have you ever had any concerns or uncertainties regarding what process you had to go through (you can include visa process, integration to the country specifically, searching housing, confirming some requests or documents)? Could you perhaps give an example or a few?
- E.g., would you say the law systems (visas, finances etc.) here in Lithuania are doable and friendly for international students?
- E.g., how easy was it to make friends for you, adapt to society and public systems?

- E.g., do you find the Lithuanian Community (Outside of university, people you had a chance to interact with?) sociable and friendly for international students? Could you tell me a little bit more about it?
- E.g., how do you find communication with your friends or relatives at Lithuania? How do you feel about it? Is there anything that raises concerns for you?
- E.g., would you say the community of Lithuania and community of VU are different in a way? Perhaps in communication is not the same, social and friendly approach? Perhaps any changes the way you experienced life outside of VU campus and inside of VU campus?

II Thematic block. The initial period at Vilnius University and familiarization with the infrastructure, studies process

I'd like to ask about your journey here at VU if you are feeling alright to talk about it? Tell me about your experience of moving to Vilnius University...

- E.g., speaking about your experience at VU – how did you hear or chose your programme you are studying?
- E.g., how would you evaluate your integration week at VU?
- E.g., how did you find the start at university? How would you describe your situation at VU? Is it doable, or are there any concerns?
- E.g., Adaption is out ability to gradually learn to fit into new and unknown physical / social / individual spaces. If you were to evaluate your first weeks, months or even first years at VU as adaption how would you describe it? Would you say your adaptation went well, or are there any concerns regarding it?
- E.g., emotionally, were there particular moments when you felt joyful or uncertain about the adaptation process
- E.g., are you familiar with infrastructure of VU and possibilities to use academic spaces, gyms, garden, accommodations? how did you become familiar with them? how often are you engaging with VU environment – lecture halls, academia spaces, gyms, garden, accommodations etc.?

III. Thematic block: social networks and socio-cultural challenges faced at university

- E.g. VU environment – academia spaces, gyms, garden, accommodations and etc... according to cultural background, are these spaces adapted and suited for your day-to-day practices?
- E.g., do you have a space where you can engage and be comfortable with your cultural or religious practices?
- E.g., do you have anyone or any specific method where you get communication about VU activity? Specifically, an activity that is friendly to your cultural background? How often are you engaging about activity that is relevant to you at VU?
- E.g., do you have any activities or participated in any (at VU – clubs / societies)?
- how often do you communicate with other students in your programme/course? do you have a chance to communicate with them outside university? at some informal events?

did you make new friends or social acquaintances at University? can you talk more about it (e.g. who are these friends, local students or other international students and so on)

IV Thematic block: challenges faced at university

Next, I'd like to ask about your experience with processes and hardships that you face now at Vilnius University.

- E.g., Is there anything certain about your current stay in VU that you would like to share? Perhaps anything that you find foreign compared to your homeland?
- E.g., were there any shifts during your current stay (something you never had to consider before)? how do you feel about it?
- E.g., how mentioned aspects affect your quality of life in university?
- E.g., emotionally, did it help you feel more secure? If so, could you tell me a little bit more about it? perhaps it's been a struggle that affected your daily mood? Would you like to talk about it more?
- E.g., does it reflect on your social life and lived environment? Do you have any stories you would like to share about it?

**** [Time for reflection. Briefly recapping on the said information and allowing interviewee take a little break while interviewer speaks.] ****

V. Thematic block: resources and help

Last question is related to supporting systems here at Lithuania and VU. Are you happy to touch topic of supporting systems?

- E.g., you mentioned several hardships at VU during your integration period. Were you provided any support contacts or help plans during difficult time?
- E.g., some hardships you mentioned were related with structures outside of VU. Were you able to get any help on that?
- E.g., have you tried to reach out to international relation committee / helplines etc., here in Lithuania?
- E.g., were there any supporting systems that are relevant to you? Were they easily accessible? If not, what was the main barrier for it to happen?
- E.g., were your family or close connections a sort of help during hard times?
- E.g., what would you say is the main barrier between supporting systems and international students?
- E.g., were there any support systems that would be friendly with your culture, religious practices?

**** [Time for reflection. Briefly recapping on the said information and allowing interviewee take a little break while interviewer speaks and enables closing] ****

Appendix 2.3. Phases of Thematic analysis

Phases of TA

Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(Braun & Clarke, p. 12)

Appendix 3. Shadowed Interviews

Appendix 3.1. Jasmine:

India, female, 28, doctoral level student / Erasmus +, Hindu (not practicing much)

1 I think my case is different from other students because I was there on a short time,
2 short term visit. Like I was there on Erasmus, but not like the normal Erasmus
3 exchange because I think that's mostly for masters and bachelor students.

Commented [AF1]: Lines 1-3: Short-term migration

4
5 But I was a PhD candidate in Delhi. And so I am studying international studies and
6 I'm specifically focussing on the Eastern Europe. And my centre is like the academic
7 centre.

8
9 I mean, in Jawaharlal Nehru University, we've studied the countries that were part of
10 Soviet Union. So my supervisor introduced me to this area, Baltic, Baltic, Baltics in
11 general, not Lithuania in particular, Baltics in general, because she's been working
12 on that topic for long. And then, as you know, [Shadowed Name 1], she also is like
13 working on India.

Commented [AF2]: Lines 9-10: Studies related with
adaptation country

14
15 Her area is preachery topic is related to India. So she used to come to visit. She
16 used to visit my university.

17
18 So I got to know or I think I got this idea. Actually, I learned about Vilnius University
19 from my supervisor and [Shadowed Name 1]. My supervisor regularly used to visit
20 Covenus, VU, but not Vilnius University.

21
22 But I got to know that there was this opportunity for foreign exchange research
23 programme for a semester in Vilnius University through my supervisor. And then I
24 applied and then I got the opportunity. And also I'm also working.

Commented [AF3]: Lines 20-22: Migration opportunity /
academic achievement / work experience / information from
supervisor

25
26 Actually, I'm doing a comparative study of three countries of post-Soviet space and
27 Lithuania is one of that country. So it was really interesting for me, though I do not
28 require a field data. I'm working on secondary data.

Commented [AF4]: Lines 24-25: Country of migration
becomes study focus / academic relation vs personal
experience

29
30 But still, I thought it would be interesting to go experience the country that I'm
31 studying. So, yeah, that's how I reached Lithuania.

Commented [AF5]: Line 28: Motivation to migrate /
curiosity / desire to experience something new

32 [...]

33 See, for the visa application, it was kind of easy for me because I had been to
34 Europe twice before, so I was familiar with the application form. Though earlier I
35 filled, I got Schengen visa because I was in Europe for a short period and for
36 Lithuania I had to apply for a long-term visa.

Commented [AF6]: Lines 31-32: experience in visa
acquirement / milder stress to travel continent / administrative
migration skills

37
38 But it was not any difficult for me at all because I actually like doing paperwork and it
39 was really interesting to do that, you know, application. And I did, I received the visa
40 within three weeks and so application format, application, that process was actually
41 kind of interesting, not difficult for me.

Commented [AF7]: Lines 32-34: changing visa types to
secure long-term stay

42 [...]

Commented [AF8]: Lines 37-39: academic support to solve
visa / benefits of academic migration / positive experience

43 Actually, I already knew, I was informed by the international relations officer, office in
44 Vilnius University, that I will only be receiving my Erasmus fund after I reach. So I
45 knew that it was going to take a couple of days.

46
47 Like I had some of my seniors who's been to VU a couple of years back, they told
48 me they received their first instalment after, I think, two or three weeks after reaching
49 governance. So I was already prepared. I had, I already had money, my personal
50 money with me. So, but it didn't take much time. I think within 10 days, I received the
51 fund. So it wasn't really difficult for me.

Commented [AF9]: Line 47: resources / awareness of
material adjustment for migration

53 And because I knew it's going to take time, so I was already prepared. I see. All right.
54 [...]

55
56 Actually, everything was new to me.

57
58 See, even though I have been to Europe before, I was staying only for like a couple
59 of days, because it's like, previously, I attended conferences. And in the
60 conferences, it's like, I'm there on a formal capacity. I'm like there as a presenter.

61
62 So my experience was totally different. But here, I felt like I had to figure out
63 everything on my own, because I was going to live in a new place, like not as a
64 visitor, but as someone who is going to stay there for a long term. So yeah, actually,
65 I would say, in the beginning, everything was difficult for me, because figuring out
66 things, like, because obviously, India is totally different from Lithuania.

67
68 And even when, I remember one thing, that's funny, funny thing, because the first
69 Lithuanian I met was in Poland. So I met him in the conference. And in Poland,
70 everybody was following traffic signal.

71
72 And he told me, he was from Vilnius. So he told me, in his country, in his city, he
73 normally don't follow traffic signal. And he just crossed the road just like that.

74
75 Then I told him, in India also, we do the same. So I had this, just because he told me
76 that, I had this impression that maybe Lithuania is different from other European
77 country. And here, traffic rules are not that strict.

78
79 And, but the first day I reached, I realised he was wrong. Maybe he was, I don't
80 know, maybe he was just making fun of me or whatever it is, I don't know. But I tried
81 to cross the road, but I was so scared, because I saw people, you know, they were
82 like, even more stricter than Western Europe.

83
84 That's what I felt. You know, actually, after coming to Lithuania, I visited more
85 Western European countries. But I must say, Lithuania has one of the strict, like
86 people really follow the traffic signal.

87
88 So I had wrong impression. It's totally not like India.
89 [...]

90
91 Actually, about the transport, I haven't noticed it much.

92
93 Let me tell you. But one thing is that I really like the bus service in Vilnius because
94 that is something I have... Actually, last September, I visited Vilnius again. For a
95 month, I was there.

96
97 And I made sure that I, whenever it was possible, I took the bus and I travel because
98 I really loved it. And that's the first thing I noticed. The first day itself, I took a bus
99 because I stayed in a hotel for a night and the next day morning, I went to my
100 dormitory.

101
102 So I took a bus. And I really loved it because people were really like... I like the way
103 people were behaving in a public space. See, I'm coming from India.

Commented [AF10]: Line 55: belonging and social integration start

Commented [AF11]: Line 57: Pre-existing short-term migration experience

Commented [AF12]: Lines 61-62: Feeling of loneliness / lack of social support

Commented [AF13]: Lines 61-63: Shaping identity in migration context

Commented [AF14]: Lines 63-64: cultural shock

Commented [AF15]: Lines 64-65: Awareness of homeland separation / perceptive evaluation of different living environments

Commented [AF16]: Lines 71-72: cultural information from international relations / cultural shock initiation (misinformation from Lithuanian??)

Commented [AF17]: Lines 79-81: cultural shock / intercultural relation / emotional pressure / integration

Commented [AF18]: Lines 92-96: adaptation / coping strategy / cultural shock prevention / public transport use

105 You must have an understanding how people are here. And it's such a crowded
106 place here in India. And if you step out in a public space, it's always loud.

107
108 But there, it was even though the bus was full or there were people, but people
109 weren't really being loud. So I found that good. I mean, it was interesting.

110
111 And so the travelling in bus, always was like, you know, used to make my mind calm.
112 And I just used to take a bus and just go. I took this car.

113
114 Yeah. In my phone, I had this app and I had this pass for three month pass
115 something. And whenever I wanted to get some fresh air, I used to just take a bus
116 and go wherever it takes me.

117
118 And then I used to come back because it was nice. I really liked travelling. Apart from
119 the bus, I haven't really noticed anything else because I'm not really into transport.

120
121 I don't know how to drive a car. So I don't really notice that. Yeah.

122
123 So regarding transport, bus, and then the traffic rules, these are the things that I
124 noticed, but it made a good impression on me both.

125 [...]

126 See, everything was new to me.

127
128 Okay. Because I would say even from Western Europe, Lithuania is different. I have
129 like before Lithuania, I had been to Poland and Sweden and Lithuania is different
130 from both the countries.

131
132 There was one similarity with Poland that people had the same expression on their
133 face that was similar to Poland. But I assume, but later I realised it's because of the
134 winter, because I reached Lithuania at the end of January and I must say February,
135 March, maybe until mid-April, people had the same expression on everybody's face.
136 But from mid-April, I started noticing the change.

137
138 Like how I noticed is that older people started smiling at me. So in the beginning, you
139 know what I used to think? I used to think that maybe these older people, they might
140 not want to see a different person there. I used to think that maybe they don't, they, I
141 mean, I might, I must say that I thought that they could be, you know, racist.

142
143 It could be because of that, that they're not, they're not happy seeing, you know, a
144 brown person there. And nobody was even looking at me, smiling at me. It's just
145 everything, everything felt so like, everybody seemed so unapproachable.

146
147 Like I was actually kind of scared to go stand in a bus stop, like a bus stand. And so
148 it was really difficult for me until the bus coming. I don't know what to do, where to
149 look at.

150
151 It's like, but gradually changed, I must say. Then later I realised, okay, it could be
152 because of the weather, not really because they are racist. That is a possibility.

153
154 I later, I felt because once, once the sun started coming back, I could see in people's
155 behaviour, people's name, they just, they become entirely different group of people.
156 [...]

Commented [AF19]: Lines 100-103: homeland separation / awareness of loneliness / current environment contrasts with homeland culture

Commented [AF20]: Lines 108-109: adaptation / resource development / management of personal emotion in cultural adaptation phases / managing loneliness

Commented [AF21]: Line 123: new identity, re-evaluating self in completely new environment

Commented [AF22]: Lines 130-133: cultural shock / adaptation over time / reflecting on cultural differences / isolation / seasonal shock /

Commented [AF23]: Lines 135-137: cultural shock experience / social barriers /

Commented [AF24]: Lines 144-145: negotiating personal comfort / social behavior challenges in public spaces / the emotional pressure during wait / cultural loneliness

Commented [AF25]: Lines 147-148: thought framing about cultural misunderstanding / cultural shock awareness / process of adapting with new culture / cultural trauma (racist part)?

157 Yeah, because actually in India, even if it's strangers, when you actually meet eyes
158 with someone, you have to smile.

159
160 So that's like a social, social thing. It's like a norm. If you see somebody, you just
161 smile, like polite way of saying hello.

162
163 But here I felt a bit awkward. I was like, should I do that? Should I not do that? If I
164 smile at some stranger, that will be awkward. So this took some time for me.

165
166 [...] I loved food in Lithuania. See, one thing is that I was cooking food in my dorm. So I
167 was cooking Indian food, whatever I could.

168
169 I'm not that great at cooking, but whatever I could do, I was cooking. But whenever I
170 was going out with some people, then I loved eating Lithuanian food, because I have
171 my favourites. Okay, I don't know if I can, šaltibaršiai, pink soup? Yeah, šaltibaršiai
172 yeah, yeah.

173
174 I love that. I love that. And then I also like that thing.

175
176 Okay, I'm forgetting the name. Kibinai? Okay, kibinai.

177
178 I love kibinai. And then there are actually more. And I don't know how Lithuanians
179 make the soft boiled potatoes.

180
181 It's so simple, but so tasty. When I came back, I tried at home to make that. It's just
182 not possible.

183
184 I think it's because of the local potatoes available there. Here with the Indian
185 potatoes, somehow I tried my best. I looked at so many YouTube tutorials.

186
187 I just could not make that. I loved that. Just simple boiled potatoes with some dill.

188
189 And dill, I love dill. We don't get dill in India. But I just used to love dill on everything.

190
191 And for the first time, I'm seeing dill on pizza, and I love that there.

192
193 [...] I think I have a lot story to tell about people I met in Lithuania.

194
195 See, the first month I reached, it was actually it was really hard for me because it
196 was a new place. I literally knew nobody. And of course, I knew [Shadowed Name 1],
197 but I think at that time [Shadowed Name 1] went to India and she was not there.

198
199 So I literally knew nobody and I had no idea how to talk to people, how to make
200 friends. So one good thing I did, I'm so thankful to [Shadowed Name 2]. [Shadowed
201 Name 2], she was my supervisor.

202
203 So but I was not meeting her that on a regular basis. But she suggested me that to
204 take some courses. And she also suggested that, do you know [Shadowed Name
205 3]? He's a cultural psychologist.

206
207 [...] Of course, I'm very close to him. I still talk to him.

Commented [AF26]: Lines 163-164: adapting with food culture / adapting positive mechanism-resource / mixing diet from two cultures in day to day experience

Commented [AF27]: Line 195: Loneliness / isolation / integration to the host society

Commented [AF28]: Lines 196-197: coping through contact with supervisor / shaping into social integration / supportive academic relationships

210 We are very close. So [Shadowed Name 2] suggested that I take his class because
 211 she told me he's apparently his teaching method is different. And he's he was
 212 offering a very interesting course.
 213
 214 And I've never studied anthropology in my life before that. And I actually doubted,
 215 should I do that? Because I'm coming from a different background. And should I?
 216 Then she suggested that it would be interesting anyway to study because
 217 interdisciplinary, all these things.
 218
 219 So I decided to go to his class and that actually kind of changed my life in Vilnius.
 220 Trust me, that was the best decision I made. So it's like I made some friends in the
 221 class and our class was like truly international because since the course was offered
 222 in English, so many students were interested.
 223
 224 So they were like there were like students from Japan and then different parts of
 225 Europe. And one girl from Indonesia. So I got so close to that girl in front that girl
 226 from Indonesia.
 227
 228 We started hanging out regularly. She kind of became my best team. And she was
 229 also from my dormitory.
 230
 231 And I have a very interesting story I would like to tell you, which I had a bad
 232 experience I had from my dormitory. So the first I was given a room with the two
 233 other girls and one girl left after a few days because I think her Erasmus programme
 234 was already over. And another girl was Indian.
 235
 236 She's from north of India. I'm from south of India. We are different ethnicity.
 237
 238 We speak different language. We are totally different people. So we obviously talk to
 239 each other in English because we don't have a common language.
 240
 241 And so that girl, I thought it would be nice to have an Indian roommate, but I think
 242 she did not want me to be her as her roommate. So she was creating sort of an
 243 issues for me visibly making it visible that she don't want me there. And I overheard
 244 her after a week, I overheard her telling another girl that she would like the other girl
 245 to be her roommate instead of me.
 246
 247 So I went and told her that it's okay, I have no problem. If you have issue with me, I'll
 248 change. But it actually made me feel really bad.
 249
 250 I mean, because I thought of your fellow Indian girl, it would be nice. She was
 251 actually doing like a regular course. They're not Erasmus.
 252
 253 But she was way younger than me, maybe maybe 10 years younger than me. She
 254 must be she was doing her bachelor's. So I felt it was really awkward the way she
 255 was so strange in the way she was behaving with me.
 256
 257 But anyway, we went to that officer, office lady in dormitory and told her that we want
 258 to change. And that lady was asking me, what's the problem? Why can't two Indian
 259 girls live together? So I told her I have no problem. I've been living with Indian girls in
 260 India.
 261

Commented [AF29]: Lines 210-211: academic identity crisis / cultural discipline / ethnical barriers / thought processing

Commented [AF30]: Lines 215-217: reconstructing identity / overcoming loneliness / multicultural academic spaces / resources from academic life

Commented [AF31]: Line 221: rebuilding sense of belongingness in cross cultural bond

Commented [AF32]: Line 231: intra-national cultural experience / migration competition

Commented [AF33]: Lines 236-237: emotional strain / doubts though experience / inter-cultural neglect experience

262 I literally have no problem. I've been staying in dormitories all my life, but I don't
263 know what was her problem. So I got changed, I got a new room.

264
265 And that was supposed to be a room for three girls. But since I maybe because I
266 moved in later, no, no one else came. So for a whole semester, I had that room all to
267 myself.

Commented [AF34]: Line 260: temporary solitude /
adaptation sphere / loneliness

268
269 And I was happy, though it was really, you know, the beginning, I was really, really
270 upset about how things happened. It really disturbed me. Because because I didn't
271 know literacy because because it was a new place.

272
273 And I didn't know anybody, such a behaviour from a fellow Indian. I was not
274 expecting that. So I when I told [Shadowed Name 2] about it, so [Shadowed Name 2]
275 told me a different perspective.

Commented [AF35]: Lines 263-266: cultural shock
experience / disorientation / cultural distress

276
277 She told me that some Indians when they move to Europe, they discriminate among
278 the new Indians who are coming. So what she told me that it's it's it's kind of a trend.
279 She knows patterns observed among these Indian immigrants in Europe that after
280 living there for a while, they think that they are superior than the new Indians coming.

Commented [AF36]: Lines 270-271: intra-cultural battle /
discrimination among fellow cultures / hierarchy / impact on
belonging

281
282 So she told me that could be the reason, but I don't really know what is the reason.
283 But one thing I was sure that she only wanted Europeans as her roommate. That's
284 what I so maybe it is true.

285
286 But anyway, whatever. So I was really upset about that. And I didn't want to talk to
287 anyone else after that.

288
289 I was scared. But then I met this Indonesian girl in my class. She was from the same
290 in the same dormitory.

Commented [AF37]: Lines 279-282: withdrawal /
loneliness / negative social experience

291
292 So we started hanging out. So I was really happy after that. I mean, I was not sad
293 anymore after meeting her.

294
295 [...]

296
297 So I attended two, three lectures and then I just decided not to go because I didn't
298 think it would be because I at my PhD level, I want something more challenging. So I
299 decided I decided not to go. So then I was left with only [Shadowed Name 3]'s
300 course.

301
302 And it was really, really interesting, maybe also because I have never studied
303 anthropology before and everything was new to me. So literally, maybe it could be
304 the basic things, but that was challenging and interesting, new to me. And I had only
305 classes on Friday and remaining days, I would I was still writing my thesis.

306
307 So I would have I think I either stayed in the room writing thesis or I used to go to
308 library like I used to go to the library. Yes, I also used to go to the library in an old
309 town, that very pretty, the library with the central library. Yes.

310
311 Yes. But but both had different why. So I used to select where where to go based on
312 my mood that particular day.

Commented [AF38]: Lines 299-303: Routine and
environmental discovery as a coping resource / self-
regulation coping

314 So it's just I used to I used to but do like that. But even anyway, it was never. One
315 thing I noticed that I don't know, some hope the people, the students and the staff at
316 they seemed more approachable and friendly.

317
318 And the staff and students who used to come to the library at the old town, they they
319 were not that approachable. That's it. That seemed more like very serious, you know,
320 environment.

321
322 So I mean, it was more relaxing sort of environment. Yeah. So I used to go
323 depending on my mood.

324
325 So that was nice. I know I haven't had really any bad experience at the university,
326 maybe also because I had limited times there. But I really loved and enjoyed my
327 Friday classes.

328
329 And every week I was looking forward for forward to attending [Shadowed Name 3]'s
330 classes. And he everything like the the the materials he used to ask us to read and
331 the and the other, you know, the class task, everything. It was really fun.

332
333 I just enjoy. I just loved it. I mean, I attended [Shadowed Name 3]'s few lectures.

334
335

336 [...] OK, I think I would describe it as biryani. Do you know biryani?

337
338 [...] OK, so it's like it's like a very popular Indian dish. It's like a South Asian dish. It
339 originated from the Arab Persia, but now it's like the most popular dish in South Asia.

340
341
342 So it's like rice, chicken with spices instead of chicken. It can also be lamb or beef,
343 but it's like a most popular is chicken. So it is so tasty.

344
345 And it's like when when I was staying in dormitory in India, it's like we we also get
346 food at the dormitory in here. So we only used to get biryani once a week. And I
347 used to look forward for that day, like we used to get every Wednesday dinner.

348
349 So every week I used to look forward for Wednesday dinner so that I can eat biryani.
350 And whenever it was good for me to order in food, I would always order biryani. And
351 if anybody asked me what to what should we eat, I always say biryani.

352
353 It's like it's not only my favourite, but it's like a national favourite. So I would say my
354 Friday classes were like a biryani to me because see my life apart from that Friday
355 class, my life in Vilnius was kind of dry. See one thing I think it's also my fault
356 because I'm not really a people person.

357
358 I do not like to interact with people that much. I don't go out. I don't like going out.

359
360 I would I would I only go out if it's extremely necessary, necessary. Otherwise, I don't
361 prefer going out. So it could also be my problem that, you know, it's difficult to find
362 my kind of people, especially when I'm living in a place like Lithuania for a short term.

363
364 So anyway, but in that class was something I always used to look forward to. I have
365 even told this to [Shadowed Name 3] that this class is the best thing that happened

Commented [AF39]: Lines 317-320: transition from isolation to belonging through academic resources / social connections / adapting in social settings

Commented [AF40]: Lines 343-345: cultural metaphors (biryani) / emotional nostalgia / experience of adaptation

Commented [AF41]: Lines 345-348: Self-awareness / understanding personal barriers to succeed integration in social settings / identity formation

Commented [AF42]: Lines 351-352: awareness of temporary influencing depth of social integration / lack of time to fully adapt in new culture

366 to me in Vilnius. So he asked me, is your life that boring in Vilnius that you are
367 looking forward for a class? I'm looking forward to attend the class in lecture because
368 my so I told him, no, no, no, it's not like that, not because it's boring, but because I
369 really like like that class.

370
371 So I would say it's like a biryani to me that is something that I always look forward to.
372 [...]

373 Yeah, actually, I'm very close to him.

374
375 Even last time when I visited in Vilnius, I met him twice. We had we we went out for
376 drinks and so I also text him. So like we are like he's like my I have told this to you.

377
378 I have told [Shadowed Name 1] that [Shadowed Name 3] is like a father figure to me.
379 And she can't believe this. She's like [Shadowed Name 3].

380
381 Because, you know, for the I know for everybody, he's like a very funny person, a
382 funny, funny person. But I don't know. I for to me, he's like a father figure.

383
384 So I think to him also, I'm like I'm like a daughter, I believe. I will tell you more
385 stories. I'll tell you how, why it is like that.

386
387 So you can ask me more questions. So if it comes up, I'll tell you more stories.
388 [...]

389
390 I don't know if I had any. See, apart from my personal challenge that I was really
391 lonely in the beginning, but once I got some friends from the from [Shadowed Name
392 3]'s class, I wasn't feeling that way anymore. And then regarding the info.

393
394 Yeah, one thing is that I was I wanted to do interviews of some politician because I'm
395 working on political representation of women. So I discussed this thing with
396 [Shadowed Name 1] that if it is possible for me to maybe meet some professors who
397 are working on the same area. So [Shadowed Name 1] gave me contact of one
398 professor from that politics department, but I could never meet her because I felt like
399 she was not open to meeting me.

400
401 And again, with maybe finding even at the local level, fine talking to some politician, I
402 find that really difficult. I sent actually emails to so many political parties, some local
403 politicians. I did not get any response back.

404
405 And then I eventually I did interview one person, but I got that contact through one of
406 my classmates in [Shadowed Name 3]'s class. And he was he was not a student
407 student. He was a middle aged man.

408
409 He was just auditing the class. So this apparently this politician used to work with
410 him. And now she's she's not in politics anymore.

411
412 But she she she was a politician in the past. So I but I did not include her interview in
413 my thesis because I could not just take just, you know, insight from only one person.
414 It was not a full fledged study.

415
416 But that did help me to understand something for, you know, just the base at base
417 level. She did help me understand how a woman in at least local politics in Lithuania,

Commented [AF43]: Lines 367 – 371: Connectedness through wisdom with mentor / academic resources / familial belonging

Commented [AF44]: Lines 379-381: Academic engagement as space for identity reconstruction and social-emotional-cultural stability

Commented [AF45]: Line 387: cultural distance / unapproachability on academic ground / neglect

Commented [AF46]: Lines 393-394: bonding broader within academic network and social resources / adaptation

418 how how their experiences. But this thing I felt like I just could not get in touch with
 419 people, even even in politics or even academy.
 420
 421 I felt like I mean, I was also clueless because I didn't know how to approach these
 422 people. So the only people I knew was, you know, [Shadowed Name 2] and
 423 [Shadowed Name 1]. I was asking them, but things were not somehow working in my
 424 favour.
 425
 426 [...]

427 No, actually, as I said earlier, my study was not based on primary data.
 428
 429 Like so I didn't really have to interview them for my study, but I thought it would add
 430 on, like it would help me to understand. So so it was not much of a low, low, like, you
 431 know, for me to. So I was like, it's OK.
 432
 433 I felt like if they're not available, it's OK. I will just carry on with my earlier idea of just
 434 doing secondary data. So my primary data set was electoral data, which was already
 435 available in the Election Commission of Lithuania website.
 436
 437 So I thought, OK, I'll just do my study on the basis of that. But I did get some good,
 438 you know, materials from the library. Like some books about a woman in Lithuania.
 439
 440 So that did help because some such books are not always available online and
 441 especially difficult to access from India. So they are using Vilnius University official
 442 Wi-Fi, this thing. Internet, I could actually access some good materials.
 443
 444 And then the library also, there were some books available. So, yeah, that was really
 445 helpful. [...]
 446
 447 I don't think it changed me as an academic person because, but it did change me as
 448 an individual. Because academy, because, yeah, academy was difficult for me
 449 before and after Lithuania. So the loneliness didn't really help me in anything.
 450
 451 But but it did change me as an individual because that was my first time in my life
 452 going to a new place where I just everything was new to me, the culture, the
 453 language, the people. It's like I felt myself in the middle of something, middle of an
 454 ocean where I just could not escape, like I just didn't know what to do. So that and I
 455 was for the first month, I think I came there end of January and the whole month of
 456 month February was extremely depressed, I would say.
 457
 458 Yeah, I think it is the right time to use depress. I was even thinking I might have to
 459 take anxiety medications when I go back to Delhi because I was feeling really, really
 460 depressed. I just didn't know what to do.
 461
 462 I had nobody to talk to. I was going to the classes, but I still hadn't made, you know,
 463 friends there. So February was really tough and and the weather extremely cold.
 464
 465 I have I have never experienced that kind of cold in my life before. So I just I couldn't
 466 go outside. I know that going out will help, but I just couldn't go out and inside.
 467
 468 I was alone in the room. I had no roommates. I wasn't talking to anybody, only calling
 469 some people in India, my friends and family over phone.

Commented [AF47]: Lines 449-450: struggle to navigate academic and personal spaces due to the cultural unfamiliarity / cultural shock

Commented [AF48]: Lines 449-456: difficulty of forming social bonds / lack of belonging / living like an alien in host culture

470
471 Apart from that, I think the whole month of February, I didn't even do anything. I had
472 no energy to work on my thesis. I was only watching Netflix shows the whole month
473 of February.
474

475 I was watching Netflix show some Korean dramas I watched and I didn't do anything
476 else because I just could not do. That's the that is the first time in my life I'm
477 realising, OK, this is what what the people talk about the winter, something
478 depression, seasonal depression, things like that. I thought maybe it is something
479 like that.
480

481 And then seasonal plus, you know, me not having anybody around. So, yeah, that
482 that changed me. I actually I can say it.
483

484 I think it won't be wrong to say that I can do kind of classify or divide, distinguish my
485 life as before Lithuania Jasmine and after Lithuania Jasmine because I have
486 changed a lot. Seriously, because because I was put in such a situation, I have
487 changed and I have learned a lot of lessons. The primary lesson is that I shouldn't be
488 feeling scared whenever I move to a new place, because I know that since I am in
489 academy, I will have to keep changing places.
490

491 I love to go to, you know, to different universities and maybe leave places. So I now I
492 know that I don't have to worry too much. Just wait for three months and we and in
493 three months I will find a new home.
494

495 That's what I felt about. Yeah, so it really changed me as an individual. Academia,
496 nothing.
497

498 No, I wouldn't say nothing much.
499

500 [...]

501 So the qualities, can it be bad or good, like anything? Anything you'd like to share.
502 It's the freedom you have. So I feel like there are more good qualities that I have
503 learned from here, that I think I become more polite after leaving Lithuania.
504

505 Because since I was in India all my life, it's not in our culture to say thank you to us,
506 anybody, even not even our family member, only in extreme, some just very rare
507 occasion you said thank you to a person in India. And if you say thank you to a
508 family member, it's like kind of offensive here, because you don't do that to a very
509 close person. Saying thank you, that seems really formal.
510

511 So I feel like after living in Lithuania, I have learned to become more formal and
512 polite, especially when I go out in public place. So last week my family was here. So
513 I went out with my nephew and after getting out of the cab, I said thank you to the
514 cab driver.
515

516 And my nephew asked me, why are we saying thank you to everybody? So he was
517 so shocked. Then I realised, oh yeah, I do say thank you to everybody. It's like now
518 it's become a habit, which I cannot get out of my system, that I just say thank you to
519 any service I get, be it a cab or maybe at a restaurant, anywhere, I just say thank
520 you.

Commented [AF49]: Lines 463-465: Seasonal trauma / difference of living in new environment / feeling of survival shock

Commented [AF50]: Lines 470-471: transformation of identity before and after migration / experience and emotional struggle, cultural shock causes change in participant

Commented [AF51]: Lines 474-478: acceptance of transience in short term migration / coping - adapting

Commented [AF52]: Lines 486-490: ascension of personal qualities /

Commented [AF53]: Line 498: recognition of personality change living in short-term migration / shock in native land / notice of individual transformation

521 And maybe they also feel good listening it, I don't know. But I think yeah, I did
522 become more polite and formal and I like it. I want to keep doing that.

523
524 I feel good about myself when I'm being more polite. And yeah, but and I feel like I
525 have become more matured. That is one bad quality maybe I had before coming to
526 Lithuania, that I was a bit, I think I was a bit more childish.

527
528 Maybe living alone in a strange land made me feel more, made me more self-
529 reliable, because I learned to cook on my own. I learned to do grocery on my own. I
530 learned to, you know, manage my finances, because I had to do everything on my
531 own with the limited money I was getting.

532
533 So all those things, I think I learned to do. But I also said that I kind of lost that, that
534 maybe that sometimes the childishness inside me was good. Because when you,
535 when you are still, when you are not that mature, you can maybe it life sometimes
536 gets a bit easier.

537
538 Because you just, you don't, you don't really take into consideration many problems
539 or you just ignore these things. But after that, I became more mature. So I started
540 noticing these kind of things, problems, small issues, problems in life.

541
542 Okay, I don't know how I mean, I don't know if I'm saying it right.

543 [...]

544 Yes, yes, because I've noticed that when I say thank you to a cab driver, he instantly
545 becomes happy.

546
547 I feel like that there is a positivity, because people just, I know that they're just doing
548 their work, they're busy, they might want to go to go get another ride, but still they
549 become happy. And I noticed that whenever I'm around people and I say thank you,
550 they all become happy. I feel like it's a very positive thing to do.

551
552 I know it's a very small act, but it still makes it somehow, it makes things around me
553 better. That's, yeah, that's what I feel, felt like. Is that your question? Did I answer it?
554 Yeah, you did answer it, and I really like the answer, because you got it on point.

555
556 [...]

557 Yes, it is.

558
559 It was difficult because not everybody uses, you know, WhatsApp. I could only make
560 a call via internet, and with people of my same age, like my sister, my friends, I could
561 call them via WhatsApp, but my mother don't use a smartphone. So my home is in a
562 village.

563
564 So for her, it was really difficult. She had to go to my sisters and then make a call. So
565 I was not able to call her, and we were talking like once in two weeks or something
566 like that.

567
568 And even then, she's not used to call, so she wouldn't know. If it's a video call, she
569 would still try to, you know, she wouldn't understand it's a video call. So such
570 challenges I had.

571

Commented [AF54]: Line 503-504: negotiating personal and cultural values / positive identity change / appreciation of surviving cultural shock

Commented [AF55]: Line 511: personal agency and practical resource-skill development to survive

Commented [AF56]: Lines 510-512: developing self-independent identity / survival in culturally alien settings / grow in emotional confidence / living through poverty and pressuring times

Commented [AF57]: Lines 540-543: barriers that prevent to reach out with relatives / technological gaps as part of the culture

572 But initially, it was a bit difficult, but then I got used to it. And of course, sometimes
573 internet is not stable. So it's just difficult.
574

Commented [AF58]: Line 550: gradual adaptation / alignment in different culture

575 And the time difference. Time difference was also difficult because when I'm free in
576 the evening, my friends would have already slept. That's the time when you don't
577 want to disturb somebody.
578

579 After eight or after nine, you don't want to disturb anybody. So in the beginning,
580 when I used to feel lonely at night, I had no one even to go. The time difference was
581 a problem because at night, I used to feel, you know, this some sort of anxiety.
582

Commented [AF59]: Lines 558-559: lowered belonging / regional timezones cause higher level of pressure / disrupted communication with home / increased wordiness

583 And during the day, even if I'm all right, at night, I used to feel something in my chest,
584 and I had this urge to talk to someone, but then people would be already asleep in
585 India. So yeah, the time difference was a challenge. Yeah.
586

Commented [AF60]: Lines 557-562: emotional strain / anxiety / isolation and social contact craving / neglect

587 [...]

588 I don't have a ritual, anything of that sort. But I started doing a ritual from Lithuania.
589

590 Oh, I started I started drinking coffee, which I never did before, even though I come
591 from a place where we we make coffee like at my home, we had a coffee tree and
592 my grandmother used to make coffee powder out of it. But I but at my home, nobody
593 drinks coffee. I don't know why I never I was I never used to drink and I came to
594 Lithuania.
595

596 I see that literally everybody is crazy for coffee when they don't even have coffee at
597 Lithuania in Europe. They don't produce coffee in Europe, but how can they? I was
598 used to wonder how can they be so crazy over coffee when what if they what if we
599 decide not to export coffee and then all Lithuanians will be dead within a week or
600 two. So I started drinking coffee there.
601

602 I have because I have seen people because you people have such a coffee culture. I
603 got influenced now every every day in the morning I drink coffee. I start my day with
604 the coffee.
605

Commented [AF61]: Lines 576-579: adoption of foreign cultural rituals / coping through host country resources / evaluating same items with different values post-short-term migration

606 My mother is shocked. Would you say that's a positive thing? I think it is a positive
607 thing because it makes me happy. I know it's kind of a drug coffee.
608

609 It does make me happy. And Lithuania had a huge variety of coffees and I and I got
610 into it. I'll tell you how I got into it.
611

612 The girl who was staying in my room, she left behind a coffee bottle and it looked
613 some it looked fancy. So I wanted to try it and I liked it and I started drinking it every
614 day. So though I can't get the same thing here, but now I am just trying different
615 coffees available in India.
616

617 Now I drink every day morning. So I got this coffee habit from Lithuania. It's good.
618

619 I love coffee now.
620

621 [...]

622 But the coffee reminded me an issue I faced regarding food. I see where I am from,
623 rice is our staple food, the south of India, like all the time rice. There is no day
624 without rice.

Commented [AF62]: Lines 597-598: awareness of cultural and dietary identity / self-reflecting on homeland traditions

625
626 But in Lithuania, the type of rice I was getting, I was not able to cook that either. I
627 would always overcook it or undercook it. So for four months I left rice.

628
629 I was so frustrated. I tried a couple of times. It didn't come out, turn out well.

Commented [AF63]: Line 603: emotional frustration / helplessness due to lack of ability / craving to succeed to make native food ritual

630
631 So I just decided to leave it. And yeah, so for four months of my life, I lived without
632 rice. And that will never happen again, because last time I was in September, when I
633 was in Lithuania, I was introduced to rice, which I was able to cook well.

Commented [AF64]: Line 607: creating social bond to solve hardship / adopting host resources / studying locations of the host country

634
635 So if I come to Lithuania again, I won't struggle like that. But living a life without rice
636 was really tough.

Commented [AF65]: Line 609: learning from past struggles to be better and stronger / adaptation towards predicted future

637 [...]
638 No, actually, I was in my best shape after eating rice. Even looking at those pictures,
639 I used to think, is that me? Because I was looking so good after, you know, after
640 leaving rice for three, four months.

Commented [AF66]: Lines 609-610: lack of native ritualistic components in day-to-day life / redefining daily identity with new food culture

641
642 So, but still, I don't want to look that good. I'm okay looking like this. I don't want to
643 leave rice anymore.

644
645 So, it's just fine. But I think it didn't affect me that much, though I really craved for
646 rice. Whenever I craved for rice, I went to this Indian restaurant and I had biryani.

647
648 So, that was really nice. So, I think every Friday after my class, I used to go to the
649 Indian restaurant with my Indonesian friend and we used to have the biryani. So, that
650 was okay for me.

Commented [AF67]: Lines 622-623: shaping sense of belonging / social bonding / shared culture and positivity through food / food rituals

651
652 [...]
653 See, actually in India, tea is pretty common. Everybody drinks tea. But coffee is
654 something, a special drink.

655
656 We don't just drink like that on an everyday basis. If somebody's making coffee, I
657 don't know, at least in any, even in my distant family, we just don't make coffee like
658 that. We might make coffee if some guest is coming.

659
660 Not like on a regular basis. On a regular basis, it is tea that we drink, but not coffee.
661 And even our coffee is like, you know, we have this unique coffee, something like
662 unique to South India, with very small, it comes in a small glass like this, and we only
663 drink this much.

664
665 But Europeans or particularly Lithuanians drink like big coffee, like this much in a big
666 coffee mug. So, that was really strange to me.

667 [...]
668 Yes, yes.

669
670 I went to have lunch with [Shadowed Name 2] and she ordered a coffee after lunch.
671 And she said, and she drank it just like that. And I asked her, how is it even
672 possible? How can you? And she said she likes the bitterness.

Commented [AF68]: Lines 643-645: negotiating cultural means and preferences in social interactions / identifying cultural shocks through observing / surprise effect

674 Then I asked her, how can even, how can people like bitterness? Bitterness is
675 something, it's a very negative thing. Even we use the word, the term bitterness in a
676 negative, you know, context. But how can someone like bitterness? So I was just
677 really shocked.

678
679 This you will never see in India. In South India, when we drink coffee, it's sweet
680 because we add a lot of sugar and milk. So it's a sweet drink.

681
682 [...]
683 I loved that chamomile tea. Somebody told me they only drink it when they get sick.
684 So a friend of mine, he told me that it reminds him of his childhood.

685
686 You know, it's like a childhood trauma for him, but I loved it. When I came back to
687 India, I bought like many packs of that and I was drinking it every day.
688 [...]

689 Actually, where I am from is south of India and we have tropical weather. I don't
690 know if you have heard of Kerala.

691
692 I am from Kerala. So many Lithuanian tourists come here. It's like a tourist location.

693
694 It's a tropical, it's throughout the year, it is, we do not have winter.
695 [...]

696
697 Okay. So it's like a tropical region, but where I was coming from was Delhi. Delhi has
698 a very severe winter.

699
700 So I already had enough winter clothes, but even though we say that Delhi has
701 severe winter, but it is nothing compared to Lithuanian winter. So I shouldn't even
702 making a comparison like that, but still I had enough clothes. I had bought a special
703 jacket for the Lithuanian cold and it was okay.

704
705 And since I went there in, I think that spring semester, what is it called? Was that a
706 spring semester? So I could kind of, it is called a spring or winter semester. Yeah. So
707 I could, I could, I could see the change of seasons.

708
709 Okay. That is something was a huge cultural shock to me because I'm from a tropical
710 region. We do not have seasons in Delhi.

711
712 There are seasons, but not exact four month, four month season, like in a, this, you
713 know, Northern hemisphere, like in Delhi, the seasons are also kind of interloping.
714 It's complicated. It's strange in Delhi.

715
716 So coming to Lithuania, first time I get to see that seasons, like I have only seen that
717 in movies and in TV shows before in my life. And I could really see and experience it
718 winter from winter to the beginning of some spring and then spring becoming
719 summer. And there was a, from my dormitory right in front of my window, there was
720 this maple tree.

721
722 When I went there, it was fully covered in snow and there was no leaves. And since
723 there was no leaves, I could see the opposite building very clear. And there was a
724 cat, two cats on the opposite building in one particular apartment.

725

Commented [AF69]: Lines 659-659: Integrating elements of host culture into personal contemporary ritual schedule post migration

Commented [AF70]: Lines 681-689: empirical evidence of environmental and sensory culture shock / identifying regional differences / an awe from media memory replicates in real time experiences (only saw it in TV shows, but now lives it in reality)

726 And I used to see them every day. I had even given them some names in my local
727 language. So I used to see them every day.

728
729 I could see them through that tree, you know, because tree didn't have any leaves.
730 So I could see them very clearly. But as the season changed, the tree started having
731 more leaves.

732
733 And by the end of the time I was leaving, I could not see the cats. And I was a bit sad
734 that I couldn't, I felt like I couldn't say goodbye to them because the tree had covered
735 my view of the cat. So, but that was really interesting because the first time in my life
736 I'm seeing that.

737
738 And I still have, I plucked maple, the leaf from that tree. I still have that in my diary,
739 that tree, because that tree was also important integral part of my life in Vilnius,
740 because I felt like it's, you know what, I felt like it was my, it was my child and I have
741 seen the child growing up in front of my eyes, you know, like, so, so that what I'm
742 saying that when I went back, went back to Vilnius in September, I did go there and
743 made sure that I have seen the tree, took a picture with it and came back because I
744 was missing the tree. Yeah.

745
746 So, yeah. So the season, the changing of season, it was amazing. And I feel like I,
747 then I realised what I have been missing all my life, living in a tropical region,
748 because for us, every year is the same.

749
750 Every day is the same. In between there is monsoon. But apart from that, it's, it, it,
751 there is nothing to look forward to.

752
753 But in, but when you live in a place like that, there is always something, even if you,
754 your, your life is a mess, you still have something to look forward to. Like, you know,
755 the spring coming, the beautiful flowers of, I just love that daisies and, you know, that
756 how it's just, it just, the whole country, the whole city became heaven. You know, if
757 somebody asked me what heaven is, I would say Vilnius in May, because May, May
758 is my favourite month in Vilnius.

759
760 [...] Yeah. So it's just so beautiful, so beautiful life.

761
762
763 I actually have, I saw so many flowers which I have not seen before, only heard like
764 lilac, daisy. I'm forgetting the name of the yellow flower. What was that?

765 [...] And then, and then it will, it will get dried and it will fly away, the things. So it look, it
766 was, so that was all those flowers.

767
768
769 I think I have some, I have still kept those. I have that with me. Yes.

770
771 [...] Oh yeah. Dandelion. Yes.

772
773
774 [...] And it looks so pretty. So pretty. So I actually, I didn't really like summer that much
775 there because it was extremely hot and without a ceiling fan.

Commented [AF71]: Lines 697-698: creating symbolic memory / identifying symbolic meaning for personal satisfaction / coping mechanism from isolation

Commented [AF72]: Line 705: experience of environmental and sensory culture / exposure to cultural patterns

Commented [AF73]: Lines 707-708: creating cultural memories / attachment with host country / positive memory / memory that remind of belonging in host country

Commented [AF74]: Lines 711-712: reconnection with meaningful memory places / memorial places as coping resource

Commented [AF75]: Lines: 714-716: identifying the personal and cultural difference / contrast withing homeland environment vs host environment / new experience / new coping resource

778 And anyway, I'm coming from a hot country. I just, I don't want to go experience hot
779 in another country. I would rather stay in my country if I want to experience heat, but
780 I really loved April and May in Lithuania because, you know, starting off the flowers
781 and you just so happy that feeling was really nice.

782 [...]

783 Yeah. I, I actually, I didn't go much into the forest. I have heard so many people
784 saying Lithuanian forest are very pretty, but I'm not really a forest person.

785 So I have been to the forest, but I find it a bit scary. So I didn't really spend much
786 time in the forest. Yeah.

787 [...]

788 I thought Lithuania is a safe country. I never, I never felt any problem. I used to even
789 walk at middle of the night and I always thought it's a very safe place.

790 [...]

791 Yeah. I have one experience of catcalling. When I went to me and my Indonesian
792 friend, we went to that place.

793 What is that famous, uh, river and there is this thing in No, no, no, no, no, I didn't feel
794 men innappropriating staring in Vilnius, but in Trakai there were these guys, me and
795 my friend didn't look back and walked straight ahead.

796 [...]

797 I had [Shadowed Name 3] and [Shadowed Name 2]

798 [...]

799 There is international office... Sk[Shadowed Name 1]nte.

800 So she was very helpful. So she was, I mean, whenever I had any issue regarding
801 the Rasmus thing, she was always there. And then any other personal thing, I could
802 always go to [Shadowed Name 2] or [Shadowed Name 3].

803 And then, of course, the friends I met in my class. Once I got become friends and we
804 started going out and we just really fun. So, yeah.

805 So after actually from April, my life started getting really good. I really had fun. I
806 enjoyed only February and March was difficult.

807 But apart from that, the remaining three months were amazing. And I did not want to
808 go back. I cried so badly the night before I was leaving.

809 I was so sad. I just did not want to leave at all. Even after coming back, I used to,
810 you know, see those.

811 I used to relive those moments in my dreams. And it used to make me feel so sad
812 that I was missing the place a lot. And and I and I was thinking that when I was living
813 there, I did not understand how important this was to me.

814 And then now that I am back, I just wanted to go back. So, you know, thinking about
815 it now, it's making me feel emotional because I just I really had a wonderful time

Commented [AF76]: Lines 776-779: negotiating identity and social support within academic network and social network / coping strategies / social support resources

Commented [AF77]: Lines 779-782: development of belonging / social-emotional stability / social integration

Commented [AF78]: Lines 783 – 785: distinction between hard short-term migration period between positive short-term migration / self-awareness of transition from cultural shock to joyful memories

Commented [AF79]: Lines 786-788: emotional attachment / resistance to depart / reflecting on benefits of short-term migration experience / desire to explore more

Commented [AF80]: Lines 791-793: reflecting on personal transformation and attachment formed though short-term migration

829 there. And then I also met, adding on to the supporting system, I also met a lot of
830 people from my home, my place in India, my home state.
831

832 So and since then we all speak same language, even from my hometown. I found I
833 met two, three people from my hometown and we were all speaking in my language.
834 And now I am friends with all of them.
835

836 And we shared contact on Instagram. They organised programme. They have an
837 association there.
838

839 So it's like it was good. So to know that, you know, my people are also there. Most of
840 them are working in the IT field.
841

842 They're like they are with there are some people with the families. Also, they're
843 staying. They said it's a wonderful place.
844

845 So so I'm it was actually I met them while I was working in the old town. I heard
846 some people speaking my language and I was so surprised and happy at the same
847 time. And I went up to them and I talked.
848

849 And then I then I kept meeting people. I kept hearing my language and I was so
850 happy. So, yeah.
851

852 So after a while, I felt like, you know, I felt like Vilnius was another home. Because I
853 could get my food, I could see my people, I could speak my language. It didn't really
854 feel like I'm far away from home.
855

856 [...]

857 No, I actually I wasn't aware of.
858

859 I knew that there was some organisation of Erasmus students, but since that was for
860 only, I think, bachelor students or something, I was never part of that. So no, I was
861 not, I didn't even know about any such support system.
862 [...]

863

864 I think I may have heard this during my orientation, but I didn't really think about it
865 later. Like I completely forgot about it because they only said this on the first day
866 orientation and they were saying a lot more things and my focus was on other things.
867 So I just didn't really think about it.
868

869 [...]

870 If I could access it like since I was a short-term student and is it applicable to me
871 also?
872 [...]

873

874 Then I would have definitely given it a try, but at least I would have, I mean, see if
875 how that works and if it will be helpful for me or not.
876

877 I would have given it a try.
878 [...]

879

880 No, I think I didn't check the website for such things or I may have heard some things
were going on in the department, this Asian and transcultural, but I haven't attended
any, yes.

Commented [AF81]: Lines 800-801: rediscovery of belonging / shared homeland language / culture abroad / diverse cultures unify to cope socially

Commented [AF82]: Lines 804-805: media connection makes social belonging more flexible / digital coping with loneliness

Commented [AF83]: Line 820: Both good times... and hard times and successful survival shapes host country like second home

Commented [AF84]: Lines 820-821: Development of belonging and emotional connection to host environment through cultural familiarity

Commented [AF85]: Lines 821-822: encountering homeland resources in host country (language / food / people) / good experience / minority culture bonding within social settings

Commented [AF86]: Lines 825 – 832: not aware of VU support services like academic counselling, library support system, wellbeing division, law clinic or career and advise team / cultural disorientation

881 [...]
882 It depends, if it was a topic of interest, I would have definitely gone, yes. But if it was
883 a general topic or the topic of not of my interest, then I would not have gone.
884
885 [...]
886
887 By then, I had already developed my group of friends, my support system, like the
888 other support system, like [Shadowed Name 3] and, you know, [Shadowed Name 2]
889 and all my friends. So I met him, I met him like a month before I was leaving. So
890 even then we were not very close and we got close later.
891
892 He came to India for three months. So then actually, but I did introduce him to
893 [Shadowed Name 3] and [Shadowed Name 2]. So yeah, yes, so I don't, I didn't talk
894 about him because he was not there in majority of my part of my, you know, my stay
895 in Vilnius.
896
897 As I said, I met him very late, but by then I was already, you know, found my space
898 and I was already really happy there. So.
899 [...]
900
901 Bye-bye. Good night.
902 [...]

Commented [AF87]: Lines 853-855: identity and stability / academic resources and relationships

Appendix 3.2. Tulip:

Pakistan, female, 24, bachelor level student, Muslim (practices)

1 [...]

2 Okay, so I decided to come to Lithuania because it was like an underrated and

3 basically I know about Lithuania through Google and when I looked at it and I looked

4 at the university, it fascinates me and I have a really good interest in politics as well.

5 So I chose this course and pretty much everything was fine but I faced challenges

6 during the visa documentation and the university process was pretty smooth. I got

7 my offer letter in two days actually and I got my interview in like four days or

8 something so it was pretty smooth and everything was fine but I faced like a lot of

9 challenges while I was filing my documentation with the migration and it was

10 basically only one document.

11

12 This was police certificate to see if I have any kind of criminal background or

13 something. It takes a lot of time because my country doesn't have double legalisation

14 or a post trial so I have to like send the documents over here and it takes like two to

15 three months to double legalise and which delayed my visa filing and I was like

16 almost late to arrive in Lithuania but I came like at four or five of September which

17 was not too late but a little late because I missed really important functions in the first

18 week of Vilnius University and I think yeah that was pretty much transition when I

19 was filing everything regarding the documentation.

20

21 [...]

22 Yeah I remember I talked to one of the international coordinator and she told us that

23 15th of September is the last day and after that you have to like change your

24 contract to another year if you're late but the role in like documentation was I was like

25 a little disappointed because when I was talking to the university because it was my

26 document of police character certificate was in Lithuania and I talked to multiple

27 peoples in Lithuania including the Vilnius University administration and they told me

28 like they cannot do anything regarding it because the university has no concerns with

29 the documents of visa processes but at the end migration changed the policy again

30 and they told the university to like collect the documents of the students that they are

31 inviting and how can I say that in English and and give it to them basically so it take

32 like three months or four months basically to to file that and when I suggested this

33 idea to the administration they clearly denied it that they don't have any concerns

34 with the migration so it was a little disappointment.

35

36

37 [...]

38 I almost give up I'm like this document is not gonna legalise I'm gonna quit I'm not

39 coming to Lithuania but there was a light from the university that that international

40 administration woman she emailed us that she will help us through the

41 documentation and that was a time I was like okay let's give it a chance.

42

43

44 [...]

45 No actually because I think the meeting with the mentors who was my mentor I have

46 to meet them in person in the first week so that I know if I have any kind of problems

47 I should talk to them and and address it and the professors and everything like get to

48 know about each other and there was a trip to I don't know Trakai or something I

49 missed that as well so when I came to the university everyone was like friends with

50 each other and I was just looking at them and I was sitting alone and then some

Commented [AF1]: Lines 2 – 4: long-term interest, decision-making, migration determination

Commented [AF2]: Line 5: challenges with visa

Commented [AF3]: Lines 6-7: smooth documentation system at VU, fast paced academic process

Commented [AF4]: Lines 8-9: challenges with migration

Commented [AF5]: Line 11: complicated criminal investigation sight for visa check

Commented [AF6]: Lines 13-16: prolonged arrival / missing out on integration week of VU / complicated migration stages causing delay

Commented [AF7]: Lines 20-22: Short-term finalization at VU vs risk to lose position as a student / alternative safe in case of failure to legalise residence status in Lithuania

Commented [AF8]: Lines 22-26: Risk assessment due to visa renewals / no support from VU with visa documentations / Strict GDPR system blocks permission to help student

Commented [AF9]: Lines 27-31: radical visa application for government has lesser meaning for VU system / challenging work for no progression / new experience causing risk to health to integrate at VU

Commented [AF10]: Lines 35-38: Hardship raising system and mere possibility to manage documentation independently – risk to give up on migration process / support from individual staff at VU / hope and belief

Commented [AF11]: Lines 42-47: Missed out integration welcome experience at VU / miss out on contact and primal communication with mentors and fellow students / integration isolation and loneliness due to late arrival

51 people came and we talked and then we socialised but that was a later but already
52 there was a foreign group when I came but I just only attend one one function which
53 was at AdAstra because I was already there but I enjoyed it but on my second year
54 with the newcomers I actually saw everything with which I missed last last year now I
55 saw it with the new people who just arrived in Latvia in September.

Commented [AF12]: Lines 47-49: Later socializing with fellow students / phasing out from loneliness / integration with locals and fellow internationals

56
57
58 [...]
59 Like socialising get to know about new people and obviously when you're like away
60 from your country and there is no one even in your friends or like family so you have
61 like other people to talk to so it's better to like socialise and get to know about more
62 people so you don't feel like homesickness or something so it was like the part that I
63 missed on my first year in Lithuania.

Commented [AF13]: Lines 56-59: socializing and craving for social support / barrier of not knowing people

64
65
66 [...]
67 Yeah there were so many because I was so confused on the certain things regarding
68 the finances regarding the like leave or something I'm not sure I don't remember so
69 many things but I usually talk to my international coordinator in my faculty she
70 usually always timely reply me like within like few hours or within a day I talked to her
71 about like changing my group because when I came here she gave me like your one
72 class should be with the first group and the rest of them would be the second group
73 and I was confused so I talked to her about it emailed her and she usually helped me
74 a lot with all my work and even though I was confused with the finances because I
75 paid for the university and it doesn't reflect on the system and I was confused like if I
76 paid it or not because the money just deducted from my account and I don't have
77 more money to show or give it to them and she helped me with that she is like okay
78 you need to chill everything is fine I finance this department just take like few
79 business days to reflect it on the system so it's fine so yeah.

Commented [AF14]: Lines 64 – 70: support from international coordinator to obtain guidance on financial support and academic scheduling / complex and old academic information systems

80
81
82 [...]
83 No I didn't face anything they were pretty friendly and they usually reply really timely
84 if I'm facing anything they are like really helpful in anything they don't have like
85 priorities towards some group of people or their own local people they are like super
86 friendly that's what I like I can say about my faculty but I cannot say about the other
87 faculties.

88
89
90 [...]
91 It was pretty okay because I didn't come here like directly from my country it was like
92 my country doesn't have a Lithuanian embassy so I have to go to another country so
93 I we basically me and my friends who were like travelling together they we basically
94 have like exposure of like roads and everything but overall Vilnius was pretty chill
95 and I could say that everything was fine but there are like certain things because
96 when we enter into the bus we usually tap our card but we have like an application
97 called Traffi and we bought like a monthly subscription of that ticket so it was pretty
98 weird that we don't have to scan it or something or we are just sitting and I when I
99 saw people uh travelling in the bus they're like coming in and just sitting on their
100 seats and I'm like why they're not tapping is it free or something or I just paid

Commented [AF15]: Lines 86-90: multiple country phase before arrival / arrival with friend group / migrational processes

101 something more so uh but google maps helped really well and in the beginning
102 everyone was like fascinating because you don't know the city and you're like
103 travelling different roads and different roads different streets to explore but now
104 everything is like known so everything feels like nowadays it feels so boring because
105 you know everything so and Vilnius is not like a really really big city because I came
106 from a really really big city and if I say I spent like 19 years in my city and I didn't
107 explore like full like I can say 40 50 percent

Commented [AF16]: Lines 90-96: new public transport experience / cultural shock presence / community life at transports / learning to mobility of town

108
109
110 [...]
111 Lithuania yeah Lithuania is like my population in one city wow
112

Commented [AF17]: Lines 96-101: inner desire to explore new environment / fascinating town infrastructure / quick adaptation leading to boredom / seldom lack of diversity in massive town / double edged experience

113
114 [...]
115 the faces I want to avoid is like I'm sitting I'm standing on the bus stop and I'm like
116 looking at them oh my god not him or her again I just want to avoid oh no what about
117 uh so at least uh from
118

Commented [AF18]: Lines 109-110: Transport challenges / communal depiction of one / introversion / discomfort

119
120 [...]
121 social media perhaps your colleagues from the university uh so about the clothing uh
122 when we got here it was like a cultural shock or something that like stores like
123 Maxima I guess yeah Maxima has like clothes in it like it's a grocery store why there
124 are clothes in there so it was we were like shocked for us sometimes but I came to
125 know that from my university uh colleagues like the locals that there is a place called
126 Humana where you can find the cheap clothes because at the time when we were
127 here like the first year we usually like convert our currency to this currency like if
128 there is like one euro in my country one euro is equal to 320 or 330 currency yeah
129 wow so it's like when you're spending in euros first year is like oh my god that's so
130 expensive we should skip it or something like that so there was no way that we go to
131 like big malls or something and shop from there for like 30 euro jacket or 30 euro
132 shirt so they told us about the cheap stores but it's fine now we don't convert it
133 anymore because we are earning in euros and we're spending in euros and about
134 the food uh if you don't know I'm muslim so it's uh pretty much hard for us to find
135 halal options because everything even not recently but like few months ago I came
136 to know that some of the cakes contain gelatin or maybe they mix alcohol in it which
137 was like a really shocking like what what am I eating non-halal food from from like
138 two years so now we have to like translate it before we bought it but it was really
139 hard for us to like find so much halal options I know there are like basic groceries like
140 onion and something that this is basic but you know when you're craving for
141 something like food for example like pasta or something and you have to like make
142 sure that it's 100 percent halal or you just have to you have to finish your craving or
143 something or make food at home so it was a really challenge for as a muslim to find
144 halal options
145

Commented [AF19]: Lines 115-123: financial difficulties / cheaper store facilities / survival struggle / adapting to hardships

Commented [AF20]: Lines 124-126: living with new form of currency / adapting to host economy

146
147 [...]
148 I have so many options that I can go to but not so many but like for example most of
149 the Turkish shops which they sell like kebab or something they're halal but you have
150 to ask them before because some of them are not so you're just opening the door

Commented [AF21]: Lines 126 – 136: food challenges / halal policy / hardship to find food maintenance / survival struggles / adapting with time

151 and asking them is it halal and they say yeah then we go away or else we go out and
152 so basically yeah we usually ask before like going or maybe you can say like
153 Pakistani food or Indian food restaurants you have to like not Pakistani but Indian
154 you have to ask like is it halal or not or Turkish shops there are so many but taste
155 varies so there are like limited options but you have to choose between it and KFC is
156 also halal by the way so yeah we basically uh in the beginning um me and my
157 friends usually avoid like McDonald's and KFC which is like a biggest brand in our
158 country as well so we have it here but we are like avoiding it but when I met a friend
159 who is from the same country but not the same city as mine he told me that it's halal
160 and he usually eats it and I'm like I don't have proof and he showed me like the
161 chicken and the things they're using are labelled as halal so we started eating it yeah
162 but I think I know what you need to have a direct evidence on the food market that
163 it's halal approved

Commented [AF22]: Lines 143 – 144: finding food options in other ethnic shops / discovering suitability of fast food chains / adapting

164
165
166 [...] but uh I can say like grocery store like Rimi, Maxima these two or Iki these three are
167 like half halal meat if you want to buy but not so many options but you have to like
168 you know there is a stereotype in on the internet when Muslim people are like buying
169 stuff they just look at like reading everything so you have to like look at the code
170 before buying stuff so if you're buying halal chicken there the code should be 4128 if
171 it's not then it's not halal according to the scholars which are in Lithuania right now I
172 see well what's useful to know it is actually

Commented [AF23]: Lines 159-162: coded identification for halal foods / infrastructural support languages

173
174
175 [...] word halal not every product uh of the chicken or meat uh says halal so you have to
176 look at the code while you're purchasing so 4128 products doesn't say it's halal but
177 according to the

178
179
180 [...] actually if I say one thing about Lithuanian people they don't care so in like coming
181 from a city which was like heavily populated people usually care about your
182 existence and if you're going somewhere you're like you're being watched like if
183 you're walking just walking people are looking at you like where are you going in
184 which direction or something so when I came here it was like nobody's looking at you
185 and my family just asked like how the Lithuanian people and I just say one sentence
186 if I just started dancing on middle of the road they don't give a shit this is how
187 Lithuanian people are so this is how I address Lithuanian people when my family or
188 like a really far relative asked me like how Lithuanian people are they like nosy
189 people or they're just minding their own businesses this is a phrase I usually use to
190 address them it's not in a bad way but it's a good way so I didn't face any kind of
191 discrimination or any kind of racist like phrases from Lithuanian people maybe if
192 they're even saying they're saying in their own language so I don't know but I didn't
193 face any kind of things maybe but I have like similar experiences with my friends
194 which I came to know that when they are mentioning mostly the guys when they're
195 like going around or maybe they're being too loud or something so the old people
196 basically ask them to like like speak slow or they're just irritated and started speaking
197 in Lithuanian and they don't know what they're saying so they face like a little
198 discrimination maybe because of their tone when when we we first got here
199 Lithuania is so quiet and we are loud people international people are loud people
200

Commented [AF24]: Lines 169-175: identifying population perspective on south Asian cultures / people neutralism towards internationals / surprise – culture shock

Commented [AF25]: Lines 175 – 179: 0 racism / positive feedback on nation

Commented [AF26]: Lines 181-185: comparison of friend lives in same host country / friends face discrimination / cultural conflict / sex difference? (male friends)

201 don't know why but yeah we are like our tone of voice when we are excited it just go
202 off and we don't even realise so well I can share one interesting fact about Lithuania

Commented [AF27]: Lines 186-188: communicational skill difference / silent host country loud arrivers / communal struggle to adapt to introvertism / cultural shock

203
204 [...]
205 culture where I grew up but yeah I can say that because my Lithuanian friends
206 usually like complaining about some random stuff like my toaster didn't work today
207 you know and they have one hour debate on that or maybe one hour lecture my
208 toaster didn't work it was like such a random thing but but yeah okay I'm here to
209 listen but I don't give a shit if my toaster isn't working I will not eat someone ears by
210 telling them the whole story about their morning so yeah they complain a lot about
211 and they just talk randomly I don't know the things that I usually keep it to myself
212 they're like talking randomly about to me and which is like weird for my first year now
213 I'm like okay I see yeah I'm not complaining about Lithuanian people so don't get
214 offended
215

Commented [AF28]: Lines 192-199: cultural communication differences / Lithuanian negativity surprise the speaker / day to day life / adapting to locals / individual debating

216
217 [...]
218 my all documents are in English because my country support like like English
219 documents more and they're like more more like priority based documents so my
220 degrees my my police collector certificate my bank statement everything was in
221 English so it was not um a hard thing to do but everything was fine I guess yeah kind
222 of amazing I'm glad to hear that
223
224

Commented [AF29]: Lines 204-208: documentation in foreign language raises difficulties for host countries

225
226 [...]
227 something like that I have been a part of during representation and I left it because it
228 feels like boring I don't know it felt really boring uh because some of the events are
229 like maybe our faculty is a little like introvert or something I don't know I'm not sure
230 because when I was working as an organisational in organisational affairs they we
231 usually like plan everything and some people like sign up for it so the plan usually
232 just cancel so I don't know but if I wait I forgot that's okay okay you were asking
233 about the library and stuff okay so um I really enjoyed the Sauletekis library because
234 I have a really hard time focus when I'm at home or uh yeah when I'm at home
235 basically so it's really hard for me to focus on just one thing because there are like 10
236 things going on in my brain and there is a problem with me that I'm glued to my
237 phone most of the time which is a really bad habit I know but library is that library is
238 like a magic or a game changer that everyone is like studying and it's like it
239 automatically makes me like you should study too and I can log in for like hours and
240 hours and if I'm doing the same thing at home it's like I can log in for like 10 minutes
241 or 15 minutes and I will not do anything in that as well so I really like the library so I
242 usually go it when I have exams or I have really important like assignment to do or
243 the project or research paper I have uh accomplished not accomplished but I have
244 taken uh so many career counselling not so many but in the initial days I have been
245 to like career counselling it was helpful but not in my thing because I'm studying
246 politics and there's nothing to do right now so I didn't go with but I was like
247 considering taking I don't know psychological classes or something the the that
248 university provided for because I have been struggling with my assignments and it
249 was really hard for focus because of my personal life and study life work life it was
250 really imbalanced so I was thinking of taking that or maybe from my home country

Commented [AF30]: Lines 211-215: poor communal events / cancellation of leisure time activities / disappointment

Commented [AF31]: Lines 233-240: reflecting on use of social study spaces like library / reflection on independent learning improvement area / life at library

Commented [AF32]: Lines 243-248: counselling services at VU / career support / making study life more flexible with alternative activities

251 because it's like English is not my first language so when you're talking to a
252 psychologist or a therapist it's better to talk to them in your native language that's
253 what I understood so far because you cannot express everything in English so that's
254 why I was trying to avoid the Lithuanian uh psychological classes but I was
255 considering of taking it or

Commented [AF33]: Lines 248-253: language struggles / cultural emotional barriers

256
257
258
259 [...]
260 in my first year I remember everything was pretty okay but obviously in my home
261 country it was different because we have classes from like eight to five and here is
262 like a little chill that you have like what in one day you have like two or three classes
263 that's it but what I face challenges is funny but I am not habitual of learning uh
264 listening to english that much because obviously english is now my first language so
265 I was not like so much habitual and professor when they're speaking in english when
266 it was like my initial days one of my like coursemate I was sitting beside him and he
267 asked me like how was your first lecture and I'm like I couldn't understand a shit
268 because I cannot understand his accent and he's like yeah he's he has like a perfect
269 accent like not like jumble words or maybe he's not even mumbling so it was fine I'm
270 like I know but I'm not like too much to understand uh so many accents and then
271 there's a second class the lady professor was speaking in english and I couldn't
272 understand because of her accent as well but it become easy time to time but about
273 the course module and the structure throughout the course it was okay and it was
274 really good because professors usually like provide everything on on the model so
275 and on the first class they also explain that what he is asking us to do like 40% is like
276 research paper and 40% would be the exam final exam and the rest 20% would be
277 seminar participation and which is like easy to read but they usually explain it so that
278 if someone missed it or have any question regarding the the structure of the whole
279 course or any question regarding the percentage or how they will be graded they can
280 ask them freely so it's a good thing that if that the professor is not just like I have
281 uploaded this syllabus you can read it and if you have any question just email me or
282 something I will continue with my class that's actually good I see oh I'm glad to hear

Commented [AF34]: Lines 263-273: language barriers / connection between academic staff and students

283
284
285 [...]
286 as a whole like a concept yeah I was confused as well in the beginning like what is
287 the point of having a lecture and a seminar because in my country seminar is like uh
288 it's like a get together where the professor is teaching like hundreds of students it's
289 not just one class it's like a basically a motive for example they need to share an
290 important stuff with the university students not from the one course but the different
291 courses or different classes so they like invite them to an auditorium a big one so
292 that they can explain everything to them that was a seminar for me when I came
293 here it was like weird like what is going on why there are people sitting in just one
294 class and in the lecture there's like a whole class then I realised oh it's different over
295 here but everything was basically it was unclear that lectures are not mandatory you
296 can skip it and seminar you have to but first I usually go to the seminars and the
297 lectures but sometimes I skip the lectures because I'm too lazy and there's like a
298 really really big gap for example on Tuesday I have class at 9 45 and it ends at 11 50
299 and then two three hours nothing and then I have another lecture which is on 4 45 till
300 16 15 which I usually skip because what am I gonna do on that two to three hour

301 break if I have anything else to do like another assignment so I can like sit in caffeine
302 or maybe at the university place and do my work but if I

Commented [AF35]: Lines 295-301: academic matrix impacts day to day being at academia / confusion of system

303
304
305 [...]

306 that raised any concerns for that so in the beginning everyone was like pretty friendly
307 and for like a year and a half everyone everything was pretty chill and like the local
308 people what I heard from my friends who are from my country not from the same
309 faculty they usually tell me a story about their faculty that their uh students are not
310 like Lithuanian students only get friends with the Lithuanian students they don't talk
311 to international students that much until unless there is a work to do but in my faculty
312 it was okay that everyone was getting along with each other and they're like hanging
313 out and everything but I remember in my second semester or the third semester I got
314 a job at the company and I didn't have time to like talk to them because it's like a not
315 a ritual but it's like after the class there's like 15 minute break or there's no class we
316 usually go out and stand across the street and talk randomly about stuff like for
317 example um classes or about the day about the plans about hanging out or
318 something but I didn't have time to talk to them because my class ends at one and I
319 had shift at 1 30 so I had to like run to to my workplace it's not the same place which
320 I'm working right now it's it's it's a it was a company so I had to run to I don't know
321 how to pronounce that street name but it doesn't matter so it took me like 15 to 20
322 minutes to go there so I break all the contacts with the people I usually talk to like
323 really really good communication with so and now I would say like everything is good
324 but now I can see that the international students are like sitting on one corner and
325 the Lithuanian people are sitting on the other corner and now they're like hanging out
326 with each other Lithuanian with the Lithuanian and international with international I
327 don't know maybe it's just me or but they are not rude they are not like excluding
328 they're just like they found some people with their own language so it's easy to
329 communicate if I have like a person with my native language I would be really happy
330 to talk to them because you can express like so many emotions and so many inside
331 jokes or memes with them so that they can actually get understood and if I translate
332 them in English it's not funny so it I can get it that they are like hanging out but they
333 are not excluding they're not being racist they are not being uh like like don't talk to
334 us and you are the international or something like that they're like pretty chill but
335 they're sitting with their people this is what I noticed so far

Commented [AF36]: Lines 306 – 311: local and international groups at VU / friendism and preferism / selection of communication groups according to nationality

Commented [AF37]: Lines 313-318: employment increases separation from course mates / dissociation from community / craving for socializing

Commented [AF38]: Lines 320-325: observer position to change of community at VU / witnessing segregation of international and host communities / change of work to manage studying / craving for socializing

Commented [AF39]: Lines 327-335: clear cultural boundaries between international and host groups / forming clans / not racism but comfortability

336
337
338 [...]

339 or maybe a different because Pakistani people and Indian people are like pretty
340 much same because we if I speak my language the other people can understand me
341 and if they're speaking I can understand but in terms of writing it it's different so they
342 usually get my humour and I usually get their humour so it's fine so this is what
343 actually is so I don't have so many Pakistani people in my in my in my friend list but I
344 get to know about some Indian people because it's the same language we're
345 speaking maybe the dialect some of the words are different their pronunciation are
346 different but if I speak sorry speaking they can understand well okay that's interesting
347 because it was one country before I'm getting independence so we

Commented [AF40]: Lines 339-346: bonding with similar cultures / finding connection between diverse groups / language unites differences

348
349
350 [...]

351 like one hour break or something and I have really important lectures so I usually
 352 stay at the to wait basically it depends on the other people I'm like with for example
 353 my other friends wants to eat something and we usually go to restaurants which is
 354 really expensive the university shouldn't be in the central because it costs a lot and in
 355 the first year I remember most of my money just go to Hesburger because you're like
 356 really really hungry and when you have like no breakfast and you come straight to
 357 the university and then you have one or two hour break you you're eating something
 358 so we usually go to caffeine Hesburger or hurricane cafe to just like chill or maybe do
 359 assignments or something but in the supermarket they're not they don't have like a
 360 lot of spots to just sit and work it's like when you enter there is a really big hall you
 361 can sit but it's usually full when it's when everyone classes dismissed and they have
 362 some spots on the third floor there are bean bags that you can sit but it is usually full
 363 as well when a couple of people are sitting over there so you have to go out maybe
 364 to caffeine or other cafes to just sit because you cannot spend in winters you cannot
 365 spend just whole time sitting across the street when there are so many benches over
 366 there so that was a little weird thing because I saw so many my my friends
 367 universities and they are so cool and I remember I go to business school it's so cool
 368 it's really cool my friend make me visit to that uh their their business school and they
 369 have kitchen they have a chilling area they have gaming area and they have so
 370 many things and when he when I when he asked me like can I visit your faculty and I
 371 said no no don't come here yeah that's probably one thing about

Commented [AF41]: Lines 351-358: costly food areas next to faculty / no campus canteen nearby / challenge to maintain financial security due to unadapted environment

Commented [AF42]: Lines 359-365: poorly adapted environment for life between lectures / need for bigger spaces to secure studying comfortability / hardship to study

Commented [AF43]: Lines 366-371: Unequal VU faculty treatment for students / dissatisfaction / lowered joy

372
 373
 374 [...]
 375 everything is pretty much everything is in Sauletekis and it's too far from my home
 376 and from the Central

Commented [AF44]: Lines 375-376: poor facility planning / separation from student activities and appropriate facilities

377
 378 [...]
 379 it's going to be successful spot I hope my my faculty do this as well but they have like
 380 an excuse we have so many restaurants in the old town because there's Hesburger
 381 there's Caffeine there's Sushi Express there are like so many restaurants so you can
 382 go and eat but they're so expensive you cannot just eat every day over there or
 383 maybe once or twice a month maybe when you're

Commented [AF45]: Lines 379-382: lacking mindfulness and sensitivity from staff / economically unfriendly location / staff don't understand students

384
 385
 386 [...]
 387 to get more inclusive with life here I didn't get a chance to do it but because of in my
 388 first year I skipped I almost skipped that email but I tried to go into port how can I say
 389 it was uh it was a club but when I emailed them they were like it's all Lithuanian so I
 390 was interested in going over there but it was all Lithuanian so I didn't get a chance to
 391 get in mm-hmm but the rest of the thing I didn't participate in any kind of clubs would
 392 you say

Commented [AF46]: Lines 387-392: missed opportunity / illogical communication strategies / academic life barriers ability to find available leisure time activities at VU

393
 394 [...]
 395 now for now I can say I don't have time of these things because as I mentioned I am
 396 working also 30 hours so after my after my classes I usually go to work and I usually
 397 go home by nine or something 9 30 so I just eat and sleep and do the same thing
 398 which is that's why I was like struggling with uh with my mental health because my
 399 brain is like you are doing the same thing again and again again and again so it's just
 400 tired like waking up for a university and then go to work come home eat sleep or

401 maybe just like waking up going to work and then coming home eat sleep so it's just
402 in a loop that's why I was struggling like two or three weeks before but I'm trying to
403 find something like different so that I will my mind will a little go a little on relaxation I
404 guess so I will find something well speaking more about let's say emotional

Commented [AF47]: Lines 395-402: hardship living repeating duty cycle / working and studying shuts out one's ability to enjoy themselves / energetically drained person

Commented [AF48]: Lines 402-404: coping strategies

405 [...]
406
407 main thing that requires to recharge the energy okay jokes apart uh first of all in my
408 first year I didn't get a chance to even think about it even though I'm exhausted I
409 didn't like realise what is happening with me I just know that my brain is not habitual
410 of doing the same thing again and again for like months so in the first year when I
411 was working at a company I was so exhausted because it was a pressure obviously
412 you're working in a company there are so many responsibilities instead of working at
413 a store so at a company there was like so many requirements changes and I was
414 managing my studies with it so it was really hard for me and my brain was super
415 tired when I resigned I feel so relaxed like there was something on my head just just
416 vanishes so it was feeling like really light-headed not in in a sense of like fainting so
417 but what I try to do is to find different things such as I in I asked my friends to let's go
418 for a hike or let's go to explore some new places that's why I know pretty much
419 everything in wellness because I usually go out in nature I really like to go for a walk
420 in that and I ask most of my friends to go over here like I saw something on google
421 maps I pinned it and the next day or the next week we are going somewhere if we
422 are we all are exhausted and we just make our time free and we just go this is what I
423 usually do for my escapism that's good

Commented [AF49]: Lines 408-416: overloaded work drains ability to adapt smoothly / loss of time sense due to responsibilities / hardships and struggles

Commented [AF50]: Lines 416-424: Coping strategies / nature and friends help to reduce pressure / desire to temporarily escape hard responsibilities

424 [...]
425 not thinking about so much no work no studies just you sitting and listening to the
426 water or maybe the birds or something so it's pretty much relaxing have you tried I
427 don't know if

428 [...]
429 thing is really hard for me is to focus that's it if I focus everything is done within an
430 hour or two hours if I'm not focussing four five hours it's wasted not doing anything
431 so it's a really big problem that's why I chose to go to Sauletekis library because
432 everyone is like studying and you have something in mind like if you are doing
433 scrolling if you will do scroll or if you're not doing anything people will judge you so I
434 just usually do my work

Commented [AF51]: Lines 433-438: difficulty to manage studies and tiredness / preassumptions of being judged / surrounding pressure

435 [...]
436 actually apply for the mentorship for the upcoming students which was actually funny
437 because I was working at that company and I didn't have so much time so the people
438 who were conducting the interviews for the mentorship I asked them they made a
439 time for me basically my time was 2 p.m but I had shift at 1 30 so I asked them to
440 come make take my interview basically at earliest time as possible so they did but I
441 asked them like is everything okay and they're like okay everything is fine but there
442 was another interview which was which held on like 15 days after that and I asked
443 them like I don't have any day off on this and it is really important should what should
444 I do and the person was taking the interview he was like it's fine you can skip it and

451 blah blah blah but when the results came out they didn't make me the mentor
 452 because all I skipped that 15 days after interview even though the person say it's fine
 453 you can skip it and they made another person and in another person a mentor and
 454 the people who are coming from like for example from my country from the third
 455 country where they don't have embassies of Lithuania and they are struggling with
 456 documentation because I have gone through this kind of stuff and I know how to
 457 handle it and I know how the things should work and will work who to coordinate who
 458 to communicate who to email but they made a person I'm not like jealous of that
 459 person and I'm not targeting that person he's good she's good everyone is good but
 460 they didn't make another person an international person a mentor who has
 461 experiences documentation who to contact because it is easy for Lithuanian people
 462 and the Ukrainian people to get into the university without so much documentation
 463 like visa or something so it is easy for them to do it but for the international people
 464 even though like you can say American or or like Turkish people they still need some
 465 kind of documentation when they're with their visa so they not just me there were two
 466 more people as an international uh as an international student as a mentor they they
 467 also applied for it but they didn't get a chance but because we thought like it's maybe
 468 because of because they're biased towards them it can be a possibility because we
 469 don't have time to go to the bars we don't have so much time to socialise and attend
 470 every meeting because we have another thing to do like work personal life
 471 socialising with other friends so we cannot be just at the university all the time for the
 472 meetings so maybe they're biased towards them because they are always available
 473 at the bars partying communicating socialising or hanging out together maybe or
 474 maybe there is another reason I left the student representation because it was
 475 biased as well towards some people well that's

476
 477 [...]
 478 people to do these interviews I actually reached out to the I don't know how the head
 479 of all those people there was like I don't know how to call it I emailed her regarding
 480 everything and she clearly denied that everything was fair and everything but you
 481 can but I'm not sure if I'm going to be a mentor no but it would be really helpful for
 482 the upcoming people who will be the mentor for the next year students so it will be
 483 helpful for them absolutely it's really important
 484
 485

486 [...]
 487 maybe there are any specific notices about that actually besides a career thing i
 488 didn't get a chance to to actually attend those but since i mentioned about the clinical
 489 like therapy sessions i didn't took it because of the language i would have taken it
 490 because i was struggling with my mental health few weeks ago but i would have
 491 chosen it but i was like delaying it because i thought that it would be really hard for
 492 me to talk to about my emotions and everything in english because i cannot find like
 493 certain words maybe maybe i just say the thing i was feeling really dizzy it cannot
 494 help the situation uh for what i have been experiencing since my start of studies or
 495 start of the semester about the gym areas and everything i don't know about it i know
 496 one because uh my friend live in Sauletekis dorm and there is a gym and she usually
 497 go over there i know about that but since it's really far and i live like 45 minutes away
 498 from Sauletekis so there is no way that i could go like over there
 499
 500

Commented [AF52]: Lines 454-467: mentorship at VU faces double standards? / ignorance from mentorship to accommodate and help systematically third country students / challenges to associate with local students who don't know needed information

Commented [AF53]: Lines 468-475: hardship to find common language with local host representatives and mentors / biased and double standard harm experienced from VU / dissatisfaction / not mindful peers

Commented [AF54]: Lines 494-499: limited space areas to cope and support physical health / not enough availability to enjoy academic services

501
502 [...]
503 that's actually i didn't know about because this these things happened on the first
504 first week of the university they talk about everything like i even attended the class
505 on career counselling or mental health classes and everything so they mentioned it
506 over that time but obviously you cannot remember everything but about the law and
507 this thing i

Commented [AF55]: Lines 503-506: missed integration opportunity / unawareness of available support at VU / hardship to remember everything in short period of time / need for re-integration

508
509
510 [...]
511 i haven't spent two years maybe i'm just revolving around and i don't know about
512 anything

513
514
515
516 [...]
517 the last thematic block i think everything is pretty much covered and if i have any
518 kind of challenges i have talked to the administration in the university or if i didn't get
519 a chance to directly communicate i usually talk to the class representative person
520 who has direct connection with the coordinators of or maybe the head of studies in
521 our faculty so if there is a problem with the professor usually it doesn't but sometimes
522 when you don't understand anything because they hired a new professor and he is
523 american and he speaks so fast really really fast that they didn't even give him like
524 separate lecture so we only have seminars like with the group one and group two so
525 he speaks really fast because he has to cover everything in that one seminar is not
526 like a seminar it's more like a lecture and he asked like one or two questions i don't
527 know why he didn't they didn't give him a separate lecture like the other courses but
528 maybe he asked for it or maybe they didn't give him but i could say that i have a
529 friend like who is american and he is also in his class and as he mentioned like as a
530 native speaker i can also say that he speaks really fast so as a native speaker he's
531 saying he's really fast so we are just cooked so that's pretty much it but i don't know
532 but someone maybe mentioned it to him or something after like that time he started
533 speaking a little slow maybe someone mentioned it so it's a good thing so if there is
534 a problem with the course i usually talk to the professor and if there is something like
535 within like the colleagues or something i usually talk to the class representative or
536 anything about other than studies or like for example finances or anything that needs
537 like you know the application on ui so i talk to my international coordinator with that
538 directly because i don't want like any kind of loose loop so if i'm missing something
539 or just not paying attention because what if anything bad happens you never know
540 yeah that's

Commented [AF56]: Lines 517-521: ability to reach out to administration for help

Commented [AF57]: Lines 529-534: hardships to communicate with professors / same English but not received the same / building relationship with professor to help courses

541
542
543 [...]
544 he tries to make it good i am a kind of a person who usually do multitasking so i do
545 like for example i have anything to do i'm working on my laptop and i'm listening at
546 the same time or maybe taking notes or doing other stuff on my laptop but when he's
547 speaking i just shut my laptop down and just listening to him and i remember in my
548 initial days i'm just working and he started speaking and it was my actually first day in
549 his class and he started speaking and i'm just looking at him what the fuck what he's
550 even saying i locked my laptop shut it down and i start sitting like this and listening to

551 everything what he's saying and didn't understand even though i was fully attentive
552 towards him but now everything is fine but there's like an urge when you are like
553 doing every day like you are doing multitasking in class every day so in that class i'm
554 not doing anything i'm just listening to him but now thankfully he someone mentioned
555 it to him and he is a little slow about towards his lectures and and the things he's
556 mentioning because the course is really important and he is explaining 15 different
557 things or concepts in just one seminar so it's not possible to like absorb everything in
558 those 45 minutes i say well damn some new concepts some old concepts how the
559 new and old concepts are connected so it's really hard to to absorb everything and
560 make connection in your head and when you have a really bad habit of forgetting
561 things so it's really so you have to write it down every time so that you don't forget
562
563

Appendix 3.3. Dandelion:

Bangladesh, female, 29, bachelor level student, not religious (parents are and try to force it)

1 [...]
2 Okay, my journey started long, long, long ago. But I will start with Vilnius University.
3 One day I was looking for something that suits my studies and my budget as well.

4
5 And I only had 100 euros to spend on this. So I found this media discourse course
6 and I was like, okay, this is a good thing, checking boxes. And I started sending
7 email.

8
9 I sent a lot of emails. Everybody will know that I was a headache. I'm an anxious
10 person, so I had to check every box before I apply.

11
12 So I kind of applied. And it was just a rational decision that I need to make it now.
13 And this is the perfect thing I will ever have.

14
15 So I made it. And yeah, I got a call for interview. And it was really stressful at first
16 before I start.

17
18 But it was really fun during the lectures All the professors were really helpful. And
19 they were talking just like my friends.

20
21 Because in my country, professors are like you talking to the gods. So it's a different,
22 even a different language they speak. So it was really fun talking to them,
23 exchanging the ideas.

24
25 It was fun. And then I got the offer. And then started the journey.

26
27 All the thing was, I don't know how to express it. It was like I had to plan everything
28 ahead of time. At least two months ahead of time.

29
30 I was thinking that I will get the document after two months. So I need to think what
31 am I going to do in two months. So matching the timelines were a task.

32
33 But for me, luckily, I got everything on time. And yeah, it was stressful. But it was
34 kind of smooth.

35
36 So from the university, I sent thousands of emails. And I got replies that that's the
37 best thing. And yeah, from the immigration side, it was a bit stressful.

38
39 Because we do not have Lithuanian embassy or anything in my country. So I had to
40 go to different countries. And going to India was a task.

41
42 India was not giving us a visa, diplomatic stuff. So yeah, it was a little bit stressful.
43 Too much stressful.

44
45 But everything worked.

46
47 [...]

48
49 I mean, not really. But I kind of had someone's path to follow. It's also because of the
50 university, I guess.

Commented [AF1]: Lines 3-10: limited finances to coming to university / stress to support oneself financial / systematic worries

Commented [AF2]: Lines 18-23: different appreciation of staff / friendly people / cultural shock in community

Commented [AF3]: Lines 27-34: strategy to survive / issue and challenges with documentations / system barriers

Commented [AF4]: Lines 39-43: migration challenges / visa acquirement / travelling to different countries to achieve it

51
52 Because there was some ambassador they assigned. And this guy was sending
53 documents. He was kind of doing financial stuff as well.
54
55 But I didn't... I was like, I will do it on my own. Just let me know how the things are
56 done, where are the things.
57
58 So he sent his immigration form to the group. He had a Facebook group. And I just
59 saw what documents I need.
60
61 I had to run for my documents. I collected them. And also we have this thing for
62 police clearance legalisation.
63
64 It was done by the university. I sent it to the university and the university did it for me.
65 And, yeah, that was a huge relief because at that time it was really impossible for me
66 to get it done because I don't have anyone in here.
67
68 And it was almost impossible.
69
70 [...]

71
72 It was lovely. I miss that time. So at that point of time, I mean, I have my own mental
73 issues, so I was suffering for a long time and the journey was so stressful.
74
75 And this was the best thing ever happened to me because I was planning to leave
76 my country for like 10 years or something. So finally it happened and the first month
77 it was magical. I loved the country, I loved everything.
78
79 It was autumn and, you know, autumn in Lithuania is like magical. And the university
80 class started, the professors, I met so many professors, they were wonderful. And
81 maybe, I didn't join, you know, all those activities that were planned, like hanging out
82 or something, going to places with people.
83
84 [...]

85
86 I mean, it was not depression. It was probably because of my anxiety. I was not
87 comfortable meeting a random bunch of people.
88
89 In my class, it was kind of okay. Inside the room, we were talking. I was like a scared
90 chicken because it's like a completely different society.
91
92 Whatever classes I have had in my life before, I was almost silent because I was
93 scared of the judgement. What if I say something stupid? Because if I say something
94 stupid, I will be judged.
95
96 And here, I said so many stupid things. I mean, gradually I started opening up. First
97 day of my class, I was silent, but then we started having conversation and then I had
98 a sudden stupid idea about the fact and I just said it to the professor and they
99 appreciated the idea.

Commented [AF5]: Lines 52-59: social support groups /
desire to complete tasks independently

Commented [AF6]: Lines 72-82: self-doubting /
excitement to escape old environment / passion for season /
commitment to start new life with new people

Commented [AF7]: Lines 89-99: introvertism / challenge
to start communication / fear of being hated by host society
and fellow peers / cultural shock / appreciation from
professor

101 I mean, when it's not related, they told me why it's not related, but how it could be
102 related, they explained it. It never happened to me before, so I got rid of that anxiety
103 of speaking inside the classroom. Also, the mates I have, colleagues, they were not
104 that judgemental.

105
106 Judgement is a nice thing in South Asia. It's a completely different thing.

107
108 [...]

109
110 That's the best thing, probably, because I feel insecure and inferior. It's about the
111 feeling. I never left the classroom feeling really bad about my brain.

112
113 I don't know shit, because my education system is completely different. I literally
114 struggled to complete the basic courses because there's a leap I took. If I took the
115 bachelors in my country and bachelors in here, it would be aligned, and then I had to
116 take the master's.

117
118 Imagine skipping your bachelor's. That was me. I had no idea how education system
119 works here, how you need to read papers, what things exist, how phonetic things
120 exist.

121
122 I mean, I had a basic idea, very basic. I had a course. That's why I was able to enrol,
123 but what they teach there is not even related.

124
125 It was just completely taking a leap. Even now, I'm struggling with my paper because
126 I have no idea how to write it. But a person in my age, at least doing their master's,
127 they have to have written two, three papers in their life, and I have no idea.

128
129 I'm still struggling to explore how the thing works, where to write what.

130
131 [...]

132
133 Yeah, the map was a bit confusing, a bit more confusing for new students as well. I
134 sometimes explained that this is not this, this, this. But I find it kind of interesting
135 because, first of all, when I was applying to Vilnius University, I checked which
136 faculty, where I'm going, and I saw that it's this old, and I'm like, that's my place.

137
138 I love old places, and I loved it here. There were days that I had no lectures, yet I
139 was sitting in the halls doing nothing at some times because I don't have friends, I
140 don't have anywhere to go. I just went to the university.

141
142 Sometimes I was reading. That was first semester, though. So, yeah, it was chill.

143
144 I liked the places. All the halls are my favourite places. I can still go to this, I don't
145 know what it's called.

146
147 The names are still not to me. The one in the third floor next to the entrance. The
148 room with...

149
150 There's one seminar room and some...

Commented [AF8]: Lines 102-106: acceptance of not being categorized / friendlier community / cultural comparison and reflection

Commented [AF9]: Lines 113-125: challenge to adapt with new academic environment / reflecting on past ability and present barrier at academia

Commented [AF10]: Lines 134-140: interest to apply to university / passion for history / motivation to be a student at VU

151
 152 [...]

153
 154 I love that place. There's like a cabin place. It's like the confession room in the

155 church.

156
 157 It's so nice. If you're sitting there, nobody can see you properly, and you can have

158 your time. So I love that place as well.

159
 160 I just go there, read, and it's the best place for reading, even better than the library.

161 Yeah, so I like the place. But the timing was a bit weird for me.

162
 163 Lectures are from 3. I mean, I understand it's for master's students. But for master's

164 students, we need to sometimes work until 4, 4.30. So just only because of the

165 reason that I have to attend the classes from 3, I couldn't get a desk job. And I had to

166 work in a restaurant for at least three semesters. So not from the top notch

167 beginning, but for the last two semesters, I had to because I was paying my own

168 tuition. And that was a complete different struggle.

169
 170 So yeah, I worked as a dishwasher, gladly, and survived. So yeah, that was another

171 story. I used to work from like 9 till 2.30. And then again, after 5.30 till night at 12.31,

172 something like that. And I worked like that. I almost like ran out of time for studies,

173 but I had to make the money. So that was a struggle.

174
 175 But it's completely different because I came here with the papers that my parents are

176 going to support me. But logically, I don't want to take the money from them. That's

177 it.

178
 179 That's my ego. So I won't blame university for that. But the timing could be a bit

180 nicer, maybe.

181
 182 [...]

183
 184 No, I can feel you. I had four jobs during summer. And I slept.

185
 186 I used to come here for like three hours, four hours. I used to start six or seven in the

187 morning and I'm finishing at two or three at night running here and there. It was fun.

188
 189 [...]

190
 191 No time to study. I don't know how I finished my studies. It's not wise to say on

192 record, but I sometimes use AI because I had to complete it and I had no time to

193 complete it.

194
 195 Even if I take a sick day at work, I am losing money because I am getting paid

196 hourly. So if I take a sick day and work at home, that means I'm going to be one day

197 behind for paying my tuition.

198
 199 [...]

200

Commented [AF11]: Lines 154-161: Coping strategies / coping environment / motivational element to deal with adaptive struggles

201 Okay, so the bus kind of took me a little bit of time because I took ten, I have to take
202 that one from the NHS to this. I took so many times, ten now in UK. Nobody ever told
203 me that we have this, this, this, three kinds of buses, one is express.

204
205 Nobody ever explained it. So if I meet someone new, I just tell them that for the
206 buses, we have three kinds. Always read the names.

207
208 So yeah, it was a bit confusing. I took so many wrong buses, but I explored, I
209 learned. For the food stalls, the first friend of mine was Maxima.

210
211 The first thing was a bit weird because I didn't know. Now I know a few words, like
212 what is chicken, what is beef, what is whatever. I know, but at that time, I had no
213 clue.

214
215 So I was always like translating with a phone. I see sometimes people doing that
216 slump, maybe they are new. So I do like look at them and see how I was doing.

217
218 Also, the kind of rice, we are Bengali, we eat the main food is rice, everything, we
219 need rice. So exploring the rice was another journey. Now I finally found it last
220 month, the best rice.

221
222 So yeah, everything, looking for the best thing which suits my taste. It was a lot of
223 trial and error. Also, while paying, the self-service was new to me.

224
225 I learned, made a lot of mistakes, got scolded by so many Maxima ladies. They were
226 kind, they taught me, but language was a barrier because I had no idea, even though
227 I didn't know Spike. I had to learn, that wasn't me, but still, there was a language
228 barrier.

229
230 So yeah, it was just learning step by step. Now I'm a bit comfortable. Now if
231 someone says go to another country, I'll be like, nah, I love it here.

232
233 [...]

234
235 Okay, so for, I have met so many people, so many international students as well, but
236 for specifically Lithuanian people, at first, it will see their poker face, nobody has
237 feelings for anyone, nobody cares, but whoever I have been friends with, they are
238 the most vulnerable people, they are the best friends you will ever have, so that I
239 really appreciate for this, like this culture, in this culture, nobody will not show you
240 anything that they care for you or something like that, but once you go under their
241 radar or under their zone, they will die for you, that's the best thing about this culture,
242 in my culture, you will be the best friend in a second, but they can ditch you any
243 second, so you better be careful, but here, I love it, and yeah, what this part of the
244 world has that my part doesn't, is probably the best thing is not being judgemental,
245 not judging everyone, I mean, I feel insecure about a lot of things, I have said things
246 like, my hair get this shit, I look like, like I was fat in my region, like I have been fat
247 shamed all my life, when I first uttered like, I am fat, everybody was like, what?

248
249 So, it's like a completely different feeling, like I am not being judged because of my
250 appearance or what I'm wearing or what I'm saying, I have said stupid things that, I

Commented [AF12]: Lines 222-231: experience at local food stores / cultural shock / learning the systems of society / learning host economy

Commented [AF13]: Lines 235-243: learning the experience of Lithuanian community / communication challenges at home / friendlier society in Lithuania

Commented [AF14]: Lines 245-247: trauma from home / hard self-appreciation lack

mean, completely irrelevant stuff in a classroom, and, I mean, I'm not a researcher, but I'm studying something, like, it's related to linguistics, and I have no idea about linguistics, at first, I had no clue what we are studying, so when it's even the pronouncing stuff, I would be like, what is that? And they explained, they didn't judge, even the international students, the Lithuanian, the professor, everyone was really kind, so kindness is a new thing I learned, and I feel less judged now, I can be myself, a bit more.

[...]

I had a bit of a struggle with that as well, because I came here alone, and I had a group, friend group back in my country, I was introverted, but I was extroverted with them, and the group was really big, so I was having my best time, the best time of my life, during like Covid, before Covid, until like 19 to 24, it was wonderful, here I came here, and I was almost alone, I had two flatmates, and I just met them almost, one was, I knew him before from my country, and one was completely new, so it was not really a bond, and when I came here, nobody was really talking, I was trying to explore, I was talking to my mentor, and he was also busy with his paper research, and we were just talking like, how it is, and he just told me, like society, it is like this actually, you need to have friends, to go and chill, you cannot just go and make friends, so I struggled a bit with it, and it kind of pushed me towards depression, because I am not expressive, I am not the person who will seek for connection, so I was just sitting at home most of the time, sometimes at the university, I enjoy my time on myself, but on my own, but you know sometimes, you are enjoying your time, but it has a limit, so limit was crossed, and I kind of, in the winter also hit, I had a depressive period because of it, but I don't blame anyone, because it was my fault, I am introverted, I cannot go seek, and this is the society, you have to go seek if you want, so yeah.

[...]

I have had many conversation, weird conversation with strangers, and I never met them again, so many encounters, even some old ladies, they don't even know my language, I guided them through, until their hostel at midnight, because I'm a night stroller, I take long strolls at midnight, so it's, also I have met so many drunk people, because Lithuanians are really, extroverted when they're drunk, so I have had many wonderful conversation, it's not like they were hating or something, they were being friendly, it was really fun.

Also, racism, I won't say I have encountered directly, but I have heard many people saying, you know, shit sometimes, some homeless people, crossing, or drunkhead, saying some Russian curse word to me, it was just, I mean, I'm used to it, in my country it's normal, if you are a woman, you will be cursed, you will be told shit on the road, so it was just like, eh, okay, I don't care.

[...]

So, Bangladesh is completely different, in this, like, cursing or saying stuff to random people, especially if you are a woman, you will be told nasty shit on the road, so I was used to it, so I don't mind, it never happened, like, too many times, a few times,

301 maybe two or three times, in this whole, almost two years. Yeah, I had fun
302 conversations, with random people, so many times, and I loved it. It started with
303 politics, it ended with, I don't know, they even don't know, with one beer, they change
304 topics.

305 [...]

306
307
308 Yeah, I mean, the city, there's well developed part, there's villages, extremely rural,
309 even they don't have electricity, till now, I come from a village, where electricity was
310 introduced, in 2005, we still have everything, but we don't have internet, like cable
311 internet connection, you have only the phone, so, yeah, we still live in there. So,
312 where I come from, girls are getting married, that like, they are getting not married,
313 like married off, but parents want them to get married, at like, 15, 16 is a wise age,
314 even though nobody cares, if they are 18 or not, the legal age is 18 though, so, yeah,
315 and for the city, we have posh places, like cleaner ones, sometimes I feel like, if I go
316 to the Europa part, I feel like I'm in the capital city, the posh part, where like every,
317 posh people live, but, we have slums, that you see on the movies, or posters and
318 stuff, so, if you are walking in a dense road, I have this experience, thousands of my,
319 like, time, it's like every day, saying, you will get touched, inappropriately, you will not
320 notice whoever has done it, you will be told stuff, I have like, so many people ask
321 me, how much do you take per night to sleep, like, it's nobody like, someone, shh, for
322 your appearance especially, I have never wore the burqa thing, because it's like
323 religious, and I'm not from the Muslim religion, so, I have never, I don't know how,
324 what they treat it, but, if you are not wearing it, even if you are wearing proper, like
325 salwar stuff, this is not appropriate, for that places, for posh places it's okay, go and
326 wear the miniskirt, nobody cares, but, for the slums, or for the regular middle class
327 road, I come from a little middle class family, so I have lived everything, it's not
328 appropriate, wearing a jeans or t-shirt is not appropriate, you will be told so many
329 things, nasty stuff, you know, anybody will comment on your body, they will grab
330 body parts, and nobody does anything about it, it's just their right to do it, so, yeah,
331 that's a nasty side of being a woman in Bangladesh, I had to like fight against it,
332 because I was like, my parents were like, I'm the only child, so my parents were like,
333 you are our son, so son is the most important part, that was another discrimination
334 mentally, but still like, they were like, you are our son, you have all the freedom, go
335 do stuff, that's why I'm here, so, but yeah, they were like that, so, I have done things,
336 that normally women doesn't do, or I have been to the places, that women normally
337 doesn't go, because they are just scared of being touched, or like harassments, I
338 have been harassed a lot of time, even, regular transport, take the buses, you have
339 to take the bus, to go to your workplace, and buses in Bangladesh, if you have seen
340 in Dhaka, it's like, crunched piece of metal, and inside there is thousands of people,
341 you are standing in a bus, and you don't know, who is touching your body, people
342 start masturbating, standing next to you, so it's that nasty, and if you say something,
343 sometimes people do protest, but most of the time, the case is the woman is at fault,
344 why is she wearing some short salwar, or even jeans or t-shirt, why is she wearing
345 that in a public bus, if you want to wear t-shirt and jeans, get your own car and stuff,
346 I'm not that rich, how am I gonna get a car, so, yeah, so the freedom is limited, in
347 spaces, most of the spaces, there are certain places, tiny barriers, where you can
348 go, or, if you are born in a really wealthy family, then you have all the freedom,
349 nobody cares, if you have money, go with your car, into the posh places, it's just
350 shiny, outside, so, yeah,

Commented [AF15]: Lines 298-304: toxic past / trauma carried from home society

Commented [AF16]: Lines 310 – 325: reflection on past and lived trauma

351
352 [...]
353
354 yeah, it took me nine years, to, like, make them agree to my decision, that I want, I
355 don't want to stay here, so, first, I was not financially independent, I was dependent
356 on them, when I was doing my, like, 10th standard, 12th standard, I was asking them
357 for like, for the money to make a passport, which is like, 20 euros, or 15 euros,
358 something like that, I was begging for it, and they were not giving it to me, because
359 society told, the girl will not stay in track, she will be like, I don't know, slut, so, yeah,
360 it's really easy to call someone a slut, in my country, so, they didn't let me, they didn't
361 let me, to go to the bigger city, they didn't let me study, what I wanted to, I wanted to
362 study filmmaking, they didn't let me, because media is nasty, the first attempt I took,
363 was, I wanted to go to India, at least, because they have a bit of, more freedom, than
364 my country, but they didn't agree, my parents, finally, it took them, until, suddenly, in
365 December 2022, all of my cousins were going, like, in the UK,

Commented [AF17]: Lines 354-365: desire to leave homeland / fight with parents / desire to be independent / trauma

366
367
368 [...]
369
370 and almost everyone, we have a big cousin group, like, 21 people, and everyone
371 was going somewhere, and they were like, why don't you try, so it's societal
372 pressure, that everyone is going, why aren't you going, so, yeah, that, I just, they told
373 me, in December 22nd, why don't you do, I took my IELTS, in January 20th, I just, I
374 just, studied for 10, 15 days, and took the IELTS, and it was a good score, luckily,
375 and I started applying, I applied in, Wilmots University, in February, something, 5th
376 or something, I submitted my application, so in two months, I made it, like, I have got
377 it, I now have to make it count, also, marriage is a thing, when, so, Hindu families, let
378 the girls stay, until they are a bit of, more, stable, with their studies, and everything,
379 we give some importance, to the study, so, until you are 25, you are free, but if you
380 are 25, your life is going to be hell, so, when I turned 25, my mom was like, I'm going
381 to get you married now, you are, well of your age, but, my target was to be,
382 independent, before 25,

383
384 [...]
385
386 was, I made it, and I told my mom, if you, want me to get married now, I will run
387 away from home, and I had enough money, and she was like, okay, now she will run
388 away, so, yeah, they had to give up the idea, now I'm 29, and, I'm going to be 30,
389 and 30 is the last stage, if you get married or not, so, that's going to be another thing,
390 we will see, we will deal with it.

391
392 [...]
393
394 it's completely, societal pressure, nothing else, it's just society, deciding everything,
395 what you do, everything for you, and, I don't want that, so, I was, anxious, and so
396 scared, that I never had a partner, in my life, especially with my parents, because
397 they have religious, obligations, that this person, has to be the same caste, same
398 last name, weird, yada, yada, yada, I mean, Hindu, religious stuff, so, I never, ever,
399 was in a relationship, just because of that shit, because I didn't want it to, be face to
400 face, and tell my parents, and I also, didn't want to hide it, from them, because

401 hiding, takes a lot of energy, and I was, too anxious, like, too anxious for that, so I
402 just skipped, the whole part, and now they want me, to get married, to whom?

403
404
405 [...]

406
407 I mean, the, it was not too much, to complete, we had, four or five, it was possible,
408 probably the work stress, made it a bit hard, also, the leap, the gap, in between my
409 studies, made a bit, weirdly, not understandable, because I don't know, what's in
410 between, this, these two parts, and it's suddenly dropping, out of nowhere, and it was
411 like a bomb,

412
413 [...]

414
415 yeah, if you are talking about, something that someone knows, someone who really
416 came, to study this, understand this properly, who does, like know the things, for
417 them, it's really perfect, I don't have any objections, so I never wrote to anyone,
418 because whatever I was facing, is coming from my side, probably a lot of students,
419 from Bangladesh, had this issue, because, our academic structure, is different, it's
420 really, like, if someone is, trying to choose linguistics, and here, I would say, like take
421 a bachelor's, never go for master's, because, it's completely different, from what we
422 are taught, in my country, so from the university side, I don't see anything, from my
423 side, yeah, or from like, if you are, trying to assess, someone, who is trying, to get
424 into the course, maybe, they need to learn, some more things, about it,

425
426 [...]

427
428 of course, also, this, writing structures, where the things, are coming from, basic,
429 core, basic things, you can probably, YouTube, find in YouTube, some guy,
430 explaining this stuff, but it's a bit, destructive, when the instructor, is like different, or I
431 don't, know the person, or it's like, they are trying, to explain something, that I don't
432 need, so, for this course, probably, what can I say, okay, take critical discourse,
433 analysis, which was really, weird for me, because, I had no idea, what's going on in
434 here, so, we are using terms, academic terms, we are coding the data, I didn't know,
435 what is coding, I had no idea, what is coding, so, I had to ask, that stupid question, in
436 front of 30 people, that what is coding, so, yeah, they were really patient, with me,
437 but these are the core things, that I need to know, the words, the terms, that we are
438 using, we are collecting the data, how are we collecting data, what steps, we can
439 take, first, when I saw, I had never read, a research paper, probably, this academic,
440 before, I read, random stuff, like my cousins, used to write, papers, and he was,
441 letting me review them, just for, grammar and stuff, because, I didn't know, weird
442 stuff, so, and they were mostly, from literature side, so, it was completely different,
443 from linguistic, point of view, so, when I was, doing this, CDA course, and I was
444 going, going crazy, completely crazy, I had no idea, I had no clue, what we are
445 doing, in this excel sheet, where it comes from, where we, why we are taking the
446 numbers, how are we assessing them, how are we, you know, doing the semantic
447 analysis, and stuff, it was, I learned it, but I learned it hard way, if someone,
448 explained it to me, I mean, I could have asked, professors, but, we had, many
449 important things, to learn, so, I cannot ask, the basic thing, that I am supposed to
450 know, so, there was, this little gap, probably, people who are coming, from my

Commented [AF18]: Lines 396-402: past trauma / forced upon choices from parents / desire to have a new life with no pressuring systems

Commented [AF19]: Lines 428-434: support from social platforms like youtube / learning to write in European standards

451 country, or this side, I don't know about India, but in Bangladesh, it's not really
452 common, to teach this stuff,

453
454 [...]

455
456 Be less anxious, people are not judging you, the societal frame, is different, so, I
457 don't have to, like, put my guards on, all the time, sometimes, I can rest, it's not that
458 scary, in here, so, that's a bit of, a different, idea, for studies, I was scared, most of
459 the time, because, yeah, that gap, made me, really, sceptical about stuff, but I was
460 learning, I was having fun, there was stress, what was the question?

461
462 [...]

463 something to. Yeah, I have changed my food habits, because you know, the
464 availability, of the items, here you can find, Greek yoghurt, everywhere, But in my
465 country you have to go to that specific shop six kilometres away to find good thing
466 So yeah, I have changed my diet completely almost Because if I want my food from
467 my country it takes first two hours to cook Second I have to go shopping to that
468 specific colour you place no matter where I'm leaving. So it's like It's convenient to
469 adapt So yeah, it has changed my routine has changed I have never been to the
470 gym in my life but now I go and try to keep up because in winter there is no place I
471 can walk so my way of staying healthy was walking or going on hikes and In winter
472 here, it's impossible because yeah still I feel cold Even if it's almost two winters, but
473 still I feel cold But Yeah, also walking and hiking in summer. I love hiking and In my
474 country, it's not possible for one girl to get lost in the woods But here I can get lost in
475 the woods and come back safely within one piece So that's that's a lovely thing I can
476 go whenever I want better, but I want the freedom. I love it Mmm, what else?

477
478 [...]

479
480
481 Okay, so in my country we have six seasons So first summer it's burning you will feel
482 your skin. It's getting crunched then comes rain Rain, I miss rain Rain is completely
483 different. So last year one day you had a really big rainstorm Everywhere it was like
484 phone was beeping and stuff and it was like so windy and it was five minutes of
485 heavy rain That's the rain we have for two whole months So I missed the other rain
486 and it's not that cold like here rain is so cold It's not that cold in here.

487
488 You can go into the rain and take it like get showered like it's so lovely It's heavenly
489 experience Imagine you were burning and then the Sun rain comes and it's like a
490 taking a cool shower in the Sun. It's really fun so yeah, I missed that and then we
491 have Autumn and then we have another one called late autumn, which is kind of now
492 blending in because of the global changes So autumn is less cold and late autumn is
493 a bit more and then we then comes the winter Winter is max 16 degrees plus not
494 minus so Here autumn is probably max 16 degrees. So changing the temperatures
495 was a bit First for the first time it was I was lucky the winter was not harsh But this
496 time was a bit more Weird to settle in, you know Buying clothes.

497
498 It was also trial and error because I don't know which one is going to be I am really
499 not Not mad. I'm really bad at choosing clothes because some people are like, oh
500 this has this lining This is the this is the best for cold or something like that They will

Commented [AF20]: Lines 464-469: adapting to host country food / surviving skills / trying to find preferred choice

Commented [AF21]: Lines 473-477: coping strategies / learning environmental laws

Commented [AF22]: Lines 481-483: experiencing different climates / cultural shock / craving for home nature

Commented [AF23]: Lines 490-494: seasonal differences / temperature affects mood

501 look at it and they will know and I don't know shit. I Will buy your autumn jacket for
502 winter because it looks heavy But I like that The this time it was sunny So depression
503 was less but the last winter it was so dark.

504
505 It was I was depressed and I somehow found Person_1 and that saved my life

506
507 [...]

508
509 Yeah, probably I had the first appointment with Person_2 for by the system But
510 Person_1 called me because I wrote something really disturbing and she was really
511 worried probably She was so she called me like one hour after I submitted it and she
512 was like, do you want a consultation tomorrow?

513
514 I'm free. I can't have it.

515
516 [...]

517
518 I have been to all the free places Because I was so stressed about my finances I
519 wanted like I didn't even wanted to spend money on takeouts I was Saving for the
520 tuition so I never let me I wanted to last week last year.

521
522 It was really lovely I wanted to but probably this where I will but I love this kind of
523 places even the pictures is really nice and I love Lithuania that one of the reason is
524 there's so many places you can just be you can just go and sit and just show

525
526
527 [...]

528
529 No No, I I mean I'm running away from certain beliefs, but it's not that I hate religions
530 or something religions I believe were made to make for the society structure I mean
531 religion has done shitty stuff But if someone believes in religion I do I don't have any
532 objection on them until or unless they are forcing me To believe that as well or they
533 are hurting someone for just because of the belief So, yeah, I don't care it's okay you
534 you are the nicest person if you're a nice person you are a nice person That's it. So
535 for religious beliefs on the festivals.

536
537 I enjoy Like gatherings Fears and stuff it to also religious stuff people go there I
538 mean, I I do enjoy even go to churches sometimes just because it's just calm and
539 you can like find your inner strength

540
541 [...]

542
543 Yeah, so I have issues with concentration So that's a different story. Even if I'm
544 listening, I'm not getting the list of it So it was a struggle to understand the professors
545 because you cannot rewind it. They are saying this one time So it was a task also
546 learning the keywords because the academic keywords, especially I have no idea
547 They are saying something and I have no idea.

548
549 What is that? Sometimes I do have time to Google if they're emailing me, but if we
550 are doing face-to-face, I'm like and they will know But now it's been a bit easier that I

Commented [AF24]: Lines 502-505: life risk / well-being / support at VU

Commented [AF25]: Lines 509-512: quick help from VU helpline, psychological support / saved live

Commented [AF26]: Lines 518-524: host communal spaces for leisure time activities / financially friendly spaces

Commented [AF27]: Lines 529-535: no religious belief / contemporary freedom and perspective on religious and cultural things / support from participating in festivals

551 know certain I still don't know a lot of stuff I still don't know if they some introduce
552 some new words. I still Google but it's been a bit easier and Also the judgement part.

553
554 I'm being like I admit what I can admit without the fear of being judged I say well, I'm
555 glad to say that from this conference.

556
557 [...]

558
559 For the resources when I was in Depression I go down. I don't look at anywhere, but
560 I am scared of dying so when the thoughts coming in started coming in I started
561 looking for resources and I googled What I can do and I suddenly remembered that I
562 received an email long long long ago when I started the university that university
563 provides Mental health support. So I just wrote in Google that we you mental health
564 support or something like that and Okay So yeah That's how it started seeking for
565 help For resources.

566
567 Um, I had Would like my flatmates to tell me some of the stuff like I need to get the
568 bus app I need to get the Maxima apps and stuff For the nature I kind of explored it
569 myself Because I liked when I came here it was all my freedom I have that's all I
570 wanted all my life So I wanted to explore and the bus tickets specially were like one
571 month for 750 and at that time It was 680 maybe or something like that. Yeah, so It's
572 like one month of bus and free What are you talking about? So I was taking buses to
573 weird places at least at the time when I was not working and And when I started
574 working I was all day I was working so there was no school But taxes are still a
575 headache for me I still don't understand because mostly it's in latvian and they still
576 added probably the english translation part But it's on paper like the pdf document.

577
578 It's not translated to it. Yeah, but it's on me. I'm not learning so I need to learn Yeah
579 language sometimes is a barrier uh, especially in the clinics or something I was
580 Tackling this polyclinic because I have this problem with my shoulder when I was in
581 dishwashing.

582
583 I made it like worse so Yeah, they were really nice The service everything was really
584 like systematic.

585
586 [...]

587
588 um, I have received a lot of emails about a lot of stuff, but maybe I still don't know
589 about many stuff. I mean I recently got to know about the career consultation thing
590 um, so Probably I have to explore the website really well or something um I mean
591 the website is also sometimes was confusing. I don't know about the new one But all
592 one was sometimes redirecting to weird pages and their pages were blank I still don't
593 have the a library thing because I have never been there and on my um Vuis if I go
594 click on the library thing, it doesn't take me anywhere.

595
596 It takes me to a blank page so I am just anxious that I will go and nobody will let me
597 in and that's why I never went to the library because I mean, that's weird. It's absurd
598 to think but It's me who's brain works that way. So yeah, there is some weird things
599 sometimes happening, but uh overall, uh I go to the gym.

600

Commented [AF28]: Lines 544-552: struggle to communicating with lecturers / use of search platforms to help with academic life

Commented [AF29]: Lines 559-565: mental well-being struggles / seeking support through search engine / will to have a help during hard time

Commented [AF30]: Lines 567-570: supportive advice from flatmates / apps to help within adaptation / desire to have broader freedom

Commented [AF31]: Lines 588-594: complicated VU communication through emails / too much information / hard and slow softwares to access study material / dissapointment

601 I'm taking the sessions. I know about the career consultation I am not into sports
602 because i'm not fit right now So I saw the sports thingy coming up And I don't know if
603 there's something else So, yeah, I probably I should explore a bit more Well, if we
604 talk about the library services, actually, uh, you are always free to write, you know
605 There is like a general help email called pagalba in english.

Commented [AF32]: Lines 598-603: support through physical health / desire to start more than gym route (sports)

606
607 [...]

608
609
610 For now i'm doing this um customer service thing Because this was the easiest thing
611 I could do without engaging the core of my brain um I like creative stuff But for now if
612 I start creating all of a sudden or I take a job as creating I will go crazy.

613
614 So I have never done a project or I have like I used to do animation. I used to do
615 drawing I used to like do a lot of shit, but when it came to do stuff in exchange of
616 money, I made shit I was over the deadline. I was all over crying.

617
618 I couldn't do it So I don't want to make it my profession right now So the easiest thing
619 to do was doing some random stuff. So there's still a performance thing popped up
620 When I was like trying to leave the dishwashing stuff because I was almost done with
621 my tuition So I started this one and now I all day. Um, listen to people ranting about
622 their hotel Um I mean I can do it for one year and i'm good at micromanagement that
623 I see So probably some administration shit, but for that probably I will need the
624 language as well at least a little bit.

Commented [AF33]: Lines 610-624: work experience between VU / no available support in related spheres / working to survive while studying

625
626 So I'm on it. I'm on it. Let me finish my paper

627
628 [...]

629
630 Yeah, I mean I can it's okay so normally parents doesn't let kids go like The Girls go
631 abroad without getting them married, but my parents did so i'm kind of In depth I
632 mean, it's it's not a normal feeling. It kind of sounds toxic. But according to the
633 society It's it's the best thing I can do for them and uh, they also have been nice.

634
635 They love me They try to put a lot of societal pressure on me which caused me
636 Weird mental state marriage do that do that. Don't go there. Don't do shit I don't care
637 but like I I lie to them a lot.

638
639 So it's it's just a complicated relationship that i'm trying to keep like Clean just they
640 love me. They care about me. What am I doing here?

Commented [AF34]: Lines 630-640: pressure from family / enforced family rules over happiness / lack of pure love and a lot of forced pressure

641
642 They don't need to know they need to know a straight lie. So yeah, that's kind of
643 thing And for the financial support they wanted to but I have this ego thingy and I
644 don't want So they have done a lot for me they we come from a middle-class family
645 and Affording 5 000 euros a year is not regular activity. I would say So it's a lot of
646 money and they paid for one year.

647 [...]

648
649 Yeah, I just don't tell them like they sometimes enquire about my results What am I
650 doing? I mean i'm not doing completely shit, but it's not the thing they will expect

651 because Expectation is a big thing and I have cousins who are like really bright
652 They're studying in usa with the full scholarship doing phd and my parents also
653 wants me to do my phd They were really sad why I didn't Go for the master's right
654 after my completed my bachelor's I completed in 2019 And I came here in 2024.
655 There was a gap and they were really sad about it because I was not studying So
656 study is like a status symbol that they want So if somebody is doing a phd it's like a
657 class symbol like it's posh thing to do And mentally i'm not in a stage to start my phd
658 right now I need to complete this first.

Commented [AF35]: Lines 651-658: comparing family members with oneself / high standards from family / mental health pressure

659
660 I need to explore. I need to understand what I really want to study Because I studied
661 linguistics media linguistics and I think this is not my thing, but I still need to complete
662 it So I will complete it And I need to find out what I am really interested in so I even if
663 i'm doing a phd I need a lot of time So I need to work on myself And for now, I think I
664 will not go for a phd straight away Or in my life i'm not sure about that It depends on
665 the time and the energy that I have but they want it.

666
667 [...]

668
669 I love studying it I have read like tiny little small ones Not the big ones tiny papers
670 and it it may gave me more Pleasure than reading a linguistic paper. So My mind is
671 preferring psychology than linguistics. So why not going for that?

672
673 So I also can find something else that i'm interested in. I'm not sure i'm going for that
674 one. So It's a weird brain and I don't know how it functions I want to know and I want
675 to find the most comfortable thing that I can do without being panicking I mean
676 panicking is a normal thing to live I guess but not panicking like crazy all the time.

Commented [AF36]: Lines 669-676: learning behaviour differentiates from academia / new hobby / emotional unsettlement

677
678 [...]

679
680 So, I mean they are not targeting for six at all six is like oh my god grand prize for
681 them Okay, so they are targeting for 3.5 to 4.5 maximum 5.5 So the girls who get 5.5
682 are the Diamond of the market They will be like, uh, they need a husband who will
683 sponsor for them Yes That's called husband visa that's a thing that exists. So, okay I
684 have uh, I was offered fully funded studies in uk in exchange of Signing a marriage
685 document with someone because my score was 7.5 and they were like you can go to
686 anywhere Just sign this document. I will fund your studies.

687
688 It's uh, 1600 pounds doesn't matter I will give you the because they have the money
689 they are not good at english So I have taught so many people like that it was really
690 easy if someone doesn't know english and They just want to get 3.5 so the target of
691 the girls were the being the diamond with the score and they were achieving the
692 score and The agency was looking for the husband for them So they were arranging
693 the marriage The whole thing was a contract the contract used to be like We will be
694 there like be together for three months and after three months this divorce paper
695 They they will already sign at the time of the marriage will be submitted Um That's so
696 much exciting stuff happening in there Um, also the fake papers that I was talking
697 about so the there was some specific universities private universities They were
698 taking money. Um um suppose, I don't know how much probably Three four
699 thousand or five thousand.

700

701 There's a lot of money from bangladesh in exchange of a certificate Like hold a
702 tuition for three year or four year and they will give you a certificate You even if you
703 have never been to the university campus People have done that people are in a
704 good places with those certificates. I know a lot of people It's it's a business, you
705 know going abroad is business because when you were born in bangladesh your
706 first target is leaving the place that leaving the country

707
708 [...]

709
710 Um also like some of them are Students so we don't count them, but it is a big
711 business scheme Even people are trying to um yesterday.

712
713 I was with a friend who is from bangladesh He got a call from some guy. He lives in
714 portugal He has a lot of money and he was like can we start a business in lithuania?
715 How hard it is?

716
717 So he was like no business maintaining is really hard because less people in here
718 you cannot Profit much and he was like we don't want to profit. We want to bring
719 some people from my country Well, that's the thing about lithuania.

720
721 [...]

722 Yeah So, I mean it's comfortable living in a 1000 salary you don't have to stress
723 about Like you spending 800 on just your house electricity utilities and everything It's
724 good here, I mean if I was living in denmark I had to pay 7 800 for just a room Here, I
725 mean i'm living in a dorm. So it's different but even if i'm living in a Apartment like
726 studio I the best I will pay is 4 4 15. That's it So I still have 5 600 to survive the month
727 and it's more more more than enough Yeah, no, absolutely.

728
729 [...]

730 Probably here I connect with lithuania more With trauma We have same level of
731 trauma Yeah, so, you know trauma wants a really Good friendship it turns out to be
732 good friendships so when I When i'm talking to someone white from different country,
733 I kind of find it hard to relate with them because the It's completely different But if i'm
734 speaking to someone lithuanian Yeah, upbringing was different but the trauma It
735 somehow matches it's like a different thing, but it's somehow it's like oh my god.

736
737 I had the same thing I mean if it's not same thing, it's same feeling At any cost like I
738 had the same feeling

739

740

Commented [AF37]: Lines 710-719: students maintain hardship process to help relatives / being a student to employ a family?? / migrational pacts ... responsibility on students

Commented [AF38]: Lines 722-726: lower host country prices compared to other countries / benefit of living in Lithuania

Commented [AF39]: Lines 730-735: home trauma and lived experience match the vibe of host community / bonding with Lithuanians through trauma

Appendix 3.4. Lily:

India, female, 26, bachelor level student, Muslim (practices)

1 [...]
2 Okay, so as a student moving to a different country is never easy. There's a bunch of
3 rules, regulations, legal stuff that you have to take care of. And I came across Vilnius
4 University because I was searching for medical universities that offer programmes in
5 English.

6
7 And Vilnius University was not my first choice. I was doing my, I was starting my
8 medical career through a consultancy in Dubai. And I had applied to Prague, to Italy,
9 and also Vilnius University as a backup.

10
11 And then luckily, thank God, I got accepted into all three universities, I had to write
12 the entrance exams, and also for Vilnius University. And I qualified a few weeks
13 later, all of them sent me their application letters and offer letters. So I calculated like
14 the international student fee and the living cost, the accommodation, because it's a
15 six year course, and it takes a lot of time and money, financial aspect of it is quite
16 important to consider.

17
18 So taking all the points, I thought Vilnius is definitely cheaper than Rome, Italy, and
19 the university is also much more accredited, or it has much more worldwide standing
20 and etc. So I went to Vilnius University. And then after that, we had to start the visa
21 process.

22
23 And I was facing a lot of difficulties with the visa process, because in the UAE, I had
24 to apply for it through VFS. And we also only have a Lithuanian embassy in Abu
25 Dhabi. So I reached out to both and started my application for the visa.

26
27 And it took me more than a month to just get an appointment for submitting my
28 passport and all documents. And because of that, I was a month late to uni because
29 school had already started and I was here in October-ish. And the semester started
30 in September.

31
32 So I missed a lot of classes, etc. And the legal stuff like for the application for my
33 visa, I had to get a lot of documents, which mainly I did by myself. I went for the
34 appointments by myself because my parents, my mom was in India, and my dad was
35 working.

36
37 So I just did everything by myself, whatever documents I needed help with from my
38 dad, like the bank statements and stuff, he just got them out for me and rest
39 everything. Yeah, I reached out to people because I had to get some documents
40 translated to Lithuanian language for the application. So yeah, that was the main
41 problem.

42
43 It's just that my visa came very late. It was hard to get an appointment. But once I did
44 submit my passport, I got my visa and my passport back in like three days.

45
46 So that was a good thing. And then I booked my ticket, I left. And it's hard because I
47 hadn't even figured out where I'm gonna stay in Vilnius.

48

Commented [AF1]: Lines 13-21: VU as a cheaper and more accredited choice / decision making / process before visa

Commented [AF2]: Lines 37-47: visa processes / passport issuing / residency at Lithuanian

49 And I don't even have any friends or families or anyone that I know of. So initially, I
50 stayed at a hotel for like a month almost, which was very expensive. And after that, it
51 was a struggle to find a place.

52
53 Initially, I thought of dormitories. But then, back then, four years ago, the dormitory
54 that's near the medical faculty, I think it was only for Lithuanian students. So I could
55 not get a spot over there.

56
57 And then everyone, like the university dormitory in charge, whatever, they just kept
58 suggesting Sauletekis dormitory for me. And I had not heard a lot of good things or
59 any nice thing to be very frank. Because first thing, it's very far from the medical
60 faculty.

61
62 And it's kind of in the middle of nowhere. And from what I've heard, the situation
63 there is not good. Like there are rats in the kitchen, and you know, a lot of drunk
64 people.

65
66 And it's safe, but overall, not the best. And I live alone. So my safety, my well being
67 is all in my hands.

68
69 So I was like, no. So I moved to a single studio, one bedroom apartment type
70 situation. Which again, was expensive.

71
72 But over the four years, it just kept getting more and more expensive. And the
73 wintertime, the utilities are priced high. Anyways, so that was that.

74
75 And now I moved to the dorms in Olandu because I have a few friends that stay
76 here. And the situation is pretty good. It's pretty clean.

77
78 It's not in the middle of nowhere. I can reach the city centre pretty easily. I can reach
79 the hospital in Santariskes pretty easily.

80
81 So yeah, now it's just been two semesters since I moved to the dorms, and it's okay.
82 So yeah, I think that's the initial part of moving to Lithuania.

83
84 [...] No, I did not get any help from the university representatives whatsoever. So the first
85 big struggle was finding a place to stay, and initially, as I said, I was in the hotel for
86 like roughly a month, and it was getting expensive, and I knew I had to move out. So
87 I found a company called Houston.

88
89 There's a few of them, Houston chapters, co-living, shed, whatever. So I found the
90 one that's the closest to the medical faculty, and then I had a meeting with them. I
91 saw the apartment, and then they said that they can offer it from so and so.

92
93 So I made a contract and moved. So that was the first thing. I did not get help for
94 finding that whatsoever, but then a lot of people did recommend me to search in
95 Aurodos, which is like a property, like basically landlords, they put their properties
96 out there, and the only way is you call them.

97
98

Commented [AF3]: Lines 53-64: horrible dormitory conditions at VU / poor accommodation directions

Commented [AF4]: Lines 66-76: better solutions for accommodations for cheap price outside of VU / health risks at VU accommodations

Commented [AF5]: Lines 85-96: no help from university staff

99 So I used to call people, and a lot of people don't speak English, so again, it's hard.
100 Like people would pick up, and I would speak Laba diena, like the little Lithuanian
101 that I know, and they would hang up immediately. The people who would stay on
102 call, they would be like, okay, where are you from, and et cetera, et cetera.

Commented [AF6]: Lines 99-102: Lithuanian discrimination and racism

103
104 So I've noticed this thing that whenever I say I'm from India, they tend to not, they
105 would be like, oh, it's not available anymore. And the times I do say that I'm from the
106 UAE, they're like, oh, that's so nice. So there's a double standard with that, because
107 ethnically, I am Indian, but I live in the UAE, like my whole family migrated there.

108
109 So, but I can't call myself an UAE citizen, because in the UAE, you do not get the
110 passport, no matter how long you've stayed there. Unlike the European countries,
111 you just get the residence permit, like you're a resident there, that's it, but you can
112 never be a citizen. And that's the same rule that applies for a lot of GCC countries,
113 which, which, yeah.

Commented [AF7]: Lines 104-113: documentation challenges / status hardships / discrimination and racism from landlords

114
115 And so that is kind of annoying. It's frustrating when people treat you differently when
116 they know that you're Indian, and how they treat you differently when they know that
117 you're Middle Eastern or whatever. And so that was a hassle.

118
119 And living wise, situation wise, since I am Muslim, there is a community for Muslim
120 sisters, just females in Vilnius. And the way I found out through them is because in
121 location-1, there is a little Islamic centre, it's also like a mosque, kind of like a church,
122 basically. I used to go every Friday, you know, because it was very close to my
123 house, it was like literally a one minute walk.

Commented [AF8]: Lines 115-121: support from communal centre made by migrants / coping / assistance from like-ethnic individuals

124
125 So I used to go very frequently. And then I met the other girls who used to come
126 there. And then randomly, they were like, Oh, we have a WhatsApp group.

Commented [AF9]: Lines 125-126: social support from platforms / connections

127
128 So if you're interested, you can join. So I joined. And then I learned that there are a
129 lot of other students, majority medical students.

130
131 So I made a bunch of friends. And then I made a bunch of I met a lot of other girls
132 who are Lithuanian even, and then they're Muslim. So they would share their
133 experiences, because as Muslims, you eat halal.

134
135 I don't know if you know what that means. But yeah, so it's basically animals or
136 chicken, for example, that's slaughtered a certain way. So then it's permissible for
137 you to eat.

138
139 But again, some Muslims do not eat halal meat like for them, it's okay, because their
140 school they advise like, okay, you can eat whatever. But my school that I follow, that
141 they say that you can only eat halal. If you don't have you can eat vegetarian or
142 seafood, which is okay.

143
144 So they told me like, okay, you can buy halal meat over here. You can there are like
145 some Asian stores that you can find. So initially, I visited all of them and they are a
146 bit pricey.

147

148 It's very expensive back home. Like for example, the same thing that I would get
149 back home for like less than a euro, I would have to pay like three euros here, which
150 is pretty expensive. So every time I would go back home during the winter break or
151 the summer break, I would just bring back things that I can't find here or it's
152 expensive to find here.

Commented [AF10]: Lines 144-152: home food is pricier at host countries / financial struggles / pressuring situation

153
154 And also you do improvise and you know, just just make the recipes without the food
155 that you like, you know what I mean?

156
157 [...]

158 So so yeah, other than that, it was pretty okay. I could still find everything I need. It's
159 just that it's expensive.

160
161 So yeah. And over the years, definitely inflation has hit and because I came here in
162 2022, it's 2026 now. Rent prices have gone up.

163
164 Actually, even food prices, if I can say so, like eating out four years ago was a bit
165 more cheaper than it is now. So yeah, I mean, yeah.

Commented [AF11]: Lines 158-165: economic hardship and struggles / surviving global changes

166
167 [...]

168 Very, very different. We don't have air conditioning here so much, but back home in
169 Dubai, you have air conditioning everywhere. And then in the winter it gets super
170 cold.

171
172 So that was a huge culture shock, to be very honest. And yeah, so a lot of my, in the
173 first semester, a lot of my winter clothes, I bought them here. And as for packing
174 goes, when I was, the first time I came, I had like 40 kg luggage or something.

175
176 So my mom packed literally everything that I could need. Like she did not miss out
177 on anything because she knew that, you know, you're moving to a country, you're
178 going to need a lot of things. So she packed a bunch of like spices, utensils,
179 blankets, she even packed me pillows.

180
181 So yeah, she had me covered on that aspect. And mentally, I could say that I also
182 had it in me that I am going to be away from my family. I'm going to be away from
183 home.

184
185 It's a completely new country. I have absolutely no one that I know here that I can
186 rely on or trust. So whatever I do, wherever I go, my safety is in my hands.

187
188 So I didn't really feel so homesick whatsoever in the first three years. I wouldn't
189 randomly be like, okay, I'm so bored. I want to go home because my friends, the
190 international students, they're like from Germany, Sweden, so they will, it's easy for
191 them to take like a one hour flight and go back home.

192
193 But it's not easy for me because the flights are expensive. They're long and like the
194 whole day just goes into travelling. So mentally, I had prepared myself very strongly
195 that I'm coming here.

Commented [AF12]: Lines 182-195: challenge to go back home / early preparedness to go through loneliness and isolation / inner craving to meet close ones

197 I have to get my degree and it's not going to be easy. It's six years and I'm spending
198 my 20s in a country. So I don't want to, you know, do anything that's gonna, that I
199 would look back and regret like, oh, why did I go there?

200
201 Why did I hang out with such, such people or get involved in such, such, I don't
202 know, because essentially in this age, the main activity is to go out pubs, clubs,
203 drinks, you know, make memories, whatever. And that's just not my scene because I
204 don't drink alcohol and I'm a veiled woman. So it's, it's weird if you see a veiled
205 woman in a club or a pub, even though she's just having a juice or something.

206
207 It's, it's not the ideal setting. So, and it's, I don't know. So friends wise, I could not
208 mingle so well with my university friends because as I said, like every weekend they
209 would just go for a pub, a club, they would call me.

210
211 Initially, I declined like, no, I don't drink alcohol and I'm not comfortable in such a
212 setting. So they understand and they would be like, okay, you know, just come
213 maybe for like a juice or soda or something. And I would still be like, no, you know,
214 because I have my priorities, I have my limits.

215
216 And then eventually they also understood and they would respect it and not call me
217 for such things. But other than that, if we go for like a picnic or like, you know, just a
218 coffee or something, I would go. So it's just that I knew the activities I knew I wanted
219 to get involved in and didn't want to get involved in.

Commented [AF13]: Lines 216-219: friendly coursemates
/ coping with leisure time activities

220
221 And additionally, the Sisters Group in Vilnius, that was a huge help. I definitely don't
222 know what I would have done without them. I would probably have been very lonely
223 as well because it helped me improve myself personally, spiritually, focus a bit more
224 on what, I don't know if I can say this, but what Islam teaches you, um, like it's a
225 religion of discipline.

226
227 You know, sometimes you don't want to follow, sometimes you feel like you're alone
228 and you feel that when you're in a country all alone. So that was a really, um, huge
229 strength because, you know, it's like, you're not alone. We're here for you.

230
231 You know, there are a lot of other girls who are going through the same thing. So
232 don't feel like you're in this alone. So, and it also definitely made me a bit more
233 spiritually stronger.

234
235 Like I started praying more, I was focussing on myself. So I took it on myself as like,
236 okay, you know, I'm growing. I'm transitioning into adulthood.

Commented [AF14]: Lines 221-236: sisters society
provides help / mental support / adapting to host country with
help of like minded individuals

237
238 I'm studying, I'm going to be a doctor and side by side, I'm focussing on the, on the
239 way I want to live life, on my priorities, on my, um, like the way I make my decisions.
240 Like, for example, in my head, I would, sometimes I would be like, okay, you know,
241 it's just a club. It's just a pub.

242
243 [...]

244
245 Yeah. But the thing is before I left for university, my mom was in India because my
246 granddad passed away and she had a lot of legal work that needed to be done. So

247 she was in India for approximately three years because she went when COVID had
248 started and then the lockdown happened and then she was stuck in India.

249
250 So during that time, I could say I was pretty independent because I took a gap year
251 after I graduated high school because I was preparing for the medical school exams
252 and I would look after my sister and my cousin and my dad. So I would like wake up,
253 make the breakfast. You know, I would go grocery shopping, do all of that.

254
255 So organise the household chores, whatever. So on that aspect, like managing
256 finances, managing home, taking care of yourself, making meals, I was pretty
257 independent already before I moved to university. But after that, the thing is, it
258 became more on how independently you can assess yourself in a situation where
259 you have no one else that can, you know, cover for you.

260
261 Like back home, if anything happens, I can call my dad, I can call my mom, I can call
262 friends, I can call the police. But here it's different. I don't know the language, I don't
263 have anyone I can trust on.

264
265 So that was that. But can you repeat the question again?

266
267 [...]

268
269 As an individual, before I left for university, I was extremely extroverted. I was very,
270 very free-spirited. My parents are very liberal.

271
272 And when I moved to university, I made the decision that I want to put the hijab on.
273 And my mom was like, are you sure? Do you want to do this?

274
275 You know what it means? Like, you're going to have to wear a hijab in public. People
276 will know you're Muslim.

277
278 My dad was also like, you know, what if you get hate crime because people will try to
279 do something.

280
281 [...]
282 So my parents were actually very scared and initially even opposing the idea of me
283 wanting to wear the hijab. But my whole life, my parents never really were like,
284 maybe it's time for you to put it on now. You're big enough now.

285
286 No. I made my decision. I was like, you know, I'm going to be in a country.

287
288 And if people see that I am a veiled woman, I wear the hijab, they will understand. If
289 they're educated enough, they will understand that, you know, this woman, she has
290 priorities. You can't casually go and be like, hey, what's up?

291
292 You know, you kind of respect her boundaries because she presents herself that
293 way. And that I have noticed people do respect it when like educated people, they do
294 respect it when they see a woman and she's veiled and she is wearing the hijab.
295 They don't necessarily pass inappropriate comments, but obviously there are bad
296 people everywhere.

Commented [AF15]: Lines 245-259: learning to become more independent / the benefit of being far away from relatives / managing to survive on own without anyone / taking care of relatives while being independent

Commented [AF16]: Lines 269-279: transforming oneself to become new / migration enforces transformation / learning new skills

Commented [AF17]: Lines 282-296: learning to accept people a new / parental influence / deciding to change in the host country

297
 298 [...]

299 Okay. In university, um, in the first semester, since I was one month late and the first

300 month of university, you learned a lot of the major subjects like anatomy histology.

301 Um, and I was lucky to have a professor in anatomy.

302

303 She was very nice. And I told her that, you know, I'm a month late. So I had already

304 missed like three, four tests, like three, four colloquiums.

305

306 She was like, it's okay. You can do these first and then we can move on. And, uh,

307 she helped me through everything in anatomy.

308

309 But, uh, again, there were a few professors who were not necessarily rude, but also

310 not super like welcoming whatsoever. Like, um, I don't want to say nonchalant, but

311 that was the vibe that they were giving, not just to me, but I think to everyone as well.

312 And, uh, you could feel that very strongly.

313

314 Like some professors were there. They just don't care. If you do the assignments,

315 they don't care.

316

317 If you come on time, they don't care if you miss seminars. And, uh, in the first year

318 you have to learn Lithuanian and Latin. That's a course.

319

320 And, uh, how they had structured the programme was first you do a Latin and then

321 you do Lithuanian. So I missed the whole of, um, Latin and I could only do the

322 Lithuanian because I was there. So I spoke to the professor who was doing

323 Lithuanian for us.

324

325 And I was like, Hey, so for, uh, for me to get the points for this course, I have to do

326 Latin as well. And I have missed all the classes because of my visa issue. Like, what

327 do I do?

328

329 She was like, you should, uh, you can do it like next semester. It should be totally

330 fine. You can contact, uh, I don't know if I can say her name, but the academic

331 coordinator for the international students.

332

333 Yeah. So I went to her and I spoke to her and I told her like, okay, Hey, so I have

334 missed like half of the, um, the course, half of the course, the Latin course, I have

335 missed it because my visa was late. And the Lithuanian professor, she said that it's

336 okay.

337

338 You can do it next semester. But the thing that they failed to tell me was that I would

339 have to pay for it. And I was like, okay.

340

341 And each course is around like 960, like close to a thousand euros each module. I

342 had no idea of this. And I was like, okay, we can do it next semester because I was

343 reassured that it's not going to be a problem and that they understand that I was a

344 month late.

345

Commented [AF18]: Lines 299-315: learning new form of academia / host country lectures work differently / relationship with academic staff / hardship to adapt with new form of studying / cultural shock

346 And then when next semester came, I spoke to the, uh, coordinator again. And I was
347 like, Hey, so how do I enrol for like just the Latin classes? Because I have already
348 taken the Lithuanian course and I have passed it.

349
350 It's just that Latin I have missed. So she was like, she will check and with the
351 financing and everything. And she was like, um, you will have to pay, but then she
352 was like, Oh, don't worry.

353
354 You will only have to pay half of it because you won't, you attended Lithuania and
355 you only didn't attend Latin. So I was like, okay. And everything.

356
357 And, and then later, a few weeks later, she told me like, okay, you know, it's not
358 possible to do it halfway. You have to pay the whole price and do the whole thing
359 again, which I could not understand because if that was the case, then the previous
360 semester, I could have taken Latin with a different group because we have like, uh,
361 eight groups who are doing medicine internationally. I could have done it with
362 another group.

363
364 Why was that option not given? And, uh, you told me like, it's going to be okay. I
365 don't know.

366
367 I felt like I could have avoided paying that fee if I had just done the research a bit
368 more better, understood the system more better, but, um, these informations were
369 not provided so easily and what to do when you fail a course, what to do when you
370 skip seminars, what to do when your final is not, uh, for example, you haven't got
371 enough points to like pass the course. So these things were not, not clear in the first,
372 uh, first year after that, I had to slowly learn from like speaking to like the older
373 students, like the senior students, they would say like, okay, if you have these, these,
374 these problems, you have to talk to this person at university, or if you're having
375 different problems, talk to this person. So it was a, it was much more of like me
376 finding out help for my situations by myself rather than it being readily available.

377
378 So that is a struggle that I faced in university. And now, now we are more in
379 Santariskes, uh, because I'm in my fourth year, everything is in Santariskes now or
380 the Republic Hospital. And I don't want to say that it keeps getting worse, but some,
381 some subjects, it does keep getting worse.

382
383 Like for example, we just finished neurology right now and neurology is a very
384 difficult course. Um, you have to study a lot. There's a lot of information and the time
385 that they have given us is two weeks, 10 days, which is not fair.

386
387 It's not good. And, uh, the professors in some modules, they are not good. Frankly
388 speaking, they are not fit to be professors, to teach the English speaking students
389 because they themselves don't speak English.

390
391 And it's hard because they're trying to, you know, for example, explain some sort of
392 neurological problem and they are stuttering, they're pausing, they're taking time. Uh,
393 the slides are like from 2018, 2020, like they're not updated. And, uh, you have to
394 find, um, like for some modules last year, they did not provide us the material that
395 they would provide in seminars.

Commented [AF19]: Lines 333-348: disinformation about university system / faced deception ended up in debt / lack of administrative informing / not included ability to retake exams when emergency occurs

Commented [AF20]: Lines 367-376: acknowledging own fault / explaining the hardship with provided informations

Commented [AF21]: Lines 387-395: language barriers / academic challenges

396
397 They would just send the articles and we would have to find the information ourself.
398 So like there are some, uh, modules that were articulated very well and some
399 modules that were really done very badly. And, uh, every semester after every
400 module, we have like a survey to assess like the wellbeing and all of that.

401
402 And frankly speaking, I don't think these surveys do anything because we do attend
403 these surveys. We do these mandatory surveys and nothing changes. So that is not
404 good.

405
406 [...] Exactly. And it's hard, you know, because if you're studying something like medicine
407 or in healthcare, you have to know what you're studying. Like your professor, your
408 teacher, whoever, they have to know how to teach.

409
410 They have to know how to, you know, make sure that students are listening.
411 Students are like, you can't just put on a slide and be like, okay, one of you guys
412 read and then you guys can do a presentation. Like, no, this is your job.

413
414 You are the expert here. So share your knowledge with us. It's not like we sit at
415 home, we do, okay, I doopathic intracranial hypertension.

416
417 We do our research, we come to seminar and we do the presentation and that's it.
418 And the professor just passes a few comments and that's it. No, this is not how
419 you're supposed to make doctors.

420
421 This is not how you're supposed to make, like you have to train these students. What
422 are they going to do when they are in the hospital and they don't have a supervisor
423 or a professor to ask for, and they're going to have to make the decision themselves.
424 Like, how are you making it easy for them?

425
426 Like some professors, they really do understand and they try their best, which I
427 absolutely respect. And that's how it's supposed to be. And I don't think it's fair that
428 international students have to come and in some subjects, teach ourself.

429
430 Like, as I said, neurology course, it was very bad. We just finished it. And it was
431 really, really very harsh.

432
433 Professors in the Republic hospital, they, I don't know how to say this without getting
434 angry, but literally they could not speak English. It was very bad. And it was just two
435 weeks.

436
437 And then we had the final exam, which was hard. And also keeping in mind that we
438 pay 11,000 euros per year to study this course, which is not a small fee. It's a huge
439 fee.

440
441 And we pay this for six years. So over six years, it becomes what 66,000 euros.
442 That's just tuition.

443
444

Commented [AF22]: Lines 398-404: loss of hope towards the system / need for support / lack of provided ability

Commented [AF23]: Lines 411-425: questioning the liability and competence of academic experts / cultural discrimination / not being taught

445 It's a huge amount of money when you consider it. And this is not the standard of
446 medical education that you should give anywhere. That's it.

447
448 If you want to make Vilnius University the best university that's producing the best
449 qualified doctors, highly trained, highly skilled, highly knowledgeable, you have to up
450 your standards. You have to do things. Like, for example, in the beginning, I was
451 noticing there aren't a lot of international students.

452
453 And even if they were, they were mainly like from Germany, from Sweden, from
454 Finland, et cetera. But over the years, Vilnius University has partnered up with
455 consultancies or like associations in different countries like India and Bangladesh
456 and other Middle Eastern countries, et cetera, et cetera, to bring more international
457 students. I respect that you want to make your university be represented elsewhere,
458 et cetera.

459
460 But you have to also raise the standard. And when it comes to VUSA, the students
461 association, the students representation, everything in the first year, second year,
462 third year, it was in Lithuanian. So it's hard for international students to get integrated
463 in such societies and such associations.

464
465 And even if there is an event going on, like for example, there's an event and I'm
466 really interested, I want to go, but it's in Lithuanian. So even if I do go, because I've
467 been to events and I would just have my Google translate on my phone and record
468 it, record the voices that they're speaking and then have it translated and then read,
469 which is an inconvenience for me and also inconvenience to the people over there,
470 because you can see that a person who doesn't understand the language is sitting
471 there and they're trying to integrate.

472
473 You know, it gets exhausting. Like even though we are trying from our side, what are
474 you guys doing to make us feel integrated? Like, you know, like you, like if you can
475 cannot accommodate international students, don't call us.

476
477 And if you want to, if you want to have international students, make sure that you
478 have at least the basic stuff for us to feel integrated. That's all I can say.

479
480 [...]

481 Again, this bilingual type events, they are happening now. In the beginning, it was
482 not, I don't know how it was before 2022, but 2022, 2023, 2024, it was not happening
483 whatsoever. And that's already like half of med school for medical students, you
484 know?

485
486 And the thing is in medical school, you have to do as much as you can. You have to
487 do internships, you have to do observerships, you have to shadow a doctor, you
488 have to gain all these experiences because it gets more and more competitive. Like
489 right now I'm trying to find internships for my final year and it's so difficult.

490
491 It's like the application for 2028 has already begun right now because of the
492 competition. And they look at your CV, they look at the activities that you have done,
493 the associations that you are in, the student societies that you are in, these things

Commented [AF24]: Lines 434-446: academic lecturers not minding the international student ability / lack of English skills from staff / enforced poor quality exams / financial insecurity due to academic systems

Commented [AF25]: Lines 460-471: role of student representatives / lack of friendly inclusion / lack of directions

Commented [AF26]: Lines 473-478: university is not prepared to accept international students / lack integrability / questioning university honesty in marketing it's ability

494 matter. And if the international students can't openly or, you know, it's not easily
495 accessible to them, then how is it going to be beneficial?
496

497 You know, like, because then I'm just going to have a degree and that's it. My CV is
498 going to be empty. My portfolio is going to be empty.
499

500 I can't do internships because I don't speak the language. I can't do observerships
501 because everyone in the hospital speaks Lithuanian. And there are a few doctors
502 who do understand this and accommodate, you know, there are a few doctors like in
503 abdominal surgery, etc.
504

505 They have, when they have students and they're doing night shifts with the students,
506 they explain everything in Lithuanian. But then again, it's not all of them. It's not all of
507 them.
508

509 And as students get burnt out, the doctors, our professors, they also have burnt out.
510 And, for example, I want to do an internship. I want to do an observership.
511

512 I email them. They don't email back because they know that it's international
513 students and they're going to have to like do a little extra work, you know, translate
514 everything for them, translate what the nurses say to them, translate what the
515 patients are saying. So sometimes I feel like, you know, doctors themselves, they do
516 not want this hassle of translating it for someone.
517

518 So they do not reply at all. And it's hard. So it's not all of them, but there is still a lot
519 of them who do this.
520

521 [...]

522 So when we talk about internships, mainly you have to be in the hospital. And
523 wellness university hospitals, they do give you internships. And in the third year, we
524 had a course called nursing skills, where essentially you learn how to take blood,
525 check blood pressure, talk to the patients, you know, first aid, all of these things.
526

527 So you have to communicate with the patient. And in that course, we had a
528 mandatory observership that we had to do and get like the signature from the head
529 nurse. So most of the students, they went back to their home countries and did the
530 internship and then got it done.
531

532 So that's easier for them. But I know a few students who did it in Lithuania. And I
533 asked them, how was it?
534

535 Like, did you guys get to like, draw blood on like an actual patient? Like, did you
536 guys learn how to do these things? And they said, No, we couldn't, we could just
537 stand there and watch.
538

539 And that was it. Whereas the students who went back to their home countries, some
540 of them could actually like physically do the blood tests, you know, sugar tests on the
541 patients and much more easier communication, because it's in their native language,
542 etc. I also did it back home.
543

Commented [AF27]: Lines 491-503: university doesn't prepare experts / skills are not provided / fear that no one will employ

Commented [AF28]: Lines 512-516: students don't feel included, because university didn't ensure they will have space to fulfill their academic criteria / struggle to manage anything /

Commented [AF29]: Lines 522-543: academic programmes don't ensure students gain equal level of skills / questioning validity in academic module / desire to learn but enforced barriers

544 And I couldn't draw blood in Dubai, because the healthcare system is pretty strong
545 there. You can't touch the patient unless you have the licence in your hand. But But
546 again, in some countries, they allow it in some countries, they don't.

547
548 So that is a thing. And as far as I've heard from the sixth year students who are in
549 their mandatory internship phase right now, most of them go back home to do their
550 internships. And a few of them who plan to do their master's or residency in
551 Lithuania, they are doing it here.

552
553 And so far, what I've heard from them is the same story again, like sometimes the
554 nurses are not very happy to accommodate international foreign students, because
555 even they understand that, you know, they don't understand what they're saying, and
556 we don't understand what they're saying. So that's a bit hard. And also something
557 about Lithuanian people is that they are, they are not welcoming, but not for
558 example, I come from India, and we are pretty welcoming.

559
560 And in the UAE also, we are very, I don't know how to say we smile at each other,
561 you know, even if it's a smile back at you, you say hello to someone, they say hello
562 back to you. Here, if you smile at someone, they just look at you like, why are you
563 smiling at me? Like, we don't even know each other like, okay, it's just a gesture.

564
565 It's just the way society is here. Everything is pretty. I don't want to say dull.

566
567 I don't want to say cold.

568
569 [...]
570 Yeah, I kind of agree on that, you know, because initially, I thought, since I'm going
571 to be spending six years in Vilnius in Lithuania, like, I could also potentially see my
572 future here. Like, for example, settling down here, like practising as a full time doctor
573 here doing my master's here. But over the four years that I've been here, I don't want
574 to do that.

575
576 Because as much as I love this country, it's too peaceful for me. But that's just my
577 perspective. That's just my opinion.

578
579 It's too peaceful for me. And I love that. But at the same time, sometimes it gets
580 boring.

581
582 There's nothing much to do in the city. Like, okay, you can go Kaunas, you can go
583 Klaipeda or something, Trakai. Great views, great nature.

584
585 Amazing. It's calm. It's nature.

586
587 You know, you want to relax, you want to debrief, you want to do all of that. Vilnius is
588 best. But if you want something that's a bit more, you know, open, something that's
589 more fun, because in the UAE, it's very fast paced.

590
591 [...]
592

Commented [AF30]: Lines 556-563: passive discrimination / fear of communicating with someone due to cultural differences / social differences

Commented [AF31]: Lines 570-589: concern of staying in host society / doubt of future / unmatching vibe / slow paced environment / little opportunity

593 Yeah. No, but every country is kind of the same when they start off to accommodate
594 people and uplift their economy, et cetera, et cetera. And Lithuania is trying to do
595 that right now.

596
597 We are trying to integrate more foreign people, uplift the economy, have more
598 projects, everything. But at the same time, there is a lot of racism that also comes
599 with it. And if you're not going to teach the population on how to accommodate or
600 integrate with the foreign population that are in this country to help your country to,
601 for example, the labourers that come here for the constructions or the associations
602 that come here to start their businesses, et cetera.

603
604 Through these activities, the country gets bigger. You have more opportunities. You
605 have more, I don't know, let's talk a bit more on the construction side.

606
607 You want people to come and work here. We're coming, we're working, we're
608 earning, we're sending money back homes. And the people who come here, they
609 don't come here because they don't have another option.

610
611 They come here because back home, everything is saturated or they can't find a job.
612 They're coming here for their livelihood and you have to make them feel safe.
613 Because even in Facebook, there are a lot of posts about foreign people in old town
614 and the street photography.

615
616 And the comments are very, very bad. People are being like, go back to your
617 country. Don't bring your culture to our culture.

618
619 Okay. If you don't want all of that, then don't call us. Don't be like, okay, we have
620 opportunities for you.

621
622 We have jobs for you because we're not coming here to put our culture in your
623 country. We're not coming here to colonise your country whatsoever. We're coming
624 here because we're just trying to find a way to live.

625
626 We're just coming here for education, for work, for such things to sustain ourselves.
627 So you have to make them feel safe. You have to send the message to the
628 Lithuanian people that they are not all bad people.

629
630 Not all coloured people are racist. They're not all gangsters. For example, you see a
631 man with a beard.

632
633 He's not going to be a terrorist automatically. He's just a man with a beard. You can't
634 see a black person and immediately think like, okay, maybe he's selling drugs or
635 something.

636
637 No. This misconception has to change and it's going to take a while to change. And
638 the upcoming generation, our generation, the generation before us, but the older
639 generation definitely still has that strong misconception.

640

Commented [AF32]: Lines 604-617: racism and discrimination in the country / little future perspectives / toxic social environment / not prepared country

Commented [AF33]: Lines 622-635: uncivilized Lithuanian people / racism / historical insecurity of host society

641 But our coming generation does not feel that way, which I really love. We are open to
642 people coming. We are open to, you know, not discriminating people based off
643 colour or what they wear or how they present themselves.

644
645 So that is good. But still, we have a long way to go.

646
647 [...]
648 Me personally, I would say it's equal. Like, it's, I don't know, like the way I feel and
649 when you say the way I feel in university, because I can only speak on behalf of what
650 I feel being in international students committee, like international students groups. So
651 then I guess it will not be equal because most of the international students kind of
652 share the same struggles and same ideas as me.

653
654 But otherwise, otherwise, no, the Lithuanian students also are pretty introverted.
655 They do hang out with the Lithuanians only. There are a few who do hang out, you
656 know, so and so.

657
658 But then again, it's activities that I am not interested in. So it's hard. But one thing I
659 want to mention is that we have a student's research network, the SR, no not SRT,
660 SRN.

661
662 Research is very important in medicine and a lot of students from the international
663 part want to do research. We want to, you know, like do case studies or narrative
664 reviews, literature reviews, etc. But it's hard to find opportunities because most of
665 these professors also prefer Lithuanian students because it's easier to work with
666 them.

667
668 And it's easier to make the papers in Lithuanian. So very few accommodate
669 international students. And we have committees for like the research network and for
670 example, cardiology, neurology, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, internal
671 medicine, every speciality has their own association.

672
673 And I'm very interested in obstetrics and gynaecology. So I joined last last year and I
674 would be with the Lithuanian students. I would go for their workshops and
675 everything, even though I wouldn't understand anything, I would stand there, I would
676 see.

677
678 [...]
679 So far, no, because I have never been in need of any legal advice whatsoever here
680 in Lithuania or any psychological help or had the opportunity to call a helpline or
681 anything because I don't want to say that I have not put myself in such a situation,
682 but it's just that, I don't know, maybe something is protecting me. It's just the thing I
683 strongly believe is that my mom's prayers protect me, no matter where I am. I know
684 someone, my mom or dad, someone's praying for me to be safe and that's working.

685
686
687 And so far, I have not faced anything bad whatsoever. But the international students
688 have a department. I don't know what the name is, but the department that takes
689 care of the TRP, the visa stuff.

690

Commented [AF34]: Lines 649-658: international students excluded from Lithuanian activities / introverted host society / lack of bonding

Commented [AF35]: Lines 683-685: coping strategies

691 [...]

692

693 So I had got the document and I luckily did not even have to submit it. She did not
694 like the person who was doing my TRP. She was very nice and she did not, she was
695 very sweet.

696

697 She was smiling and she was like, okay, so you have all the papers check. You can
698 stand here and take the picture. She didn't, I was like, okay, she's going to ask me to
699 take my hijab off now, but she did not do any of that whatsoever.

700

701 So it just depends person to person. Not everyone is like that, but there are a few
702 who will target you based on your colour and everything. And it's changing, it's
703 changing, but you just have to not take it so seriously.

704

705 You can't take everything to heart because you will find such people everywhere and
706 you cannot sit and cry about it. You have to move on. It's, you just have to focus the
707 way you deal with these situations and that's it.

708

709 It's just words, you know?

710

711 [...]

712

Commented [AF36]: Lines 701-707: racism / neutrality /
coping / belief

Appendix 3.5. Lotus:

India, female, 21, bachelor level student, not religious

1 [...]

2 Okay, so I was looking into university options and I was pretty sure that I wanted to

3 do dentistry and I think Vilnius University is like one of the cheapest in Europe and I

4 had some other options but the application process wouldn't like allow me to apply

5 because they were expecting my results to like come before they were announced

6 by Cambridge so I couldn't apply and I went on like Reddit to check people's

7 experiences in all of the universities I was looking at and they had like a lot of

8 concerns that were like a huge red flag to me so I was not sure about those and then

9 about Vilnius University I like heard good things but I didn't consider that different

10 faculties are like totally different but yeah so I heard that and I did some research

11 about the country and the cost of living is quite cheap as well and the city is beautiful

12 so the moment I was like researching I already felt like drawn to it I was like this this

13 looks really nice I like it and I was looking into like how Lithuanians are as well and

14 like that offset me a little because people did say that everyone's really cold and like

15 language wouldn't be a problem I saw that and I was like fine but I like we're like very

16 close to Russia okay that's a little bit of like it's like concerning and also Lithuania

17 supports Israel so I like that one I was like oh this is not good and I read that there's

18 like some racism but I personally haven't noticed anything like targeted toward me

19 yet so yeah that's what I read and I still thought about it and I was like you know what

20 it feels okay so I applied and I also used like an agency to apply through so yeah I

21 was like within the deadline everything was fine I think the only thing I struggled with

22 was Migris because they I just feel like the process is so long for a country that I

23 need to study in right it's just so many documents and it's so much money and we

24 had to do it through like VFS the appointments are impossible to get impossible like

25 my mom has been trying to come visit me for the past 1.5 years there are no

26 appointments and even if so she has to apply through other countries that means

27 she has to go to other countries and then land there and then fly here and then she

28 did apply to like like two different countries and they rejected her and they never give

29 you a reason why and it's like it's frustrating because if she just had a different

30 passport she wouldn't have to go through any of this and for Migris the appointment

31 was the paperwork was hard to navigate the university genuinely helped a lot they

32 sent like a lot of resources but they can't make the process easier because it's not up

33 to them it's up to Migris right and they tell you that the visa will come between like 40

34 to like three months which is insane because like I have to get in first and then I have

35 to apply I'm not going to apply first and I only got in like not enough time like I got in

36 in summer right and then from summer to the application there's not enough time

37 because what if it did take three months and then the university has like this link sent

38 out for a whatsapp group with all international students which is really helpful also

39 nerve-wracking because these people are applying from different countries I was

40 applying from Dubai right so they're obviously treating my application differently than

41 compared to people applying from India for example so applying from Dubai like

42 there are way less applicants I think the applications are genuinely treated differently

43 because I would see these people applying from different countries and they would

44 be waiting so long for their like visa to come through even mine I think only like came

45 after uni started so I missed like the first few weeks of university and they were

46 telling me like oh well if you're not able to make it in one month you cannot be a

47 student right which is crazy because they made me pay fees and they were like oh

48 yeah well if you can't if you can't make it we'll refund all of it and I was like that's not

49 the point I want a degree I don't want the money but yeah and surprisingly I actually

50 heard that people did come later than the given date the deadline and they were still

Commented [AF1]: Lines 3-9: social media shapes
decision / cheap costs

Commented [AF2]: Lines 10-14: cultural curiosity /
expecting racism / excitement / cheap living costs

Commented [AF3]: Lines 41-47: complication of arrival /
late arrival / risk of losing student position / fear / shock

51 allowed in right so I was just like then why are you causing anxiety if you actually
 52 don't care right because I didn't miss out on much when I wasn't here and like if
 53 you're having a course that is like fully international students I think they need to be
 54 more considerate I don't think they are because most of the most of my like friends
 55 my batch mates are European so they don't have to go through the same process
 56 like they don't even if they don't get the residency permit they can just come here
 57 stay here three months fly back they don't need a permit for any of that like they can
 58 just act like they're tourists because they live in fucking they live in Germany
 59 because they live in Germany like they can just if they can take a one-hour flight
 60 back it's gonna be fine so yeah I think that like the way because Migris doesn't tell
 61 you anything they can't even like wait three months and they reject your visa so there
 62 was like always that like fear that oh this will happen and another thing was like the
 63 dorm situation is insane I like I was like okay I'm gonna move into my own like get
 64 my own place but first I need to go to dorms they just had none and we had already
 65 emailed them about it and then later they go like we have none and I was like well
 66 we emailed you why are you acting this way and then I feel like there has to be some
 67 kind of priority for international students because we don't know Lithuanian we don't
 68 know how things work like it's really difficult to navigate especially like I was 18 when
 69 I came here 19 it's scary and it would have definitely helped to be in a dorm because
 70 it's like I have a place to stay I was like staying at a hostel and then I was like trying
 71 to find a place it was really stressful and I cannot believe that there was like no help
 72 provided by like the dorms it was it was crazy yeah did I cover everything?

Commented [AF4]: Lines 50-53: negative university reflection / caused emotional distress / missed out integration

Commented [AF5]: Lines 56-63: discriminatory situation for international rights / unequal treatment /

Commented [AF6]: Lines 63-72: no help from dormitories / accommodation administrators act toxically / craving for help in difficult circumstance / survival in not adapted location

73 [...]
 74 the impression that I would get one I would get a dorm and then they were like we
 75 have no places and I was just confused because like how you like we emailed you
 76 already so I was just like and then we tried to talk to them and be like hey like this is
 77 what you told us also I really need a dorm because I have never been to your
 78 country I don't know your language also I'm late like I need a place to stay and they
 79 were just like sorry so yeah that's a literal answer which is sorry actually there was a
 80 huge email that we that we wrote like pleading them and they were like sorry they
 81 literally just said the word sorry that's all and I was I was so appalled I was like this is
 82 crazy no that's not that's

Commented [AF7]: Lines 75-83: inappropriate staff behavior towards international students / risk relating scenario / risk of being left on the streets

84 [...]
 85 like I always wanted one I just wanted to have a place to stay as soon as I got here
 86 so yeah I think that's about it also I find it weird that they say they have no spaces
 87 because like everyone in my batch right none of them live in the dorms so and with
 88 international students most international students don't live in dorms okay across all
 89 faculties so I was just wondering like where's the space going like who is living in
 90 these places because every view student I know no one lives in the words yeah I'm
 91 as I do my second master said I live in dorms so my friend in the like first year she
 92 used to live in dorms and a lot of the rooms like the beds were free so I was just
 93 wondering like okay so if something frees up why are you not like contacting me
 94 because you know I need one like why can't you put me on a waitlist why isn't there
 95 a better way like I'm supposed to email you every day to be like hey did something
 96 open up hey did something open up um like I just feel like it was really disorganised
 97 on their behalf I can actually second you

Commented [AF8]: Lines 86-91: corrupted dormitory systems / no exceptional cases among international students

Commented [AF9]: Lines 92-95: negative experience with accommodation administration / neglect from staff / evidenced opportunity not opened for international students / discrimination

98 [...]
 99
 100

101 remaining obviously Europe and stuff um I actually had a great experience at the
102 hostel I met a lot of people I'm still friends with some of them um it was it was a nice
103 place the only challenge was I couldn't cook there and I don't really like the food in
104 the city so I think that's what I struggled with um I had a lot of luggage and like the
105 room is shared so that was a problem because I've never had to share a room with
106 like strangers or I've never had roommates and I've never lived out of my house so I
107 had to like live out of my bag I was so it was so weird there are no closets or
108 anything um and uh every time I would go out I would have to like take my laptop
109 with me because I can't just like leave it um so it was stuff like that uh and this hostel
110 was like a bar in the front and like a hostel in the back so that was cute

Commented [AF10]: Lines 101-106: surviving hardships / dealing with stress / adapting to host environment / new connections / coping

111 [...]
112 visit that and overall that's okay so I was at the medicine faculty for the whole first
113 year and I actually really like the medicine faculty it's really cosy and it's got good
114 equipment and it's like all updated and everything a lift would be nice but but it's fine
115 we I remember explicitly we had this histology class which was the prettiest it was
116 full of like plants which I love all of the all of the faculties are full of plants and I
117 remember the corridor for histology is full of skulls have you been there
118 yeah oh it's amazing I was so I was so fascinated by it it's like the whole thing it's like
119 from ceiling to floor with the skulls and I was like wow this is beautiful yeah I loved
120 going to classes at the faculty it's like in a nice part of town and everything then I
121 yeah we did have classes in like other areas like we have we had in Santariškės the
122 hospital and then there was like another

Commented [AF11]: Lines 113-120: positive experience at academic facilities / positive adaptation

123 [...]
124 or even in the students until what came along uh I think I think that the language isn't
125 that bit of a problem because um English is my best language so even if someone
126 isn't speaking it well I still understand but I would understand like some of my other
127 um batch mates their English is not as good as mine and they might like find it
128 harder to understand uh like in the first year there is this a friend of mine who's
129 French he um his English was not so good and I would like he was really struggling
130 um and now he's way better right so like now he's understanding better but yeah I
131 mean I feel like people should always work on their language skills especially if it is
132 their job um but I never like had I don't think the English is the problem uh it would I
133 would say that because that it's like they're not the most comfortable in that language
134 it takes a lot longer to deliver so I watch all my lectures on 2x uh and it's way faster
135 and I understand the same amount uh uh the lectures I I don't like that they're online
136 um it's not like good for our health and we don't observe anything uh and then it's
137 just like you attend it and you can't do anything while you're attending a lecture so
138 you have to pay attention but nothing is going in your brain so then you have to
139 watch it again anyway um I also I I really don't think the teachers like it either
140 because they were like talking to an empty screen and then when they ask a
141 question like no one's able to answer it or no one wants to answer it so I I don't know
142 I I I heard that um the reason yeah so I brought this up in this like one um course that
143 I had in the first year it was mental and physical health and there was like a whole
144 discussion about why like suggestions to the university uh on what can be done
145 better and um my group suggested that we need to have more physical lessons
146 because it's going to be better for the students and the teachers and the the teacher
147 said that it would that it's difficult to have physical lessons because we don't have
148 enough classrooms which is interesting because you shouldn't admit people if you

Commented [AF12]: Lines 126-129: language barrier

Commented [AF13]: Lines 136-141: issuing discomfort with the studies / hardship of learning material

Commented [AF14]: Lines 145-150: unequal opportunities for international students / posed suggestion are not considered / feeling of uneasiness

151 can't accommodate them no one asks you to accommodate like thousands of
152 students you can keep it you can keep it small because it would increase the quality
153 of education also every time I go to the faculty it's never full so what so how are the
154 classrooms full because like my Lithuanian class or actually every single one of my
155 class there's half the class is empty so there is space it's just that it's not being
156 utilised properly right like my some classes that I've accidentally walked into had
157 three people and it's a huge room that's not that's not like the correct use of
158 resources because I feel like when you're when you have like difficult modules like
159 anatomy they cannot be done online we had anatomy class online can you imagine
160 learning anatomy online exactly exactly and then like for the seminars we would like
161 go in for them and I just found it so annoying because I'm so excited about anatomy I
162 like my course I want to study it properly and I just it was just and like the professors
163 can't do anything it's not up to them it's up to the management and I just either it
164 would be that either it would be like live online or they would be pre-recorded which
165 is crazy because you can ask questions and like they obviously the professors go
166 like yeah you can like email me or like text me and I'm like yes I can but am I going
167 to like they need to understand that just because people aren't asking questions
168 doesn't mean they don't have questions the problem is there's there's a
169 communication gap and like I I don't it's just like blissful ignorance it's easy it's easy
170 for them to do that so they do it
171

172 [...]

173 they have certain problems as well I don't think so I think that it's quite fair and like
174 every course the professor has their own way of like doing things I would say that
175 sometimes it's more lenient and I would like them to be stricter I think that the
176 organisation is quite good like so far I haven't had a subject that I thought like oh this
177 is so unfair they're making me do so much work I've always thought that it was fair
178 yeah yeah
179

180 [...]

181 I want to feel bones I'm sorry but I want to feel it we did feel the bones but we felt
182 them in the seminar which was like what like we had like two a week but the hours
183 for the course were way more and I just feel like whatever he's talking about it's like
184 it's gonna be way better and it would save more time if it's like contact because you
185 can't explain things online like you're it's gonna be better to explain them in real life
186 and that way like we waste less time so I think that was the that was my only
187 concern I just was really unhappy that I had to do all of these online classes I've ever
188 tried to look
189

190 [...]

191
192 yeah so we used to do study sessions sometimes we'd like on like attend the lecture
193 online or like we would make notes and compare them and like study together but I
194 don't have a problem studying I have a problem with the class yeah because it's also
195 like being the medicine faculty if anyone they need to know how important it is to
196 learn in real life because they learn in real life and I feel like everyone should get the
197 same opportunity I even feel so like stupid explaining it to them to be like hey like
198 why is my class online online is something that happened during COVID as like as
199 an alternative and now we've shifted to it completely it's sucking everyone's soul out
200 it is and honestly the more of more years

Commented [AF15]: Lines 150-155: disinformation / unequal treatment / discrimination of student's studying quality / harder adaptation and lower level quality of life

Commented [AF16]: Lines 173-178: positive feedback on course complexity / adapting to academic flow

Commented [AF17]: Lines 181-187: programme concerns / adapting to different academic system / evaluating lower quality of life

201
202 [...]
 203 yeah but they're like they say it because they're corporate and they're capitalist like
 204 of course it's better for them they don't have to they have to pay less rent they have
 205 to pay less electricity they don't have to pay cleaning staff right it's better for their
 206 bank right just like the success of a country is measured by its GDP not by how
 207 happy people are but uh like if you are teaching something I it does not apply at all
 208 like it's like you're teaching me online but you need me to practise in real life like I
 209 how will I be a dentist in real life but like now we have clinicals so we have a lot of
 210 real practise but still have online lessons like so it's just so if you're a kid to answer
 211 this how
 212 [...]
 213 pleasant they don't judge you they're just trying to do their job for halloween I wore
 214 like halloween makeup to class and it was like the strictest teacher I had it was a
 215 histology teacher and she's just like she was like asking questions and answering
 216 them she's like good job and I'm like me? thanks! it was it was perfect yeah
 217
 218 [...]
 219 the medicine faculty and it's a nice place I like working in but it has to be way bigger
 220 it's way too small most of the time there are no spaces the best part is you can
 221 actually get work down there right because everyone is on the ground but there has
 222 to be more space like there's like a part of the room that is just books and I was
 223 wondering like who can't you store these in like a storage room and like only have
 224 like certain amount like work like a bookstore because people can borrow them and I
 225 was just like I think they need to work on that they need to make it way bigger
 226 because more people will use it right like you can borrow books and stuff people
 227 don't really do that because we have like PDFs and borrowing is quite easy it's just
 228 like I actually never got my university card I don't know why like I thought I don't
 229 know I thought someone would just give it to me and I arrived like quite late
 230
 231 [...]
 232 people like sleep in there yeah it is it's a 24-hour library yeah I like the place it's nice
 233 there's also only one like focus room where you can and it's not like soundproof
 234 which is interesting because the whole point of a focus room is you can do whatever
 235 you want in there but if it's open everyone can hear you so basically you have to be
 236 quiet in there but then that's the same as just working anywhere else in the library so
 237 I was like what is the point of this so I just see like this and there's a staff room like
 238 beside it and they're always like speaking in the staff room and I was like I really like
 239 the library though and we also have like these like student rooms yeah corners and
 240 rooms like so there are like places you can sit throughout in the corridors and stuff to
 241 study and then there are rooms as well like there's relaxation room and like a study
 242 room which I think need to be worked on because they're not comfortable like there's
 243 just it just feels like oh they have to make one let's just throw whatever we have in
 244 there right and like one of them was so cold that you can't sit in there at all like they
 245 need to like step it up like the library is really nice I just feel like they should put in
 246 like the same amount of effort in the other ones too because you can speak in the
 247 other ones right and like there's like a wire board so you can like hold study sessions
 248 there's like a microwave and like a mini kitchen and everything I just feel like it has to
 249 be like a little bit more comfortable because I really like sitting there like they have
 250 plants and stuff so it's just that we couldn't use it much because it's because you

Commented [AF18]: Lines 205-210: evaluating critically systems / expressing one's perspective / concern of study quality / worries of own future

Commented [AF19]: Lines 219-221: not adapted areas / difficulty to maintain academic life

Commented [AF20]: Lines 224-228: struggles at academic library / difficulty to maintain positive learning / disappointment

Commented [AF21]: Lines 232-235: not adapted study spaces / misinformation / living inside of the library

Commented [AF22]: Lines 241-244: horrible study environment / discomfort / lowered quality of academic life

251 don't look forward to it so yeah I think there's that I like the medicine faculty a lot
 252 yeah
 253
 254 [...]
 255 need to like work on it like I just I feel like they have never used this space so they
 256 don't know what it means like like they made a little okay we need a sofa we need a
 257 few chairs we need a table a microwave a mini kitchen and a board and then they
 258 took that but they never went in to see what it would be like right because the space
 259 has to be inviting because most people get more work done like outside their home
 260 that's why like they love going to the library but yeah it's also like a cafeteria would
 261 be nice we have like a blending machine that like has like cold sandwiches like and
 262 like snacks is that good for us I like why why are you selling sneaker like sneakers
 263 come on like between classes sometimes we'd have like like in a row we'd like go
 264 grab a snack and I was always so sad to eat those because it's like you could have
 265 just like had a cafeteria that sells like actual food right instead of like a random
 266 selection of things from maximum so yeah like like they were they sold like these
 267 mini waffles and yoghurt and whatnot and it's so expensive it's like three euros for
 268 like a sandwich and it's not the same price outside I like it was I don't know it's like
 269 it's like they forget that we're students and also like it's bad food like you're making
 270 me pay more for bad food okay it's a big faculty I don't understand why they don't
 271 just have a cafeteria like it's so it's so normal to have a cafeteria like we had one in
 272 every school and they like I don't know I just feel like there's and it's not only for
 273 students it's also for professors and staff and everyone we actually brought this up in
 274 the class as well and she was like oh actually there is this cafeteria and I was like
 275 there is none what are you talking about and it was like some place called the like
 276 behind the faculty and it's never open and no one goes like how have I never heard
 277 of this place I don't know I was I was just surprised as to what she was talking about
 278 and like I know that there is a gym but it's shitty because it's historical yeah because
 279 it's shitty and I so apparently they charge like three euros a month right which is fair
 280 because it's shitty and I was like we suggested that you can charge us more just
 281 make the facility better right and this is the problem with most things like even the
 282 dorms right they're not a great place to live they're not okay just charge us more
 283 money we'll pay you more money but make it better right and it's not like a one-time
 284 fee like people pay rent in dorms you're gonna keep getting the money just increase
 285 it like my friend was paying 70 euros that's nothing like when I heard that the price is
 286 70 euros I was like actually I don't want to live there because I know how it's going to
 287 be I am much happier overpaying for some tiny apartment in the city right like it's a
 288 shared kitchen fridge is shared people are stealing things from the fridge this is not a
 289 great place to live like you can have a mini fridge for three it's three people in a room
 290 there are only two desks how are people how are they going to study there's there's
 291 like two closets not enough space this is a girl's dorm they have so many things uh
 292 they're like shelves and because there's no space to keep anything you have to like
 293 stack them up so my friend like when I slept over at her place she was making me
 294 breakfast she had to like climb up on her bed to get her oil right I was just like oh my
 295 god this is like I they need to see these places like just because no one is saying
 296 anything doesn't mean that it is okay to do like and I went to the like dorm in uh
 297 someone's someone's dorm in like Dailes academia it's so nice it's so maybe
 298 because there aren't students they've like decorated it well but there's so much more
 299 space it's much nicer and I was like what is going on like you don't have to charge a

Commented [AF23]: Lines 256-261: facility interior requirement / needed tools to cope with academic life

Commented [AF24]: Lines 262-268: poor food options / difficulty to survive in academic settings / pricy and not financially friendly options

Commented [AF25]: Lines 277-283: desire to have better living settings / ability to pay but not provided with solidary options / poor health and contact related areas

Commented [AF26]: Lines 292-296: poor living conditions in accommodations / unhygienic and unsafe environment

300 70 euros take 200 take 300 make the place better right uh yeah it was I just feel like
301 create separate blocks that

302
303 [...]
304 need to have options for like individual rooms as well charge more make an
305 individual room people like privacy or make like two rooms and it's all like
306 randomised right why can't they have like oh you can pick because if you if you have
307 like a two-person room maybe you want to live with your friend because I don't know
308 it's scary to live with a random person uh it's it's interesting and like there were like
309 uh room shared with like two and there was also like my friend said there was this
310 one girl who just like paid three three times the rent and had the whole room for
311 herself so she had like three beds and every and I was just like how is this allowed
312 because people need these spaces she does not need the whole room right and I
313 was like you know what maybe I should do that because like what is going on like do
314 you get what I mean it just sounds ridiculous to me uh

315
316 [...]

317
318 that you mentioned if you're a captain yeah yeah I just feel that it's a very basic thing
319 to have food available at the place that people need to be productive like I think in
320 Dubai there's a law that you have to have a break room where people can like eat
321 food and like hang out and chill for their break because if there is no break room
322 people will not relax like they can sit in their office and on their lunch break but it's it's
323 just a way of people to like your boss can is more likely to overwork you if there is no
324 break room and I feel like that applies to like every place it's just so weird to not have
325 a cafeteria like there is a break room but there's no cafeteria like there's no hot food
326 it's weird like when my friend will be like okay I'm gonna take a break and get
327 something to eat and then she'll get like a pack of cookies and like I don't know it's
328 so being the medicine faculty they should know like how important it is to have food
329 but also like it's like we're gonna pay for it it's not for free so like it's fair to invest in
330 something if you're gonna like make money from it like you don't have to what is it
331 called you don't have to outsource the food because right now they're outsourcing
332 the food you can like get actual like cooks and chefs at the thing and like yeah we
333 like discussed this a lot in that class as well so yeah.

334
335 [...]
336 I think I like had to learn to be a lot more independent because my class is not very
337 close knit even though we're like a small batch like we're less than 30 people and in
338 school it was totally different because we were like I mean I had all of my friends
339 there it's basically like us experiencing life together and at university it's totally
340 different because you first come in you don't know these people and then you have
341 all these experiences together so like the timeline of getting to know them and like
342 how close you are compared to how many things you experience together is like
343 warped also I think personally I just don't relate to most of my classmates we are
344 very different and like I like them they're really nice but the like I don't think we
345 understand each other and relate to each other on the same level right and it
346 obviously affects like our friendship because sometimes they will say things that I
347 find so weird because like I come from a different background they come from a
348 different background and it's just those things and in school it was not like that yeah
349 so I used to I do like most of my studying by myself right that's so different for me like

Commented [AF27]: Lines 308-311: corrupted dormitory system / discrimination / illegality

Commented [AF28]: Lines 318-323: missing opportunity to adapt / cohertted experiences / poorly adapted facilities

Commented [AF29]: Lines 336-341: skill acquired from living on own / socializing with host society / new experiences / challenge overcoming

350 I never had to in school I would always be studying with someone because
 351 everyone's studying the same thing but now it's like you know people have their own
 352 pace it's like all different and your schedule is more free people do different things
 353 with their time and um I like I'm okay studying by myself but like that's a new thing
 354 that I had to like get used to and personally also just like living alone is tough
 355 because you have to cook all your food by yourself and you have to pay like you
 356 have to figure out how to pay electricity bills and your like phone bill or something um
 357 eh what else yeah most of my classmates are German like more than half of the uh
 358 class and that comes with its own challenges um because they like to stick together
 359 and they don't like they don't really like they always talk in German it's weird it's like a
 360 cult uh uh and yeah like you know we we all try to get along but it always feels like
 361 everyone else is an outsider because we have less like non Germans everyone's
 362 international but there are less non Germans and I think like that's it's it's just I did
 363 not expect my university experience to be like that because I don't know we watch
 364 shows and movies about like American schools and I'm insane I know like how fun
 365 everything is but no most of the time we're all just studying because our degree is
 366 serious um what else um I think like I think that's about it

Commented [AF30]: Lines 353-356: surviving independently / adapting to a new life way / managing own socioeconomic position

367 [...]
 368 I think my relationship with my family is quite complicated so I actually like being
 369 away from home like I miss them obviously but I only miss them enough to go visit
 370 them I don't miss them enough to want to live with them and obviously I want to visit
 371 because I want her to like see my life here but like I know that she wants to visit me
 372 so that like it's important but like I would rather just go back home cause like you
 373 know I miss home and I think if anything like the distance between us because of me
 374 like living in a foreign country is better but that's just a personal thing like we call
 375 every day and I feel like that's enough I don't need anything more

Commented [AF31]: Lines 361-366: living in international cluster / societal barriers / lack of identity in the group / cultural shock / social media affects perspectives on what universities are like

Commented [AF32]: Lines 369-371: detaching from families / ground settlement in personal choices / craving to visit family / coping desire

376 [...]
 377 not much when I can't log in to my since you mentioned I used IT help and I needed
 378 the free lab card that they gave out I didn't pick it up because I was late my student
 379 coordinator helped me with that otherwise I haven't I didn't even know these services
 380 existed yeah I didn't maybe because I missed integration so I didn't know also like I
 381 know that there are clubs and stuff

382 [...]
 383 I don't know about any of them and like now I don't even go to the faculty anymore
 384 I'm always at the clinic so it's just like less because I know that there were some
 385 posters for things but I didn't want to join those it was like some like geology stuff and
 386 I don't know anything about it but yeah there's like the orchestra

Commented [AF33]: Lines 386-389: missed out information on all available VU services for students / disinformation from faculty / craving to have activities / disappointment

387 [...]
 388 I know he told me about that and I was like where do I sign up I don't know where to
 389 sign up I don't know where the classes are and I don't know where to find these
 390 things like I want to go and like because that is the uni experience to me these are
 391 the things I had at school we have loads of clubs I want to dance I founded the
 392 dance club in my school with my friend and I was like I wanna dance at university I
 393 don't know of anything and I don't know where to find it and like I don't know

Commented [AF34]: Lines 393-397: lacking university programmes / need for leisure time and adaptability / socializing craving

394 [...]

400 yeah, maybe I need that because I need a life I just study and then I procrastinate I
401 waste my time I don't I need hobbies I need to have common experiences with my
402 peers some studies in Sauletekis I live in Zverynas it's so far like I understand but
403 they have buildings everywhere and it's so far because if I have to do the same thing
404 close to me I have to pay for it like a private one yeah I need to figure it out I can
405 share my experience

406
407 [...]
408 I know that like there's like Instagram and they have like updates about these things
409

410 [...]
411 like I think a website would be nice and actually a lot of the view ones they are sorry
412 a lot of the instagrams they are in Lithuanian so not all the posts are made in English
413 and it's only translated if the text is added on to the story it's not translated if the
414 picture has text and I don't know maybe they can make different on instagram for
415 different updates or I don't know there has to be a better way to do this like groups or
416 something cause group updates are way better than clicking through a story I don't
417 know do you know about this app EventBrite

418
419 [...]
420 yeah like anyone can host any event and you can just join, it can be paid, unpaid like
421 all the details and you can have different categories for it and you can like events
422 that you're interested in it's like a tinder for events it's perfect and I feel like that's
423 such a great way to organise it cause there will be like 20 plus events
424

425 [...]
426 there will be like 20 plus events in like one day and it's so easy to navigate and I just
427 feel like if they really wanted to find a solution they would cause I know that really
428 passionate people are looking for gateways and really passionate people are hosting
429 these things and like from both sides no one is able to have like the best experience
430 because there is such a big gap in like the communication
431

432 [...]
433

Commented [AF35]: Lines 400-404: Uni activities are split across whole city / far distances and short time due to heavy learning and work schedule / life quality at VU not adapted for student comfort

Commented [AF36]: Lines 411-416: craving to have more user friendly information / need to have more modern access / social platform generation

Commented [AF37]: Line 417: event specific app can help students adapt with event life at university

Appendix 3.6. Peony:

Bangladesh, male, 31, master level student, Atheist

1 [...]
2 So yeah, when I decided to like travel to abroad for studies and everything, I think it
3 was like seven years ago when I started my plan. Obviously I'm like 25, so I can't
4 really play with my decisions, so I have to have more precise and logical things that I
5 want to do. So me and my parents, when we moved from Bangladesh to Dubai, we
6 had a long discussion of what I want to do in the future.

Commented [AF1]: Lines 3-6: migration to another country / a new start

7
8 [...]
9 My family are from middle class and I myself also am from middle class and while we
10 don't have the best opportunities, financial availability, I'm still able to travel abroad
11 thanks to their support, even though I do work full-time. But back to like my whole
12 decision making, so as I said, it was like several years ago I was looking into actually
13 United Kingdom, the Scandinavian country universities, because that's what I really
14 wanted, where I really wanted to go. And even though I had very high GCSEs and
15 general education level, well, the opportunities that I could have taken at the
16 universities and acceptance was not what I could really manage.

Commented [AF2]: Lines 9-16: initial decision to study abroad / financial difficulties

17
18 [...]
19 Like all the courses were really, really expensive, so I had a drawback and like
20 emotional description that I can't achieve the courses and degrees I really need for
21 my future in the countries that I really like. So like for a whole month I was trying to
22 fight with the university administration and everything just to see if there are any
23 opportunities to do biological sciences in the specific field I do. And unfortunately,
24 there was no to-go options and well, I didn't have funds to have independent studies
25 like I wanted and there were no scholarships that could support me in the
26 programme I needed.

27 [...]
28
29 So I looked into other countries in Europe, in Australia as well, so I looked into a
30 different continent as well. I checked in North America part as well as continent, so I
31 checked the Californian state universities. Sadly, no options that I wanted to do in
32 the specific field were available for cheap or free opportunities.

33
34 [...]
35
36 Well, there are really few courses, but the reputation of universities was not very
37 promising and the feedback I had from employees was not the best. So like I stuck to
38 German university, so Hamschek, Leipzig. I've also checked the University of
39 Warsaw, I checked the Science Cathedral of Poland as well, and then I checked
40 Russian universities and then I checked Lithuanian.

41 [...]
42
43 Well, Vilnius University was the only option that really I could take. And out of all the
44 universities at the time when I was applying, Vilnius University was the only
45 institution that was friendly to my budget that I had and the budget that my parents
46 could grant me, even though they couldn't really support me. It was mostly like 50%
47 of what they support me and 50% I have to pay off myself.

Commented [AF3]: Lines 43-47: Cheap university / budget friendly

48 [...]
49

50 So Vilnius University, price-wise, was the only option that I could take. So I started to
51 form all the documents that I need. I also messaged International Relations Office.
52 [...]

53
54 There was a very lovely woman that coordinated me to the things I need to settle
55 with the university system before my application is sent out for the acceptance. And
56 well, there was like a hardship. So like I personally had to wait for a very long time
57 and specifically with the visas and the border checks, even though I'm a male and I
58 have a residency status in Dubai and the work permit as well, I still had to wait for
59 like several months on the border check.
60 [...]

Commented [AF4]: Lines 54-59: support from international lines / long documentation wait / guidance through administration

61
62 Like at the time, we had also like institutional changes in the visa department of City.
63 And like I think they were going back on my father's background check because my
64 father used to serve the army and had a specific record which legal systems were
65 showing up to all relatives that are related to him. So me, my mom and my two
66 sisters, we were always like frozen on actually formal documentations just because
67 our father had an army records that he served.
68 [...]

69
70 And it was not, let's say Dubai army, he served in Indian and British army or
71 whatever it was called. So like perhaps they were doing background check on my
72 family just before granting me this visa check. Because I do know like anything
73 related to armies are always taking their own drafts to do.
74 [...]

Commented [AF5]: Lines 70-73: family army history affects border checks

75
76 But regardless of it, I had my visa confirmed. And when I was arriving to Vilnius
77 University, I managed to get in the country right week before my studies began.
78 Because I know like the first week was like inclusive week where we like have these
79 stupid sessions with like different different staff presenting what services we can do.
80 [...]

Commented [AF6]: Lines 76-79: integrational week did not meet expectations / negative point of few on available options

81
82 Like I personally just don't see any use for me because in practise none of these
83 services ever confirmed the needs I had. So like I never really got to participate in it.
84 Only because I was in travel.
85 [...]

86
87 And then like a year after I regretted it, but I couldn't attend it. Not like I could have
88 changed it because I faced some issues at university. But anyways, I was like I
89 arrived before the 10th of September.
90 [...]

Commented [AF7]: Lines 87-88: using the services, once regretted

91
92 So I managed to stay in campus. I was not drafted back. So like I managed to
93 successfully integrate into that.
94 [...]

95
96 Now there was an issue. And issue was probably with accommodations. So while
97 academic side of university confirmed and accepted me with no questions,
98 accommodations had withdrawn my application for the residence stay.
99

Commented [AF8]: Lines 96-98: accommodation rejection

100 They didn't say what was the reason. They just said they had they cannot accept my
101 application. Like I called in like several times and their administrators were very rude.
102 [...]

103
104 Like I understand we have zero emotional intelligence and that's like upsetting. Like
105 they display university face in a very inappropriate manner. But regardless of it, the
106 administrators of accommodations did not want to have any talks with me.
107 [...]

108
109 They I think even blocked my number. Because when I was trying to reach out to
110 them on my day two in Lithuania when I was staying in a hotel, I really wanted to get
111 into accommodations. And little did they know I have friends at Vilnius University
112 who studied and lived in accommodations for longer term. And I know that there are
113 rooms in university. There are available spaces that are never taken. And I was
114 evidenced by my friends that throughout all year, nobody has used these rooms.
115 [...]

Commented [AF9]: Lines 109-113: corruptive residency
spots / disinformation / harm

116
117 But when I mentioned that if they have any free spaces in different accommodations,
118 I would like to at least for half a year to stay at accommodation, administrator said
119 no. So like administrative sites on residency of university raises a lot of concerns.
120 And I think that was the main part where I doubted if I want to trust Vilnius University,
121 if their staff that are responsible for my stay, for my life, try to neglect me.
122 [...]

123
124 Regardless of anything, I stayed in a hotel for a month. My family, well it wasn't really
125 a hotel, I think it was like a hostel. So it's like costed me not a little amount of money.
126 [...]

127
128 And I went minus on the food and everything. I had to ask my friends to help me out
129 with food and everything. So like on a month, two and three, I moved into the
130 different accommodations, which I'm happy because I still live in there and their
131 administrators were very warm and welcoming.
132 [...]

133
134 Like they didn't discriminate me non-verbally nor through emails. They sorted out
135 everything professionally, like we arranged it, but it's not university accommodations.
136 So on that end, I really don't want to make a fuss out of it.
137 [...]

138
139 I'm just sharing like my integration phase at university. I simply faced a massive
140 johannes from university. And my actual initial courses and sessions, I skipped a lot
141 of them.
142 [...]

143
144 And well, I didn't particularly enjoy that I skipped these sessions, but I couldn't do
145 anything else. My personal being, my wellness was affected by many causes. Like I
146 had a very disrupted first semester. Like we had very important lectures. We had the
147 assessment presentations of what we need to do and everything. So my first
148 semester, I ended up with two debts in two different modules, which I reassessed
149 after the summer, honestly, the start of integrating into the academic life was very

150 difficult primarily because accommodations made it very difficult. And even my
151 academic faculty couldn't do anything. Like we said, we have no relation to
152 accommodations and with all the desire to help, they couldn't do anything.
153 [...]

Commented [AF10]: Lines 144-149: hardships due to academic pressure and residency / poor adaptation experience

154
155 So I was really confused about it as well. Like I applied to university and apparently
156 my student status doesn't have a single monolith system that would join all my
157 finances and everything together. So like I have a separate apparently account for
158 accommodations, or we don't even have any registry systems because we don't
159 know what rooms we have and all that. Like I had different debts and everything. So
160 academically, I had one system. Financially, I had other debts that I need to resolve
161 with university. So like with counselling systems, so I have all the different type of
162 systems. Also the sports centre, we have a different one. I was really confused why
163 they don't have one budget system because I have a single student number. So it's
164 like it's registered and recognised by my passport, by my old details. It's university
165 services. Why do they not recognise me? And with all the departments, all the
166 service providers of university I had relationship with, I always have to register,
167 provide new details, which made it very complicated for me.
168 [...]

Commented [AF11]: Lines 155-159: uncomfortable academic systems / requirement to use many systems to live academic life

Commented [AF12]: Lines 160-167: lack of single system to have satisfying experience

169
170 So I really hope university will fix it. Perhaps on that end, but back to the session. So
171 yeah, my lectures were actually, well, part of them were very nice. And particularly
172 the younger professors were super nice. I mean, there is like this older lecturer, the
173 guy and then older lady. They are nice as well. This particular professor who is very,
174 very, very passive racist, I think, because in our programme we had all
175 internationals, but he forced all Asian background to sit in specific side of class. Well,
176 our class was mixed with other nations. I don't know if it was targeted, but he
177 assessed and he said he would prefer to see us in this specific column. So it was
178 very interesting, but a week after I think someone reported it and then he never
179 repeated this thing ever again. But he did show his passive aggression, like
180 whenever we had presentations or anything, he was always stricter to Asian
181 students and lighter to people from other countries. Like we had German people, we
182 had folks from America, I think. I don't really chat with my course mates, so I don't
183 really know what was happening specifically when I was first arrived. So like we had
184 different students and everything, but yeah, that sort of experience that I had.
185 Obviously, if I had to tell about how I started making friends in university, which
186 particularly affected me for my first year, I didn't have any friends of sorts during my
187 first year at all, because I only participated half of my lectures.
188 [...]

Commented [AF13]: Lines 170-179: relationship with staff / experienced racism ?? / international student society

189
190 I only attended mandatory things in the university and the rest of the time I had to
191 work my ass off. I'm sorry, I'm cursing, but literally, I had to work my ass off to
192 integrate myself financially, to feel the security and manageability that I can live in
193 the university. So I think my first year did not turn out atypical like most students had.
194 [...]

Commented [AF14]: Lines 190-193: lack of time to enjoy university / attending mandatory things / survival

195
196 And I think getting visa process was less of a fuss than trying to manage to get my
197 hands together, trying to adapt in my first four months of university. Like even public
198 systems outside of Vilnius University aren't the easiest as well. Like I searched
199 Google and everything to find the stores that suit me.

Commented [AF15]: Lines 196-199: hardship while adapting to the country / comparison to administrative aspects / language and culture barriers

200 [...]
 201 So like there are a few stores, but they're expensive. I had to get used to European
 202 junk food. I had to live off very minimal wage just to manage to not to starve to death.
 203 I had no energy whatsoever. I think I had a suicidal line on second year of my
 204 studies because I was already giving up of how hard it is to manage it. But then
 205 February came to the end and I started counselling with a psychologist from
 206 community well-being division. And this somewhat helped me to get back on my
 207 track. After it I found sports centre. I asked my parents to budget and help me to get
 208 the membership for it because I didn't have funds as well at the start.
 209 [...]
 210
 211 And slowly my track and adaptation was coming back better. I had no whatsoever
 212 communication with my family as well during hard time because I didn't want to fail
 213 them. I didn't want to become the shame of my family to my father, to my mother,
 214 and my sisters.
 215
 216 So I stayed very silent and enclosed. I think my professors tried to help me and chat
 217 with me. Even my course representative tried to reach out to me but then they went
 218 toxic.
 219 [...]
 220
 221 But really my first year was messed up and fucked up. It was basically me getting in
 222 the morning preparing for the lectures. After the lectures that I could attend I was
 223 straightly going to work, working as a dishwasher. Then I changed my job to the boat
 224 driver which was slightly nicer. And keep in mind I was 25 at the time. Now I am 31.
 225 So I'm older than the average student could be. And now I'm actually having a better
 226 job and everything so I'm like resolved. But my first year was definitely very difficult.
 227 [...]
 228
 229 I didn't have time to enjoy libraries, gardens of university or whatever. I was trying to
 230 literally survive in this country. And the head start that I had in this country massively
 231 impacted how I feel. But thankfully university provides free crisis support and that
 232 helped me to stay morally sensible and not legitimately off myself from the roof or a
 233 bridge. Which is extremely sensitive I know but I'm just sharing what I had to go
 234 through. And really when year two started it I had already by the time a better job.
 235 I actually made two or three friends in university and I've met some people from
 236 international region in the old town by work settings. Which became my chat buddies
 237 as well. I think on top of all the difficulties actually I had to deal with I was also
 238 coming out from the closet if you get what I mean. So I started to realise that I didn't
 239 like girls. Well I do like them but not really and like well that did cause me a little
 240 ruckus. So that was something I was overcoming individually as well. I also actually
 241 had a lot of interpersonal affairs happening in my life. So like a little my first year was
 242 just messed up as shit could be. Then obviously things happen, life builds. But my
 243 experience as I said like we started the question with a specific particularly the
 244 question of how do I find my experience in this university. Well I enjoy it. I really do at
 245 least for now.
 246
 247 [...]
 248

Commented [AF16]: Lines 201-207: hardship living off a different food / expensive food / suicidal and mental health / support services at VU / coping strategy

Commented [AF17]: Lines 207-208: financial difficulties / desire to work on physical health / family support

Commented [AF18]: Lines 211-214: family pressure / lack of familial contact

Commented [AF19]: Lines 216-218: isolation / available support signs from the community

Commented [AF20]: Lines 221 – 226: swapping jobs / working to survive / difficulty to adapt with academia and practical work

Commented [AF21]: Lines 229-236: missed leisure time opportunity / survival / hardships / suicidal risk / support / bonding with relatable students

Commented [AF22]: Lines 237-241: discovery of individuality / relationships affect personal quality of life

249 But the first year was horrible and even though I had strong lectures, a very stupid
 250 examination system that I managed to pull off. Even though I had some debts
 251 academically and I had to reassess it. I still managed to do it. I enjoy my programme
 252 I mean now my master's programme so it became better. And if I had to evaluate my
 253 integration if I could exclude the year one of my life it's on strong seven. But if I talk
 254 particularly on my year one living and managing to survive. Like literal hunger games
 255 trying to survive myself and not get stabbed or shot in the back. I managed to pass it
 256 but I evaluate it as lower than two. It was really disgusting. I also seen and
 257 recognised the sides of me that I've never had before. My parents also don't even
 258 know that I had this experience to this day. So I hope you don't share it with them.
 259 But yeah on other sides. Well adapting to physical spaces of Vilnius University I'd
 260 say it was roughly interesting. Like I found some spaces in library I like to use.
 261 Like my faculty also have like student spaces which I use. So it kind of helps to
 262 maybe versatile my experience. So I'm definitely learning my environment the
 263 spaces I want to be the cosy the noisy less crowded areas once I learned it.
 264 Knew how to use it. That was the most positive impact that I had environmentally. I
 265 still haven't visited any of the botanic gardens that the university has.
 266 Nor did I visit the museums. It's not relevant to me. I did visit a few career events.
 267 [...]

Commented [AF23]: Lines 259-263: adapting through university spaces / learning loved spaces / academic quality of life

268
 269 Also some seminars from philosophy faculty which are quite interesting. I actually
 270 really liked one event I don't know who hosted in Vilnius University. It was actually
 271 about the city building and another event about men's well-being.
 272 [...]

273
 274 They still help me today because inflation is going stupidly high in Lithuania. And
 275 with my job I don't know if I can call it enjoyable. I think a few months passed in if
 276 prices continue to grow.
 277 [...]

278
 279 I fear that I won't have any money again and that is raising a lot of fear in me. So I
 280 could say financial security for me is something that I got used to by swapping my
 281 food dietries, my lifestyles, even the same cloth buying. I couldn't purchase like fancy
 282 goodies I really liked.
 283 [...]

Commented [AF24]: Lines 279-282: financial insecurity / adapting to live in host society / life risks

284
 285 I had to stick to very cheap humana clothes. Also I think one of the humana clothes
 286 gave me skin rash but not interesting to that. I think what also affected me and
 287 helped me to familiarise with the university was the it was kind of like a mentorship
 288 talks I think. Like I found the mentorship events and they kind of helped me but it
 289 was a year free of my life at university. So it was in the past the second year of
 290 studies only on third I heard about some kind of mentorship that helped me a lot. So
 291 I'm really grateful for that for sure.
 292 [...]

Commented [AF25]: Lines 285-288: health risks / surviving in modern society

Commented [AF26]: Lines 288-290: opportunity and experience / coping / strategies and career

293
 294 But my challenges already I think already as I mentioned one of them was definitely
 295 the accommodations. Obviously there is documentation for visa processing. The fact
 296 that I arrived late to the university but I managed to come to the university just before
 297 my session started but I missed integration weeks and all that.
 298 [...]

299 That most certainly have impacted me. I had some interesting relationships with my
 300 course mates, my lecturers as well like some good some bad but it's life so I
 301 understand it. I also was going through existential crisis as I was trying to survive it.
 302 [...]
 303

304 It had a lot of conditions that didn't help me to enjoy my life but morally forced me to
 305 enjoy it. I think the most the most heartbreaking thing that I've experienced can
 306 actually be the fact that my idea of university was never fulfilled. I really thought I can
 307 start good friendships, built international communication from year one but it only
 308 started from year two.
 309 [...]
 310

311 I've also joined a student association where I faced neglect and ignorance from
 312 Lithuanian part of association for students like they completely don't know what it
 313 means to have equal meetings, events for all course representatives, student
 314 associatives and really my experience talking about equality was low. I mean outside
 315 of university obviously there were different conflicts but I don't really want to talk
 316 about it. As you said you're interested in my experience for the university so I'll share
 317 particularly that.
 318 [...]
 319

320 Though I did experience bullying and harassment in Lithuania so I was beat up,
 321 sprayed with alcohol and some fuzzy liquids in the streets closer to the new years. It
 322 was my actually the first year as well so I was like going from the store in the old
 323 town and then there are like two guys that called up additional two folks and they
 324 surrounded me, beat me up, they broke all my groceries so I felt like shit completely.
 325 That's where I lost the meaning of my life because I was literally harassed and police
 326 didn't want to take or escalate this event very far because there were no cameras, no
 327 evidence captured even though I was physically beaten up.
 328 [...]
 329

330 So government part of Lithuania doesn't satisfy me as well. Even though I'm learning
 331 and I've learned basic Lithuanian I passed all the required exams and I can
 332 communicate with Lithuanians to basic level which is not good, it's not perfect but I
 333 think in my position I did a very good job and I'm still learning, I'm still trying to get
 334 used to this culture but I see that people outside of university are very evasive of
 335 people like me. So I stick to people like me most of the times when I'm not working
 336 and obviously it doesn't help me to feel included to the country nature because I find
 337 it quite comfortable and interesting to live in this setting but people make it very
 338 difficult like I had people scream at me like countless of times I just see this passive
 339 looks at me as if people don't want me here I have like interpersonal conflict as well
 340 as if people are talking behind my back and all of that so social networks and
 341 activities within and outside the university don't really help with that I did find people
 342 and activities that suit my liking but regardless of it, it is what it is I mean I didn't feel
 343 neither secure neither pleased life has happened there were many risks many
 344 negative impacts I felt disastrous I overcame it and now I feel strong I understand
 345 that this country is very very shadowed and I don't want to delve into it I'm here
 346 literally for experience for my degree I'm grateful for experience that happened to me
 347 actually it built me extremely strong but I would not wish any of my relatives to face
 348

Commented [AF27]: Lines 312-318:

Commented [AF28]: Lines 321-328: racism / physical abuse / loss of hope / harm / no support from legality

Commented [AF29]: Lines 331-336: learning host country language / neglect from host community outside of academia / outside pressure

Commented [AF30]: Lines 337-340: social pressure from host community

349 the things I had to go through I can stand up for myself finally I know people that I
350 can trust and call brothers but I still feel very very insecure to share the full story that
351 I had to go through because there are certain things that I just can't talk it's just too
352 difficult for me and as for the resource helps well as already mentioned yeah there is
353 like this community well-being division so I had my initial psychological support from
354 them it was the first time I was actually ever counselling with people I was really
355 irritated at first but then I started to see point of it and I gave it a hope and now I'm
356 here I then actually visited the library services so I had certain explanations of how
357 could I abuse data search bases which academically helped me to proof check
358 certain articles and find better references I've also met a doctoral student who
359 mentored me for like a few months so they helped me a lot to get into the field of
360 studies that I did I've also met certain fellow students of university who had more
361 play in my life and they helped me a lot as well obviously I had my family my mom
362 my dad my sisters I am without a doubt the most grateful person to them and I really
363 hope they can continue to be there for me even though I am not very chat wise
364 person I still enjoy it I've also made few connections actually from my work channels
365 what I did they really helped me to feel more included though there was no other
366 help supports that I had well yeah there was this career one at Vilnius University
367 outside obviously there were like additional programmes for Erasmus students so on
368 my year four I did take a little trip which helped me to see another part of the world
369 which was really nice I think I've also found a social platform where I could say I feel
370 appreciated in so it's the one that helped me to socialise with people more they want
371 more to open up and communicate it with people younger than me people that are
372 different ethnicity of me I want to avoid certain words and to use the words that
373 people expect in certain circumstances but from my end that's all that I can share
374 there were no other helplines or anything else that I could commit for the support at
375 the start of year I did have the help of international student office that's that's more or
376 less all that what I can recall
377 [...]

Commented [AF31]: Lines 349-352: desire to be independent and accepted / difficulty to open up

Commented [AF32]: Lines 355-358: support with library services / academic support

Commented [AF33]: Lines 360-363: individual support

Commented [AF34]: Lines 366-370: support through academic opportunities / Erasmus support

Appendix 3.7. Zinnia:

Shri Lanka, female, 24, bachelor level student, not religious

1 [...]
2 Okay, so to start off, I didn't have any intention of continuing my studies, mainly
3 because in my country, I think it's the same even now. We have a lot of protests
4 conducted by university students and a lot of strikes
5 and basically they're spending majority of their time doing things unrelated to
6 studies. So I didn't see a point of going to the university.
7
8 So I've been telling my parents since I was doing my O/Ls and A/Ls, I'm not going to
9 continue my studies, at least in my country. And my dad's friend, he is a tourist
10 agent, and his son and his cousin were planning to study abroad. And he mentioned
11 that this country, it's not very expensive, but they also have a high standard of
12 education.
13
14 And he just recommended it and my parents mentioned it to me. And I checked it
15 out, not with the intention of actually applying, but actually our first choice was
16 Poland. It was a university in Warsaw, but he said there were some issues with the
17 visas, getting the visa, so we shifted to Lithuania.
18
19 And I just checked out the University website, the official website, the courses they
20 had. And also I was quite interested in the pictures they had in the website. It was
21 very, let's say, Harry Potter themed.
22
23 I'm pretty sure it was the pictures from the library in the old campus. And I really liked
24 the vibe. And also the country in general, it's very green.
25
26 I'm not a big fan of the city vibe, the bustling. Also because I'm from a very, very
27 busy town, so I always wanted some calm environments. And I just really liked it.
28
29 I didn't have a big reason to apply. And I just applied just for this university. And I
30 was surprised I got the admission.
31
32 I did the interview and I was surprised. I was like, are you for real? I just applied for
33 it.
34
35 And yeah, it was the recommendation. But when it came to choosing the course, I
36 always liked accounting. I did commerce for my A-levels, my O-levels both.
37
38 And I was thinking I wasn't going to continue my studies, but I thought if I were
39 to, I'd always want to do something I really liked. Because I know if I start doing
40 something just to get a job, I'm just going to get sick of it. So I was looking through
41 the courses.
42
43 I saw accounting and audit. I was a bit sceptical because of the audit part, because I
44 had no idea about audit. But I thought, okay, why not?
45
46 It's accounting, so I'll just try it out. And I applied. I just chose my course.
47
48 And we had some issues when it came to the documentation for the visa. There
49 were a lot of delays. And the main issue was that we were kind of like the first few to
50 apply to Lithuania in general.

Commented [AF1]: Lines 23-30: decision to arrive / synergy with the environment

51
52 So even the government authorities, they had no information. They didn't know what
53 to do with the processes. So it was a bit of a trial and error process.
54
55 And yeah, we had to figure things out. There were a lot of trying and getting
56 appointments, getting rejected. And especially when it came to the
57 document legalizations, we got the documents.
58
59 And there was one time when we had to get the transcripts for the high school
60 certificates, for the O levels and A levels. And we used the official website. We got
61 the certificates.
62
63 But I think it was from the university that email said they need to send it
64 directly. So our authorities said, if you get it on hand, you can't send it. So we had to
65 apply again.
66
67 And we had to go for a courier. They got it and shipped it. It was a big process.
68
69 And I got my, well actually three of us applied. And I got my visa, the decision for the,
70 not the visa, for the TRP at first. And there was like two weeks until we were
71 planning to come here.
72
73 But one of us didn't get it until last week. So we didn't, we couldn't purchase the
74 tickets earlier. So we had to pay more.
75
76 There was a lot of, let's say unnecessary expenses, a lot of delays, a lot of, well
77 basically we didn't have any reference. We didn't have any information sources.
78 And yeah, I came here.
79
80 But even now, I don't remember the process of going through the airport, coming
81 here. It was my first time travelling abroad. And my agent did like everything through
82 the airport and applied university, basically everything.
83
84 I just came and after landing here, it finally hit me, oh my god, I'm here. And
85 I came to the accommodation. Let's say it wasn't the best first impression.
86
87 We didn't have any choice when it came to the roommates, the rooms. And I was, I
88 was late to coming here. I think I came on 28th August 2023.
89
90 And when I came here, I already had two roommates and I had, I just had a panic
91 during the first week. I was trying to figure out what am I going to do. It's like, it's so
92 overwhelming.
93
94 There's so many things to do. And I missed a lot of the orientation part because I
95 was late. And also, I had no idea about how to use the public transport here.
96
97 Because in my country, I never got the chance to use the trains or the
98 buses because my dad would bring us to anywhere we wanted. And it's pretty much
99 chaos in my country, the public transport. You need common sense to know where
100 to get off.

Commented [AF2]: Lines 80-92: paid support services to pass legal checks / integrations in accoms

101 We don't have like the digital apps to navigate or anything. Even if they were,
102 they don't work in reality. And yeah, I remember I came here and I was really
103 excited to go to this one event.
104
105
106 [...]
107 So if it came to clothing, well, when I came here, my suitcase was packed. I had my
108 help from my mom and it was majority of them was food because I didn't know what
109 they had here. I didn't know if I could buy certain things.
110
111 So I just brought a couple of snacks, some instant food and things I thought
112 I wouldn't be able to find here and some clothes. But in my country, we have like a
113 certain place that's very cold where we go for trips. So we had some clothes for the
114 cold season.
115
116 Also my mom's, my grandma, she's in Italy. She would send us some winter clothes,
117 not really for the winter here, but I would say for the autumn, it's good. And I brought
118 some of them, some of this, some of that.
119
120 And after coming here, I don't think food was really a big problem for me because in
121 my house, specifically my dad didn't really like eating outside. So my mom cooked at
122 home and I would help her. I just, I didn't really learn, but I saw what she was doing.
123
124 So I didn't have a problem cooking for myself. And I didn't grow up in like
125 the, let's say the traditional household where we had like the very traditional dishes
126 or upbringing. And we were quite fond of like the western dishes.
127
128 So it's quite easy to find here the things I can make. And I also got some information
129 from one of my friends and the thrift stores. It's not really a thing in my country, to be
130 honest, but I just went for, let's say a scavenger hunt and I got a really nice deal.
131
132 [...]
133 I would say I grew my whole life living with parents, even till I came here. And
134 there weren't a lot of times when I had like opportunities to meet people from
135 different countries or cultures to generally live with them. I would see them, but it's
136 not like I would go and talk to them or live with them.
137
138 But yeah, the dormitory life wasn't the best, but I met a lot of friends and I was quite
139 lucky. I got a room in the Erasmus building for some reason. So I meet new people
140 every single semester.
141
142 So I got friends from Turkey, France, Spain, Italy, Korea, China, Japan, a lot of
143 different countries. So it's quite fun when I see them. Sometimes we talk about things
144 and it's kind of interesting to see how different, let's say, living styles are.
145
146 Also the things we eat, how we communicate. And yeah, I got, I didn't, I honestly
147 would say I don't have any problems with managing things by myself. But after
148 coming here, I definitely got used to doing things by myself, especially when it came
149 to going out.
150

Commented [AF3]: Lines 116-126: cultural shock / family support / adapting to environment

Commented [AF4]: Lines 138-144: bonding at accommodations

151 Back in my country, I wouldn't go anywhere without my mom. I would drag her
152 everywhere I go. And after coming here, I didn't have a choice.

153
154 I had, there were places I had to go whether I liked it or not. And after some time, I
155 got used to it. And living with different people, managing issues with my roommates,
156 how to deal with them, not to create conflicts.

157
158 Well, yeah, I still have most of those Erasmus students. They already went back, but
159 I still keep in touch with them from time to time. So it's quite nice in that aspect.

160
161 [...]
162 So I would say it's quite different from my country. Even till high school, it's the same
163 even now, because my siblings, I'm the oldest, my siblings, they are still going to
164 school and my mum talks about things, how they do things in school. But the
165 interesting thing is in our schools, I went to the school that has like the local syllabus,
166 I would say, but we do have some international syllabus schools as well.

167
168 I'm not sure about them, but when it comes to local syllabus schools,
169 whether it's private or public, we have this interesting system where when the
170 teacher gives notes, you don't have the freedom to change it. So you just follow what
171 she says, even if you see that. There was one time where I saw that instead of a
172 paragraph, a table made more sense and I changed it, but the teacher questioned
173 me why I changed it, because I was supposed to follow her.

174
175 And the other thing is there's no digital technology involvement in studies. Even
176 when it comes to presentations, it's analogue. We do use papers, the
177 cardboards, the posters and after coming here, it's the first time I learned how to
178 make PowerPoint presentations. I was very scared when it came to, because I felt
179 like everyone knows how to do it and it's kind of, I wouldn't say it's my first time, I do
180 know how to use it, but I never really did a presentation using it. So when it came to
181 making the slides, I felt like I'm so behind others and things like that, but yeah, I kind
182 of got used to it. And the most important thing is because of that, I'm bringing off just
183 following what the teacher said.

Commented [AF5]: Lines 175-182: technological differences / hardships in academia / adaptation

184
185 After coming here, there's no notes. We decide what we want to take note of and
186 how to figure out how to take notes, how to not write everything down and just also
187 focus on the lectures, but also write down things that I want to know and how to
188 figure things out in general when it comes to school. But I'd say when it comes to
189 education, I'm quite happy with it.

190
191 I'm quite successful in that aspect and the lectures are definitely
192 different. There's, I'd say, they're not very, that level of, okay, I'm the
193 teacher, you're the student. There's sometimes, most of the lecturers, they are quite
194 friendly. They're very approachable and I kind of, I quite like that compared to the
195 school life from my country, I quite like the system here and the freedom they give
196 us. I was quite shocked when the professor said, lectures are optional.

197 You don't have to come if you don't want to.

Commented [AF6]: Lines 191-197: relationship with staff / cultural shock

198
199 And I think in my country, I haven't gone to the university, but I know that from some
200 people who went, it's quite mandatory to attend lectures, whether you like it or not.

201 And I was like, okay, there's a lot of freedom to students here. And so I felt like
202 everything is up to me.

203
204 So I decided that I want to study, I decided I want to do the schoolwork. It's also nice
205 and it's also sometimes scary when I think about I'm responsible for everything. But
206 I wouldn't say I had any problem when it comes to adapting to the university life
207 here.

208
209 I did everything, because even in school, I did everything by myself. I managed
210 things. I got help for sure from my tutors or my family, but majority of them I did by
211 myself. So I didn't really have any problem finding how to do things or getting used to
212 things. I'd say in that aspect, I was quite, quite equipped to adapt to the university life
213 here. And we had a WhatsApp group with classmates from my programme before
214 coming here for some reason. I don't know how they made it, but someone made
215 a group and introduced like, okay, this is my name, I'm coming to this course and
216 blah, blah, blah. And after coming here, I met them. So it wasn't the first time
217 meeting them in that sense. So it didn't feel like I'm meeting
218 strangers. So I immediately made some friends because of like, the common
219 hobbies were interesting. And yeah, I think the friends I made during the classes
220 helped a lot when it came to integrating to the university life here.

Commented [AF7]: Lines 213-219: social support platforms / bonding with other international students

221
222
223
224 [...]

225 I think so, I went there, it was very huge, I didn't think it was that big, and yeah, I just
226 did my volunteer work, I was just strolling around, it was nice, and I got lost, I couldn't
227 find the way out, and I spent like, I remember spending like 15 minutes trying to
228 figure out how to go out of this place, and it was, I'd say the fact that it was a park
229 made me less nervous, because it's this, it's this place to just walk around, so I was
230 just calling my mom, just showing her around, just walking everywhere, trying to find
231 the exit, and it was, it was really nice to see the plants at that time, and also the
232 flowers, and yeah, that, but when it comes to the gym, I would say, okay, I always
233 wanted to go to the gym, I didn't in my country, and I wanted to, after coming here, I
234 went with one of my friends to check it out, and when I went there, it was, I think the
235 main was, one was under construction, and there was like an alternative choice, so
236 we checked it out, but the times didn't really work well for me, and I didn't know, I can
237 start, but I can't do it on a regular basis, I would say go like two times a week, that's
238 not very nice if I'm actually trying to go to the gym, so I kind of gave up on that idea,
239 but I think later, if I have time, I will definitely check it out, but for now, not really.

Commented [AF8]: Lines 227-233: adapting with area / getting used to physical environment

240
241 [...]

242 I'd say not really the infrastructure, but more of how the system works. I find it a bit
243 strange sometimes, I see that we get notifications, especially when it comes to the
244 exam season, that these actions, behaviours are not accepted when it comes to,
245 especially cheating for example, but I myself see during every single semester,
246 during at least one exam, someone cheating, or sometimes it's just, I wouldn't say it's
247 the lecturer's fault or anything, but sometimes there's not enough supervision, I'd say
248 during the exam time itself sometimes, and there was this one situation, I remember
249 it was the last semester, we had an exam on computer in the exam room, and we
250 were sitting like next to each other, it's not like we didn't have extra space next to us,

251 and I was doing, it was an accounting class, so we had a lot of calculations, a lot of
 252 hard calculations, and I remember I spent 20 minutes working on a huge question,
 253 and after spending that time, I got the answer, because they only ask for the answer,
 254 I would just put the answer, and I saw that the girl next to me, she didn't do any
 255 calculations, but she was on the same question, and she was just writing the
 256 answers, and I was like, I found it quite strange, but I didn't really have the time to
 257 look around, because there's not enough time, especially when it comes to
 258 accounting, but I found it really strange that I just looked at her, and she was just
 259 fully looking at my computer, while she was just filling out, I was looking at her, and
 260 she didn't care, and she was just writing answers, I just quickly shifted to the next
 261 question, and it pissed me off so much, because I spent all of that time doing that
 262 question, and she's just copying my answers, and she didn't care, and the lecture
 263 was behind us, at the time, I don't know if she saw, or maybe she didn't really
 264 identify, but I just stood up, I just went to the lecture, and I said, look, so she's
 265 copying my answers, and she's literally looking at my computer, and the lecturer
 266 said, to be honest, there's nothing that she can really do at that time, and I can move
 267 to another computer, so I don't have time to just escalate the situation, I just went to
 268 another computer, and did my work, and I don't know if something happened, but
 269 because they don't really necessarily tell you if it got sold, or there were any
 270 punishment, or any actions, we don't know, but I sometimes find it strange a bit that
 271 the lacks of the, let's say, supervision in general during the exams, because it's not
 272 the first time I've seen it, many, many, many times, and I know that they send out
 273 notifications, if this behaviour is not accepted, and things like that, but that's from the
 274 exam perspective, but sometimes I also find it a bit frustrating, let's say, when it
 275 comes to scheduling sometimes, and it means that, not the general schedule,
 276 sometimes the lecturers add extra lectures, but the issue is we have individual
 277 classes, and I don't think the administration tracks every single student's classes,
 278 and sometimes they schedule a class, sometimes it clashes, and we have to choose
 279 which one to go to, and yeah, things like that, I find it quite annoying that there's no
 280 consultation with the students before they schedule those classes, I would
 281 appreciate it if they asked if the students have any engagements before that as well,
 282 some lecturers do, they ask us, we are going to have a class on this time, do you
 283 have any other classes, can you come, but in general they don't ask, they just
 284 schedule it, and yeah, that comes to scheduling.

285
 286 [...]

287 No, it's alright. So not many, to be honest, but there were some instances, one in
 288 particular, I still think about it from time to time, but it doesn't bother me right now. I
 289 got past this, like it's in the past, but there was this one time where I think it was for
 290 an year or maybe a year and a half after coming here, we had, you know, the thing is
 291 that when the lecturers say the lecture is optional, you see, let's say, 70-80% of the
 292 class at the beginning. And again, all of them during the exam time, but in the
 293 middle, there's like barely anyone. And I personally prefer going to every single
 294 class, because if I miss, I feel like I could have done that. I could have just gone
 295 to the class. If I stayed at home, what am I even doing? Like, I could have used that
 296 time for the class, even if I'm not actually doing a lot of things, just listen to the
 297 lecture. So I would go to the class, every single class, and my friends, my
 298 classmates, they all know that if they want to ask something about classes or
 299 professors say, most of them, they would contact me to just get some information.
 300

Commented [AF9]: Lines 251-256: being used by other students / victim of cheaters / not satisfying academic check

Commented [AF10]: Lines 258-263: role of professor to prevent unfair behaviour in academic background

Commented [AF11]: Lines 264-267: academic professors don't understand how to ensure positive treatment during hardships / lack of support from professors

Commented [AF12]: Lines 277-281: not ensured smooth option for individual classes / academic neglect to justify equal opportunities for students

301 I don't have a problem with that. Of course, I would help out, but there are some
302 students that I've identified in particular, because I'm in the full-time course. I see
303 how they not behave, but in a sense how they attend classes. They would come to
304 the classes at the beginning, and after that, they would just focus on, I'm not sure
305 what they're doing. Maybe they're working. Again, I don't see a problem, but the
306 issue is if they come to me to get some help, I would, of course, help out.
307 But there are some students who just come to me for the results. Like, if it's a
308 question, I would get the answer. They're not asking for me to help them solve it,
309 but they're just asking for the answer. And I hate just giving away the answer. Even
310 if it's my close friends, they know me well enough to not ask for the answer. They
311 would ask for my help. I would, of course, help out. And there was this one time. It
312 was a guy who contacted me that he wanted some...

Commented [AF13]: Lines 306-311: experiencing good will supporting others / difficulty to maintain equal boundaries with other students / victim of lazy students

314 that we had a practical for the ICT class. We had to upload that assignment. It was in
315 Excel, and it honestly took some time to just get everything done. And it was a
316 couple of hours before the submission deadline, and he contacted me saying, could
317 you please send me the answer to this activity, because I don't have time to solve it.
318 And I just didn't want to say no outright. And I just said, okay, so I can't give you the
319 answer, but I can help you out if you have any issues, like if you tell me
320 where you're stuck or where you need help. And after that, he said he's working on
321 something. He doesn't have time to do it. Just these once help him out. But I mean, I
322 understand you don't have time, but just giving away all my effort is not my problem
323 at that point. It's for you to figure out. And I outright said, I can help you out, solve it,
324 but I'm not comfortable giving you just my answer. It's the result of my effort. And
325 then he came on to me saying that, but it was on text, but still he said it's common
326 human decency just to help someone out and things like that. And he has all these
327 engagements and things like that, just help him out. But I also told him, I'm helping
328 out, it's my own initiative. I have the choice to make who I'm helping and who I'm not.
329 It might sound mean to a lot of people if I decide I'm helping out this person and I'm
330 not helping another person, but still I see how they behave or how they interact in
331 classes, their attendance, or let's say the dedication to schoolwork in general. Based
332 on that, I would kind of have some impressions of certain people that there are, of
333 course, my close friends who I know, they come to class, sometimes they miss
334 classes and I would be willing to help them out with anything. But there are some
335 others who are just out there to get not help, but just results because
336 they don't have time to focus on studies because they're doing other things. And
337 I don't see the need to just help them out.

Commented [AF14]: Lines 328-334: maintain strong backbone to withstand unfair student treatment / drawing clear academic boundaries to maintain oneself

338
339 [...]

340 I would say, I'm not sure how I assess it, but I don't feel emotionally bad when it
341 comes to university life, except for those like few hiccups here and there. But in
342 general, I don't feel any issues because I would say it comes mainly from my
343 success in the educational side itself. I would definitely feel different if I was failing
344 my classes or had a lot of issues with my classmates or anything. But as of my
345 current standing, there's not really any stressful situations. Of course, there are some
346 exam stress during the exam time when I overestimate myself and think I can finish
347 this syllabus during this time and I end up just cramming sometimes two or three
348 lessons the day before the exam. Except for that, from an emotional
349 perspective, it's manageable.
350

351 There's no any issues and it's quite weird that I felt the actual stress, the concept,
352 after coming to the university. Because in high school or even in middle school,
353 I didn't really feel this stress. And after coming, I didn't know it was stress at the
354 beginning. But I was talking with my friends. Oh my god, I have my overwhelm. I
355 have all these things to do. I was just ranting. I know I can just manage it. But I just
356 wanted some let it out somewhere. So I was talking with my friend and she asked
357 me, girl, are you stressed? And I didn't know. I told her, I don't know. She was like,
358 maybe you should just calm down, just take things one step at a time. So I know I
359 can manage it. But still, it just comes. But yeah, it's manageable. And I'd say it's in a
360 way preparing myself for the actual reality of the job market, let's say. Because in
361 school days, you're just following what the school wants, following what the teacher
362 says. You don't have any initiative for yourself. You actually take steps by yourself
363 after coming to the university. And of course, it's going to be
364 stressful. It's uncomfortable making certain decisions. But it is, in a way, a good
365 experience to build myself as a person to go to the real society. But yeah.

366
367 [...]

368 I would say when it comes to how I think about things, my mindset in general,
369 because, yeah, as I mentioned, I had to do things by myself. But if I was back home
370 and I think about I had to do things by myself, I would always get some input from
371 somewhere. And it kind of feels like too big of a responsibility.

372
373 But after coming here, knowing that I have to do certain things
374 and taking independent decisions, of course, I would still get input from my
375 family. But still, the majority of the decision itself was from my side. And yeah, it kind
376 of changed how I thought. I don't feel scared, but now I think about like the gains and
377 losses, let's say, pros and cons of my decision and weigh things out and things like
378 that. And also, I would say living environment in general, because back home, of
379 course, I was living with my parents. I didn't have a lot of responsibilities for my life
380 itself because a lot of it came from my parents' side.

381
382 [...]

383 I would say recently I really wanted to join this online programme coordinated by the
384 career counselling. They have like how to build your CV, how to make your LinkedIn
385 profile. But unfortunately, when I checked the times, it was right on time for a couple
386 of my classes for the whole week.

387
388 But I would say rather than those mentioned support systems, I don't know if it's
389 considered support, but I often contact my study coordinator if it comes to any issues
390 with my studies or if I want to ask something, even when I don't know where to
391 contact because I need to find someone, but I don't know where to go. I just text my
392 coordinator, I have this issue. And there were a couple of times they redirected me to
393 give me the emails and stuff like that.

394
395 You can contact this person. And I got a lot of a lot of interactions with when I first
396 came here when it came to visa issues. It was Person_1, I'm not sure about her last
397 name.

398
399 And yeah, a lot of contact because I had a lot of issues with my document
400 legalizations. Because I came here and I had to get my police certificate

Commented [AF15]: Lines 373-380: becoming more independent / new life skills / seeing and finding world on own

401 double legalised. But there was a big issue that after a long wait, I went to the
402 migration department and they said I'm missing a seal.
403
404 And I asked the authority from my country, they said they did it right. And after
405 coming here, I'm here already, what am I supposed to do? And the worst part was
406 that we had to book a time slot and it was still my time slot.
407
408 But the guy who was there that day, it was my bad luck. But he wouldn't answer any
409 questions. He wouldn't talk to me because if you are telling me it's missing a seal, I
410 should know where to get it.
411
412 Because you're just telling me I'm missing a seal. So what am I supposed to do? And
413 they wouldn't answer me.
414
415 They shut the window and go on with their work. And there were a couple of other
416 international students with me at that time for another slot. But they also said they
417 had the same issues when it came to like service in general.
418
419 So I contacted person1 a lot about that stuff. And I contacted the relevant embassy
420 and got that thing sorted. I think I visited person1 a lot during the first semester I
421 came here, especially for the legalisation stuff and also when it came to renewing
422 my TRP.
423
424 Yeah, I interacted a lot with the international relations department a lot. But if it
425 comes to education, the first I would go to is definitely the study coordinator
426 because I'm not the most well-versed when it comes to specifically where to go
427 because I know she would just redirect me to the relevant place.
428
429 [...]
430 Yeah. I honestly haven't really checked things out with the new website, but I
431 checked it out because I wanted some information about the scholarships, because I
432 was waiting for my incentive scholarship. But the funny thing was I clicked on the
433 link.
434
435 It was scholarships information. When did the link, it said page couldn't be found.
436
437 [...]
438
439

Commented [AF16]: Lines 424-427: academic support staff

Appendix 4. Thematic Analysis Tables

Appendix 4.1. Thematic table: superordinate & subordinate themes

Appendix 4.2. Thematic map

Appendix 4.1. Thematic table: superordinate & subordinate themes

Sociocultural Adaptation of South Asian Students at Vilnius University Community: Processes and Challenges		
Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes	Codes
Arrival & starter phase	Securing documentation & legalities	/.../ for the visa application, it was kind of easy for me because I had been to Europe twice before, so I was familiar with the application form. Though earlier I filled, I got Schengen visa because I was in Europe for a short period and for Lithuania I had to apply for a long-term visa. /.../ <i>Jasmine.</i>, lines 31-36
		/.../ I just did everything by myself, whatever documents I needed help with from my dad, like the bank statements and stuff, he just got them out for me and rest everything. Yeah, I reached out to people because I had to get some documents translated to Lithuanian language for the application. So yeah, that was the main problem. It's just that my visa came very late. It was hard to get an appointment. But once I did submit my passport, I got my visa and my passport back in like three days. So that was a good thing. And then I booked my ticket, I left. /.../ <i>Lily.</i>, lines 37-47
		/.../ army, he (father) served in Indian and British army or whatever it was called. So like perhaps they were doing background check on my family just before granting me this visa check. Because I do know like anything related to armies are always taking their own drafts /.../ <i>Peony.</i>, lines 70-73

Settling necessities for survival
(accommodations / food / clothing
etc.)

/.../ I had some of my seniors who's been to VU a couple of years back, they told me they received their first instalment after, I think, two or three weeks after reaching governance. So I was already prepared. I had, I already had money, my personal money with me. So, but it didn't take much time. I think within 10 days, I received the fund. So it wasn't really difficult for me /.../ *Jasmine.*, line 47-51

/.../ Initially, I thought of dormitories. But then, back then, four years ago, the dormitory that's near the medical faculty, I think it was only for Lithuanian students. So I could not get a spot over there. And then everyone, like the university dormitory in charge, whatever, they just kept suggesting Sauletekis dormitory for me. And I had not heard a lot of good things or any nice thing to be very frank. Because first thing, it's very far from the medical faculty. And it's kind of in the middle of nowhere. And from what I've heard, the situation there is not good. Like there are rats in the kitchen, and you know, a lot of drunk people. And it's safe, but overall, not the best. And I live alone. So my safety, my well being is all in my hands. So I was like, no. So I moved to a single studio, one bedroom apartment type situation. Which again, was expensive. /.../ *Lily.*, lines 53-64

/.../ So if it came to clothing, well, when I came here, my suitcase was packed. I had my help from my mom and it was majority of them was food because I didn't know what they had here. I didn't know if I could buy certain things. So I just brought a couple of snacks, some instant food and things I thought I wouldn't be able to find here and some clothes. But in my country, we have like a certain place that's very cold where we go for trips. So we had some clothes for the cold season. Also my mom's, my grandma, she's in Italy. She would send us some winter clothes, not really for the winter here, but I would say for the autumn, it's good. And I brought some of them, some of this, some of that.
/.../ Zinnia., lines 107-126

/.../ about the clothing uh when we got here it was like a cultural shock or something that like stores like Maxima I guess yeah Maxima has like clothes in it like it's a grocery store why there are clothes in there so it was we were like shocked for us sometimes but I came to know that from my university uh colleagues like the locals that there is a place called Humana where you can find the cheap clothes because at the time when we were here like the first year we usually like convert our currency to this currency like if there is like one euro in my country one euro is equal to 320 or 330 currency yeah wow so it's like when you're spending in euros first year is like oh my god that's so expensive we should skip it */.../ Tulip., lines 115-123*

Initial start in academic life
(communication / first lectures /
integration to modules and
university etc.)

/.../ So I attended two, three lectures and then I just decided not to go because I didn't think it would be because I at my PhD level, I want something more challenging. So I decided I decided not to go. So then I was left with only Person_3's course. And it was really, really interesting, maybe also because I have never studied anthropology before and everything was new to me. So literally, maybe it could be the basic things, but that was challenging and interesting, new to me. And I had only classes on Friday and remaining days, I would I was still writing my thesis. /.../ *Jasmine.*, lines 297-305

/.../ in the first semester, since I was one month late and the first month of university, you learned a lot of the major subjects like anatomy histology. Um, and I was lucky to have a professor in anatomy. She was very nice. And I told her that, you know, I'm a month late. So I had already missed like three, four tests, like three, four colloquiums. She was like, it's okay. You can do these first and then we can move on. And, uh, she helped me through everything in anatomy. But, uh, again, there were a few professors who were not necessarily rude, but also not super like welcoming whatsoever. /.../ *Lily.*, lines 299-315

/.../ But it was really fun during the lectures All the professors were really helpful. And they were talking just like my friends. Because in my country, professors are like you talking to the gods. So it's a different, even a different language they speak. So it was really fun talking to them, exchanging the ideas. /.../ *Dandelion.*, lines 18-23

Relationship with host academia (environment, staff & peers)	Bonding with peers / fellow residents / staff	/.../ In my class, it was kind of okay. Inside the room, we were talking. I was like a scared chicken because it's like a completely different society. Whatever classes I have had in my life before, I was almost silent because I was scared of the judgement. What if I say something stupid? Because if I say something stupid, I will be judged. And here, I said so many stupid things. I mean, gradually I started opening up. First day of my class, I was silent, but then we started having conversation and then I had a sudden stupid idea about the fact and I just said it to the professor and they appreciated the idea. /.../ <i>Dandelion.</i>, lines 89-99 /.../ I had no whatsoever communication with my family as well during hard time because I didn't want to fail them. I didn't want to become the shame of my family to my father, to my mother, and my sisters. So I stayed very silent and enclosed. I think my professors tried to help me and chat with me. Even my course representative tried to reach out to me /.../ <i>Peony.</i>, lines 211-218 /.../ we had a WhatsApp group with classmates from my programme before coming here for some reason. I don't know how they made it, but someone made a group and introduced like, okay, this is my name, I'm coming to this course and blah, blah, blah. And after coming here, I met them. So it wasn't the first time meeting them in that sense. So it didn't feel like I'm meeting strangers. So I immediately made some friends because of like, the common hobbies were interesting. /.../ <i>Zinnia.</i>, lines 213-219 /.../ if i have any kind of challenges i have talked to the administration in the university or if i didn't get a chance to directly communicate i usually talk to the class representative person who has direct connection with the coordinators of or maybe the head of studies in our faculty /.../ <i>Lily.</i>, lines 517-521
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Adapting with academic studies /.../ , writing structures, where the things, are coming from, basic, core, basic things, you can probably, YouTube, find in YouTube, some guy, explaining this stuff, but it's a bit, destructive, when the instructor, is like different, or I don't, know the person, or it's like, they are trying, to explain something, that I don't need, so, for this course, probably, what can I say, okay, take critical discourse, analysis, which was really, weird for me, because, I had no idea, what's going on in here, so, we are using terms, academic term /.../ *Dandelion.*, lines 428-434

/.../ I watch all my (remote) lectures on 2x uh and it's way faster and I understand the same amount uh uh the lectures I I don't like that they're online um it's not like good for our health and we don't observe anything uh and then it's just like you attend it and you can't do anything while you're attending a lecture so you have to pay attention but nothing is going in your brain so then you have to watch it again /.../ *Lotus.*, lines 136-141

/.../ I skipped these sessions, but I couldn't do anything else. My personal being, my wellness was affected by many causes. Like I had a very disrupted first semester. Like we had very important lectures. We had the assessment presentations of what we need to do and everything. So my first semester, I ended up with two debts in two different modules, which I reassessed after the summer, honestly, the start of integrating into the academic life was very difficult primarily because accommodations made it very difficult. /.../ *Peony.*, lines 144-150

Spaces within academia
(libraries / gardens etc.)

/.../ issue was probably with accommodations. So while academic side of university confirmed and accepted me with no questions, accommodations had withdrawn my application for the residence stay /.../ And well, I didn't particularly enjoy that I skipped these sessions, but I couldn't do anything else. My personal being, my wellness was affected by many causes. Like I had a very disrupted first semester. Like we had very important lectures. We had the assessment presentations of what we need to do and everything. So my first semester, I ended up with two debts in two different modules, which I reassessed after the summer, honestly, the start of integrating into the academic life was very difficult primarily because accommodations made it very difficult. And even my academic faculty couldn't do anything. /.../ Peony., lines 76-79 & 144-149

/.../ There's like a cabin place. It's like the confession room in the church. It's so nice. If you're sitting there, nobody can see you properly, and you can have your time. So I love that place as well. I just go there, read, and it's the best place for reading, even better than the library. Yeah, so I like the place. But the timing was a bit weird for me. /.../ *Dandelion.*, lines 154-161

/.../ so I was at the medicine faculty for the whole first year and I actually really like the medicine faculty it's really cosy and it's got good equipment and it's like all updated and everything a lift would be nice but but it's fine we I remember explicitly we had this histology class which was the prettiest it was full of like plants which I love all of the all of the faculties are full of plants and I remember the corridor for histology is full of skulls have you been there yeah oh it's amazing I was so I was so fascinated by it it's like the whole thing it's like from ceiling to floor with the skulls and I was like wow this is beautiful yeah /.../ *Lotus.*, lines 113-120

**Relationship with host
community outside
academia (facilities &
people)**

Positive day to day experiences

/.../ So yeah, everything, looking for the best thing which suits my taste. It was a lot of trial and error. Also, while paying, the self-service was new to me. I learned, made a lot of mistakes, got scolded by so many Maxima ladies. /. They were kind, they taught me, but language was a barrier because I had no idea, even though I didn't know Spite. I had to learn, that wasn't me, but still, there was a language barrier. So yeah, it was just learning step by step. Now I'm a bit comfortable. Now if someone says go to another country, I'll be like, nah, I love it here. /.../ *Dandelion.*, lines 222-231

/.../ I don't have a ritual, anything of that sort. But I started doing a ritual from Lithuania. Oh, I started I started drinking coffee, which I never did before, even though I come from a place where we we make coffee like at my home, we had a coffee tree and my grandmother used to make coffee powder out of it. But I but at my home, nobody drinks coffee. /.../ I see that literally everybody is crazy for coffee when they don't even have coffee at Lithuania in Europe. They don't produce coffee in Europe, but how can they? I was used to wonder how can they be so crazy over coffee when what if they what if we decide not to export coffee and then all Lithuanians will be dead within a week or two. So I started drinking coffee there. I have because I have seen people because you people have such a coffee culture. I got influenced now every every day in the morning I drink coffee. I start my day with the coffee. /.../ *Jasmine.*, lines 590-604

Negative day to day
experiences

/.../ Though I did experience bullying and harassment in Lithuania so I was beat up, sprayed with alcohol and some fuzzy liquids in the streets closer to the new years. It was my actually the first year as well so I was like going from the store in the old town and then there are like two guys that called up additional two folks and they surrounded me, beat me up, they broke all my groceries so I felt like shit completely. That's where I lost the meaning of my life because I was literally harassed and police didn't want to take or escalate this event very far because there were no cameras, no evidence captured even though I was physically beaten up. /.../ *Peony*, lines 321-328

/.../ Because even in Facebook, there are a lot of posts about foreign people in old town and the street photography. And the comments are very, very bad. People are being like, go back to your country. Don't bring your culture to our culture. Okay. If you don't want all of that, then don't call us. Don't be like, okay, we have opportunities for you. We have jobs for you because we're not coming here to put our culture in your country. We're not coming here to colonise your country whatsoever. We're coming here because we're just trying to find a way to live. We're just coming here for education, for work, for such things to sustain ourselves. So you have to make them feel safe. You have to send the message to the Lithuanian people that they are not all bad people. Not all coloured people are racist. They're not all gangsters. For example, you see a man with a beard. He's not going to be a terrorist automatically. He's just a man with a beard. You can't see a black person and immediately think like, okay, maybe he's selling drugs or something. /.../ *Lily*, lines 611-635

.../ if you don't know I'm muslim so it's uh pretty much hard for us to find halal options because everything even not recently but like few months ago I came to know that some of the cakes contain gelatin or maybe they mix alcohol in it which was like a really shocking like what what am I eating non-halal food from from like two years so now we have to like translate it before we bought it but it was really hard for us to like find so much halal options .../ *Tulip.*, lines 126-139

.../ told me that some Indians when they move to Europe, they discriminate among the new Indians who are coming. So what she told me that it's it's kind of a trend. She knows patterns observed among these Indian immigrants in Europe that after living there for a while, they think that they are superior than the new Indians coming. So she told me that could be the reason, but I don't really know what is the reason. .../ *Jasmine.*, lines 270-78

Individual changes & challenges during adaptation	Discovery of new individual skills	
		.../ Like I started praying more, I was focussing on myself. So I took it on myself as like, okay, you know, I'm growing. I'm transitioning into adulthood. .../ As an individual, before I left for university, I was extremely extroverted. I was very, very free-spirited. My parents are very liberal. And when I moved to university, I made the decision that I want to put the hijab on. And my mom was like, are you sure? Do you want to do this? You know what it means? Like, you're going to have to wear a hijab in public. People will know you're Muslim. My dad was also like, you know, what if you get hate crime because people will try to do something. .../ <i>Lily.</i> , lines 235-236 & 269-279

/.../ like had to learn to be a lot more independent because my class is not very close knit even though we're like a small batch like we're less than 30 people and in school it was totally different because we were like I mean I had all of my friends there it's basically like us experiencing life together and at university it's totally different because you first come in you don't know these people and then you have all these experiences together /.../ *Lotus.*, lines 336-341

/.../ that I think I become more polite after leaving Lithuania. Because since I was in India all my life, it's not in our culture to say thank you to us, anybody, even not even our family member, only in extreme, some just very rare occasion you said thank you to a person in India. And if you say thank you to a family member, it's like kind of offensive here, because you don't do that to a very close person. Saying thank you, that seems really formal. So I feel like after living in Lithuania, I have learned to become more formal and polite, especially when I go out in public place. So last week my family was here. So I went out with my nephew and after getting out of the cab, I said thank you to the cab driver. And my nephew asked me, why are we saying thank you to everybody? So he was so shocked. Then I realised, oh yeah, I do say thank you to everybody. It's like now it's become a habit, which I cannot get out of my system, that I just say thank you to any service I get, be it a cab or maybe at a restaurant, anywhere, I just say thank you. /.../ *Jasmine.*, lines 502-519

Conflicts within academia
(peers & system)

/.../ I don't know shit, because my education system is completely different. I literally struggled to complete the basic courses because there's a leap I took. If I took the bachelors in my country and bachelors in here, it would be aligned, and then I had to take the master's. Imagine skipping your bachelor's. That was me. I had no idea how education system works here, how you need to read papers, what things exist, how phonetic things exist. I mean, I had a basic idea, very basic. I had a course. That's why I was able to enrol, but what they teach there is not even related. /.../ It was I was depressed and I somehow found Person_1 and that saved my life /.../ Yeah, probably I had the first appointment with Person_2 for by the system but Person_1 called me because I wrote something really disturbing and she was really worried probably She was so she called me like one hour after I submitted it and she was like, do you want a consultation tomorrow /.../ *Dandelion.*, lines 113-116, 505 & 509-512

/.../ And when it comes to VUSA, the students association, the students representation, everything in the first year, second year, third year, it was in Lithuanian. So it's hard for international students to get integrated in such societies and such associations. And even if there is an event going on, like for example, there's an event and I'm really interested, I want to go, but it's in Lithuanian. So even if I do go, because I've been to events and I would just have my Google translate on my phone and record it, record the voices that they're speaking and then have it translated and then read, which is an inconvenience for me and also inconvenience to the people over there, because you can see that a person who doesn't understand the language is sitting there and they're trying to integrate. You know, it gets exhausting. Like even though we are trying from our side, what are you guys doing to make us feel integrated? Like, you know, like you, like if you cannot accommodate international students, don't call us. And if you want to, if you want to have international students, make sure that you have at least the basic stuff for us to feel integrated. That's all I can say. /.../ *Lily.*, lines 460-478

/.../ (remote classes) you shouldn't admit people if you can't accommodate them no one asks you to accommodate like thousands of students you can keep it you can keep it small because it would increase the quality of education also every time I go to the faculty it's never full so what so how are the classrooms full because like my Lithuanian class or actually every single one of my class there's half the class is empty /.../ *Lotus.*, 150-155

/.../ I was doing, it was an accounting class, so we had a lot of calculations, a lot of hard calculations, and I remember I spent 20 minutes working on a huge question, and after spending that time, I got the answer, because they only ask for the answer, I would just put the answer, and I saw that the girl next to me, she didn't do any calculations, but she was on the same question, and she was just writing the answers, and I was like, I found it quite strange /.../ , I just went to the lecture, and I said, look, so she's copying my answers, and she's literally looking at my computer, and the lecturer said, to be honest, there's nothing that she can really do at that time, and I can move to another computer, so I don't have time to just escalate the situation /.../ *Zinia., lines 251-256 & 264-267*

Balance between work and academic life

/.../ but I remember in my second semester or the third semester I got a job at the company and I didn't have time to like talk to them because it's like a not a ritual but it's like after the class there's like 15 minute break or there's no class we usually go out and stand across the street and talk randomly about stuff like for example um classes or about the day about the plans about hanging out or something but I didn't have time to talk to them /.../ say I don't have time of these things because as I mentioned I am working also 30 hours so after my after my classes I usually go to work and I usually go home by nine or something 9 30 so I just eat and sleep and do the same thing which is that's why I was like struggling with uh with my mental health /.../ *Tupilp., lines 313-318 & 395-398*

/.../ I only attended mandatory things in the university and the rest of the time I had to work my ass off. I'm sorry, I'm cursing, but literally, I had to work my ass off to integrate myself financially, to feel the security and manageability that I can live in the university. So I think my first year did not turn out atypical like most students had. /.../ *Peony., lines 190-193*

Support & available services	Family, relatives & close ones	/.../ the thing I strongly believe is that my mom's prayers protect me, no matter where I am. I know someone, my mom or dad, someone's praying for me to be safe and that's working /.../ <i>Lily.</i>, lines 683-685 /.../ I have told Person_1 that Person_3 is like a father figure to me. And she can't believe this. She's like Person_3. Because, you know, for the I know for everybody, he's like a very funny person, a funny, funny person. But I don't know. I for to me, he's like a father figure. So I think to him also, I'm like I'm like a daughter /.../ <i>Jasmine.</i>, lines 378-383
	Academic support at university	/.../ Well adapting to physical spaces of Vilnius University I'd say it was roughly interesting. Like I found some spaces in library I like to use. Like my faculty also have like student spaces which I use. So it kind of helps to maybe versatile my experience. So I'm definitely learning my environment the spaces I want to be the cosy the noisy less crowded areas once I learned it. /.../ I started to see point of it and I gave it a hope and now I'm here I then actually visited the library services so I had certain explanations of how could I abuse data search bases which academically helped me to proof check certain articles /.../ <i>Peony.</i>, lines 259-263 & 355-358 /.../ if i have any kind of challenges i have talked to the administration in the university or if i didn't get a chance to directly communicate i usually talk to the class representative person who has direct connection with the coordinators of or maybe the head of studies in our faculty /.../ <i>Lily.</i>, lines 517-521

Non-academic support at university

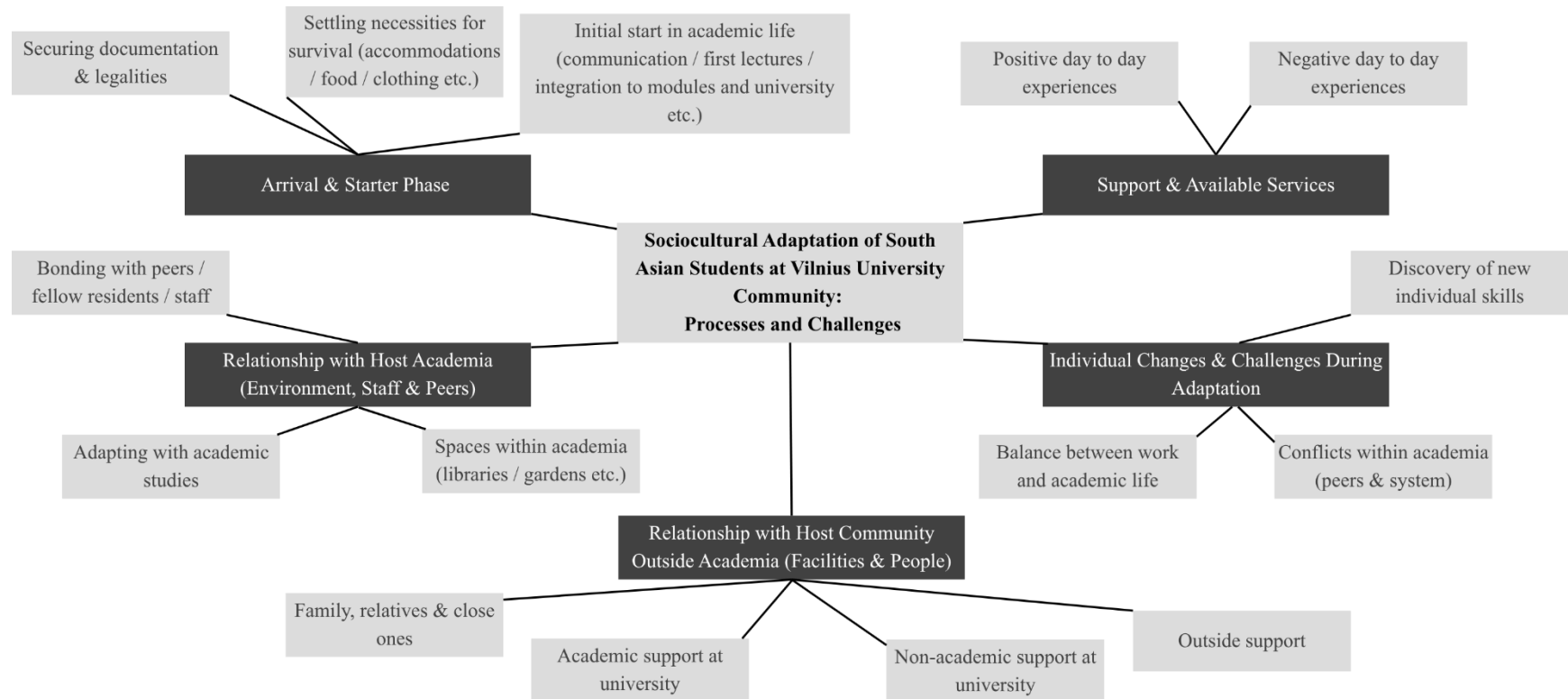
/.../ there was this career one at Vilnius University outside obviously there were like additional programmes for Erasmus students so on my year four I did take a little trip which helped me to see another part of the world which was really nice I think I've also found a social platform where I could say I feel appreciated in so it's the one that helped me to socialise with people more /.../ Peony., lines 366-370

/.../ But thankfully university provides free crisis support and that helped me to stay morally sensible and not legitimately off myself from the roof or a bridge. /.../ Peony., lines 230-232

Outside support

/.../ the Sisters Group in Vilnius, that was a huge help. I definitely don't know what I would have done without them. I would probably have been very lonely as well because it helped me improve myself personally, spiritually, focus a bit more on what, I don't know if I can say this, but what Islam teaches you, um, like it's a religion of discipline. You know, sometimes you don't want to follow, sometimes you feel like you're alone and you feel that when you're in a country all alone. So that was a really, um, huge strength because, you know, it's like, you're not alone. We're here for you. /.../ Lily., lines 221-230

Appendix 4.2. Thematic map



Filatov Alan

Pietų Azijos studentų(-ų) sociokultūrinė adaptacija Vilniaus universiteto bendruomenėje: procesai ir iššūkiai / Alan Filatov, Šiuolaikinės Azijos studijų programos studentas; mokslinė vadovė doc. dr. K. Šliavaite; Vilniaus universitetas. Azijos ir transkultūrinių studijų institutas. – Vilnius, 2026. – 78 lap.
Sociokultūrinė adaptacija, Pietų Azijos studentai, tematinė analizė, kokybinis tyrimas

Magistro darbe tiriama Pietų Azijos studentų(-ų) adaptacijos procesai ir sociokultūriniai iššūkiai Vilniaus Universiteto bendruomenėje. Tikslas šiame darbe, atpažinti svarbiausius adaptacijos etapus ir sociokultūrinius iššūkius, kurie formuoja studentų(-ų) integraciją į priimančią akademinę erdvę. Numatyti keturi darbo uždaviniai: įvertinti teorines prieigas (Berry, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990; Wilson, 2011), pagrindžiančias sociokultūrinius iššūkius Europos universitetų aplinkose; išnagrinėti iššūkius susijusius su situacijomis reikalaujančiomis tarpkultūrinių kompetencijų su studentėmis (-ais), darbuotojomis(-ais) ir studijų sistema; įvertinti kaupingo mechanizmus ir paramos sistemas, pasiekiamas institucijoje ir bendruomenės lygmenyse. Tyrimo empirinė dalis atliko septynių pusiau struktūruotų interviu teminę analizę. Remiantis surinktais duomenimis, tyrimas atskleidė trys adaptacijos etapus: atvykimo ir pradžios fazę, santykių kūrimo fazę, individualaus prisitaikymo fazę. Esminiai iššūkiai aprėpia biurokratinės kliūtis, tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos sunkumus, kalbinę atskirtį nuo studentų(-ų) gyvenimo ir užimtumo spaudimą, ribojantį socialinį įsitraukimą. Vilniaus universitetas yra pažengęs paramos sistemose, tačiau, tyrimo dalyvių duomenis pažymi trūkumus prieinamumo, kalbinio pritaikymo ir institucinio ryšio srityse. Darbo rezultatai gali pasitarnauti lyginamiesiems tyrimams apie adaptacijos patirtis skirtingose Europos universitetuose ir ateities ilgalaikiams tyrimams, sekantiems apčiuopti Pietų Azijos studentų (-ų) adaptacijos esmę laiko perspektyvoje.