

Helena Eijsberg

SOCIAL INTEGRATION TO FIGHT BACK THE “BRAIN DRAIN”

Case Kokkola

SOCIAL INTEGRATION TO FIGHT BACK THE “BRAIN DRAIN”

Case Kokkola

Helena Eijsberg
Thesis
Spring 2022
Master's Degree Programme in
Education Entrepreneurship
Oulu University of Applied Sciences

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the participation and valuable input of the interviewees. I thank you once again for taking the time to share your stories. I wish you all the best on your paths, wherever they may lead. I am grateful to the workshop participants for their ideas and enthusiasm for building a better tomorrow.

I wish to show my appreciation to my close family, Roope and Viktor, for their support and understanding throughout the research and writing process. A warm thank you to Heidi for reading and reviewing my work.

I would like to thank Satu Vihtari, from the Talent Coastline Employment project, for the wise discussions and support throughout this research. I would like to extend my special thanks to the City of Kokkola for allowing me to address the topic of international students during my speech at the International Kokkola Day in May 2022.

Last, but not least, the assistance and guidance of Pablo Santur were greatly appreciated, Kiitos! A warm thank you to all the MEEs students and alumni for their mutual support and assistance. May this thesis be a reminder that we work best by working together.

"None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful." – Mother Teresa

Helena Eijsberg,
Kokkola May 2022

ABSTRACT

Oulu University of Applied Sciences
Master's Degree Programme in Education Entrepreneurship

Author(s): Helena Eijsberg

Title of the thesis: Social integration to help fight the brain drain

Thesis examiner(s): Pablo Santur

Term and year of thesis completion: Spring 2022

Pages: 83 + 2 appendices

Education-based migration flows are shifting students from their home countries to host countries. Considering the increasing labour shortage, many countries are turning to these skilled immigrants to help counter their decreasing population by remaining in their host countries for an extended period to help boost the economy and gain an innovative advantage.

In the case of Finland, where immigration is still a recent phenomenon, the government has been developing its legislation to attract and better retain these international talents. However, studies show that when deciding to remain in a country, international graduates consider a wide range of factors: practical, financial, and personal matters.

This study is focusing on the city of Kokkola, home to over half a thousand international students. Whilst the city welcomes hundreds of students each year, not many remain in the area after graduation. Various projects are currently focusing on supporting students to get into contact with working life and find work easier.

This research focuses on social integration, as many activities are being led concerning more practical matters and connections to working life. It has an inductive approach; rather than directly focusing on solutions, this research aims at asking how the international students are experiencing any feeling of belonging to the area, to understand how they value social integration overall. How do they experience their place in Kokkola, and what elements influence their feeling integrated – or not? What elements and stakeholders could help?

The respondents provided three key elements to enhance integration: mindset, people, and language. By focusing on and supporting these elements, social integration could be smoother and support further connections with working life, among others, and thus, help retain these talents in Kokkola or Finland. As integration is a two-way street, local stakeholders, such as the municipality, and private and public organizations, could coordinate their actions to support the process of social integration and help international students take a step from going global to local.

Keywords: International students, social integration, HEI, migration, brain drain, Kokkola

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	6
2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	9
2.1	The global market of education.....	9
2.2	Migration to Finland.....	10
2.3	International students throughout Finland.....	12
2.4	A national issue in Finland – attracting and retaining international talent.....	14
2.4.1	Current situation in Finland.....	15
2.4.2	Integration in the legislation.....	16
2.4.3	All hands on deck ?.....	19
2.5	From host country to home country.....	23
2.5.1	Integration in brief and why it matters.....	23
2.5.2	Integration is multi-layered and multifaced.....	24
2.5.3	International students, a different type of migrant group.....	25
2.6	Scope and objectives of the study.....	27
3	METHODOLOGY.....	28
3.1	Research context and design.....	28
3.2	First phase: the interviews.....	29
3.2.1	Qualitative research with an exploratory approach.....	29
3.2.2	Data collection: semi-structured interviews.....	30
3.2.3	Data analysis: thematic analysis.....	32
3.2.4	Ethical framework.....	33
3.3	Second phase: Ideation of possible solutions.....	34
3.3.1	Adapted service-design.....	34
3.3.2	Journey maps.....	35
3.3.3	Ideation workshop.....	36
4	RESULTS: THE INTERVIEWS.....	40
4.1	Elements that the social integration process from the viewpoint of the students.....	40
4.1.1	Expectations when selecting Finland.....	40
4.1.2	The practical arrival stage and settling down.....	42
4.1.3	A question of mindset.....	44

4.1.4	The social aspect of settling down: social integration	46
4.1.5	The local language	48
4.1.6	The student ecosystem.....	50
4.1.7	The bottleneck: financial worries and work	52
4.1.8	Looking ahead	53
4.2	<i>How to support the social integration process?</i>	56
4.2.1	Support connections	56
4.2.2	More support for the new international inhabitants	58
4.2.3	Develop the information available	60
5	RESULTS: THE WORKSHOP	63
5.1	<i>The journey maps</i>	63
5.1.1	Student A.....	63
5.1.2	Student B.....	64
5.1.3	Student C.....	64
5.2	<i>The workshop solutions</i>	64
5.2.1	Finding the right channels to suggest the connection with language studies	64
5.2.2	Voluntary service for social integration in local society	65
6	DISCUSSION	66
7	CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS	69
	REFERENCES	74
	APPENDICES.....	84

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the recent years, Finland has gained tremendous traction in the field of education, it is recognized worldwide not only as the happiest country in the world, but also as having the best educational system (Education, 2020). Despite the recent global pandemic, Finland has been attracting and welcoming an increasing amount of international degree students to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Yle, 2022). Thus, in 2021 there were over 20,000 international students enrolled in HEIs in Finland, representing over the 6,3% of the 325,000 students in the country. (Study in Finland, 2022; Statistics Finland 2022a, 2022b).

At the same time, there is a growing lack of skilled labour force which is already starting to negatively affect the economic growth in numerous countries, such as in Finland. As explained by the Ministry of Interior (n.d.), the competition is fierce to both attract and retain global labour and talents to Finland in order to upkeep the country growth and competitiveness, as well as its welfare society. As an example, the Ostrobothnia Chamber of Commerce reported that 42% of companies in the service industry suffered from a lack of workforce hindering their growth (Ostrobothnia Chamber of Commerce, 2022). Policy makers have turned their attention to migrants to help counterattack the labour shortage and are creating policies to help skilled workers and key players. International students are standing out as excellent candidates to address the labour deficit as they have experience from the country in question and a degree recognized by the local authorities (The Expert Council on Integration and Migration, 2012, p.50).

The Finnish Government (2021b) is now aiming at retaining 75% of internationals graduating from Finnish HEIs to work in Finland upon graduation by 2030. There is therefore a clear will to retain talent at national level, and a need for workforce throughout the country to keep the country afloat and be able to thrive. The government set up a road map aiming at improving the attractiveness of the country on the global education scene. (Finnish Government, 2021b). To develop and retain international talent in Finland, many projects are currently being organized to promote the economic and structural integration of internationals in Finland, by supporting the professional opportunities of internationals and their hiring. Encouraging international graduates to remain in their host country for longer than their studies could well be a way to offset the declining population and answer to the lack of skilled workforce (ICEF Monitor, 2013).

Unfortunately for their host countries, all students do not plan on staying in their country of study after graduation; this trend is described as a “brain drain” (European Students’ Union, 2021, p.4). Various factors come into play when decided to remain or not in the country. In a recent study in the Netherlands, Funk and Walenkamp (2013) pointed out that students take into considerations many factors when thinking about staying in a country: job opportunities, legal matters, personal relationships, socio-cultural activities, or safety, among others. Similarly, a study by Barker (2021) pointed out the wide range of factors influencing integration: employment, accommodation, and social relations.

Recently, Jääskeläinen (2021) explored the experience of international students in Finland. She pointed out that international students hope for more individualised support and guidance within the academic world, creating social networks as well as connecting with their relevant professional fields; and this already from the start of their study path. She also explained that International students experienced a lot of pressure to succeed in their studies – financially, academically, and socially, making it difficult for them to join the local community. Similarly, Mathies and Karhunen (2019, p. 73) identified that many elements play a role in whether international graduates remain in Finland. According to them the key element was having a family (partner, children) and social ties that would tend to bind the graduate to Finland. Likewise, the second most important reason to stay were work possibilities and employment.

Many efforts and projects currently focus on working life and work opportunities, but before reaching that step, international students are human beings moving to a new country. They represent a potential solution to a major problem and their viewpoint must be recognized to create the right solutions and hopefully retain them in the area.

This research aims at understanding how international students experience their settling down and integration into the Finnish society, eventually hoping to understand what could be done to better support them to remain in the country. More specifically, the study focuses on the perceived social integration of international students in the Kokkola area, on the western coast of Finland.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

International students are an intricate element of globalised education and mobility, which leads students to immigrate to foreign countries to pursue their education. Simultaneously, countries are hoping to retain these international students upon graduates to help answer the growing labour shortage. These students represent a heterogenic group of immigrants that requires support to be integrated and retained. (The Expert Council on Integration and Migration, 2012, p.8)

2.1 The global market of education

Students currently have access to a wide range of options when considering their education possibilities. Some years ago, UNESCO (2013) pointed out that the number of students enrolled in an institution outside of their home countries grew from 1,3 million in 1990 to 4,3 million in 2011. In Europe, there were 1.3 million international students originating from outside of the European Union in 2020 (Eurostat, 2020). Whilst the original study migration trend used to attract international students to English-speaking countries, international students have now also discovered other countries that offer international degree programmes designed for an international student audience such as Finland, Germany, or the Netherlands (UNESCO, 2013, p. iii). As described in research from Marginson (2006) competition is thus worldwide amongst Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), institutions are competing for students on both national and global markets to attract the best applicants. Once the students have graduated, the competition continues to retain them in their host countries.

The “brain drain” phenomenon is a global trend. As described by the report by the European Students’ Union (2021, pp. 4-5), the term stands for the situation in which international students are coming to a country with the purpose of gaining knowledge and education, and then leaving the country upon graduation, either to return home or to another country. This trend is equivalent to a loss of human capital, thus having a negative effect on the economic growth of the host country, which has invested in their education (European Students’ Union, 2021, p. 6).

According to the ICEF Monitor (2013), countries worldwide are seeing the value of education as a major export element: international students have been contributing over US\$ 22 billion to the US economy,

and US\$ 8 billion to the Canadian economy. In Europe, the situation varies amongst countries. In the UK international students contributed to US\$8 billion to the economy. In Spain, the economic impact of international students represented US\$2.5 billion in 2018 (ICEF Monitor, 2022) In Finland, the National Agency for Education (2021) announced that the cumulated turnover of the members of the Education Finland programme had reached nearly \$ 0.53 billion in 2021. In the view of this success, Education Finland aims at developing education export and internationalisation education even further in Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021).

As Gultekin (2021, p. 100) described in his research, the first traces of international education are set in Ancient Greece with itinerant teachers travelling to teach people. Over the centuries, education has developed into a business, with nations competition against each other for students. Gultekin (2021, p. 107) offered an interesting and critical comment on international education pointing out that it is now being developed on political grounds rather than on “genuine pillars” of development, research and understanding that higher education should be about. Education mobility is far from being a new trend, which has led billions to move to other countries to pursue their education.

These degree seeking students are thus migrants, as they settled down as residence in a new country for a period longer than 1 year (de Angelis, 2021). These study-based migrants represent one part of the migration flows worldwide and their amount is set on growing more as the need for skilled labour is increasing. Immigration groups various profiles of migrants: refugees, work- or study-based migration, family reasons. Immigrants in Europe represent 23,7 million inhabitants, equvaling to 5,3% of the EU (in 2020). In 2018, there were 1,3 million international students in the EU, representing 5,5% of migrants in the EU (Eurostat, 2020). Next, the situation in Finland will put into light.

2.2 Migration to Finland

Immigration in current width to Finland is a new trend. The ratio of people with a foreign background in Finland is low comparing to the international statistics, about 8% of the Finnish population (Finnish Government, 2021). According to Statistics Finland (2011) the term immigrant is broad and open to confusion, immigrants often include former expatriates returning to Finland in addition to foreigners moving to Finland; citizenship and mother tongue are difficult variables to consider as some immigrants have Finnish background (Finnish mother or father) and speak Finnish or obtain Finnish citizenship after a few years

in Finland. It is therefore important to define what group of people one is addressing when discussing immigration in Finland. The number of people with a foreign background living in Finland also includes those born in Finland from foreign parents. The number of people with a foreign background living in Finland was 423,500 in 2019 (Finnish Government, 2021). However, for the sake of this research, immigrants refer to people born abroad, with foreign citizenship and different mother language than a local language (Finnish, Swedish, Sami).

Immigration toward Finland has been increasing steadily over the past years. According to Statistics Finland (2022c), 16,895 new immigrants arrived in Finland in 2000, whereas by 2020, this number got almost doubled, with 32,898 people immigrating to the country. Conjointly, the number of international degree students has also been growing steadily over the years in Finland.

According to Juusola et al. (2021, p.7), there were about 1,500 international students enrolled in Finnish HEIs in 2000, and close to 4,500 in 2019 – representing an increase of over 200%. According to Study in Finland (2022), there are currently 20,000 international students enrolled in HEIs in Finland. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2022), the number of applicants to English-taught study programmes increased by 35% in 2022 comparing to the previous application round in 2021, with respectively 32,700 applications in 2022 and roughly 10,000 less in 2021. The Ministry pointed out that there were also additional study places on offer comparing to the previous year.

Despite the introduction of tuition fees in HEI for non-EU students in 2017 and more recently the global health situation, the number of international students to Finnish HEIs has kept rising (Yle News, 2019). Before 2017, one important reason for coming to Finland was the free education, but this is no longer the case, as tuition fees were put into place for students coming from outside of the European Union and area. Juusola et al. (2021, pp. 10-11) pointed that despite the tuition fees, a vast majority of international students comes from outside of the EU, with 42% of these students being from Vietnam, Russia, and China (figures from 2018). These numbers prove that there is a clear will and interest to come to Finland, which may be explained by the country's "*internationally renowned, award-winning education system*" (The key to the nation's success, 2021). Juusola et al. (2021, pp. 19-21) also pointed out that the international applicants are also attracted by the positive image of the Finnish welfare system (safety, quality, high living standards...) deeming it a good place to live and work.

This present research is geographically located in Kokkola, situated in the region of Central Ostrobothnia. The city has one HEI (Centria University of Applied Sciences), one University Consortium (Chydenius

Institute). According to Vipunen (2020), the number of students in HEI within the Central Ostrobothnia area have been increasing steadily between 2010 and 2020. From 306 in 2010, to 387 in 2015 and 555 in 2020. This same year, international students represented 20% of the student population at Centria University of Applied Sciences (Ostrobothnia Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

2.3 International students throughout Finland

According to a study from Mathies and Karhunen (2019), around 60 to 70% of international graduates remained in Finland three years after their graduation. They pointed out that international students studying in the capital area of Finland, Turku and Tampere had a stronger tendency to remain in Finland. These towns have a strong student population and are home to traditional universities and universities of applied sciences. ('List of Universities in Finland', 2022).

Immigrants are mostly located in the capital area (Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo/ Uusimaa region) and other big cities: Turku, Tampere, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Kotka, Vaasa.

Relation (%) of people with foreign background in relation to population of region

- 0,0 – 3,2
- 3,2 – 4,3
- 4,3 – 6,5
- 6,5 – 7,7
- 7,7 – 16,0



FIGURE 1: The percentage of people with a foreign background in relation to the regional population in 2019. Source: Finnish Government (2021), translated from Finnish

According to statistics presented by the city of Kokkola (City of Kokkola, 2022), immigration to the area is grown steadily since 2010. Young adults and people in the age of working represent the bulk of the migration flow to Kokkola. Notice that these statistics gather all registered migrants in the Kokkola area. The city's integration plan mentions that immigrants do not form a homogeneous group, as the city welcomes international students, refugees, and work-based immigration amongst others (*Kotina Kokkola*, 2019). The municipal integration plan (*Kotina Kokkola*, 2019) mentions that all immigrants moving to Kokkola are entitled to receiving basic information about Finland.

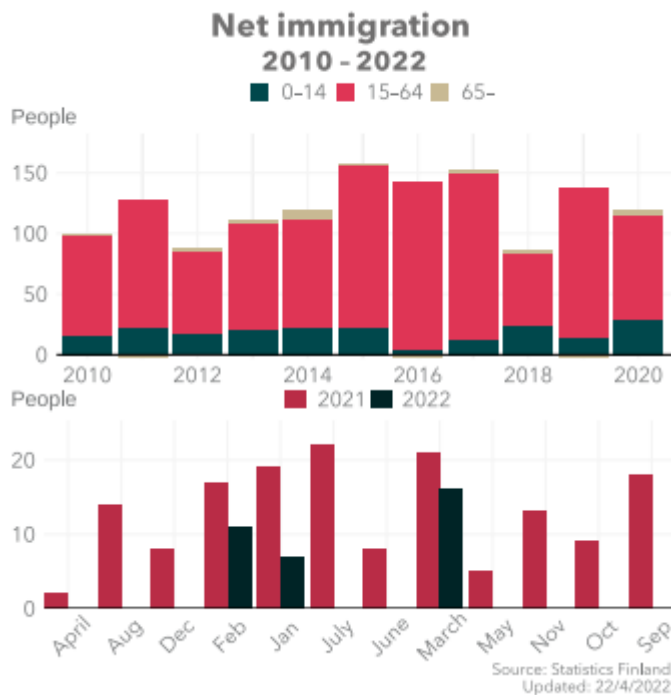


FIGURE 2: Net immigration to Kokkola 2010-2022. Source: City of Kokkola (2022)

Centria UAS' rector Kari Ristimäki expressed the joint wish of the institution and the region to retain the graduates in the area after graduation (Ostrobothnia Chamber of Commerce, 2020). International students that do receive some local language education during their studies have yet been falling between two stools and have not had access to any official integration training until now. The thoughts expressed by Ristimäki represent an ongoing process in Finland: there are efforts at many levels to help attract and retain international talent in Finland, such as the Talent Boost programme (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2021). Jouni Koski, the rector of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, also discussed in his blog post (*Korkeakoulut ratkomassa Suomen työvoimapulaa kansainvälisillä osaajilla*, 2022) the important role that HEIs have locally to retain the students, in close collaboration with actors both in the public and private sectors to help students settling in the Finnish society.

2.4 A national issue in Finland – attracting and retaining international talent

Finland is currently dealing with a growing labour shortage, partly due to the natural deficit. Immigration is considered as potential solution to fight back the lack of skilled workforce. To support attracting and

retaining these international talents, legislation on integration is being updated at the same time as local and national projects put into place to support municipalities, companies, and newcomers.

2.4.1 Current situation in Finland

Although thousands of international students are graduating from Finnish universities each year, only close to 40% were employed within the first year after graduation (Vipunen, 2019). There is difference between the institutions: 48% of the graduates from Universities of Applied Sciences (ammattikorkeakoulu) and 34% from Universities (yliopisto) were employed within this first year. Notice that these statistics do not provide information on the work in question and whether it corresponded to their education.

Furthermore, statistics from 2019 also point out that 24% of the fresh international graduates had moved away from Finland (21% of UAS students, 26% of university students.). Currently roughly 40% of international graduates are employed in Finland, out of the remaining 60%: some are opting for further studies, or still looking for work, others have left the country (Vipunen, 2020). These figures get worse over time: meaning employment levels decreased and more graduates left the country over the following years. In their study, Juusola et al. (2021, pp. 33-34) noticed that there is not one clear reason for international graduates to decide to stay or leave Finland, it is an individual decision that affects the person's life as a whole: whether he or she has work, whether he or she has social ties, what kind of network he or she has, his or her family situation, and what type of residence permit they have. Therefore, focusing on providing work opportunities may not be enough, whilst it remains paramount. In her research Jääskeläinen (Opetushallitus, 2021) explained that each student also requires individual support, based on their specific backgrounds and expectations. She pointed out the importance of creating social networks and ties with the community.

At the same time, Finland is acutely in need of workforce to support its development. An article in the Helsinki Times from September 2021 pointed that 2/3 of companies surveyed by the Chamber of Commerce declared that their growth had been hampered by the lack of skilled workforce, mostly due to an ageing population. For the sake of companies and country willing to prosper, all hands are needed on deck. In her presentation to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Immigration Director Hämäläinen (2021) underlines the importance of employment, social inclusion, and involvement of immi-

grants in their integration. She explicitly listed the importance of having to support the rooting and inclusion of international students coming to Finland, with the purpose of retaining them. The following measures would be attended with by increasing the information available about living in Finland, improving the residence permit processes, and increasing possibilities to learn Finnish or Swedish. The newcomers and the host universities should receive the latest information about the integration services.

The Finnish Government has reacted to the situation by declaring in its Mid-term government discussion (2021) that 75% of international students graduating from Finnish HEIs in 2030 should be employed on the Finnish labour market as well as tripling the amount of international degree seeking students coming to Finland. A roadmap for education-based and work-based immigration 2035 was published by the Finnish Government in October 2021 (*Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035*, 2021). It lists the service pledge and upcoming measures to support the immigration and retention of international students to Finland. The measures include amongst others developing national language education and services provided in English, as well as supporting companies in being more diverse and non-discriminating. In other words, measures that focus on public services as well as on companies and employment. The service promise for the students mentioned in the roadmap is: *“Finland offers a high-quality education and research environment, guidance, education in the national languages, and work experience and contacts to support post-study career prospects and integration in Finland”* (p. 21). The document lists the following strategic objective *“develop and introduce service packages for the application stage, other attractiveness-promoting solutions, and measures that promote integration and employability in order to increase the numbers of international students, researchers and teaching staff”* (p. 23). Integration is mentioned but there is no additional information on the scope of the integration programme. This can be seen as a positive sign, meaning that no decision has yet been made and it may be possible to provide some input and affect the measures that will be put into place.

The integration of immigrants is defined and organized by the legislation on integration. The next section will discuss how it is dealt with and by whom is covered by the law.

2.4.2 Integration in the legislation

Integration is a process that takes place at various levels, involving various actors.

Actors

The Act of the Promotion of Immigrant Integration is what shapes the backbone of all activities supporting and promoting immigrants settling down in Finland. It was first instigated in 2011 and was amended in 2013. A new amendment is scheduled for the close future (2023) to take into account the changing migrational landscape and shift the responsibility of integration from the Employment and Economic Development Offices and national level to the municipal level (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022).

The Act states that all immigrants may have access to information about Finland and basic guidance, more individual measures are taken depending on the needs and situation of each immigrant. The Act also lists the actors involved in the integration process:

- Municipalities
- Employment and Economic Development Offices
- The Police
- Other third-party organisms such as associations and organizations

There is thus a cooperation effort at various levels to support the settlement in the municipalities and to create a welcoming and suitable atmosphere for everyone to grow and live. Local authorities are also in charge of ensuring and monitoring that the integration is being carried out. These tasks are carried out by ELY Centres, the Regional State Administrative Agencies and Regional Councils (Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration, 2021). The proposal for the new Act would offer services to a broader group of migrants, not only for unemployed jobseekers or immigrants requiring social support; the need of other immigrants would also be assessed and addressed (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022).

The current Integration Programme

In addition to providing a framework for the actors involved in immigration at municipal level, the Integration Act outlines the actions of the government. The government budgets for the integration programme and sets goals and development plans for four years at a time. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and

Employment oversees preparing the Government Integration Programme, together with other key ministries. Unemployed immigrants may apply for the integration training programme offered by the Employment and Economic Development Offices. It includes:

- A preliminary assessment of the situation (educational and language skills) to define what services are required
- An individualised integration plan based on the immigrant's situation, goals and wishes, the integration training, which consists of:
 - Finnish language and culture training
 - Labour-market training
 - Possible further training or education

The aim of the integration programme is for the immigrant *“to also build up his or her civic, cultural and other skills that will support his or her integration in Finland”* (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022).

For the scope of this research, one must note that international students are not eligible for the integration programme offered by the Employment and Economic Development Offices when they enter Finland on the ground of studies: they receive a residence permit for their studies, giving them a status of full-time student. One cannot have a study place when registering as unemployed in Finland. The Employment and Economic Development Offices may encourage the unemployed immigrant to pursue studies, but this would take place as a follow-up step in the integration plan (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2022; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022). The New Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration could recognize the need of international students to have access to services to integration support when they enter the country. The shift in responsibility to the host municipalities appears quite logical as municipalities are already responsible for their citizens' wellbeing by law, regardless of their backgrounds (Kuntalaki, § 1, 2015)

There are currently many projects ran at national and local level aiming at supporting the integration on international workforce in the local labour market as well as retaining talent in Finland, such as the *Talent Boost* programme at national level.

2.4.3 All hands on deck?

Talent Boost is a cross-sectoral programme that was developed under the Sanna Marin administration in 2020, and originally launched by the government led by Juha Sipilä in 2017. It aims to develop the immigration of skilled workforce, students, and researchers to support the growth and development of Finnish companies and counterattack the demographic downfall of the Finnish society (TEM, 2020).

The Talent Boost programme has three clear targets, as listed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (Talent Boost Programme, n.d.).

1. *Finland will become an internationally attractive place to work, study and carry out research.*
2. *Employers are willing and able to recruit international talent.*
3. *The expertise of international specialists will drive the internationalisation and renewal of Finnish companies and organisations.*

Being a cross-administrative programme means that various stakeholders are involved, ministries, cities, employment administration and higher-educations institutions. *Talent Boost* is closely involved with local stakeholders and companies.

In addition to its focus on working life, the Talent Boost programme also points out the role of cities to help alleviate moving into a new city: *“in addition to work, the lifestyle choices available and the ease of daily routines make a big difference to a person considering moving to another country.”* (Talent Boost Programme, n.d.).)

Whilst being a national coordinator programme, the Talent Boost is regionally bringing together the regional actors and stakeholders. In Kokkola, Talent Boost activities are led by Centria University of Applied Sciences, and they include strategic efforts to bring international talents and local companies together, promoting the expertise of international talents amongst the local companies, organizations, and public actors (Centria University of Applied Sciences, 2021).

Talent Coastline is part of the national Talent Boost programme. It is coordinated by the Ostrobothnia Centre for the Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment. It focuses namely on the Ostrobothnian and Central Ostrobothnian regions (Vaasa to Kokkola) to help improve the attractiveness of the

region and help retain the talented international skilled workers to help fight the lack of workforce, and therefore support the growth of the region.



FIGURE 3. Goals of the Talent Coastline programme (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2021).

Kokka kohti Suomea (Course towards Finland) is a nationwide project that aims at supporting SMEs with the recruitment of international workforce from abroad. The project aims at supporting companies deal with the process of recruitment, such as on the administrative aspect and settling down. Companies can profit from the project's offering by buying the counselling and relocation services provided at a very competitive price (as 80% as covered by the project up to a certain cost). The goal of the project is to help the companies strive and avoid the lack of workforce from hindering their growth (thus, Finland's growth). The *Kokka kohti Suomea* project's services (2022) are only available to employees who are explicitly moving to Finland for the job of the company applying for the support (i.e., international students residing in Finland are not eligible). The support offered by the relocation services ranges from administrative support, settling down support, help in finding accommodation or even help in finding day-care options for children.

The *Talent Coastline Employment* is a subproject of *Kokka kohti Suomea* and *Talent Coastline* projects. It is undertaken in the Ostrobothnian and Central Ostrobothnian regions to answer to the severe lack of workforce that is hindering the growth of the companies in the area. The project has three entities:

- Elä meillä! Or live with us – focusing on supporting the language skills of international talents and developing their local networks
- Työskentele meillä! Or work with us – which aims at supporting the companies in recruiting international talents through trainings and communication efforts.
- Apua meiltä! Or get help from us – which intends to develop the coordinator of public administration and provide better information and counselling services at regional and national level.

The town of Kokkola is a participant of the Talent Coastline Employment. (Talent Coastline Employment, 2020). The Talent Coastline Employment project in Kokkola has undertaken two key measures and are described on the City of Kokkola website:

- The Welcome Office is born from the Talent Coastline Employment project in Kokkola in the autumn 2021. It is a physical office accessible by all, international students, immigrants, refugees, locals, and companies. The Welcome Office aims at providing information on language studies, free-time activities, and administrative issues. An immigration coordinator is offering face-to-face counselling.
- The MyKokkola website is designed to support settling down in Kokkola, by offering information to citizens in English: language courses, free-time activities, professional guidance, city information. The website <https://www.mykokkola.fi> was launched in the spring 2022.

TABLE 1. Summary of projects.

<i>Project</i>	<i>Nation-wide or local</i>	<i>Talent Group</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Talent Boost	Nation-wide	International talents abroad, companies	Support talent acquisition and retention, improve Finland's image as place to work
	Regional	Local companies, international talents (students)	Enable networking between international talents and employers, encourage and support companies in recruiting international talents
Kokka kohti Suomea	Ostrobothnian regions but also nation-wide	Local companies, recruited international still abroad and moving to Finland	Relocation services in Finland, administrative support
Talent Coastline Employment	Regional/local	New inhabitants settling down in Kokkola, companies recruiting international staff	Information about living and working in Finland and in Kokkola, local information

All these projects do have an overall common goal, creating a more welcoming working ecosystem, and to some extent social ecosystem through integration.

Finland is developing its processes in terms of integration. Current integration efforts are strongly focused on gaining access to the working life. However, integration is a multi-layered process that has broader implication than being part of the local workforce, such as having a home, social connections, and wellbeing (Barker, 2021).

2.5 From host country to home country

To fight back the brain drain and help retain talent, newcomers should be welcomed into the society through integration efforts. Integration is a multidimensional process, and there is no one route to integration. International students are also immigrants, with specific needs.

2.5.1 Integration in brief and why it matters

According to the World Economic Forum (2020), integration describes the delicate shift from “outsider to insider” and how immigrants become part of the local society they are entering. Integration has a qualitative nature which makes it difficult to measure. Various variables such as spoken language, relationships and employment may be used to measure the level of integration but may not provide the full picture. Put simply, integration is helping newcomers feel comfortable in their unfamiliar environment and have equal rights and possibilities as members of the host environment. Integration is the most desirable outcome when it comes to immigrants, rather than segregation or complete assimilation. This would allow the newcomer to experience a feeling of “*continuity and integrity*” in relation to life before moving to Finland whilst learning about new ways of living in his or her new country (Huuskola, 2021).

Integration is a progressive process that involves and requires action from both the newcomer and the host society. In words of Gallagher (2020):

“Most importantly, integration must be presented and experienced as a two-way process - a partnership between the community and the migrant. We have seen that when partnership is the agreed starting point, relationships are transformed. Migrants become more than the passive objects of charity, and communities become more than unwilling cogs in a policy machine of which they do not feel part.” (Gallagher, 2020, "Honesty and genuine partnership are rewarded" section).

Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) define integration as “the process of becoming an accepted part of society”. They studied the question of integration from the viewpoint of the relationship between the newcomer and their host society: who are they in contact with, what is their situation and how they regard themselves within the new community. As Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) discuss, the relationship between the two is unequal, the latter has much bigger resources to make things happen (bigger in size and population, already established). However, looking at the current labour shortage situation, both parties do need each other.

As described in the Finnish example, integration services often focus on reducing inequalities between various populations groups, improving the wellbeing of the newcomers in the society, supporting the process of settling down (Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration, 2021).

2.5.2 Integration is multi-layered and multifaced

According to Saukkonen (2016), integration can be divided into layers or dimensions, which may require support from numerous services:

- Structural integration, which refers to practical aspect of integration (finding work, accommodation, education possibilities, services...)
- Integrative integration, which deals with building social links and networks in the local community. Immigrants benefit from having networks with various groups

- Cultural integration, learning about the local culture and language (and in return, the local community adapting to the newcomers), understanding the unspoken rules of the local community
- Identifying integration, which takes place along the previously mentioned processes. This process happens when the newcomer considers him or herself as an equal entity of the host society. This is when a feeling of belonging to a community is built.

Saukkonen (2016) discusses that integration is overall about a person's experience of finding his- or her place in a community. He points out that the physical location of the integration and the experience of integration are linked, as the social ties are built within the physical social circle: through work, free-time activities. He argues that integrating locally may be more important than integration at a broader level into a country or society. He also suggests that the key to becoming a local may come from experiencing life with and as a local, through activities and events. Integration may therefore be a process that takes place at human level and must be studied throughout the personal experience of the person in question.

2.5.3 International students, a different type of migrant group

A recent study at Savonia University of Applied Sciences (2021) reported that, similarly to immigrants being a heterogeneous group, international students form a group with diverse types of needs. Their needs vary according to their country of origin and field of study, amongst others. In the study, the key issues mentioned by international students when coming to Finland were:

- the Finnish language and lack of services in English
- Lack of peer support prior to the start of studies
- Lack of information in various formats about Finland and the Finnish education system prior to arrival
- Lack of personal integration assistance when coming to Finland (Huuskola, 2022)

According to the study on Mobile Talent by the German Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2012), quoting Sidhu (2011), international students are often seen as only temporary inhabitants in a country or city, and the host society does not regard them as needing support in inclusion and

integration. Studies underline that studying alone do not guarantee smooth integration, as it does not necessarily mean that the student would develop fluency in the local language or becoming structurally or socially integrated in the local society. The report on Mobile Talent (2012) focused on challenges students faced when considering staying in a country, they listed the following: access to job opportunities, lack of language skills, social integration issues, lack of information concerning visa issues. In other terms, challenges that “regular” immigrants also encounter.

Supporting integration would be a way of “binding” international students to their new host country and offering them a possibility of life in the country. With HEIs around the world actively competing for students on the global market and societies fighting to find skilled labour, supporting the integration of international students may well be one answer to the lack of skilled workforce. Rather than focusing on advertising Finland as a destination for work or study, Finland could even more profile itself as a good place to live: Finland has already been named the happiest country of the world, a safe society, and high levels of human wellbeing amongst others. (Statistics Finland, 2018)

3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Considering the current situation in Finland and in Kokkola, this research aims at understanding how the international students experience their shift from student status to actual citizens// inhabitants in Kokkola experience their settling down and integration. The research aims at understanding what factors, elements, and stakeholders play a role in the settling down process.

This research hopes to understand the following question: How do international students experience their social integration into Kokkola? To answer this question, the study will examine the following points:

- What elements influence their social integration process from the viewpoint of the students?
- What are the elements or stakeholders that could support the integration process?

In the following section, the methodology of the research process will be discussed.

4 METHODOLOGY

This section will focus on the framework behind this study, as well as the methods used to gather and analyse data. Last, it will be presented how service-design can support in seeking solutions for this problem. The burning issue at hand is how to support international students in relocating permanently to the Kokkola area upon graduation from a local institution? To answer this question, the study will focus on two sub-questions:

- What are the elements that influence the international students' experience of integration or settling down in Kokkola?
- Who/which are the local key stakeholders and overall enablers in their process?

4.1 Research context and design

This research focuses namely on international students who are defined as persons born abroad and are enrolled in a degree programme in a Finnish Higher Education Institution (HEI). Most integration programmes focus primarily on immigrants which are unemployed, including the immigration programme in Kokkola (*Kotina Kokkola*, 2019). However, international students form a group of immigrants that fell between the cracks, as they do not belong to the unemployed category during their studies, nor did they enter the country on the grounds of refugees. The projects that do interact with international students in relation to integration efforts deal with supporting connections to working life and finding employment, especially after graduating (Finnish Government, 2019). Vaarala and Kuckling (2017) discussed that the plans of international students in relations to staying in Finland could change swiftly depending on their work situation but also on their social contacts and relationships in Finland upon graduation. If these relationships are a factor in considering staying in Finland, how can their development be supported?

To tackle this issue, our research follows the constructivist paradigm to offer an objective picture of the current situation. The goal of this research is, amongst others, to give space to the international voices to be noticed, without the opinions of other stakeholders, including the researcher's, overshadowing their stories (Ryan, 2018).

This study focuses namely on the students' experience settling down in Kokkola, offering at first an objective testimony of their experience and their "truth." Our research methods will therefore be inductive, building on from data collected. This approach is based on the inductive characteristic of optimism, "*knowledge is gained through gathering facts that provide the basis for laws*" (Ryan, 2018, p. 3)

To offer the best answer to the research question, the researcher has adapted service-design thinking to this project. Service-design aims at developing or improving already existing services with a user-centric development process. (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2012, 26) It begins with understanding the user's or customers authentic experience before moving forwards by involving the various stakeholders. The interviews provided quality data and insights to implement the service-design thinking. This development method is in line with the inductive approach of optimism in research, as previously described.

4.2 First phase: the interviews

The first phase focused on collecting data from the key protagonists through interviews.

4.2.1 Qualitative research with an exploratory approach

This study is of qualitative nature, as it provides the possibility to give a voice to our target group as well as to study their experience in their words. Interviewing is the most common method to gather qualitative data from a certain group (Thelwall & Nevell, 2021). Qualitative research is the most suitable option to help understand the experiences and views of people, eventually providing the possibility of pointing out hidden issues to be solved (Hammerberg et al., 2016). This approach allows for the interviewees own experience to be shared onwards without the opinion of the researcher overshadowing the discussion.

Moreover, the exploratory approach aims to bringing light to a topic less studied and eventually laying the path to further studies. There is not much research that focuses on students becoming citizens, or the brain drain situation in Finland.

This research focuses namely on the students located in Kokkola and aimed at finding local solutions and involved local stakeholders.

4.2.2 Data collection: semi-structured interviews

The data for this research was collected through one-on-one interviews of recently graduated students through semi-structured interviews. All the interviews followed the same set of questions providing a clear frame to the interview yet allowed the interviewee freedom to discuss his/her mind through the open-ended questions.

As Kallio et al. (2016) explain, semi-structured interviews slightly remind a conversation, offering space for discussion between the researcher and interviewee without being too rigid and yet, following a framework to guarantee the wished topics were being covered.

To obtain rich and valid data, the interview questions were carefully designed to grasp the full experience and thoughts of the interviewee, whilst giving him/her space to express his/her ideas and thoughts: they had the knowledge, the researcher simply helped the interviewee put it into words and gathered it (Schultze & Avital, 2011). The interview began with basic background questions, then focused on their arrival to Kokkola, their student life, their connections to the local culture, their current life and ended with wrap-up questions. A test interview was undertaken prior to the actual interview round to test the question and the flow of questions, allowing to make some minor improvements in the set. The interview question set is available in the Appendix 1 (pp. 86-88).

In total, 10 people were interviewed (table 2). Eight participants arrived to Kokkola for the sole purpose of studies, whereas two (Michelle and Max, named changed) travelled for different purposes but started their studies soon after their arrival. Their experiences are valuable as they provide some insight into alternative integration paths. All interviewees were graduates that had decided to remain in Finland after their studies. The assumption being that their experience had been sufficiently successful for them to remain in Finland, they may hold some of the answers we are after. The interviewees were contacted directly by the researcher or replied to the call for interviewees posted by the researcher on the professional social media platform LinkedIn in February 2022. In order to upkeep the viability of the qualitative research, the interviewees were sampled in a way to

represent graduates from various field of study/employment and a similar timeframe of studies – they had all graduated between 2019 and 2021. The researcher wished to focus on students that had been able to attend face-to-face studies throughout their studies, and thus not experience the remote teaching period that concerned most students during the Covid-19 Pandemic. According to research, the isolation due to the Pandemic negatively affected the social integration processes of immigrants, by cutting off relations amongst others (Barker, 2021).

The interviews all took place between the end of February and early April 2022. They took place online through Microsoft Teams meetings and were automatically transcribed by the built-in transcriptions feature. The interviewees could decide to use their cameras or not, the researcher had her camera on. The researcher verified the transcription manually and corrected them.

TABLE 2. Summary of the interviewees (names changed).

Name	Country of origin	Notes
Allan	Iran	Currently in Turku (working)
Daniel	South America	Currently in Larsmo (working, close to Kokkola)
Max	West African	Currently in Kokkola (working) First came on work purposes, then pursued studies in Kokkola.
Michelle	Centra Africa	Currently in Pietarsaari (working)
		First came to join her husband and took part in integration programme prior to HEI studies
Milla	East African	Currently in Kokkola (working)
Patrick	Nepal	Currently in Helsinki (working)
Sophie	Eastern Europe (non-EU)	Currently in Tampere (working and pursuing further education)
Tania	South Asia	Currently in Helsinki (working)
Tony	South America	Currently in Helsinki (working, left Kokkola at time of interview)
Wendy	South Asia	Currently in Oulu (working)

4.2.3 Data analysis: thematic analysis

Background

Once the data was gathered, it was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This analysis method was chosen because it gives space and voice to the data, and thus allowing the opinion of the interviewees to be heard. It also provides a certain freedom and flexibility to the researcher to highlight the data in the way she deems best. When analysing the data, the researcher immersed herself into it to understand and grasp what is being said and make sense from it all to answer research and sub-research questions. Whilst going through the data, specific elements or patterns did stand out in relation to the research question. This data was then coded, using labels that described “a pattern of meaning” in the text (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The biggest asset of thematic analysis is the flexibility and sense of freedom it provides the researcher, it is not constraining: the research follows the data’s lead, so to speak. The research followed mostly an inductive approach where “*data-coding and analysis is (...) driven by what is in the data*” as described by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Process

The coding started with the researcher getting well acquainted with the data, understanding what is being said. She studied the interviewees’ stories one by one making notes of the key elements that arose in the discussions. The actual coding process then began by marking the codes in the interview transcripts for each participant, then combining all codes to see if there were overlapping, similarities or incongruencies, and which codes could be combined to form one more general code and which codes were valuable as such in reference to the big picture. Once the data was coded, clear themes did arise. The codes were grouped according to a common content that gave reason to create a category or shape a theme. The themes were still reviewed when considering the main research question and sub-questions. This phase is described as the analysis phase. The interviews provided a total of over 10 hours of discussion. In total, 65 codes were labelled, amounting to a total of 11 themes. At first there were many more codes (138), but after close observation and analysis, the codes appeared to have similar content and the number of codes decreased to offer a more general picture of the situation rather than a too individual one. The difficulty being in the coding was wanting to share every participant’s valuable story and experience rather than acting as the researcher is that the researcher’s role is to offer a valuable summary of

the key elements provided in the data, rather than sharing on all the details delivered by the participants (Nowell et al., 2017). The final codes and themes are gathered in the Appendix 2 (pp. 89-90)

Following is an example of how the coding took place in the case of Daniel. First the text was analysed for codes, then the themes were placed along the corresponding codes.

TABLE 3. Example of codes and themes for Daniel

Interviewee (Daniel)	Code	Theme
What I would have loved to have as a student, or hear as a student is here is the best places where you can find food for this price. Here are the best options because as in as a newcomer, you really don't know like how different supermarkets work, what they sell, what they have. So to have, like the most basic food, like the basic basket to have it and say, like, OK, here this once you can find it here and they're in these prices...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information needed Novelty of everything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helena Eijsberg Practical aspect of settling down Helena Eijsberg Practical aspect of settling down
The biggest concern so far, and the one that is still, you know, till this day... Worries me is I really want to learn the language and I think that was the only problem about the university that we didn't have the right way of learning it was just like one or two classes a week, but with a lot of foreigner people... So you cannot learn all the time with people that actually are learning too. I think the best way was to be with Finnish people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of Finnish International Bubble Asset of knowing Finns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helena Eijsberg Local language Helena Eijsberg More support for internationals Helena Eijsberg The social aspect of settling down
Sometimes we are in contact with Finnish people and of course they need to be able to understand you. (...) I'm trying to change that, but it's really hard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure to learn language Importance of Finnish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helena Eijsberg Local language Helena Eijsberg
We thought, for example, cops are the student association. It was gonna be something really good for us because they had like these activities and all that, but later on I found out that it was not the best place for me because I realized they were just making parties all the time. And I mean, it's fun to make parties, but I didn't find like something that could give me a better understanding of Finland or my environment. So yeah, I decided with my friends mainly to stay on our own and try to find Finland or... yeah or discover Finland and the university in general on our own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More activities for internationals (needed) Novelty of everything Lack of facilitation with society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helena Eijsberg More support for internationals Helena Eijsberg Practical process of settling down Helena Eijsberg More support for internationals

4.2.4 Ethical framework

In accordance with the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019) to ensure the integrity of the study, the research followed their clear guidelines:

- the researcher asked for their consent for recording before it began and confirmed once again on record,
- the interviewees were read out information about the scope of the study, the researcher, the goal, and how their information would be treated,
- the interviewees were given the possibility to retract from the interviews and study at any given time without any reason, their participation was voluntary.
- the interviewees names were changed, and their countries of origin were replaced by their region of origin.
- all names of companies or people mentioned by name were anonymised

The interviews provided key data to understand better and deeper the experience of the international students, thus helping the workshop participants ideate solution in an inductive manner.

4.3 Second phase: Ideation of workable solutions

4.3.1 Adapted service-design

Service-design is a method used to develop existing services or develop new ones. Its key foundations, as defined by Stickdorn and Schneider (2012, p. 22), are:

- User or human -centeredness: it's about the user, fore and foremost
- Co-creative: stakeholders should be involved
- Sequencing: there are many steps in the process
- Evidencing: there should be tangible proof even for nontangible issues, pointing out everything that might have an influence on the process
- Holistic: the situation should be considered as a whole (not only one part of the service)

The inductive logic behind the design thinking methods follows well the ideology used in the first phase of the research: bottom-up. As Nielsen (2007) points out, the best way to solve an issue, is by tackling the right issue at hand. Decisions and discussions must be based on facts, rather than

on guesses and assumptions. Another way to ensure quality in seeking a solution is through constant iteration: going back and forth, checking while making improvements along the way.

The typical Service Design process has the following steps:

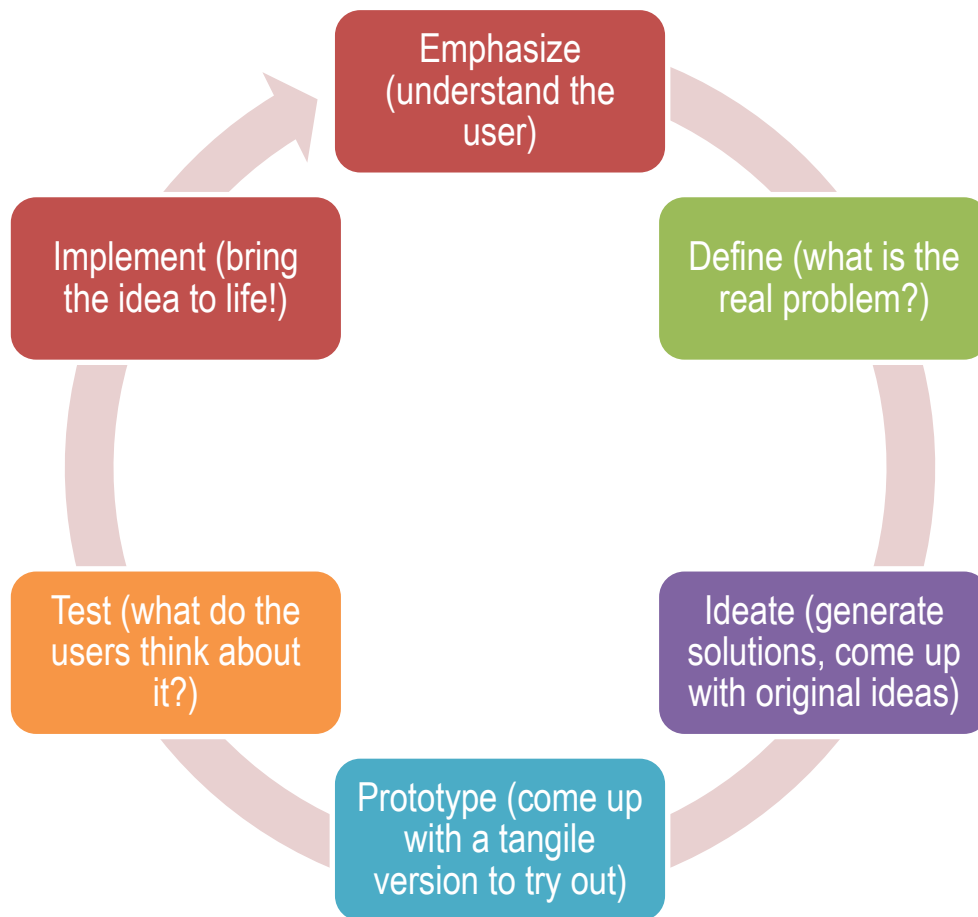


FIGURE 4. The service design process (Inspired by Gibbons, 2016)

This research will cover the three first stages of the Service Design process, from empathising with the user to ideating a potential solution. Prototyping, testing, and implementing stages are left to a further stage.

4.3.2 Journey maps

As mentioned before, design thinking has a collaborative nature. Like this, for the stakeholders to better grasp the data collected from users, the journey map is a useful tool for compiling this input.

Drew (2022) discussed the importance of settling the values and orienting the mindset and beliefs before the workshop. According to her, it is important for all participants to be “*on the same page*” before starting to the process. The journey maps help paint an honest picture of the current situation at hand.

Journey maps are a tool that allow to describe the relationship between the customer and the business interaction, including the expectations and frustrations of the customer over time. The goals are to understand the process, to better notice the positive aspects and have a chance at dealing with the hurdles that the customer encounters, as explained by Agius (2022).

The journey map provides a visual representation of the customers journey, and it includes at least the following items (Agius, 2022):

- A period to follow the process
- The actions taken place (by the user)
- The touch points or stakeholders involved
- The emotions encountered by the user at a given stage
- Hurdles or “pain points”

These journey maps allowed the stakeholders taking part in the ideation workshop to have a clearer view of the situation based on authentic facts, rather than on guesses or assumptions. These journey maps helped the participants explorer the current situation and start to build an opinion on the potential challenges (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2012, p. 109).

4.3.3 Ideation workshop

Background

As per the Design Service process goes, once the “user” experiences (here, the students’ experience) were understood, the problem framing, and ideation phase followed. The problem framing is the process during which the workshop participants aim at defining the challenges. Ideation is the process of generating ideas and potential solutions to the challenges. The ideation process should be facilitated to encourage the participation and creative idea creation. At this stage, stakeholders

were invited to join the discussion by taking part in a workshop for an ideation session. A facilitated workshop offers space for structured discussion to pinpoint challenges and seek solutions together (Courtney, 2019). As argued by Laakso et al. (2016), bringing key stakeholders to the same table has the benefit of widening the perspective of the workshop participants by bringing in their expertise and opinions, but it also may be disruptive to the creative flow. Hence, by working individually and moderating discussion, the participants were provided structure and freedom to focus on the task hand. Laakso et al. (2016) also discussed the importance of balance during the initial ideation phase and it provides a more equal discussion throughout the following phases. In the framework on this research, the researcher invited local stakeholders to take part in a workshop that took place at Kokkola City Hall on May 4, 2022.

Stakeholders dealing with social welfare, education, the town of Kokkola, the local parish were invited to take part in the workshop. The invitations were sent by email by the researcher three weeks before the event, explaining to the background of the study and goal of the workshop. The email recipients were sent a reminder one week before the event. The participation level turned out to be quite low, but still enabled to take steps in right direction: three participants joined the workshop, out of 35 people invited. Five additional invitees expressed their interests but could not join due to prior commitments.

The method selected for the workshop was the “Lightning Decisions Jam” (or LDJ) as used by the company AJ & Smart. The LDJ method was selected for its simple process and the possibly to be used with a relatively small group of participants. Courtney (2019) listed the following steps for the LDJ method:

1. List what is already working
2. Specify all the issues
3. Prioritize issues
4. Reformulate the issue as uniform challenges
5. Come up with solutions individually without discussion
6. Prioritise solutions
7. Vote for the solutions to focus on
8. Discuss steps to bring the solution to life
9. Make solutions actionable

Process

During the workshop, participants were encouraged to fill in post-it notes by themselves on a specific topic, without discussion in the group. By allowing participants to work individually, it gave the possibility to everyone to express him/herself without having a louder voice or more charismatic person take control of the situation and overshadow the workshop. This enables all participants to be equally heard. (Courtney, 2019). The participants followed a clear programme: first, pointing out the positive aspects of the current situation, then the challenges as they see them. At this stage, they voted for the most urgent issues to deal with at first. Once the problem or problems were set, the participants were encouraged to generate ideas. Their ideas were put on display and all participants were invited to vote for the best solutions. Though it is not suggested by the LDJ method, the participants did read their ideas aloud to avoid misunderstanding by others. Following the ideas phase, the participants were invited to help the facilitator place the ideas (post-it notes) on an impact/effort scale to determine the impact and effort each idea represents. The ideas with most impact and requiring the least effort were selected as the “winning” solutions for the challenge at hand, the participants discussed together about what steps to take to make the solutions come to life.

In the first stage, the participants listed positive elements of Kokkola in relation to international students, and then only, they listed challenges. They wrote their thoughts on post-it notes and placed them on a boat, drawn on a white board. The positive elements included Kokkola being a good place to live, multicultural, with abundant nature and many possibilities for its inhabitants, a broad student community and many hobby options. The challenges were more numerous, and they included: the financial burden on students, the timing of the hobby groups, the variety of needs, challenges with networking locally, lack of information about Kokkola and Finland, perceptions about Kokkola vs. bigger cities, the difficulty to find people to speak Finnish with and the need for Finnish skills for many job opportunities. These results are aligned with what the respondents had shared in their interviews.

The workshop participants were then given the opportunity to vote for the challenge that they regarded as most relevant to address. The challenge selected was “school fees problems for students”, meaning the financial burden of having to cover tuition fees. The workshop facilitator reformulated the challenge into the following question: *How Might We... help alleviate the financial burden on students?*

The reason behind being that we could not discuss the tuition fees as such, as they are not something we can address (tuition fees are set by the law, and there was no HEI representative involved in the workshop). The participants then worked individually on solutions that could address the question.

The solutions suggested ranged from offering part-time job with easy access to students, developing voluntary work in the local society, linking tuition fees to language courses, helping connect students to companies through sports, talking to companies to encourage to hire internationals, and many others. Once again, the participants were asked to vote for the most relevant solutions. In total, six solutions with more than one vote were selected as the “winning” solutions for the challenge at hand. The group discussed how much effort and impact each solution would have, there were four solutions that had an impact but required too much effort to be put into place were disregarded for now. These were promising ideas but not in the group’s reach for the time being. The two remaining solutions were selected as the results of the workshop and the group then discussed actionable steps to bring the solutions to life.

The workshop was successful as it provided practical examples and ideas of what could be done at the local level. The workshop participants also became more aware of the multi-layered aspect of the students’ path to settling down. The only drawback of the workshop was the low participant count: three participants joined the workshop, out of the thirty-five people invited.

Both the interviews and then the workshop shielded valuable results and insight into the experience of international students and potential action that could be taken by local stakeholders.

5 RESULTS: THE INTERVIEWS

Their participants' responses are divided into two separate parts that answer the research sub-questions. The first part will cover the process of settling down and integrating. The second part focuses on the support that could be provided to improve the social integration process based on the shortcoming described by the participants. Each part includes sub-themes formed by the relevant codes.

5.1 Elements that the social integration process from the viewpoint of the students

Throughout the interviews, there is no one and only integration path or story. However, from the wide range of experiences of the interviewees two phases were common to all. First, the expectations and assumptions influenced the process of settling and integrating. Secondly, the participants experienced various steps in their settling down, socially, and practically speaking.

5.1.1 Expectations when selecting Finland

The reason and the motivations behind coming to Finland influenced the integration process of the international students before they even set foot in the country. If the newcomer had long-term plans for coming to Finland or had an open attitude to what the experience would bring, he or she had a more positive attitude towards integration. For these respondents, coming to Finland held more meaning than just a country offering education, such as the possibility to a "*better future*" (Sophie).

The participants listed various reasons for selecting Finland as a study destination. The primary reason was the **education system's strong reputation** (6 participants out of 10) that offered the best chances for studying and growth. Another important factor in selecting Finland were the **friends or contacts already located in the country**. Two participants openly explained their **end-goal of settling in Finland** and expecting being able to work in Finland after graduation. Two respondents shared that they had **never planned** on staying for longer than their studies.

For example, Wendy described below that she had clearly planned to come to Finland with the hope to stay:

“...my expectation would be to be able to find, like secure a job and being able to stay here for a long term because (...) I know quite well the situation in my country and then I know for a fact... Oh, it's not bad, but I just know that for example, if I lived here for a long time, then when I come back it would be really hard for me to adapt back into the system. So that was the goal that come here and then like have a life here.” (Wendy)

The respondents also mentioned some worries they had before arriving, which may have hindered their integration process. Four respondents out of 10 mentioned worries of **language barriers and the Finnish culture being unfamiliar**. Not knowing about culture beforehand made it difficult to know what to expect and how to prepare oneself. Having friends in the country did not necessarily help alleviate the fears if the friends had described their own difficulties in settling down in the Finnish society.

Three participants shared being afraid of **racism** before coming to the country. Sophie only had friends studying in the United States and compared her upcoming experience to theirs, she feared the same would apply in Finland:

“... I have some friends who study in the States and over there, it's, of course, it's a different story and they would tell us stories about how they were like, you know, being discriminated and it painted this picture in my head. That, OK, what if I came to Finland and then I would get the same treatment?” (Sophie)

The interviews pointed out that the participants' attitude towards the country and the expectations towards coming to Finland appeared to place the newcomers in a certain mindset. This specific mindset affected their behaviour towards integration either favourably or unfavourably, in any case.

In any case, once being in Finland, additional factors came into play: elements that supported the settling down experience and others that cast a shadow on the process.

5.1.2 The practical arrival stage and settling down

International students coming to a new country are in a sense more than just immigrants, as they are simultaneously encountering various new beginnings, such as moving to a new country, new studies and living independently. They must focus on one process at the time, but they are not unable to do it, but they have to because of the circumstances. The respondents shared their experiences with the “novelty of everything,” accommodation, practical issues, and lack of information they felt they would have needed.

Novelty of everything

Moving to a new country means discovering an unfamiliar environment, a new language, a new society with all its rules, which may create a slight state of confusion for the newcomer. A few respondents remembered how the air at Helsinki Airport, smelt different from what they were used to, pointing out how the differences appeared at very intricate levels. Many participants mentioned the Finnish language that was quite different from anything else they knew. Milla described how the street names made finding her way difficult: *“In the beginning it was the excitement in the new country, new everything is new, the language, even the street names look so strange. Everything is so strange....”*

Moving to Finland and starting higher education studies also meant reaching a certain stage in life and moving alone for the first time. For many of them, this newly acquired independence was not an easy step. They had to face being alone and managing their own needs by themselves. This may add pressure to an already difficult situation. For example, for Sophie moving to Kokkola was the first time living alone and this newly acquired independence also took time getting used to: *“I didn't think I had any like that big issues, I think it was because that I had to get over like the separation and living alone and stuff like that. But it's... I made friends. I didn't.... I don't think I ever felt lonely or anything like that.”*

Practical issues

Besides the transition phase of moving to a new country, the respondents had to settle down and create a home for themselves. Part of the interviewees had worries about their accommodation and how practical life was to take place. Many mentioned that they had struggled in finding housing upon their arrival in Kokkola, feeling uncertainty. Allan encountered issues with finding a place to live, as he expected students have their lodgings waiting for them:

“It wasn't the case like when I first came there, I had a bit of a difficulty to find accommodation. And it wasn't so easy for me to understand that why as a student coming to study here, I have to look for places to stay. Why there is not like a bunch of rooms that students would just go there without any like hassle.”

(Allan)

This process did not end with finding accommodation, the home had to be furnished. A few (2/10) mentioned that it was a slow process, because they were unsure what was needed in the apartments to live comfortably. Settling in was therefore a process that took its time and required the newcomers own experience as well as advice from friends or teachers.

The difference in what is for sale in the stores in Finland, what the typical food is, and the currency differences were somewhat of a bother for some respondents. A few respondents discussed that they would have hoped for more practical information concerning where to find different types of groceries in Finland and what the basic grocery basket would have looked like. Daniel explained his experience:

“As in as a newcomer, you really don't know like how different supermarkets work, what they sell, what they have. So to have, like the most basic food, like the basic basket to have it and say, like, OK, here this one you can find it here and they're in these prices ...” (Daniel)

Missing information

Respondents missed key information that would have made their settling smoother. Max shared that he had craved more information on the welfare system and the Finnish bureaucracy. He is pointing out that once the internationals started working and receiving a salary, they would pay

taxes and would eventually also be entitled to welfare benefits. They should also know about the strict taxation policy in Finland.

Allan confirmed the need for information on the “bureaucracy” level, as he had expected international students to be entitled to the same welfare system as Finnish students. Whilst students do receive equal treatment in terms of education and health care, financial support is only available to Finns or non-locals in very certain conditions: *“My expectations were that I would have a similar kind of welfare as to local students because generally I'm just being a student. But it wasn't the case.”* There appeared to be a need for quite practical information as well as administrative information.

Moving to another country can be divided into processes: there is the physical settling down in the country and there is the process of entering the social community and society. The interviewees raised the topic of importance of mindset in the overall process of integration.

5.1.3 A question of mindset

The so-called adequate mindset for integrating in a new society would include awareness of the mental process, keeping in mind it is a two-sided relationship, having a positive attitude, being active to connect and adaptive, having the ability to grow and patience. Integration is about building a relationship with an unfamiliar environment and its people. As in any relationship, there are two sides involved. Allan discussed that belonging to the community could be an act of will. The newcomer must play his part despite feeling ill-at-ease with the other people in the community, he told that:

“... sometimes (...) I don't want to [belong to the community]. Plus, it's like a mental thing because... If you want yourself to feel part of something, then you can. Sometimes you might be like ‘that person said this.’ So, I shouldn't feel like I'm part of it. But at the end of the day, it's about your inner feeling.” (Allan)

Sophie also shared her experience, pointing out the responsibility of the newcomer and being proactive in seeking information but also in meeting people. Sophie took the responsibility to join groups, become active in the student union to meet others and actively sought contact with the

locals rather than international peers. Sophie's example shows that the newcomer's will to connect with the locals may be determining: if one wants to belong, one may have to take the first step.

The integration process required a certain attitude from the newcomers to smooth the process, namely having a respectful behaviour towards the host country and their people. Patrick explained that as a newcomer, one should respect and value the rules of the society. The right attitude could be a mix of hopefulness and a positive or proactive stance. Max mentioned the importance of providing hope to fellow internationals, *"let's give them hope that it is possible, you know, because otherwise we're going to lose them,"* he explained. Allan listed that the feeling of trust, both in the system and in others are key to feeling at home, in his experience he *"had a good trust in the system that I was going to fall into, so I didn't have big worries."*

Accepting differences and understanding there were cultural differences at play have a positive role in the relations with the locals. As Sophie commented: *"This is the Finnish way. Like, no one is being rude. This is just a different culture."* Being adaptive is seen as a strength in the integration process, taking in the "ways" that make sense for oneself, as Michelle put it, *"when you go somewhere, I think you adapt only to the positive, like you take the positive culture."*

Ability to grow

Finland has offered the chance to grow on more than the educational and professional level. Half of the respondents described how they felt like they had changed whilst settling down. Allan told how he has learned to take a more relaxed approach to life overall and that good enough is good enough: *"I relax most of the time by doing normal things like. Watching comedy or talking with people, having coffee. I don't need to do a lot of things to make myself happy. That's one of the things I think Finland has affected me."* For this growth to take place, one must be able to welcome and accept change.

Michelle explained that her time in Finland had made her more human, taught her how to focus on making good around her rather than money: *"Finland has made me.... Finland has made me to become more. I never thought I would become. Honestly, I've never dreamed that will be a nurse. (...) Like it, it made me. I don't know. So, I think that's Finland. Finland did that to me. It made me to be more of a human. Like not to think only about the money part."*

Wendy also shared her “growth story” which was not that easy; for her, integrating was about *blending in*. Her example shows that the path to integration is not necessarily easy or comfortable.

“And I had graduated, and I was able to work as a nurse, as like a real nurse then, you know, just like gradually I blended in and then at some point I didn't know when, but then I just noticed that, yeah... So yeah, so it's... it's the process. It didn't just happen over one night, but it happens with a lot of crying, going home crying, like walking home, crying and then thinking like, what have I done wrong way or so. But then it just gradually happened.” (Wendy)

Patience

Finally, a key element weighing in the scale of integrating is patience. Most interviewees mentioned the process as being gradual and that it simply takes time. Milla shared her story, pointing out that future or fresh newcomers may benefit from friendly warnings or honest information on the facts things simply take time to happen, to avoid any disappointment or other issues.

“you're so excited to move to another country, but you have to have in your mind like the patience, you have to be able to be patient because maybe someone is coming and thinking that's when I arrive here, there's a job waiting for me. There is money waiting for me, you know, things like that. Like my life will be so easy. But it is like it's going to take time.” (Milla)

As the interviewees described their processes, and the interactive aspect of their settling down came clear.

5.1.4 The social aspect of settling down: social integration

The social integration underlines the asset of knowing locals and having personal contacts overall, as well as the need for being active and having a network. Being in contact with Finnish people enabled a smoother adaptation and appeared to be essential to integrating into the society. For instance, Daniel expressed having no worries about adapting to the Finnish culture as he had experience with Finnish people prior to coming to Finland.

All the interviewees pointed out the importance of human interactions, personal contacts and experiencing things first hand in the settling down process. First, personal contacts with the local culture were deemed important to better grasp the local culture, Tania explained that reading about culture did not suffice, one had to experience first-hand to understand it: *“I guess like you can learn as much as you want. But if you don't experience it then you don't understand, and I always felt like that.”* Having knowledge and experience about the culture helped involve in the culture. Secondly, the participants pointed out that it was an asset to know Finns, as it offered a point of entry into the Finnish culture and social circles. In Sophie's words, a local should “adopt” the newcomer to welcome him or her into a pre-existing group: *“one issue was that you have to like come into a group or like be adopted by someone.”*

The interviewees also pointed out the importance of connections and networks in Finland. In Max's opinion networks are a requirement to pursue a career and settle down in Finland. Knowing people and especially being recognized by locals provided a certain type of existential value to the interviewee within the society. He discussed it when reflecting on his own path:

“And I was in contact with XXX XXXX. He's working in XXXX as well, you know? And we've known each other for a long time now. So, it was easier when there was the possibility to get a job with XXXX because all the people who are involved know me, know my personality. Know, my education, my experience and all that stuff so, it helps so.” (Max)

Max later accentuated his views on the importance of networking:

“You need a network, and you do not wait for the network, you have to go find a network. You know, I think this is one thing that is critical, you know, in Finland. And the other thing is you have to push yourself. Push yourself outside your comfort zone to try to learn language as well to try to speak it. You know because these things are key issues. If you want to live you know, under the, you know, be incorporated as part of the society in Finland. You need these things, you know, definitely.” (Max)

These experiences proved that integration is mostly interactive and happens through the connections being built between people. Human interaction offers the possibility to the newcomer to learn about the host community and to be recognized by the others as a new member of the society. It was a step towards different stages or types of integration, such as finding work in Finland. Thus, the possibilities for people to meet and having chance to build any types of relationships seemed paramount in the integration process.

In addition to people, the topic of the local language was deemed a particularly important factor in the integration process.

5.1.5 The local language

Despite being considered the key to integration by the respondents, the path to learning Finnish was difficult. Some respondents even questioned whether knowledge of the language was even necessary for a future in Finland, especially regarding work possibilities. The fluency in the language appeared to be a measurement of the integration in Finland, the more fluent one was, the more part of the community one felt. There is a clear need for pointing out why the language is required in Finland, it is not because immigrants should completely acculturate to the Finnish society by losing their language, it is not about them. The problem is the Finnish society that is not yet able to function properly in other language than Finnish (or Swedish and Sami). Max advised other internationals in Finland to focus on learning Finnish if they wished to remain in the country:

“You have to push yourself. Push yourself outside your comfort zone to try to learn language as well to try to speak it. You know because these things are key issues. If you want to live. You know, under the, you know, be incorporated as part of the society in Finland.” (Max)

Allan also depicted the language as the key to integration, he would be ready to put English away and switch to just speaking Finnish:

“I want to also be more integrated into Finnish society so that I don't need to speak in English as much. Or probably put it away for good, especially when I'm with Finnish people.” Michelle also considered it as very important for the

integration process: "I try as much as possible to speak Finnish now, because I realize I really need it if I want to further go further in life". (Allan)

Milla explained that despite being motivated to learn, there was a lot of pressure on having to learn the language for the purpose of finding work and being able to actually manage financially. As she described her situation: *"You can learn one word in two weeks or one month, but if you under pressure to learn the language because of the study and because of finding a job, then, uh, that pressure is a lot."* Milla was very appreciative of her Finnish language teacher who supported the process of learning Finnish by focusing on vocabulary that would be used in working situations (field of nursing). The studies lasted between three and four years, and Finnish was just a subject amongst others, yet it was possible to learn something. Milla added:

"Three years is a very short time and we had like 2 hours per week of Finnish lessons. So that is very little. So I think our teacher noticed that and she would teach us exactly what is required like when you go to hospital, when first of all, how do you greet the patient if you're taking the vital signs like blood pressure, temperature, how do you tell the patient in a polite way, things like that? If you're doing an interview for a patient, for example, for depression or for alcohol use or for smoking, we go through the questionnaire." (Milla)

For some, "Finnish" was clearly just a course amongst the others and was not really deemed as being as crucial if they were not planning to stay in Finland. Tania, for instance, had not planned to stay to work after graduation in Finland, thus she viewed the Finnish language course at university just as another language course.

The interviewees all graduated around the same time from a higher education institution in the Kokkola area. This study experience was an important aspect of their integration process.

5.1.6 The student ecosystem

The studies at Kokkola provided a positive experience to the newcomers, bringing many internationals together, granting them a caring environment and possibilities to grow at the educational level. In hindsight, their study path was not trouble-free.

All interviewees described their time as students as a positive experience, describing the environment as being favourable for newcomers. Sophie felt that the university was aware of the requirements that welcoming new international students entailed and provided sufficient help for them to settle down as students into the new environment.

A few interviewees mentioned being surprised by all the support they received, including support in healthcare and personal matters. The school offered a sense of equality to the students in, regardless of their backgrounds. Tania revealed her surprise in receiving the same support as local students:

“The same opportunity as any other Finnish students to do literally, whatever. Like health care, like the nurse, was always very helpful. XXXX, as the priest, was also very helpful in terms of like, you know, mental health and all that stuff. Uhm, which are the things that I think I didn't even expect because we didn't even have those in my country to even begin with. So, there was no benchmark to compare with. But if I have to compare, I would compare with what my friends have in the States and what we have here is so much better.” (Tania)

When it came to the learning environment, the interviewees praised the openness and freedom offered to them, describing it as a good place to learn. This new educational system did require some getting used to as it may have been quite different from the system in place in the home country of the new international students. Tony explained: *“I think it's very different to what people from abroad are used to regarding like an educational institution in the way of how much freedom the students have, but in good way, at least for me.”* Allan enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere in the study environment, which resulted from the fact that there was not that much pressure placed on the students to succeed, *“you just have to show up and make sure that you are on the track like*

you follow the class, and then you could easily progress. But yeah, it took me some time to get used to this mindset.”

The studying ecosystem was overall a positive environment for the interviewees to learn and to grow, yet it did feel like a bubble for some respondents. Students were supported in settling down and learning about their new institution, but similar support systems were not offered to them regarding settling down in their new home city. Allan stated that there was a disconnection between what took place at university in comparison to the world outside. He continued by explaining he lacked events *“designed to make people feel like they’re in a bigger society.”* In other words, he would have wanted events that help namely new students find their place in the new city, such as *“for students who come to stay in Kokkola for a few years and maybe want to find friends and perhaps network or get to know the place.”*

Tony described what could be called a divide between “two Kokkolas,” one experienced during his time as a student and one whilst working. The first one was busy and social, the last was lonelier and more boring. This underlines the importance for contacts with the local community already before the studies end. If the newcomer connects only with other internationals that are staying temporarily in Finland, this person may remain alone if everyone else leaves. Tony summed it as follows:

“For me, there is, like two Kokkola’s, you know, this student lifecycle is pretty good. You know, a lot of people and you get really busy and it’s nice, but when I switch, you know when I graduated and I was just working, it wasn’t that great, I must say, and specially the whole corona thing.” (Tony)

Tony enjoyed the sense of community and belonging offered by university during the studies, but this community dissolved once his studies were over. Adding about his (international) classmates, that *“none of them could find a job, so they actually everyone left.”* Therefore, the sense of community was only temporary. Tony had decided to move away from Kokkola at the time of the interview, stating *“And actually now it’s over. You just catch me when I’m actually moving out.”* Extending the smooth integration process further than the university walls may clearly have an effect on the feeling of connection with the local community also.

In the process of settling down, new international students faced the responsibility of being financially afloat and difficulties in finding work.

5.1.7 The bottleneck: financial worries and work

The interviewees had to fully cover their living costs whilst studying in Finland. They had all started their studies before the tuition fees were implemented in Finland. The financial burden had a negative effect on the integration process as it kept the newcomers from being able to focus on getting acquainted with their new city. Lack of money and expenses are thus a hurdle in connecting with the local society.

Sophie disclosed that she was partly financially supported by her mother in her home country before she was able to find work: *“one of the biggest problems I've had is money. Kind of because everything is very expensive in Finland and coming from a foreign country where we don't have, we are not a rich country. That was a, which was a difficulty because of course I couldn't work for the first few years. So, I tried and I had some like random jobs, but it's hard and money was hard and I was supported by my Mom basically, and that was a bit tight and I had to really count every penny.”* She later explained that having to follow a tight budget meant that it also limited her possibilities for free time activities.

Allan confirmed the effect of the financial burden on social activities, hoping for more free activities that would enable more students to take part in them: *“I think it was more of the case for those students who are on a lower budget, like there wasn't so many free events, that everybody could like go there and just, Maybe. Maybe talk to their classmates.”* Cost was an additional hurdle for students to meet other people.

Working was clearly an important motive for moving to Finland. One participant explained that he namely expected to be able to gain work experience when coming to Finland. Another one, Milla also shared how she had hoped on finding work as soon as possible once coming to Finland: *“So I was kind of actually depending on myself before I came to study. I was already working in my country, so I had some savings. But they were not enough like to last for more than one year. So, there was a pressure that if I don't get a job within the one year, then how do I survive? So that was number one concern.”*

Job opportunities seemed scarce for international graduates, making them want to stay in Kokkola more difficult. The appearing difficult professional future of these international students was clearly a key factor in driving the fresh graduates away. Tony's classmates experienced a lack of possibilities: *"none of them could find a job, so they actually everyone left."* Wendy explained that she already knew beforehand from her friend in the city that finding work in Kokkola would be hard, and it worried her a lot. She found out the hard way that it was true. Max described his frustration when at first thinking there would be availabilities, but they appeared out of reach. He wanted to work but there was a glass wall stopping him from accessing the positions he was after: *"It looked like opportunities were out there, but they are unreachable. And if I'm being honest, I mean, if I look at, you know, I mean how frustrating it may have been you know, in my case, in trying to get a job that I believe suits me..."*

Finding the right position had a big influence on the respondents: more than hope and value, it can give intention and a reason to stay in Finland. Wendy described how finding relevant work gave meaning to her life and encouraged her to start speaking more Finnish:

"And then the final summer before I graduated, which was like before like after the third year then I landed a job in inside there. So that was the first time that I spoke Finnish. Yeah. So that was the process. So, it was in. I remember the day that I started, so it was 28th of May 2019 that I started skipping the first day in the hospital. Yeah, because it was a good experience. It was like a day, the day that would change my life forever." (Wendy)

These experiences point out how multi-layered the process of integration the international students are. Each layer requiring its own specific attention. Each participant experienced the different dimension to some extent. However, the most influential element of their integration may have been their original intention towards staying in Finland or not.

5.1.8 Looking ahead

Taking part in studies along does not guarantee finding one's place in the local community. Most interviewees (8/10) expressed feeling settled down in Finland, sharing their appreciation of the

country and its people. A couple of respondents explained that their original plan of staying only temporarily was clearly still valid upon graduation. Whilst they did feel comfortable in Finland, they did not feel like it was their home. This showed that they had not felt any pull to stay longer in Finland despite their studies.

The feeling of growing roots in Finland was described by 6 out of 10, showing how strong the feeling of integration was. The integrated participants appeared to have adapted to the local lifestyle and values, adopting them as their own. The respondents also mentioned a sense of similarity and equality with the locals (a feeling of “we,” rather than opposing me vs. them), as well as the importance of security and financial stability. All respondents feeling settled in also expressed either being part of the local community or having their own community. Michelle described her experience:

“You know when you have home... You have a family here. You have a job here. You feel comfortable here. You don't, you don't have any problem with anyone with the system with nothing, you're clean, so it's just comfortable. So, you, you feel yourself more like a Finn now, even though you're not one and you will never be one, but you're just there.” (Michelle)

Sophie called Finland her new home country, explaining that she is now *“more comfortable now than in Finland than her country of origin. Most of my adult life, I have been here [in Finland].”* Other interviewees also shared this view on the difficulty of returning to what they left behind because the systems in each country were different and needed adapting to: they had already invested so much to be where they are now. Wendy reflected on the situation in her home country and her ability to work in Finland, but not in her country of origin. This may point out that returning “back home” may simply not be in the cards for practical reasons.

“I know quite well the situation in my home country and then I know for a fact. Oh, it's not bad, but I just know that for example, if I lived here for a long time, then when I come back it would be hard for me to adapt back into the system. (...) I'm settling down here already, so it would be weird for me to go back, especially when I already speak the language and, you know, I've learned to

adapt here and then, like, especially those medical terms, I know them in English or Finnish, but I don't know them in my mother tongue". (Wendy)

In addition to the atmosphere of equality, Finland was deemed a good place to live it provides both a comfortable and secure environment. These same reasons were mentioned by the two "less integrated" participants when asked what they appreciated in Finland. This suggests that the environment is important, but the people and relationships with locals may be the key to having stronger reasons to stay.

"It's nice to stay in Finland. Social Security is great. People are really great. The rules and regulations are very equal, equal for everyone. And I (...) most of the time, I feel like everyone is like same as me and then there were doing, they're living their life and something like that. (...) like I said, Finland is good to stay. People are very good. And then and then you can spend time with community and work what you want, and those regulations and the social life is very good here. So yeah. Depends for some people, but for me, for me it's good." (Patrick)

Interviewees praised the honesty and transparency in the Finnish culture, especially in relationships. This easy-going culture was easy to embrace and understand. Wendy explained that she felt it was easy to be around Finns, there is no "cutting around the bush":

"In Asian culture then, there's a lot of like hindered meaning in one sentence. And there's a lot of how you would behave (...) you know, to be to be included in this society. So, that would stress me out a lot, because like I when I hang out with my Finnish friends and then they don't really complain about me being weird or being too much or too little or too like just I'm just cool with everybody and it's just fun. Like it's pure fun. But yeah. But then with Asian friends, then usually most of the time I must be careful a little bit. OK, what do they mean when they say something, or like am I a little bit too much to them like, you know, you see their facial expression and then if they say something, then I would wonder they mean. So, it's just kind of like a little bit stressful." (Wendy)

Despite clearly seeing Finland as a good place to live, for some it was clear that Kokkola was just a temporary stopover, as Tony explained that “...*actually I came to study, you know? And I didn't come to move and live my life....*” This clearly points out that for some, coming to Finland and purposefully settling down in the city may have never been on the agenda despite appreciating the country for what it is.

Throughout the interviews, social integration was not only possible but also very important regarding the overall integration process. Potential to support this social integration process also stood out in the research.

5.2 How to support the social integration process?

The interviewees provided some insights about how to better support mechanisms for the integration of foreigners. Three types were identified: general support could be provided to the local society to have better tools to foster a more welcoming society, specific help could be provided to the international inhabitants and last, the information available could be developed.

5.2.1 Support connections

As previously discussed, the integration process of the international students would benefit from more contacts with the local community. The lack of connections during the time of their studies seemed to hinder their settling down in the local community, with 9/10 respondents telling they had very little contact with Finnish students during their studies. Also, the newcomers had difficulties getting acquainted with locals, as they tended to feel more at ease in their own crowd. This suggested that facilitation efforts could be focused on encouraging Finns to reaching out or getting to know newcomers. Examples of facilitation efforts could be required as Sophie disclosed her experience: “*I met some Finnish student (in class). It's not that many because I think Finns, especially in school things kind of stick together*”. She continued that

“Most of my friends from here are international and the Finnish ones that I have aren't from the classes, because there's always the Finnish group of people

and then I felt like most of them in classes aren't that interested in like mingling was international students.” (Sophie)

It is understandable to seek the company of people with a similar background or language, but such a behaviour may lead the creation of “bubbles.” Unfortunately, these bubbles may create segregation and not encourage stepping out of the bubble. Patrick explained that there is a certain comfort in being with someone from the same country, *“it’s easy to connect with my fellow countrymen. And because they have the same language, they have same culture and there from the same nation. So, it’s kind of kind of like a soft, soft place on your heart. So, you will always like be compatible.”* Tania discussed why these bubbles can have a negative impact and mixing up people should be encouraged:

“I think helping the students integrate with the Finnish culture should be a bit more than just teaching us about the culture. You know, ‘cause, we were mostly in our own bubble. We were mostly in our own community because there weren’t many opportunities for us to hang out with Finnish people. (...) It makes it harder for foreigners to reach out to them and like you know, try to make a connection. And so, a lot of students... People stay in the bubble. This community go back to their home country, still the same person.” (Tania)

She stated that bubbles were a fact in the student community. In her experience the bubbles were a consequence of the lack of facilitation to bring people together. She hoped for more possibilities to be in contact with locals, not being able to connect with them herself.

Especially the interviewees that moved out of Kokkola after graduation mentioned the size of the town and its conservative mindset as a drawback for staying; a minority of interviewees (2 out of 10) were openly critical of the town, but it is fact that Kokkola cannot please everyone. Taina compared Kokkola and Helsinki (where she ended up moving). *“I mean, I think people are a little bit odd like, not so expressive (...) too conservative like I think in in the mindset people are more conservative. I think in Helsinki it’s a bit different, and there people are like you know, more experienced with new cultures and foreigners, but yeah, in Kokkola, I felt like it was a bit more conservative.”* She pointed

out that the different mindset was due to the fact locals in Kokkola were not so used to being exposed and interacting with different nationalities.

The views on the importance of networking and human connections suggest that the newcomers could benefit from facilitated networking activities to meet locals, not only to learn about the culture, but also to be recognized by the locals. Integration is a two-way path that may require assistance on “both ends” to avoid miscommunication. As Daniel put it,

“Finnish people are pretty like introvert and is not it... they don't mean bad, they just they are not this extroverted some culture like my culture and also to make Finnish people understand that this person sometimes when they come they don't mean bad. so that they're... they're probably a bit lost in the way of how they see everything.” (Daniel)

Supporting the integration of international students would therefore influence the local population, eventually also, helping them getting more acquainted to dealing with different nationalities and culture. And thus, eventually improving the integration process of future generations of internationals (students and others).

5.2.2 More support for the new international inhabitants

Newcomers pointed out that pieces of information and support that they would have appreciated receiving, that would have assisted them in their settling down and integration into the society. It is important to remember that these students are also immigrants, which need a certain amount of support to settle down. Events should be encouraged to bring both internationals and local people together with a low participation threshold, to avoid anyone feeling forced into meeting new people. There are already some good models of successful events, such as the BackStage café organized by the Parish, and activities being organized within the school. These options were very much appreciated by the newcomers in Kokkola.

Allan pointed out that as a newcomer he would have wished for events that made them feel part of the society, not isolated within the school world. The municipality could for instance develop events or happenings that could appeal to newcomers. Allan felt that *“there isn't a lot of activities designed*

to make people feel like they're in a bigger society, things were a little bit isolated." This type of happening could provide the newcomers the feeling of being "part of the bigger picture," giving them information on their new city and eventually providing them options for a longer-term settlement than just for their studies. This could have an impact on a newcomer that is undecided about his or her future in the city.

The bubbles described earlier had an additional drawback in addition to creating segregation between groups: the language issues. The internationals in these bubbles were able to live without the use of Finnish, either using their native language or English. International newcomers willing to learn the language should be better encouraged on their journey, amongst other by being given the chance to practice it in real life situations. This could happen by developing contacts with the local community and access to events and activities to encourage the exposure to and use of Finnish. This also calls for more contacts with the local population or additional possibilities to study the language.

Meeting locals usually took place in the free time, "*organically*" as Sophie put it. She discussed that good would not follow if people were forced to connect. She explained that she met many of her friends, including Finns, through practising sports and being involved in various free time activities. She shared her experience:

"I played many different kinds of sports. I did all the kind of student or like organized events. I was a part of... I was in the board of our Student Union for all the years (...) I met a lot of people. And so many of those people are very close friends of mine now. I have met many people both like students internationally, the students that I was working with and like people that I was working is for example in the student union." (Sophie)

In Daniel's experience, being recognized by the locals meant that he was part of the community. Events should be open and accessible for locals and newcomers, and these would allow both parties to meet and recognize each other, without feeling "forced."

“Actually, I don't feel like [I am part of the local community], but it seems that other people feel like I am because I'm living in XXX and I'm working in XXX and people know me without me knowing them. They speak about it and suddenly it's like, ‘oh yeah, you're Daniel from South America’ (...) I don't feel part of it but... But it seems that I'm somehow part of it already.” (Daniel)

One participant, Michelle, had taken part in the integration programme organized by the TE-Office prior to starting her studies, as she had entered the countries on other grounds as for studies. She reflected on her participation in the programme as being extremely beneficial to her integration, as she was able to learn about Finland as a country and about living in it. She explained that *“... in the integration, they focus on language, but they tell you more about Finland, like everything about Finland, the history and how the system functions everything. The KELA, the taxes, everything basically.”* The official integration was an important source of support and offered information that was not provided later during her studies. Michelle was one of the interviewees that was happily settled and integrated, hinting that such an integration plan for people not currently benefiting from this type of integration support (such as students) could also be worthwhile. It would not necessarily have to be in the same magnitude as the TE-Office integration programme but focusing on language could alleviate the pressure from learning it later during the studies.

A few interviewees described the feeling of being unwelcome in Kokkola upon arrival and the “cold” reaction of the locals. The unwelcome feeling may come from the lack of communication. This may be something difficult to address and may require some cultural changes that may take time. This issue, as well as misunderstandings and false expectations could be avoided or alleviated by providing key information on the society and ways of life in Finland.

5.2.3 Develop the information available

The interviewees mentioned additional struggles that could be easily addressed. One key element was the false expectations and lack of data available. There were false expectations related to Finland for instance, newcomers knew Finland was in Europe, thus associated it with Central Europe. Not all participants were aware of the requirements of living up north, for instance.

There is a need for data to provide a realistic view of current situation and possibility for both prospective students to make founded decisions. Statistics and numbers could provide some proof and basis to make the decision to stay in Kokkola: showing that staying, living, and working in Kokkola is possible for international graduates could be encouraging for international students.

“So I think that it would also be good to have like a realistic view that, for example, this much of the international students end up staying in Kokkola or, you know, and the students would, for example have a realistic view, (...) in reality there are some people who stay in Kokkola and work there, but sometimes you could end up in groups of students that don't realize this. They just think that everybody leaves Kokkola, or they just feel like everybody thinks Kokkola is this negative thought but... And then there is also this kind of slogans that that come your head and they want you to stay, but then you apply to jobs, or you try to make friends. But it doesn't happen. So, if they realize that there are, for example. Let's say 10 people. For one year, that fine job like 10 international students last year are now full time employed. Then it's like a fact you realize how much people in Kokkola are capable of keeping international students. “ (Allan)

These both points argue in favour of developing an honest information service, providing clear details on what to expect from Finland, what is available and possible (because there are tangible possibilities for long-term settlement in Kokkola). Thankfully, this action is currently being dealt with the activities of the Welcome Office and MyKokkola website. Follow-up discussions with newcomers and current inhabitants would surely be welcome to ensure that the key information is available.

Whilst some interviewees underlined their love for snow and winter in Finland, some others stated that it was too cold for them, and it made it difficult to plan activities for instance, as Tony explained *“like I wasn't used to my activities being weather dependent.”* Whilst the weather is something that cannot be affected, people can be informed about activities and things to do throughout the year.

The interviews provided valuable insight into the experience of the recent international graduates. There are as many integration paths as there are people and profiles. Nevertheless, the respondents did provide a message of hope and tools that could help make integration of current and future students even more smooth.

6 RESULTS: THE WORKSHOP

6.1 The journey maps

Using the information gathered in the interviews, it was possible to design journey maps for three types of students: students A, B and C. These types of students that may be beneficial for the design of paths for their integration. The interviews provided remarkably interesting insight into the settling down process of the international students in Kokkola. The most interesting finding could be that the “mental disposition” towards integration takes place before even entering the country.

These journey maps created based on the interviews were used as a base for discussing in the workshop organised with local stakeholders. This helped to have a clearer view of the situation. Getting acquainted with the different profiles, understanding their pains, their hurdles, their motives, and thoughts helped the participants in focusing on the right problems. As this research was in Kokkola, it was important to focus on actual students that had come to live in the area, not any student elsewhere in Finland: to improve the situation locally, we most focus on the processes in Kokkola together with local actors in the area. Next the identified student profiles are explained and then the findings of the workshop shared.

6.1.1 Student A

Type A is set on simply studying in the country, the interest towards getting to know the host country and local people by oneself appeared to be slightly diminished – or at least, it would require more active facilitation from the “outside”, such as the host institution or some association for instance, to create more contacts and possibilities for the newcomer and locals to meet. Type A led an active student life and most of his or her free time with other internationals. It would also make sense to strongly encourage learning the local language if there is a wish to work in the country later. This newcomer is most likely to leave the country sooner rather than later, despite currently being employed, as he or she does not have any deeper bond with Finland. Type A appreciates what Finland has to offer as a living environment (nature, silence, security) but does not have any connection to the local community.

6.1.2 Student B

The second type of newcomer is Type B, he or she has integrated with most ease (or at least, with less pressure). His or her expectations were not too high and his or her attitude was optimistic and initiative-taking. There seemed to be less pressure for the integration to happen, as there was less at stake. This type of newcomer was taking in all good things: learning about the culture and the language, meeting new people and wanting to develop him or herself through education and work possibilities. For this type of newcomer, being in Finland is a positive step in the future. Type B was motivated and trustful about the process. He or she did not focus that much on the language at first, but he or she wished to learn and does so along the encounters with locals.

6.1.3 Student C

The third type of newcomer, Type C, may have worked the hardest to integrate. This may be due to the pressure placed in the goals to integrate: the need to find work, the wish to create a home and a family. He or she does appear to invest the most (energy, effort) and has a much more long-term goal to remain in Finland than the two others. This newcomer learned Finnish earlier than the two other profiles.

6.2 The workshop solutions

The workshop participants answered the question: “How might we help alleviate the financial burden on students?” with two suggestions and the steps to bring the solutions to life.

6.2.1 Finding the right channels to suggest the connection with language studies

This solution focuses on developing the Finnish language skills of international students. It was suggested that taking part in a language course and acquiring a certain skill level could decrease the tuition fee to be paid to the university. It was also suggested that efforts could be made to offer more possibilities to practice the language and connecting with locals, through events, language

cafés or Tandem learning. The Language Center Linginno in Vaasa, which is affiliated to the University of Vaasa and Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, was also mentioned, as they are planning a language course to be offered to new international students before their studies start in Vaasa.

6.2.2 Voluntary service for social integration in local society

Voluntary service was mentioned as a low threshold option for getting into contact with potential employers, developing the local network and overall gaining (professional) recognition from the locals. The key steps to bringing this solution to life would be to be in contact with local associations who may wish to take on volunteers. The 4H organization in Finland is seeking camp leaders each year, it was suggested that some international students could have skills and expertise that could be of interest for the youth. At the same time, the international students could function as leaders, gaining experience and a small salary, whilst also providing an international experience to the youth. Last, it was proposed that local sport clubs and associations would be invited to the camps to come to meet the students to encourage them to join the clubs. This type of event should have to take place at a convenient time for both the clubs and the students (not right when the students are arriving and sorting practical things out, for instance).

The workshop provided practical examples and ideas of what could be done at the local level. The workshop participants also became more aware of the multi-layered aspect of the students' path to settling down. The only drawback of the workshop was the low participant level: many instances were invited but only three out of about thirty-five were able to join.

7 DISCUSSION

This present study has helped understand the experience of international students in their social integration in Kokkola, firstly by studying the elements that influence the integration process from the viewpoint of international, secondly by pinpointing potential solutions and stakeholders to smooth the process(es).

To answer the first issue, international students were interviewed to gain insight into the process and help the researcher approach the topic with an inductive manner. A workshop was then organized with material gained from the interviews together with local stakeholders to discuss challenges and ideate solutions.

The interviewees provided insight into the “user paths” for the international students by defining their expectations, challenges, hopes and pain points from before their arrival and throughout their time as students. These findings helped shaped three different profiles of students, which are more or less likely to remain in Finland in the future. Each profile described their own requirements and needs, supporting the argument put forwards by Jääskeläinen (2021) and Huuskola (2022) that international students would benefit from personalized support, rather than generalized information, to help the students thrive as individuals; as well as facilitation to help connect with the local community and working life. Jääskeläinen (2021) additionally pointed out that a lack of personal and professional networks established during the studies would be detrimental when looking for work, this supports the importance of networks and connections that the respondents also underlined.

Whilst the respondents built their own international communities with fellow international students, the connection to the local community appeared to be particularly important, yet difficult to achieve. Contact with locals enabled to learn about the culture and habits as well as a practice the language. Respondents hoped for events and possibilities to connect with locals, in an “organic” manner. This is in line with the work of Saukkonen (2016), who argued that the best for a newcomer to integrate is to be in contact with a local and take part in activities with the local community. He discussed that integration is a multidimensional process that includes a practical aspect (finding a home and work) as well as integrative and cultural facets, which deal with building ties and getting to know and understand the local culture (Saukkonen, 2016). Overall, successful integration can take place

when there is a possibility to not only settled down in practical terms but also find one's place in the community and develop of sense of comfort within it.

Building a personal connection with the community, feeling supported and experiencing a sense of equality appeared to be important factors to feel integrated. The more one felt accepted and recognized, supported, and has access to the same benefits and help as the locals, the more the feeling of "we" grew, and the respondent felt at home. Research from Mathies and Karhunen (2019, p. 73) defended the same idea, pointing out that social ties were a key element in "binding" the student to Finland. They listed employment as an additional reason to stay in Finland. Juusola et al. (2021, p. 28) also discussed that the more students encountered hurdles (in their studies, but also with finding work or financial/health issues) the higher the chances were for them to remain in Finland., as this process would help the student to realise the existing supporting network around him or her, and benefit from the support and shelter by the society. Ergo, the specific needs and challenges met by the international students must be heard and answered to for them to realise they are part of the community and to help ease their settling down.

The respondents discussed their challenges when arriving to Finland, as they encountered a wide range of issues ranging from finding accommodation, navigating through the practicalities of life in Finland, learning a new language and getting used to a new academic system. Huuskola (2022) also pinpointed these hurdles in the process of settling down for international students. In their interviews, the participants described pressure in their studied, to learn the language and find work. This pressure made it difficult for them to take part in free-time activities or focus on their studies, for instance. Pressure had a negative effect on the integration process, as discussed by Jämskeläinen (2021).

The importance of learning the Finnish language was raised by all the participants, some pointing out that it was the key to integration. Saukkonen (2016) also listed that learning the local language was an important part of cultural integration, and thus, of integration overall. However, students experienced a lot of difficulties when learning Finnish, pointing out that efforts on language education could be made.

Interestingly, social integration in Kokkola or in Finland was clearly not a given despite being a student in Finland, it required additional efforts to connect with the community surrounding the school. Research by the German Expert Council on Integration and Migration (2012), quoting Sidhu

(2011) pointed out that attending university in a host country is not enough to guarantee integration in said country. Thus, there should be purposeful integration support the students' integration, studies in an international environment in a host country are not enough.

The interviews provided remarkably interesting insight into the settling down process of the international students in Kokkola. The most intriguing finding would be the importance of the "mental disposition" towards integration and that it takes shape before even entering the country. The more one was open to the possibility of a life in Finland, the more one was initiative-taking to make it happen. This aspect of mental disposition towards integration was a new concept that had not appeared in previous research. Huuskola (2022), however, did list a lack of information prior to arrival in Finland that her respondents appeared to miss. This could point out that the lack of information may have a detrimental impact on the integration process. She also underlined the importance of providing information in various formats to cater to the needs of a broad audience.

Local stakeholders were invited to discuss the topic of the international students in the framework of workshop, as integration is a two-way process that involves not only the newcomer but also the host community (Gallagher, 2020). The interviews were used to building "journey maps" to help the workshop participants discussed and ideate solution together.

Let us make Kokkola feel like home

The two main solutions that were ideated by the workshop participants aimed at alleviating the financial burden that students experienced in their studies, creating an additional hurdle to their integration.

The first solution aimed at supporting language education of international students. This is in line with the official integration efforts that were also described in the Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035 published by Finnish Government in October 2021. Language education should be improved to help newcomers have better access to work possibilities in Finland, and thus, suffer less from financial difficulties.

The second purposeful on helping international students join the community through voluntary work and create valuable contacts, which could help them professionally later. The importance of activities and events as well as sharing experiences with locals within the integration process was also underlined by Saukkonen (2016).

8 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This research aimed at understanding how international students in Kokkola experienced their social integration, focusing on the one hand on what elements influenced the process and on the other hand, on what could be done to improve the process.

A total of ten recent graduates were interviewed. The respondents provided three elements that defined their integration process, the right mindset, the people, and the language. Considering these elements and the points discussed during the workshop organized in the framework of this research, there are various steps that can be taken to encourage the social integration of international students in Kokkola and assist their overall integration and settling down as part of the community.

The answer to the main question is that most international students experience the process of social integration as being an individual and gradual human process. There is not one single story, there are different paths to integration. Based on the interviews, successful integration could be based on three key elements:

- The **right mindset**: as one respondent mentioned, one may decide to belong to the community or not. To integrate into the local community, one should be proactive, ask questions, take the first steps, be respectful and patient
- The **people**:
 - The international “bubble” tended to be the first natural community that the international student joined upon arrival, mostly composed of fellow international students. Whilst it is understandable due to the comfort it brings; it also bears the risk of segregation from the local population.
 - Connecting with local people was important at many levels, as it provided the possibility to create more long-term connections and the possibility to experience and practice the local language first hand.
 - Broadening one’s network also had the important role of allowing the international student of being recognized by the local community and developing potential connections to the local working life and community.

- The **language**: this was deemed to be the key to integration, both by those that had made the decision to try to learn it and those that had not regarded as essential at their arrival. Speaking the local language clearly provided more personal contacts with the local community.

Whilst the participants were able to point out positively defining elements in their social integration process, the participants also shared that they had encountered hurdles and pressure that made their settling down difficult. The international students experienced various emotions when arriving to Finland ranging from excitement and hope to confusion and stress as well as pressure to learn the language, find work, and integrate. There is simply a lot happening as they arrive and start to settle down. This overabundance of changes and need for adaptation calls for support adjusted to their situation, taking into account the timeframe (simultaneously entering the country, starting new studies and looking for work opportunities) to avoid a bottleneck situation, their financial situation (additional costs may be a dealbreaker for some participants in case of events) and the fact that the international students form a very heterogenous crowd both in terms of country of origins, culture and life situation.

The overall issue remains, how to support their integration process, and eventually support the retainment of international talent? The integration process should not be at the sole responsibility of the international students. The host community and municipality are also in charge of welcoming and creating a positive and safe environment for all newcomers. Each key element mentioned previously can be addressed:

- The first step is realising that the mindset of the newcomer is playing an active role in the process. The best way to foster a favourable mindset to integration is to work at providing sufficient information beforehand, creating awareness about long-term possibilities in Kokkola (eventually also in Finland) and diminishing the worries and fears the newcomer may have. This could be done by interviewing current international students and involving them in the creation of the pre-arrival information provided to newcomers. In addition, supporting the right mindset can be done by providing help, prearrival training, facilitation in a cross-administrative way: information should be available in different channels and in different formats to be inclusively accessible. (British Government, 2022)

- The international student are immigrants going through a major life change when moving to Kokkola and Finland. They will need support of some kind: support in getting acquainted with the local community, language, and culture, setting up their home, and understanding how the country works.
- The international student is undergoing many substantial changes simultaneously, meaning that scheduling events and providing information should be carefully thought out and prioritized to not become too overbearing.
- Social integration happens when people meet people. Newcomers should be offered the possibility to discover their new city, associations, local events, and culture. Connecting with locals can be encouraged through events organized at the local level by the municipality (sports clubs, associations) and developing volunteer services to provide opportunities to international students to grow their professional networks and gain experience at a lower threshold. Learning the local language should be boosted, with the possibility to exchange with locals and take part in classes.
- All newcomers would surely benefit from practical information on what to pack along, how to dress, where to shop and how to create a home from scratch in Finland. This task could be performed by social workers, town representatives or local organizations aiming at supporting the integration of foreigners. Information on how to manage a budget, prepare meals at a student-friendly budget and how to deal with taxation and bureaucracy when one starts work would also be surely valued. Some of the newcomers are living alone for the first time in their lives and they have not attended the Economic Household courses (kotitalouskurssi) as the Finnish pupils do during their Comprehensive school years (University of Helsinki, 2018).
- Sport was mentioned by the respondents as an appreciated avenue for meeting new people (international or local people). It could be worthwhile to invite local sport clubs to come to present their activities and invite students (all nationalities combined) to join them by coming to meet them once the academic year has be-

gun. The active season for most sport clubs tend to start at the beginning of August, meaning the newcomers miss joining. Sport clubs could be invited to meet the new students to recruit new members and help them connect on a low threshold.

The municipality will soon be taking on more responsibility as to the integration of international students with the upcoming updates being made to the legislation on the integration laws in Finland. This research aims at pointing out that international students are also in clear need for support in their settling down. Whilst their host institution can provide support within the academic framework, additional support on the living prospects and settling down as inhabitants of the local community could be provided by the municipality or at least coordinated at the municipal level, taking in account the support these international specifically need.

This study does have several limitations. Firstly, the study cannot generalize the findings due the small number of interviewees (N=10). Furthermore, it would have made sense to extend the interviews to international graduates that have left Finland upon graduation, to understand their experience and why they decided not to stay. Additionally, new programmes and services have been put into place during the past year that are aiming at locally supporting international students in connecting with the working life (Centria, 2021). The respondents in this research had not experienced these services and thus may not give a picture of the actual situation for students currently enrolled at the HEI.

Despite the limitations of this study, it did shed light on the importance of social integration and multi-layered aspect of integration overall (Saukkonen, 2016). This research aimed understanding the students' viewpoint to eventually support them in their settling down and assist those working with integration programmes understand the scope of the issue at hand. International students have been long falling between two seats, but due to the current labour shortage, their value as potential new talents to retain is being recognized.

This research aimed at understanding the social integration process of international students, to get a clearer view of their experience in Kokkola. This study shed light on the importance of developing social integration alongside the efforts of building a professional future for the international students in Finland. One must bear in mind the fact that taking part in studies did not account for integration efforts if there were no facilitated contacts with locals. The more an international student

had social ties and felt part of local community, the better the chances were that he or she would stay in the area. The results presented within this survey thus call for action to support the social integration as soon as the students arrive to Finland or preferable already whilst they are admitted as new students to encourage a positive mindset towards the prospective of settling down in Finland. Such support would only boost the other actions put into places by ongoing projects aiming at developing professional networks such as the Talent Boost programme, by offering a more holistic integration experience to the newcomers.

Further research could focus on the connection between intention to stay, mindset towards integration and remaining in Finland for international students, and whether their intentions fluctuate during their studies.

Another angle of study would be developing immersion classes combining international students and typically fully Finnish programmes to enable the shaping of connections. Such research could focus on the experience of the students (internationals and locals) enrolled in such a programme and how it would affect the international participants' stay rate and whether the local students and international would form more friendships comparing to other traditional programmes. This research could also offer insight on how local students experience "internationalisation at home."

Last, another valuable research topic would be the implementation and follow-up of volunteer service programmes for international students in Finland: how do they influence the participants' language skills and employment rates? How do they influence their integration process?

REFERENCES

Agius, A. (2022, March 7). How to Create an Effective Customer Journey Map [Examples + Template]. How to Create an Effective Customer Journey Map. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://blog.hubspot.com/service/customer-journey-map>

Alkukartoitus ja kotoutumissuunnitelma - TE-Palvelut. (2022). Initial assessment and integration plan. <https://www.te-palvelut.fi/tyonhakijalle/tukea-tyollistymiseen/kotoutumispalvelut/alkukartoitus>

Barker, M. (2021). Social Integration in Social Isolation: Newcomers' Integration during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 33(2), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20313>

British Government. (2022, February 8). Accessible communication formats. GOV.UK. Retrieved 24 May 2022, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/accessible-communication-formats>

Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration. (2021). Integration and refugee reception. Integra-tion.Fi. Retrieved 22 May 2022, from <https://kotoutuminen.fi/en/integration-and-refugee-reception>

Courtney, J. (2019, June 4). Lightning Decision Jam: A Workshop to Solve Any Problem. Medium. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://uxplanet.org/lightning-decision-jam-a-workshop-to-solve-any-problem-65bb42af41dc>

de Angelis, R. (2021). Global education and migration in a changing European union. *Centre for Global Education*, 32, 55–78. <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-32/global-education-and-migration-changing-european-union>

Drew, C. (2022, January 7). Developing our new Systemic Design Framework - Design Council. Medium. Retrieved 18 May 2022, from <https://medium.com/design-council/developing-our-new-systemic-design-framework-e0f74fe118f7>

Education. (2021, August 16). Why Students Choose Finland, Research Revealed. <https://www.education.co/blog/students-choose-finland/>

European Students' Union (ESU). (2021, March). Brain drain in higher education European context. ESU. <https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Brain-Drain-final-report-ESC41-Google-Docs.pdf>

Eurostat. (2020, October). Learning mobility statistics. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Learning_mobility_statistics#Students from abroad](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Learning_mobility_statistics#Students_from_abroad)

Eurostat. (2022, March). Migration and migrant population statistics. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant population: 23.7 million non-EU citizens living in the EU on 1 January 2021](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant_population:_23.7_million_non-EU_citizens_living_in_the_EU_on_1_January_2021)

Finnish Government. (2019, December 19). Talent Boost -ohjelma. Valtioneuvosto. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/project?tunnus=TEM001:00/2020>

Finnish Government. (2021, April 13). Maahanmuuton tilannekatsaus 1/2021: Suomen väestö monimuotoistuu – vaihtelua on alueittain. Valtioneuvosto. Retrieved 22 May 2022, from <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/1410869/suomen-vaesto-monimuotoistuu-vaihtelua-on-alueittain#:~:text=M%C3%A4%C3%A4r%C3%A4llisesti%20eniten%20ulko-maalaistaustaisia%20oli%20Helsingiss%C3%A4,oli%20alle%203%20%25%20kunnan%20v%C3%A4est%C3%B6st%C3%A4>

Finnish Government. (2021b, September 9). Government roadmap compiles measures to increase education-based and work-based immigration. Valtioneuvosto. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410877/government-roadmap-compiles-measures-to-increase-education-based-and-work-based-immigration#:~:text=The%20Government's%20objective%20is%20to,Finland%20for%20work%20after%20graduation.>

Finnish National Agency for Education. (2022, January 27). 32 700 applicants to higher education institutions' English-taught study programmes and art study programmes [Press release]. <https://www.oph.fi/en/news/2022/32-700-applicants-higher-education-institutions-english-taught-study-programmes-and-art>

Funk, A., Walenkamp, J. H. C., & Research Group International Cooperation. (2013). Binding International Talent to the Netherlands. The Hague University of Applied Sciences. https://www.scienceguide.nl/media/1583823/lect_walenkamp_binding_int_talent.pdf

Gallagher, A. (2020, February 7). We need to talk about integration after migration. Here are four ways we can improve it. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/we-need-to-talk-about-integration-after-migration/>

Gibbons, S. (2016, July 31). Design Thinking 101. Nielsen Norman Group. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/design-thinking/>

Government report proposes extensive programme to speed up integration of immigrants. (2021, June 17). Valtioneuvosto. Retrieved April 19, 2022, from <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410877/government-report-proposes-extensive-programme-to-speed-up-integration-of-immigrants>

Government report proposes extensive programme to speed up integration of immigrants. (2021b, June 21). Valtioneuvosto. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410877/government-report-proposes-extensive-programme-to-speed-up-integration-of-immigrants>

Gultekin, Ph.D., O. (2021). The Phases of International Education and Internationalization throughout History. World Journal of Education and Humanities, 3(2), 96–111. <https://doi.org/10.22158/wjeh.v3n2p96>

Hämäläinen, A. (2021, June 17). Selonteko kotoutumisen edistämisen uudistamistarpeista [Slides]. Valtioneuvosto.Fi. https://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/1410877/53440649/Selonteko_kotoutumisen_edistamisen_uudistamistarpeista_17062021.pdf/e39eb0d9-4c6c-7e54-e520-e2e235fd7b28/Selonteko_kotoutumisen_edistamisen_uudistamistarpeista_17062021.pdf?t=1623922938891

Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M., & de Lacey, S. (2016). Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them. Human Reproduction, 31(3), 498–501. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hum-rep/dev334>

Huuskola, K. (2022, January 17). Savonia-artikkeli: Suomalainen korkeakoulu ja yhteiskunta kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden näkökulmasta. Savonia AMK. Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://www.savonia.fi/artikkelit/savonia-artikkeli-suomalainen-korkeakoulu-ja-yhteiskunta-kansainvalisten-opiskelijoiden-nakokulmasta/>

ICEF Monitor. (2013, May 30). Increasing the “stay rate” of international students. ICEF Monitor - Market Intelligence for International Student Recruitment. <https://monitor.icef.com/2013/05/increasing-the-stay-rate-of-international-students/>

ICEF Monitor. (2022, January 17). Economic impact of foreign students in Spain estimated at €2.2 billion. ICEF Monitor - Market Intelligence for International Student Recruitment. <https://monitor.icef.com/2019/06/economic-impact-of-foreign-students-in-spain-estimated-at-e2-2-billion/>

ICEF Monitor. (2022, March 31). Measuring the economic impact of foreign students in the UK and the country’s competitive position in international recruitment. ICEF Monitor - Market Intelligence for International Student Recruitment. Retrieved 21 May 2022, from <https://monitor.icef.com/2021/09/measuring-the-economic-impact-of-foreign-students-in-the-uk-and-the-countrys-competitive-position-in-international-recruitment/>

Jääskeläinen, R. (2021, December 10). Kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden sitouttaminen vaatii panostusta opintojen alusta lähtien. Opetushallitus. Retrieved 22 May 2022, from <https://www.oph.fi/fi/uutiset/2021/kansainvalisten-opiskelijoiden-sitouttaminen-vaatii-panostusta-opintojen-alusta>

Juusola, H., Nori, H., Lyytinen, A., Kohtamäki, V., & Kivistö, J. (2021, April). Ulkomaiset tutkintopiskelijat suomalaisissa korkeakouluissa (No. 14). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163013/OKM_2021_14.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954–2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>

Ketonen, P., & Wallenius, K. (2022, January 20). Haitko korkeakoulujen vieraskielisiin tutkintoihin tai nÄpyttelijÄän koulutukseen? Katso Ylen yhteishakukoneesta, kuinka moni kilpailee kanssasi. Yle Uutiset. Retrieved 10 May 2022, from <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-12276529>

Kluukeri, I. (2022, January 20). Centria-ammattikorkeakoulun englanninkielisiin koulutuksiin ennennÄtysmÄÄrÄ hakemuksia. Yle Uutiset. Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-12279468>

Kokkolan Kaupunki. (2019, December). Kotina Kokkola - Kokkolan kaupungin kotouttamisohjelma 2019 - 2022. <https://kotoutuminen.fi/documents/56901608/78224526/Kokkola-kotouttamisohjelma.pdf/2a6e017a-e810-6715-b019-c9f1740bb480/Kokkola-kotouttamisohjelma.pdf?t=1622551657207>

Koski, J. (2022, January 26). Korkeakoulut ratkomassa Suomen työvoimapulaa kansainvälisillä osaajilla [Blog Post]. Laurea Journal. <https://journal.laurea.fi/korkeakoulut-ratkomassa-suomen-tyovoimapulaa-kansainvalisilla-osaajilla/>

Kuntalaki 410, § 1 (2015). <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2015/20150410>

Laakso, M., Björklund, T.A., Kirjavainen, S. (2016) Collaborative fixation in early problem exploration and ideation workshops. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Design Creativity (ICDC).

List of universities in Finland. (2022, March 4). In Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Finland

Marginson, S. (2006). Dynamics of National and Global Competition in Higher Education. Higher Education, 52(1), 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-7649-x>

Mathies, C., & Karhunen, H. (2019). Suomeen valmistumisen jälkeen jääneet tutkinto-opiskelijat tilastojen valossa. In V. Kazi, A. Alitolppa-Niitamo, & A. Kaihovaara (Eds.), Kotoutumisen kokonaiskatsaus 2019 : tutkimusartikkeleita kotoutumisesta (pp. 69-78). Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö. TEM oppaat ja muut julkaisut, 2019:10. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-327-487-7>

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland. (2021). Talent Boost - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Työ- Ja Elinkeinoministeriö. Retrieved 24 May 2022, from <https://tem.fi/en/talent-boost-en>

Ministry of the Interior. (n.d.). Finland invests in labour migration - Ministry of the Interior. Sisäministeriö. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://intermin.fi/en/areas-of-expertise/migration/labour-migration#:~:text=Finland%20develops%20labour%20migration%20in,and%20some%20sectors%20lack%20workers.>

New Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration would speed up integration and employment of immigrants – Consultation round begins. (2022, May 2). Integration.Fi. Retrieved 10 May 2022, from <https://kotoutuminen.fi/en/-/new-act-on-the-promotion-of-immigrant-integration-would-speed-up-integration-and-employment-of-immigrants-consultation-round-begins>

Nielsen, J. (2007, May 28). The Myth of the Genius Designer. Nielsen Norman Group. Retrieved April 20, 2022, from <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/the-myth-of-the-genius-designer/>

Niemi, B. (2015, December). Employers' Intention to Hire Highly Educated Foreign Workforce in the Kokkola Region (No. 165). Jyväskylän University School of Business and Economics. https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/47881/978-951-39-6404-7_v%3%a4it%3%b6s11122015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 160940691773384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

Ostrobothnia Chamber of Commerce. (2022, March 25). Centria serves both its students and local business life. Coastline. Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://www.coastline.fi/2020/2020/03/01/centria-serves-both-its-students-and-local-business-life/>

Palvelut - TE-Palvelut. (2022). Immigrant's independent study. <https://www.te-palvelut.fi/palvelut/-/fsc/view/service/49530805-e646-4063-a73a-ea473120925c/immigrant-s-independent-study?redirect=%2Fservices-for-jobseekers>

Penninx, R., & Garcés-Mascareñas, B. (2016). The Concept of Integration as an Analytical Tool and as a Policy Concept. IMISCOE Research Series, 11–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_2

Research with Dr Kriukow. (2020b, July 31). Qualitative coding and thematic analysis in Microsoft Word [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOYhkUC21wQ>

Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035 (No. 86). (2021, October). the Finnish Government. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-939-7>

Ryan, G. (2018). Introduction to positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. *Nurse Researcher*, 25(4), 14–20. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.2018.e1466>

Rykun, A. Y., Yuzhaninov, K. M., & Vychuzhanina, E. V. (2015). Universities and Local Communities: Problems and Perspectives of Interaction. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 200, 359–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.08.078>

Saukkonen, P. (2016, December 8). Mitä on kotoutuminen? Kvartti. Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://www.kvartti.fi/fi/artikkelit/mita-kotoutuminen>

Schultze, U., & Avital, M. (2011). Designing interviews to generate rich data for information systems research. *Information and Organization*, 21(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2010.11.001>

Statistics Finland. (2018, December 5). Finland among the best in the world. Retrieved 24 May 2022, from https://www.stat.fi/tup/satavuotias-suomi/suomi-maailman-karjessa_en.html#:~:text=Finland%20is%20the%20happiest%20country,as%20high%2C%20medium%20or%20low

Stickdorn, M., & Schneider, J. (2012). *This is Service Design Thinking: Basics, Tools, Cases* (1st ed.) [E-book]. Wiley.

Study in Finland. (2022). Frontpage. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://www.studyinfinland.fi/>

Suomalainen koulutusvienti saavutti jo puolen miljardin euron rajan. (2021, May 6). Finnish National Agency for Education. Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://www.oph.fi/fi/uutiset/2021/suomalainen-koulutusvienti-saavutti-jo-puolen-miljardin-euron-rajan#:~:text=Education%20Finland%20%2Dkoulutusvientiohjelman%20j%C3%A4senyrytysten%20ja,2020%20yhteens%C3%A4%20498%20miljoonaan%20euroon.&text=Suomalaisen%20koulutusvienti%20liikevaihto%20jatko%20kasvu,koronaepidemia%20vaikeutti%20toimintaa%20monelta%20osin>.

Talent Boost programme. (n.d.). Työ- Ja Elinkeinoministeriö. <https://tem.fi/en/talent-boost-en>

Talent Coastline Employment. (2020, May 1). Vaasa. <https://www.vaasa.fi/tietoa-vaasasta-ja-seudusta/ota-yhteytta/neuvonta-ja-palvelupisteet/welcome-office-tietoa-ja-neuvontaa-uutena-suomessa/talent-coastline-employment-fi/>

Tasks of the authorities. (2021, September 1). Integration.Fi. Retrieved 26 April 2022, from <https://kotoutuminen.fi/en/tasks-of-the-authorities>

Teichler, U. (2015). Academic Mobility and Migration: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. *European Review*, 23(S1), S6–S37. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1062798714000787>

Teivainen, A. (2021, September 3). Three-quarters of Finnish firms affected by labour shortage, reveals survey. *Helsinki Times*. Retrieved April 21, 2022, from <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/19893-three-quarters-of-finnish-firms-affected-by-labour-shortage-reveals-survey.html>

The act on the promotion of immigrant integration guides integration. (2021, September 1). Integration.Fi. Retrieved 26 April 2022, from <https://kotoutuminen.fi/en/the-act-on-the-promotion-of-immigrant-integration-guides-integration>

The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland. (2019). Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-01/Ethical_review_in_human_sciences_2020.pdf

The Expert Council on Integration and Migration. (2012, April). Mobile Talent? The Staying Intentions of International Students in Five EU Countries. https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Study_Mobile_Talent_Engl.pdf

The key to the nation's success. (2021, October 27). thisisFINLAND. Retrieved 22 May 2022, from <https://finland.fi/life-society/the-key-to-the-nations-success/>

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. (2022, May 2). New Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration would speed up integration and employment of immigrants – Consultation round begins. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland. Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://tem.fi/en/-/new-act-on-the-promotion-of-immigrant-integration-would-speed-up-integration-and-employment-of-immigrants-consultation-round-begins>

Tilastokeskus - Kuka on maahanmuuttaja? (2011, February 15). Tilastokeskus. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from https://www.stat.fi/artikkelit/2011/art_2011-02-15_003.html?s=0

Tilastokeskus. (2020). Maahanmuuttajat väestössä. Retrieved 22 May 2022, from <https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/maahanmuuttajat-vaestossa.html#:~:text=Vuonna%202020%20Suomen%20v%C3%A4est%C3%B6st%C3%A4%20oli%20ulkomaalaistaustaisia%2044%20031%20eli%208%20prosenttia.>

Tilastokeskus. (2022a, April 19). Ammattikorkeakoulutuksen suosio kasvoi edelleen vuonna 2021 - Tilastokeskus. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/ckttron1c8cpe0b00szu3mseq>

Tilastokeskus. (2022b, May 12). Yliopisto-opiskelijoiden määrä kasvoi vuonna 2021 - Tilastokeskus. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://www.stat.fi/julkaisu/ckg66hse81qyg0109v9q3kc0b>

Tilastokeskus. (2022c, April 1). Väestö ja yhteiskunta. https://tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto.html#V%C3%A4est%C3%B6%20syntyper%C3%A4n%20ja%20kielen%20mukaan%202019

UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific. (2013). The International mobility of students in Asia and the Pacific (No. 1009). UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226219>

University of Helsinki. (2018, December 17). Cooperation skills are at the core of Finnish home economics teaching. Retrieved 24 May 2022, from <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/education/cooperation-skills-are-core-finnish-home-economics-teaching>

Vaarala, H. & Kyckling, E. (2017). Kansainvälinen opiskelija – kuka olet, minne menet? Kieli, koulutus ja yhteiskunta, 8(5). Retrieved from: <https://www.kieliverkosto.fi/fi/journals/kieli-koulutus-ja-yhteiskunta-lokakuu-2017-2/kansainvalinen-opiskelija-kuka-olet-minne-menet>

Vipunen. (2020). Korkeakoulutuksen ulkomaalaiset opiskelijat- näkökulma maakunta. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Korkeakoulutuksen%20ulkomaalaiset%20opiskelijat-%20n%C3%A4k%C3%B6kulma%20maakunta.xlsb

Woldetsadik, P. (2015, November). Assessment on Foreign Students' Social Integration in Arcada (Thesis). Theseus. https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/103745/Woldetsadik_Peni.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Yle News. (2019, December 26). Tuition fees not dampening foreign students' enthusiasm for Finland. Retrieved April 21, 2022, from <https://yle.fi/news/3-11134799>

GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS

DATE	xx
TIME	xx
LOCATION	xx
PARTICIPANT	xx

Statement to be read on record

I am currently a student at Oulu University of Applied Sciences, and this study is part of my thesis. I am interested in understanding the process of integration of international students, and how different stakeholders are involved in it.

Thank for you for taking the time to share your story with me. This would help me to understand better your experience. Before continuing I would like to highlight that your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw your consent at any time of the interview or refuse to answer a question with no consequences.

Your interview and data will remain anonymous and confidential. I will anonymize your participation, using a pseudonym. Like this, your name will not appear in the transcriptions neither the thesis.

Do you have any questions about the study or the interview?

(After his/her response)

Is it ok for you that I record this meeting for research purposes?

BACKGROUND

1. Could you please introduce yourself briefly?
2. *Tell me what led you to Finland and away from your home country?*
3. How did you end up at Centria UAS?
4. When did you apply?
5. How was the overall experience at the university?

If not mentioned before

- Have you lived abroad before coming to Finland?
- Did you come here by yourself (or with a partner)?

LANDING INTO KOKKOLA

6. After being accepted, what were your main concerns about moving here?
7. And what about your expectations?
8. Tell me about your experience moving here and the support you received to solve practical problems. For example, housing, registration, etc...
9. Where did you live (student housing, shared appartement)?
10. What did you know about Finnish culture back then?
11. How did you feel when landing here?

If not mentioned before:

- Did you have a tutor? Either a student or a teacher?
- Did you have orientation days at the start of your studies?
- (If yes) What do you remember of your orientation studies?

LIFE AT THE UNIVERSITY

12. Did you find a part-time job during your studies in Finland?
13. (If yes) What did you do?
14. Did you take part in other free time activities?
15. What challenges did you face to settle down, what information or support was needed at your arrival or during your time as a student?
16. Did you have classes, projects or any activities with Finnish students?
17. (If yes) Please tell me more about that.

If not mentioned before:

- Which field of study were they from?
- How did you meet?
- Are you still friends today?

LOCAL CULTURE

18. What have you learnt throughout your years in Finland?
19. Who were you key "teachers"?
20. Every culture or society usually has some unspoken rules, such as silence is Ok... what do you think those rules are in Finland?
21. How did you learn about them?
22. Have you ever encountered issues with the Finnish culture?
23. Do you have Finns in your close community?
24. Tell me about your experience with the Finnish language.

If not mentioned before

- Did you have any Finnish friends? Contacts with Finnish people?
- How did or do you meet Finnish people?

THE PRESENT

25. Do you feel settled down in Kokkola/Finland?
26. Do you feel part of the local community? (If needed: why?)
27. What do you miss from your home country?
28. Have you thought about leaving Finland?

If not mentioned before

- Where do you live?
- Do you have a job?
- Do you have a family?
- Why do you want to stay in Finland?

WRAP UP QUESTIONS

29. Were your expectations about Kokkola/Finland fulfilled?
30. If we re-enact your arrival to Finland in year ~~xxxx~~, what would you do differently?
31. How would you say the pandemic affected your overall experience in Finland?
32. Would you like to add something that you consider relevant for the study?

INTERVIEW CODING AND THEMES

APPENDIX 2

The process of settling down and integration

1 Expectations and assumptions before arrival	2 The practical process of settling down	3 A question of mindset	4 The social aspect of settling down: Integration	5 The local language	6 Studies in Kokkola	7 The toughest bottleneck in the process: work and finding one's place	8 Looking ahead
Recommendation from friends	Practical issues	Be active to connect		Hurdles with the Finnish language	Positive experience at school	Goal: find work	Growing roots
Long-term future	Novelty of everything	Human growth	Asset of knowing Finns	Is Finnish needed?	Network born in class	Relevant work	New home country
High expectations	Missing information	Mental process	Personal contacts are important	Pressure on learning	Helpful teachers	Job opportunities?	Life security
Attractive country/town		Accepting other cultures		Importance of Finnish	Favourable school environment (Openness, Freedom)		No going back
Husband in Finland		Positive attitude (hopefully, proactive, accepting)	Network is required		Academic worries		Equality
Worries about Finnish culture and being understood		Two-sided story	Be active to connect		International Centria		Good place to live
Worries about racism		Have trust					Honesty and transparency
Worries about being understood		Patience					Easy to adapt to culture
							Family-friendly
							Never planned on staying

How to support the social integration process?

Support the internationalisation of the local society and two-sidedness of the integration process	More support for new international inhabitants	Develop the information available
Bubbles	Integration program	False expectations
Conservative mindset	More activities for internationals (needed)	Understanding the "Finnish ways"
Finns Lack on interaction with internationals	Unwelcome	Need for data
Lack of contacts with Finns at school	Connections should be organic	Bad weather
Practical experience most important	School vs. real world	
Conservative mindset	Overbearing English	
	School doesn't provide everything	
	Lack of facilitation with society	
	Facilitated human interaction supports connections	