

NHH



# International adjustment and networking across cultures

*A study of cultural distance among international students at NHH*

**Mari Sandbakken Lyngmo**

**Supervisor: Paul Gooderham**

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NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the international adjustment and networking of international students at NHH in light of cultural distance. According to the available literature it is easier to adjust to a country where the cultural distance to the home country is small, compared to when the cultural distance towards the home country is larger. The process of international adjustment is often explained by the culture shock cycle where greater cultural distance is expected to result in a deeper culture shock and a longer adjustment period. The international adjustment is seen in the aspect of adjustment to the general environment, adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and adjustment to work.

The second aspect of this thesis is to explore the networking patterns of international students and the possible effects it poses on international adjustment. Theory predicts a positive relationship between adjustment and interaction with host nationals. However, it is also predicted that networks tend to be formed with a preference towards likeminded co-nationals.

The respondents selected to explore the subject were eight international students at NHH divided into two equal groups based on expected cultural distance; one group of Western Europeans and one group of Asians.

The adjustment process fit the culture shock cycle for some of the respondents and for some not. Cultural distance could not explain whether the culture shock cycle was accurate for the adjustment or not as there was an equal spread between the eastern and western group. However, culture shock was more frequently experienced within the eastern group. Anticipatory adjustment and language skills were found to play an important role in explaining the adjustment of the international students. Moreover the networking pattern of the respondents proved to coincide quite well with the presented literature.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The main purpose of this master thesis is to explore the cultural adjustment and integration of international students at NHH. The overall focus will be to compare the effect, if any, of cultural distance between the home country of the students and Norway as the host country on the adjustment process. The culture shock cycle will be used as a guide for the adjustment process. Furthermore the thesis will focus on exploring the nature of networking among international students and host nationals with implication to the adjustment process.

## 1.2 Background

Throughout my bachelor and master studies I have had several courses focusing on cross-cultural communication and adjustment. I have also been an exchange student at two occasions, one year in Singapore during my bachelor degree and one semester in Australia during my master degree. Based on my experiences and academic theory about culture I was curious to explore the adjustment process when coming to a foreign country and how networks are formed across and within cultures. Based on my own experiences it is easier to get in contact with people that are from a similar culture and who are in the same setting. When I was on exchange in Singapore my network consisted mainly of other Norwegians and Scandinavians with an occasional other exchange student and Singaporean. When I went to Australia I consciously tried to avoid Norwegians and tried to form a network consistent of other nationalities and Australians. For the first two months of the semester I didn't speak Norwegian at all and casually avoided other Norwegians I would stumble across. However, after a while I got to know a few Norwegians through some of my international friends and they became an important part of my network. So even though I was trying to avoid other Norwegians, I still ended up spending my time with them. Furthermore, through the course International Organization and Management I have studied the culture shock cycle and found that it to some extent resembled my experience abroad. Based on these experiences I was

motivated to further investigate the adjustment process through the culture shock cycle and the phenomenon that “birds of a feather flock together”.

## 1.3 Structure

Having stated the purpose of this thesis and the background, the introduction chapter is concluded by describing the structure for the thesis.

Chapter two will give an overview of the available literature found to support the findings of this study. The literature was reviewed and revisited several times in the process of this study as it was subject to change as the process evolved. The literature presented is an overview of the literature relevant to the findings.

Chapter three introduces the methodology used and the research design that was chosen from the purpose of the thesis. The data collection and analysis process is described followed by a section focusing on ensuring data quality throughout the process.

In chapter four the interviews findings from the interviews will be presented thematically focusing on the eastern and western group separately before the findings are compared.

Chapter five will discuss the findings with respect to the purpose for the thesis stated in the introduction and in the light of available literature.

Finally, in chapter six, the key findings are summarized in the conclusion before a presentation of limitations and suggestions for further research concluded the thesis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The process of adjusting to another country and culture is complex and influenced by several aspects. Several studies emphasise the importance of attention to selection, training, assistance in cultural adjustment, evaluation, compensation, and cultural re-entry for expatriates, in order to minimize the risk of expatriate failure. Studies have also shown that the success rates of expatriates vary from different countries, as well does the failure rate of men and women (Francesco & Gold, 2005).

In a large-scale study of companies from Western Europe, the United States and Japan, it is found that the normal failure rate for Western European and Japanese companies was below 5 % whereas most U.S. companies had a failure rate at 10-20% (Francesco & Gold, 2005). The difference in failure rates among different countries may be related to variation in the home country and company's emphasis on selection and training of the expatriate. Western European and Japanese companies emphasize the need of both technical competence and the ability to adjust quickly to a new cultural environment when selecting expatriates for foreign assignments. In North American companies technical competence is often the only criteria based on the false assumption that managers who perform well at home will perform well in any other cultural settings as well, ignoring the influence of cultural differences and cultural training (Francesco & Gold, 2005).

### 2.2 International adjustment

Adjustment is generally defined as: *"the degree of a person's psychological comfort with various aspects of a new setting"*. (Black & Gregersen, 1991, p. 498)

Black and Gregersen (1991) further points to three aspects of international adjustment, namely adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and adjustment to the general environment. These aspects will be the base of international adjustment throughout this thesis.

### 2.2.1 Cultural distance

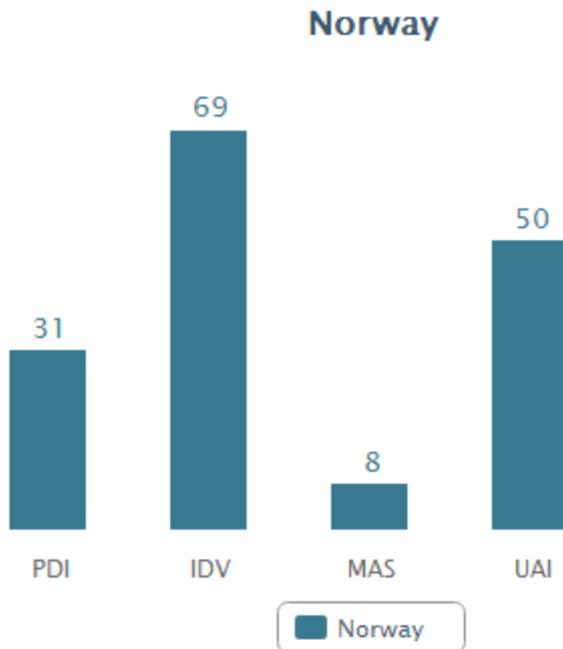
*“Culture is the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others”* (Hofstede)

Geert Hofstede (Hofstede) developed four cultural dimensions of national culture based on a large study within IBM worldwide. The study has later been verified by several other studies and Hofstede has added more cultural dimensions. Hofstede’s dimensions are collective dimensions describing the national culture as a whole, but may differ on an individual level based on individual differences within a country. Although the theory is has been criticized for being too general, Hofstede’s dimensions are used in this thesis as a reference point to compare the cultural values and calculate cultural distance.

The four cultural dimensions originally developed by Hofstede are:

- Power distance (PDI), which is defined as *“the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”* (Hofstede)
- Individualism (IDV), which refers to *“the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members.”* (Hofstede)
- Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) where *“The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine).”* (Hofstede)
- Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) *“The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these is reflected in the UAI score.”* (Hofstede)

Figure 1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions for Norway (Hofstede)



Expatriates on assignment abroad will have to adapt to the culture of the host country, which may greatly differ from the expatriate's home culture. The degree of difference between the home and the host cultures are referred to as cultural novelty or cultural distance (Kogut & Singh, 1988) and is expected to have an effect on international adjustment (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004). Larger difference between the home and host culture can result in greater difficulties adapting to the host country than for cultures more similar to the host culture (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Bhaskar-Shriniva, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005). However, even when the cultural distance is small, culture shock may occur because difference is not expected and prepared for (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004).

Cultural distance can be calculated based on the four Hofstedean cultural dimensions based on the following Euclidean distance formula (Manev & Stevenson, 2001):

$$CD_{ij} = \sqrt{\sum_{k=1}^4 (D_{ik} - D_{jk})^2}$$

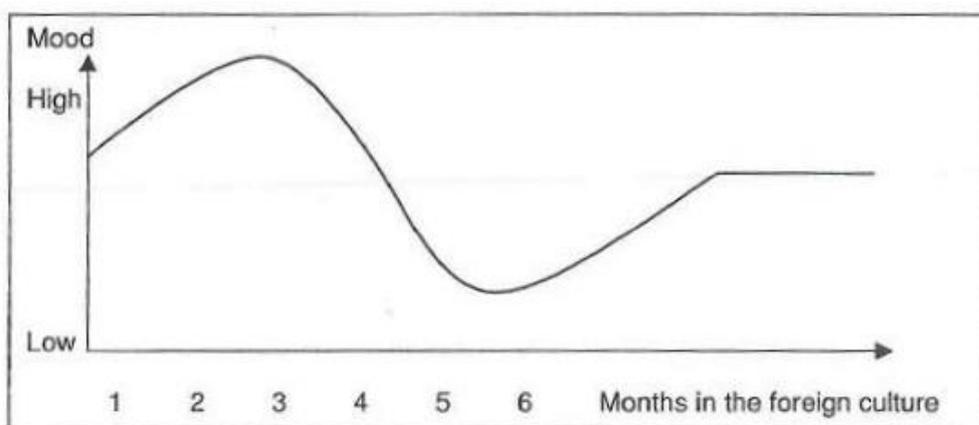
Where  $CD_{ij}$  is cultural distance between host country  $j$  and home country  $i$ .  $D_{ik}$  and  $D_{jk}$  represent the dimension  $k$  of  $i$ 's and  $j$ 's national cultures.

## 2.2.2 Culture Shock Cycle

International adjustment can be seen as a process of adjustment in order to reach psychological comfort and reduce the risk of culture shock. A popular construct for this process is the U-curve theory also presented as the culture shock cycle (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). Culture shock can occur, based on uncertainty, in the lack of familiar cues and surface as emotional discomfort such as confusion, anxiety, frustration, anger, depression, and homesickness (Friedman, Dyke, & Murphy, 2009; Sims & Schraeder, 2004). Black & Mendenhall (1991) predict that greater cultural difference will result in a more difficult adjustment process and greater culture shock.

The culture shock cycle is commonly explained by four different stages; *the honeymoon stage*, *the cultural shock stage*, *the adjustment stage*, and *the mastery stage* (Black & Mendenhall, 1991).

Figure 2 Culture Shock Cycle (Gooderham & Nordhaug, 2003)



During *the honeymoon stage* the new culture is fascinating and being in a new country is exciting and interesting. Based on selective perception individuals tend to focus only on aspects that are familiar to their home culture or superimpose familiarity on anything that seems slightly similar to home. Only cultural differences that are prominent and outstanding will be noticed initially. As the individual encounters new situation he or she will base the reaction on similar situations at home. However as the appropriate reaction may differ between the cultures of the home and host country negative feedback will occur when unable

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to adjust to the appropriate behaviour. As it takes time to generate substantial feedback on inappropriate behaviour the individual remains blissfully ignorant during the honeymoon phase. When reality sets in, negative feedback on inappropriate behaviour may cause emotional discomfort entering into *the culture shock phase*. At this point more experience with the culture has made the individual aware that he or she is not reacting appropriate according to the new culture and feels confused and frustrated as the appropriate behaviour is unknown. In this stage interaction and forming friendships with host nationals will facilitate the appropriate behaviour (Friedman, Dyke, & Murphy, 2009; Black & Mendenhall, 1991). When learning and understanding the appropriate behaviour the *adjustment phase* will be entered by utilizing the knowledge of correct behaviour. *The mastery stage* is reached when the necessary behaviours to function effectively without feeling uneasy due to cultural differences is embedded.

Black and Mendenhall (1991) reviewed the culture shock cycle in light of social learning theory and added two moderating variables in order to explain why the adjustment process may not always resemble the U-curve, but rather a J-curve or even linear pattern. The moderating variables presented are *anticipatory adjustment* and *individual differences*.

### ***Anticipatory adjustment***

*Anticipatory adjustment* relates to the expectations and preparation prior to entering a new culture. If the cultural differences are prepared for in advance more accurate expectations and anticipatory adjustment may negate the initial excitement of the honeymoon phase because of more realistic expectations. For anticipatory adjustment to be successful it is essential that the anticipatory adjustments are based on accurate facts. If the basis for anticipatory adjustments proves to be inaccurate the adjustments will turn to be unsuitable in the new environment and prove to be counterproductive.

### ***Individual differences***

*Individual differences* such as willingness to establish relationships with host nationals and imitate new behaviours may reduce the time span of the culture shock stage as uncertainty is reduced by learning new and appropriate behaviours. In studies where the U-curve is tested cross-sectional at specific times, U-curve experiences can be hidden by individual difference

in stages reached. It is therefore suggested that the adjustment process should be tested individually rather than the average of a population.

### **2.2.3 Cross-cultural training**

Cross-cultural training has proven to be effective in reducing uncertainty and facilitating international adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). The training and preparation can be executed through various methods. A visit to the host country prior to the assignment provides the opportunity to experience the country and the cultural differences up close acquiring first-hand knowledge and reducing uncertainties (Sims & Schraeder, 2004). However the visit must be realistic in terms of how life in the host country will be, otherwise a pre-departure visit may prove to be counterproductive. Furthermore it is reasonable to believe that previous experience of living abroad will ease the international adjustment later, however it is not clear to what extent this is true (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). Some argue that all international experience facilitates international adjustment, others claim it is only related if the previous experience is derived from the same country, while others still find no relation or negative effect on international adjustment. (Francesco & Gold, 2005). Country briefings providing information about the major aspects of the host country is an important asset of preparation (Francesco & Gold, 2005). Such briefings may include information about the host country's culture, customs, traditions, and everyday behaviours, as well as history, geography, economy, and politics. Furthermore, uncertainties can be reduced by provision of social support in the host country that can assist in dealing with practical matters such as finding housing (Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001; Sims & Schraeder, 2004).

## **2.3 Network patterns**

Moving to a new place and especially moving to a different country can be challenging and it is helpful to have a support network to help through the adjustment process. This support network may consist of family and friends back home and even family and friends who have followed along abroad (Black, 1990). However a new network of colleagues and friends will also need to be formed in the new country. The ability to create these networks and form new relationships will have an effect on the adjustment process. Relationships formed with host nationals appear to be an important asset in international adjustment as the host national

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can act as a guide of the host culture (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). Foreigners, who interact, socialize, and form friendships with host nationals tend to be more satisfied and encounter fewer problems with adjusting to the host country (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). Nevertheless, contact with host nationals may be limited as expatriates tend to form communities of consisting of likeminded expatriates. The forming of these communities, act as a coping mechanism of the new and unknown culture and environment (Manev & Stevenson, 2001; Bruning, Sonpar, & Wang, 2012).

### **2.3.1 Birds of a feather**

The popular idiom “Birds of a feather flock together” describes the tendency of people associating with those who are like themselves, and is captured by the term homophily.

*“Homophily is the principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people.”* (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001)

Homophily is expected to occur for the ease of communication and coordination of activities based on trust, shared cultural values, language and a common view of the world (Tung, 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). In a study of American expatriates abroad Tung (1998) found that about 50% of the expatriates on assignment expressed a tendency to socialize more with others who come from similar cultural backgrounds. Furthermore the study revealed a difference between cultural distance of host country and home country, and the likelihood of socializing with host nationals. Americans on assignment in Asia and other less developed countries tended to socialize with other expatriates, whereas Americans in other Euro-Anglo nations and industrialized countries were more inclined to socialize with host nationals.

This tendency explained in a functional model of friendship patterns established by Bochner et. al (1977). The model describes a three folded friendship pattern among overseas students which formed a hierarchy consisting of a mono-cultural network, a network of host nationals, and a multicultural network. The mono-cultural networks proved to be most common and the preferred friendships, as it was based on similar values, ease of communication and functioned as a comfortable sphere. The second most important network, the bi-cultural network of host nationals, is described as a task-oriented network

which is academically based. The function of the multi-cultural, and according to the model, least important network is to provide company for recreational, non-culture and non-task oriented activities. The model was further investigated and confirmed by Furnham & Alibhai (1985) who also found that the preference in primary network was not limited to co-nationals, but also included co-regionals coming from similar countries who may share religion, language, climate etc. While the functional model states a preference towards culturally similar networks, social interaction with host nationals, as discussed in the previous section, have shown a positive effect on international adjustment. Manev and Stevenson (2001) found that managers form personal friendships with expatriates with similar cultural background, but for work purposes connections are made with expatriates and host nationals across cultures (Manev & Stevenson, 2001)

### **2.3.2 Platform for networking**

Cultural homophily is only one of several aspects of how networks are formed. Homophily in space and geography can help explain how networks are formed. Not surprisingly are we more likely to connect with people that are at the same location than people that are further away (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). This implies that networks are formed based on where people live such as in neighbourhoods, residential blocks and dorm halls. How often friends get together in social settings is also largely determined by residential proximity. School, work and voluntary organizations also pose as important arenas for networking and the formation of friendships through common activities (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

### **2.3.3 Language**

Language is an important factor in communication and in the process of forming networks. A common language facilitates communication and networking, however if one does not know the common language of the group one is excluded, thus the lack of language skills can have a negative effect on networking (Selmer, 2006). Nonetheless, it seems that fluency in the host country's language is not as important as the willingness to learn and use some phrases and words.

*“...if language skills are viewed as a means to create and foster interpersonal relationships or as a means to understand the dynamics of a new culture, then language skill is a useful help toward expatriate adjustment.”* (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985)

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Some knowledge of the host country's language can work as a facilitator for cultural understanding and to show willingness to engage (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology and research design that is chosen and the reasoning behind these choices. Furthermore the data collection process and analysis of the data is described. Finally, this chapter contains a section on how data quality issues are overcome.

#### **3.1 Research design**

The research design represents the structure of the methodology used to answer the research questions expressed by the problem statement (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The first choice in the process of creating a research design for this thesis is to choose between a quantitative and a qualitative research design. In short quantitative research can be described as numeric or statistical research whereas qualitative research describes studies generating non-numerical data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). To best answer the problem statement I would have to go beyond numbers and figures reaching for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of culture shock and cultural distance. Therefore, in order to answer the problem statement a qualitative research design was chosen.

Furthermore, in order to establish an appropriate research design the nature of the study needs to be defined. According to Saunders et al. (2012) research can take an exploratory, descriptive or explanatory form. Exploratory research aims at providing an overview and greater understanding of an issue and is particularly helpful when handling unclear and complex phenomena. Descriptive research is used to provide specific information of a situation. Finally, explanatory research defines fundamental connections between variables. As the purpose of this thesis is to explore the phenomenon of culture shock in light of cultural distance and networking, an exploratory research design is found fit. An advantage with exploratory research is that it is flexible. As the process of international adjustment is a complex matter and it was unclear what challenges the international students would experience, the framework was subject to change along the process. The research design of this thesis takes an inductive approach. When taking an inductive approach theory is built based on data already collected exploring a certain phenomenon, rather than collecting data to test a theory which is the case with a deductive approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

## 3.2 Data collection

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester in order to explore the development and to get the respondents' thought at the moment. Had the interview only been conducted at the end of the semester the respondents may have forgotten their expectations and thoughts at the beginning of the semester, and had the interviews only been conducted at the beginning of the semester, the respondents would not have had time to experience the culture.

The interview guides were based on a preliminary review of literature that covered a wide range of topics for international adjustment. The interviews were semi-structured in order to get some deeper responses and discover possible new issues. The goal was to get the respondents to talk about their experiences related to the adjustment process. Questions and follow up questions were prompted as needed during the interviews. The review of literature was a dynamic process revised at several occasions. After the first round of interviews, available literature was further reviewed based on the findings. This again led to the interview guide for the second round of interviews which, as the first round, was semi-structured. Throughout the process of coding and analysing the data literature was revisited again based on the findings.

### *Selecting respondents*

To answer the objectives of this thesis respondents from western cultures are compared with respondents from eastern cultures. The group finally interviewed consisted of eight international students attending the master course International Organization and Management at NHH. The youngest person was 21 years old and the oldest person was 27 years old. The respondents were chosen on basis of their home country as the objective was to compare the adjustment of students based on cultural distance of their home country and Norway. Four respondents were selected from Western European countries and four respondents were selected from Asian countries. Although it could be reasonable to assume that the national cultures in Western Europe are more similar to the Norwegian national culture than Asian national cultures, the cultural distance was calculated as described by

Manev and Stevenson (2001) and referred to in the previous chapter. In order to keep the respondents anonymous their respective home country will not be mentioned. The two groups will from here on be referred to as the western group and the eastern group. The calculated cultural distance average for the western group was 60 compared to 77 for the eastern group. Calculating the cultural distance based on the three dimensions excluding Masculinity/Femininity the difference would be considerably larger, 17 and 63 respectively, as the Norwegian culture is quite extreme towards femininity compared to other European (and Asian) countries.

All respondents arrived in Norway within the timespan of one week prior to semester start and anticipated to stay in Norway from four months up to two years. Each respondent was interviewed both at the beginning of the semester, one to one and a half month into their stay, and at the end of the semester approximately three and a half to four months into their stay. Total interviews conducted were 16 and were all conducted in similar environments at NHH. Each interview lasted from 21 minutes up to 57 minutes and were recorded with the respondents' conformation, and later transcribed.

### 3.3 Data analysis

A reflective memo was held both during the interview process, the transcribing process and analysing process in order to evaluate new information as it occurred. The data was coded and organized based on theory connected to expatriate adjustment and the themes of the interview. After the first round of interviews there emerge a few new themes to be further investigated in the second round of interviews. It allowed the thesis to focus on areas that were important in the adjustment of the respondents. After going through all of the interviews the responses were coded in the template and adjusting the categories along the way for a good fit between the expected theory and the outcome of the responses.

The responses from the western group and the eastern group were analysed separately first to explore the relationship of cultural distance on adjustment. Then all the responses were analysed thematically to explore the nature of international adjustment regardless of home country and culture. The interviews revealed several other aspects as well, but this thesis will focus on the most significant findings.

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### 3.4 Data quality

There are some data quality issues associated with qualitative research, and this section will explain how these issues are handled in regard to semi-structured interviews in this thesis. The reliability of semi-structured interviews can be questioned by some based on difficulties to replicate and test the results (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). However, as the phenomenon of international adjustment is a complex and dynamic process, this study intend to explore the experiences in-depth to gain a greater understanding of the issue. Other concerns regarding reliability, is related to interviewer and response bias. The respondents participated on a voluntary basis and expressed an intrinsic motivation to participate based on an interest for the subject, opportunity to prepare for their own master thesis and/ or practice their language skills. The respondents were also presented with the theme for the interviews in advance, giving them the chance to think through the issues and prepare their thoughts. The respondents were encouraged to answer truthfully ensuring their anonymity.

One challenge interviewing a wide range of different nationalities was to meet the different cultures in the interview setting, trying to avoid cultural bias. I experienced a different approach to answering the questions from westerners and easterners and tried to adapt the interview and questions to make the respondents feel comfortable and answer as truthfully as possible. The western group answered the specific questions given, whereas the eastern group tended to answer the questions in a more indirect manner. This led to challenges both during the interviews and when analysing the results. Questions were asked in different ways and from different angles to get a fuller picture. Follow up questions were also used to check if the message received was the same as what the respondent was thinking to ensure the validity of the results. The eastern group tended to be a bit more hesitant and reluctant to come with negative comments. There might be a bias that the interviewer was Norwegian, it could be interesting to see if the results would have been the same had the interviewer been an exchange student with eastern background. The interviews were also conducted in a private room in similar locations at NHH to ensure the respondents were comfortable during the interview.

## 4. Interviews

In this chapter the findings from the interviews will be presented. Some characteristics of the two groups and key findings are summarized in a table presented at the beginning of this chapter and will be further explained and discussed throughout the chapter. The first section introduces some basic aspects of the respondents' preparation. Findings regarding the respondents' international adjustment will then be presented according to adjustment to the general environment, adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and adjustment to study (which has been modified from the adjustment to work dimension in order to fit the reality of the life as an international student). Finally, the adjustment process according to the culture shock cycle will be presented. For the main sections of adjustment the findings based on the western and eastern group of respondents will be presented separately before the findings are compared cross-culturally.

### 4.1 Introduction of findings

*Table 1 Summary of characteristics and key findings*

	Western group	Eastern group
Cultural distance (without MAS)	60 (17)	77 (63)
Previous visit to Norway	3/4	None
Previously lived abroad	All	1/4
Number of countries visited apart from Norway and home country	9-24	1-7
Had felt homesick at first interview	1/4	2/4
Had felt homesick at second interview	2/4	All
Match with culture shock cycle	2/4	1/4
Experienced culture shock	2/4	3/4
Percentage of Norwegian friends	10-30%	20-30%

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According to standard expatriate theory selection of expatriates, cross-cultural training and preparation as well as support with practical issues and spousal adjustment pose as important facilitators for international adjustment. Regarding to these aspects the respondents report fairly similar experiences and is therefore not given much emphasize in the discussion towards international adjustment. The respondents were all self-selected as they had chosen to study abroad. Some of the respondents had chosen Norway as a destination because their significant other was in Norway or close by. Having support nearby and skypeing home with relatives helped in terms of adjusting and dealing with culture shock. However none of the respondents had brought with them family from their home country and spousal adjustment is therefore not given much attention in this thesis.

The two groups differ from each other in cultural distance compared to Norway, but also in previous international experience. The western group does not only share similar cultural values with Norway, but have been geographically close to Norway and thus three out of the four Western Europeans have previously visited Norway. The one that had not previously been to Norway had visited other Scandinavian countries. In comparison none of the members of the eastern group had previously been to Norway. In addition the entire western group had lived outside of their home country before moving to Norway whereas only one member of the eastern group had lived outside of their home country before moving to Norway. Furthermore, international exposure in terms of number of countries visited (apart from Norway and home country) is greater for the western group than the eastern group, counting 9-24 and 1-7 countries respectively. Thus based on cultural distance, previous exposure to Norway and international experience it is expected that the western group will adjust easier and faster to living in Norway than the eastern group.

Apart from the international experience the rest of the preparation process was comparably similar for all the respondents. They all received practical information from NHH about and the school and Norway. All the respondents also attended the orientation and welcome week at the start of the semester supporting them in networking and the adjustment process.

*It was a great experience, it helped me to get to know people. It was a very good welcome.*

*...the culture shock presentation on the first week was extremely helpful and interesting because a lot of those things I wouldn't otherwise have known.*

Furthermore, the respondents were all offered help to make arrangements for housing before arrival. Some of the respondents chose to find housing without help from NHH and some embraced the offer and was placed in student housing at Hatleberg and Fantoft. What I found was that the respondents who had found housing in proximity of NHH and Hatleberg seemed to settle in better and faster. As opposed to the students who were placed at Fantoft further away from the school and had to take travel time into account when studying and socializing at NHH. The respondents who were placed at Fantoft acknowledged that the adjustment process could have been easier if they had lived closer to NHH and the student environment at Hatleberg.

*One of the reasons I had a hard time adjusting was that I lived in Fantoft and all the people I knew lived in Hatleberg, so it was kind of hard for me to go to college, go back to Fantoft and then come back for the events. So I ended up not going.*

## 4.2 Network pattern

### **Eastern group**

The network of the eastern group consisted mainly of international students. The proportion of international friends varied between approximately 70-80%, leaving a percentage of 20-30% Norwegian friends.

*I would say they are mostly international students, because my welcome week group consisted of more international students than Norwegian students.*

The welcome week initiated the networking process posing as a good arena for the international students to meet new friends. Furthermore, the classes at NHH facilitate networking.

*Because of the class arrangement you have to split into different groups and push you to communicate with other people. It is a good way for you to practice and understand other cultures.*

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However, because most Norwegians attend the Norwegian master profiles at NHH it makes it difficult for the international students to network with Norwegians at school:

*I think that is because of the study program because we have the same program with other foreign students (...), but not that many Norwegians. I have noticed that in some classes Norwegian students sit on one side of the classroom and international students sit on the other side.*

Nevertheless, the respondents still reported that they interacted with Norwegians mostly at school:

*I mainly talk with Norwegians in school.*

*Mostly during lectures. Because I haven't attended that much of social events.*

*I don't interact with Norwegian students outside of school.*

Some of the respondents reported that they wished to join student organizations at NHH in order to get to know more Norwegians. However, initially they encountered some language issues. This was experienced through missing information about events and issues concerning the student organizations, as well as trouble joining some of the groups as Norwegian is the working language of these groups.

*(...) but the website is in Norwegian and every time I have to use Google translate.*

*No, that is a problem I think most of the organizations are organized by Norwegian students and they use Norwegian language to communicate with each other.*

Nonetheless, when successful in joining the student organization it proved to be a great way to get to know Norwegians and the Norwegian culture:

*(...) that has helped me a lot getting to know Norwegians. That has helped me a lot getting to know the culture.*

Where there were other students from the respondents' home country present they reported to have closest relationship with these students based on similar language, background and interests, which made it easier to communicate comfortably. Where applicable the

percentage of co-national friends out of the group of international friends ranged between approximately 20-50%.

*(...) we need some time with the people you feel most familiar with and relax without translating my [language].*

*[we] have everything in common and Norwegians are different.*

*I don't know why I talk mostly to [co-nationals] at dorm, I find it easier. We find it interesting to talk about stuff from back home.*

It was reported that when you communicate with someone not from your own country, you are subject to stereotypes and to them you will represent your home country and be seen in perspective of that regardless of your own point of view. Of course that will change after the initial interaction. However, when interacting with someone from your home country you do not represent your home country towards the world, but become only you and avoid the potential stress of country stereotypes. It was also noted that the comfort of interacting with co-nationals could be extended to include co-regionals:

*We live in our own comfort zone. I mean you can maybe extend it to Asians I guess. (...) it is kind of easier in a way to click with them. Even though we might all be speaking English.*

However, within the eastern group there was not distinguished much between nationalities of the international students in terms of interaction:

*For me I don't feel there is any difference between nationalities because everyone is students here and open minded, so basically I think we are the same. But naturally Norwegian people would speak Norwegian and international people speak English.*

*It wasn't hard for me to be friends with the Western European. The only thing was that because they all spoke English and they all were coming from different countries, I could relate to them. So it was quite easy to mix up with them compared to mixing up with Norwegians.*

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*I stay in Hatleberg so it is alright interacting with different sorts of people on a daily basis.*

*We go hiking, fish, BBQ and other activities with international students.*

### **Western group**

Within the western group they reported that internationals accounted for approximately 70-90% of their friends, leaving only a bracket of 10-30% Norwegian friends. Where applicable, 30-70% of the international friends were co-nationals. Some reported to have tried to make Norwegian friends and had gotten to know some during welcome week.

*You meet a lot of people during the welcome week I think.*

*In the first week during the days we had events for international master students, they are the kind of people I got to know more because they were in the same situation, coming from abroad, they are on their own and need to make friends.*

However, after classes started it was difficult to keep up the contact as few Norwegians were represented in the courses held in English, which resulted in a tighter connection with internationals:

*It's quite hard to make friends with Norwegians because all of my courses for master students there are like one or two Norwegians.*

*There is much more internationals than Norwegians. There seems to be quite a division between internationals and Norwegians at this school. I think it is hard because you have different classes.*

*I have tried to make Norwegian friends, but they are mostly internationals.*

*And then I have some classes with Norwegians, and some groups with Norwegians, but not that much. I could go into one of the student groups here at NHH, but in the first weeks when they introduced the programs I was studying. But (...) I should defiantly try to join one of these groups later on.*

In addition to the low proportion of Norwegian students in the English master courses, the respondents found it difficult to join the student organizations and interact with Norwegians through that arena:

*I found it difficult to join clubs here, especially the Norwegian speaking ones.(...) Also the structure was strange, at my old university you can join if you are interested and get involved, it's more elitist here.*

However, the student accommodations at Hatleberg proved to be an arena where the respondents met Norwegians and networked:

*But because we live at Hatleberg we have maybe a Norwegian flat mate to share the kitchen with.*

*I'm living with three Norwegians and I have contact with them every day.*

The data showed a tendency among the western group to interact and connect better with other westerners compared to other nationalities.

*I think mainly Europeans and some Canadians and Americans stay together.*

*We tried to do something with some Asians and when you ask them if they want to join you, they feel they have to. And they don't really take part in the conversation because they are shy and it is really hard to get to know them. And I think they feel best when they are around each other. I also notices the same with the Europeans as well, because all the French when they are hanging together they speak French and so on.*

*I think it is because I have more in common with them of what to talk about.*

## **Summary**

Both groups acknowledged that interacting with people from their home country or nearby region was easier than interacting with other internationals generally and specifically Norwegians. However, while the eastern group did not report any difference in communicating and connecting with different nationalities, the western group found it easier to connect with people from other western cultures than more distant cultures. Similar for both groups was a desire to network with Norwegians although it was found difficult. The

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eastern group reported a higher percentage of Norwegians and greater overall diversity in their network. Though, the proportion of nationality in networks of the two groups must be seen merely as an indicator as it is influenced by the number of co-nationals present at NHH as well as individual judgement of who to include in the network. The respondents from both groups had experienced limited involvement in student organizations at NHH at the time of the interviews, partly due to language barriers in various degree excluding international students, partly due to culture difference in terms of structure of the organizations, and finally the overwhelming new information and events going on at the start of the semester making students miss the chance to join.

### 4.3 Adjustment to interacting with host nationals

#### **Eastern group**

The eastern group characterized Norwegians as friendly both able and willing to switch to English to help international students:

*I think that Norway is better than most of the European countries in the sense that they will try to help you like even if they don't feel comfortable switching to English. They do make an effort and make you feel comfortable.*

*I guess the Norwegians are more friendly.*

*But here in Norway if I walk on the street I can if I have any questions I can get my answers very quickly from very nice people. So I am very happy to live here because people around you are very nice. Only in some situations, if you don't know her or him they can be a bit reluctant to talk with you, that's the only thing.*

As indicated above; although Norwegians are found to be friendly and helpful they are also perceived to be hard to get to know and reluctant to proceed beyond being helpful. The statement is further supported by:

*I would say that Norwegians are a little distant to international students.*

One reason presented for difficulties in interacting with Norwegians on a deeper level than through task-oriented issues is the language barrier:

*But naturally Norwegian people would speak Norwegian and international people speak English*

*Sometimes I try to hop into the conversation. Because they talk in Norwegian so it is really hard (...) [Western Europeans] all spoke English and they all were coming from different countries, I could relate to them. So it was quite easy to mix up with them compared to mixing up with Norwegians.*

*Because if you come here and you can't understand what people are saying around you it makes you feel a little handicapped. I don't know a lot of Norwegian, I can understand a little bit when I listen to it and I can speak, but not have big discussions. That has helped me because I can connect more now.*

*I hung around some Norwegians and sometimes they tend to speak in Norwegian even if I was around and even if there was a discussion they would switch to Norwegian and continue the conversation until we had to step in and say: "Sorry, what are you guys talking about?". At first it was quite awkward in a way to tell them "sorry what are you saying?", but sometimes, like even at Rema when the cashier speaks to me in Norwegian I would just say "sorry" and they will get the cue and switch to English. So it is sort of less awkward now.*

Furthermore it was reported of difficulties in finding things to bond over:

*What I mean in terms of becoming friends is, to me a friend is someone I share the same thoughts, same taste in music, same beliefs and that sort of thing. And that is completely different here, for example talking about a movie, talking about a TV-show could be a start to a friendship, but we don't know that much about those tastes here of Norwegians. Finding those common tastes or values is a bit harder I would say.*

### **Western group**

The western group reported of difficulties to get to know Norwegians and characterized them as cold and distant:

*It is really hard to get in contact with Norwegians, everybody are saying that they are more cold and distant. It is true, but when they are together with each other it is*

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*completely different, when you see how they are talking and hang around together they are like us.*

*It takes more effort, because the other international students are in the same situation as you as an international student. Don't have any friends and want to have a lot of contact with international students. (...) But if you try to get in contact with them that will be fine, but they are not very open. They are not looking for new friends from abroad. International students always want to know each other because they are also from abroad, you then have the same basis and a good way to start a conversation with "oh where are you from?"*

*when I talk to Norwegians I would probably speak to them one to one. Because that is easier since I don't speak Norwegian and I don't want to disrupt the group conversation by making everyone shift their language. Some would be reluctant to speak English unless they are drunk, (...). But if you sit alone in a Norwegian group they will make an effort to involve you in English.*

*This speaking Norwegian took a while to get used to, (...) But it only makes me want to learn it more. Because maybe you'll be more easily accepted and not force people to speaking a language they are not comfortable with, so I'd rather they would be comfortable.*

*think it would be much easier in a group of Norwegian friends, if I would speak Norwegian. Because when I'm there they speak English, but if I went to the toilet and come back the conversation has shifted to Norwegian. So I feel like I'm forcing them to something they don't want to.*

Experiencing the language barrier motivated the participants in learning more Norwegian. They realized that even without being fluent or able to have an entire conversation in Norwegian some knowledge helped in the process of integrating and networking.

*like Oh you do speak Norwegian! But no I can say one sentence. I think people appreciate that more than you just go in there and speak English, so I tend to say a little bit in Norwegian. If you understand Norwegian and can respond in English at*

*least it won't feel that they are leaving you out as much. It makes me feel more comfortable as well.*

*If you show a Norwegian what Norwegian you have learned it is actually a very good way of making friends, that is what I have learned. They really appreciate the effort with the internationals learning the language and they are actually quite surprised and happy to see.*

### **Summary**

The eastern group found Norwegians to be friendly and helpful, but hard to get to know. The western group characterized Norwegians as cold and distant. Both groups reported difficulties to connect with Norwegians because of language barriers when speaking with more than one Norwegian at the time as they tend to switch to Norwegian when internationals are not directly participating in the conversation. However, by learning some Norwegian and utilize the language skills in conversation with Norwegians, the participants found it to be a good ice breaker and feeling more included.

## **4.4 Adjustment to the general environment**

### **Eastern group**

Language was not found to be a big obstacle in the daily life as Norwegians tend to be fluent in English, some minor issues with the language was seen in the process of connecting price tags and signs:

*No actually they all know English well. Because for example if I want to pay for what I've bought or ask a person what is the price. ... But in the daily life, when I go to the grocery store, at first I had some problems finding the price tag, "which one refers to this?" Mainly fruits because the price isn't placed specifically above them, but for other things not that much problem and I got better.*

Some respondents stated that it was harder to adjust than expected because the expectations did not match the reality:

*It was harder than I expected when I came, because I was expecting something different.*

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Others reported that because differences were expected and the respondent was prepared to handle the differences with an open mind and learn from it, the adjustment process went smoothly:

*because I prepared for the cultural differences so I don't think it is a big problem for me because if you choose to live in another country you have to accept the other culture and other people and their ways of thinking and their ways of doing things. What I am doing now is to learn your culture and understand why you are doing like this and not that way. I think the environment here is very good and the people here are very polite.*

### **Western group**

*I would say it isn't necessary, but it is good to know some Norwegian if you want to understand the newspaper or product description and stuff like that. (...) But I think it has helped me a little bit maybe, but you don't have to learn Norwegian to live in Norway, it works fine in English.*

*I'm surprised that so many people speak English here. Everybody you can just say that you don't understand and they will speak English fluently. We know that they are good in English, but it is always a surprise because when you are in the supermarket they just change the language*

### **Summary**

Both groups noted that because the English skills of Norwegians are of a high level it was easy to communicate on a task-oriented level. Though, some Norwegian skills are helpful in reading signs etc. Additionally, within the eastern group it was found that adjustment was smoother when approaching cultural differences with an open mind.

### **Drinking culture**

#### **Eastern group**

During the welcome week the eastern group encountered the Norwegian drinking culture and found it strikingly different from their home culture which caused some mixed feelings. The respondents wanted to participate in the events held at the welcome week in order to interact

and connect with other international students and Norwegians, but the amount of alcohol caused some discomfort.

*...there was a non-alcoholic group that I could join, (...) The reason is that I don't drink alcohol, but I didn't join them because I wanted to see what was going on in the main group. If I had joined them this probably wouldn't have been a problem. But one culture difference is that most people where I come from don't drink alcohol regularly, that's why I didn't attend the bar to bar round, and some other events, but I joined the BBQ and other stuff.*

Another respondent expressed discomfort regarding the use of alcohol when getting to know people and would rather have connected and formed friendship over a meal.

*...with strangers or people you have only met one or two times we don't have too much alcohol, we would like to keep our mind clear. And for the welcome week we go from pub to pub to pub, actually I don't like that kind of way.*

Yet another respondent reported:

*I wouldn't say I wouldn't like it, but it is not really my preference to go for parties and stuff. I'm more relaxed and laid back, do stuff on my own with a group of close friends.*

Thus three members of the eastern group expressed negative feelings about the Norwegian drinking culture and the way it poses as a facilitator of networking in student environments.

### **Western group**

Within the western group the drinking culture was referred to as a point of similarity.

*Drinking culture is quite similar.(...)Especially when Norwegians get drunk their English improves a lot, they're more confident.(...) So yeah I think it is easier to adapt. You should be able to talk to people without drinking, but sometimes it eases people especially if you don't have the language skills.*

### **Summary**

In summary, where the eastern group experienced a great cultural difference that challenged adjustment, the western group found a similarity which facilitated adjustment.

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## Living Costs

### Eastern group

*...well the prices in Norway are quite high for other nationalities, the same goes for me. At first when I came here I would convert the prices, but now, no not really. I just know for example during a week I can spend this much or at most this much in kroner. But in the first two weeks I would convert the prices. Now I am thinking in kroner.*

*...for groceries and things we need on a daily basis we would actually compare it to the Norwegian standard, so if you see a certain price in Rema we would actually think of what is it like in Rimi or Meny. I think that is sort of an adjustment because in this way we are sort of adapting to the price difference, because if we were to compare it with prices at home it would definitely always be more expensive.*

*But I think a huge limiting factor is the costs. Like sometimes you would like to go out for a drink on the weekends and just relax, but the cost just puts you off. So you just make like a dinner in the kitchen and relax or do some other stuff.*

Living costs in Norway are quite high compared with other countries. As pointed out by one of the respondents the earnings in Norway are also higher making the relative price difference less prominent. However for internationals coming from other countries having received their salary in their home country it can be stressful to adjust economically to the Norwegian prices.

*but then I figured if I do that I won't be able to buy anything. But then I stopped comparing because earnings are higher here as well.*

*So coming here I was trying to find a part-time job and I didn't know the language and everybody said they won't hire me because I don't know the language. But luckily I found a job which makes it easier for me to pay for my expenses.*

*I guess it would be easier to meet Norwegians if the costs hadn't been that high and we could go out for that drink instead of staying at home. It is mostly the Norwegians making those invites and you could meet other people as well.*

**Western group**

*the living costs are insane, I had a really good job during the summer and my money is nearly all gone.*

*Living costs are ridiculously high, I find the rent is outrageous for the space you get. And the prices in the shops are crazy for certain things. That has been very hard to adjust to. And the fact that the currency has more numbers makes everything seem even more expensive. But you kind of get used to it after some time. (...) And I got a job, because you get paid more, but everything is more expensive so that is a good way of adjusting.*

**Summary**

The cost level in Norway seemed to affect the eastern group and the western group to the same extent. And both groups reported to have adjusted to the price level by stopping to compare prices with prices back home, but eventually compared prices with similar products in Norway. Those who managed to find a part-time job reported that it helped them adjusting by not having to worry so much about financial issues, but also in integrating with Norwegians.

## 4.5 Adjustment to study

**Eastern group**

The respondents within the eastern group all reported a different study environment at NHH than what they were used to. However in what way it differed and the process to adjust to the dissimilarity varied. Some saw it as a positive change that was easy to adjust to:

*...most professors at my home university did not have an actual timetable for the course and for every session. They had something in mind, that we are going to teach this book and preferably these chapters, but it wasn't anything they would stick to. Here I can count on that the professors have a plan for every session, we are going to do this and we will do this, which is quite good and more desirable here.*

In addition for the school structure to be more predictable some expressed satisfaction with a more manageable work load:

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*It is easy, to be honest it is much more manageable than it is [at home]. I have sort of approached it with a more relaxed mindset (...) But I don't think it is because of the work and the content that we are doing (...) I think it's the atmosphere that has quite a huge part of it because [at home] it is very competitive, not that it isn't in Norway, but you can see that the approach to learning is different. Here we sort of learn because we want to know what the stuff is about, but [at home] most of the time, even though it might not be the clear case, you can get the feeling that you are studying because you have to do well for the exams.*

This statement was supported by another respondent saying:

*I really like the classes, I like the professors they are really helpful. And I like the fact that it is laid back, it's not controlled competition. I was used to that before coming here.*

However the opposite experience was also reported:

*I feel stressful for study here. You can see in the library a lot of [Asians] study late, but you also see a lot of the local Norwegian students study hard. I respect that a lot. For [Asians] they study hard because they want to change their living standard and situations, but for local people you already have such a good environment and still put a lot of effort in study, that is very respectful. I was surprised, because I didn't imagine that people here would study that hard.*

Furthermore, some of the respondents reported difficulties adjusting to studying as it was the first time they had used English academically.

*(...)the biggest obstacle for me is to use English to communicate with people. This is the first time I have had to use English every day, to listen to the lectures, class and talk with people.*

### **Western group**

Within the western group perception of the study environment also varied. Some reported of differences that were welcomed and easy to adjust to:

*I've noticed here that people are very relaxed, but they still get the work done. The work life balance is something I really notice here. You go to the library at 8 in the morning, but everybody is leaving by 3 or 4 in the evening. Which I really like because you can relax in the evenings, at home I would study from 8 am till 11pm all day flat out.*

The work life balance was mentioned a couple of times in accordance to studying which was very appreciated feature of the study environment. Some also pointed out difference in terms of learning and evaluation and appreciated an interactive learning process with gradual evaluation:

*I really like that you have to deal with all the stuff (assignments) during the semester, it was a lot of work, but in the end I think it was a good way to get long-term knowledge.*

While others reported of difficulties in terms of adjustment and disliked the workload and methods:

*The course load is insanely hard here I think compared to home, in terms of course work.*

*It was different. It is difficult to study because we have to change the way we study normally. It was difficult because I would look at it and want to calculate where it came from, and it doesn't matter. You actually have to know everything, but you don't have to know it deeply and not that mathematically. I'm used to study more in detail and really get all the formulas.*

### **Summary**

All of the respondents easily saw differences between studying at NHH as compared to their prior university and thereby needed to adjust to the new environment. However, on what terms the study environment was different from previous university varied widely within both groups. The students' previous experience as well as the course combination at NHH may account for the differences. The students are free to choose from a large pool of different courses at NHH and may therefore base their perception on different courses and lectures. What is interesting to note is that although Norwegian language skills are not needed in order to study at NHH, the students' fluency in English is related to academic

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adjustment. Those who lack experience in English as an academic language either from previous experiences abroad or through their native language encounter greater difficulties in adjusting to study.

## 4.6 Culture shock cycle

At the second interview the respondents were presented with a graph of the culture shock cycle and asked if it resembled their adjustment experience in Norway. The respondents were familiar with the concept and therefore able to do a self-assessment.

### **Eastern group**

Within the group of respondents from eastern cultures there was no report of exact match with the culture shock cycle. Some did not experience the honeymoon phase at all but entered into an early culture shock right at arrival consistent with a J-curve pattern. The reasons stated for this early culture shock was a mismatch between expectations and the reality in Norway. For one of the respondents the home currency depreciated against the Norwegian currency prior to arrival in Norway which caused extra stress in a new environment.

*When I came here it didn't go up, it was flatter in the beginning because I came to know that the currency had gone down back home so I have to use more money than I expected. Flatter at the beginning, then down and now on the way up.*

Another respondent reported that the experience in Norway was compared to a previous exchange experience in a western country. The respondent was prepared for a culture difference between the home country and western cultures, but not for differences within western cultures. The experience in Norway was expected to be similar to the last experience causing a culture shock when differences between western cultures arouse.

*The graph does not fit my mood. (...) When I came I didn't like it at the beginning at all, but on my way up now.*

Other respondents reported that they had not experienced a culture shock at all and that a graph of their experience would be much flatter with only minor fluctuations in mood.

*I don't think it was much of a down, it has been more stable. Just minor fluctuations, but mainly stable.*

It was stated that the culture shock cycle somewhat resembled their experience however not to the extreme.

*It is basically the same, but maybe not to that degree, a bit flatter.*

### **Western group**

Within the group of western respondents one clearly stated that the culture shock cycle matched the adjustment experience.

*It has literally gone through the culture shock cycle! I would say the honeymoon phase was the first week when you realize all the new things, all the new people and then it went down, but I don't think it went down that bad. But there was a certain drop when you realize things that you don't like. There are always those moments when you are told you can't do that here and that is a little bit demotivating, but when you adjust to them there is no problem. (...) I was surprised that I didn't think the culture would be so different, but it actually was.*

This experience of culture shock occurred even when cultural distance was small because cultural differences were not expected. Whereas another respondent stated it did not match at all:

*No, I don't recognize myself in this. A lot of people in class said it was what happened to them, but it is not true for me, it is more stable.*

The two remaining respondents reported resemblance to some extent. One of which did not experience a culture shock at all:

*At the beginning I was really excited; it was really nice because all the new experiences, the school, the people, the normal life, and I was really busy. And then comes the time where everything sets down and you are in the normal day mode (...) I didn't have a shock. It was easing out, but not going down.*

### **Summary**

Within the group of respondents from eastern cultures there was no report of exact match with the culture shock cycle. Some did not experience the honeymoon phase at all but

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entered into an early culture shock right at arrival consistent with a J-curve pattern. For others it was stated that the culture shock cycle somewhat resembled their experience however not to the extreme. Within the group of western respondents one clearly stated that the culture shock cycle matched the adjustment experience. The remaining did not match the culture cycle at all or merely to some extent.

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter the findings from the interview will be discussed in light of the purpose of the thesis and related theory.

### *Networking across cultures*

Both groups acknowledged that interacting with people from their home country or nearby region was easier than interacting with other internationals generally and specifically Norwegians which is consistent with the concept of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001) and previous research (Tung, 1998; Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985)

However, while the eastern group did not report any difference in communicating and connecting with different nationalities, the western group found it easier to connect with people from other western cultures than more distant cultures. Similar for both groups was a desire to network with Norwegians although it was found difficult. The eastern group reported a higher percentage of Norwegians and greater overall diversity in their network. The eastern group found Norwegians to be friendly and helpful, but hard to get to know. The western group characterized Norwegians as cold and distant. Both groups reported difficulties to connect with Norwegians because of language barriers when speaking with more than one Norwegian at the time as they tend to switch to Norwegian when internationals are not directly participating in the conversation. The language led to exclusion from the group as described by Selmer (2006). Ties to Norwegians were easily established on a task-oriented level at school or seeking help in the daily life. However, friendships with Norwegians were more difficult to acquire. The functional model of friendship patterns explains the nature of networking among international students at NHH (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977). However, by learning some Norwegian and utilize the language skills in conversation with Norwegians, the participants found it to be a good ice breaker and feeling more included coinciding with Mendenhall & Oddou (1985).

### *International adjustment*

Interestingly, while some aspects of the adjustment process were fairly similar between the two groups others differed drastically. Adjusting to the high level of living costs in Norway and moving from converting currency and prices to the standard their home country towards comparing products and prices with the standard in Norway proved similar to both groups.

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Acquiring a part-time job was also something that was appreciated by both groups and helped adjusting to the price level as well as integrating.

However, adjustment to the Norwegian drinking culture was quite different between the two groups, where the eastern group experienced a great cultural difference that challenged adjustment, the western group found a similarity which facilitated adjustment.

### *Culture shock cycle and culture shock*

Within the group of respondents from eastern cultures there was no report of exact match with the culture shock cycle. Some did not experience the honeymoon phase at all but entered into an early culture shock right at arrival consistent with a J-curve pattern. This was however not due to more realistic expectations as suggested by Black and Mendenhall (1991), but rather a mismatch between expectations and reality that triggered negative feedback right from the beginning. For one of the respondents the mismatch was caused by a change in conditions (currency) which expectations needed to adjust to. Another mismatch was caused by false expectations formed by previous experience in a western country. The root of this experience can be related to Harrison et al., (2004) stating that culture shock within similar cultures may occur because the difference is not expected. For others it was stated that the culture shock cycle somewhat resembled their experience however not to the extreme.

Within the group of western respondents one clearly stated that the culture shock cycle matched the adjustment experience, which can be explained by Harrison et al., (2004) who suggests that within similar cultures, culture shock may still occur as differences are not expected and prepared for. The remaining did not match the culture cycle at all or merely to some extent.

In addition to the self-assessment of the culture shock cycle, the respondents were asked if they had felt homesick or missed home at any time during the stay. This question was asked at both the first and second round of interviews. The results showed that at the first interview only one from the western group had felt homesick whereas two from the eastern group had experienced the same. At the second round of interviews two of the respondents from the western group had felt homesick, while all of the respondents within the eastern group had

felt some degree of homesickness where three out of four would characterize it as culture shock.

There is no doubt that adjustment in general and international adjustment specifically, depends on several factors. The study of this thesis found that cultural distance to some extent can explain the level of difficulty and degree of culture shock experienced with international adjustment. However, it fails to explain the situation entirely and it seems that the two most important factors for successful international adjustment, in terms of reducing culture shock, are prior expectations and language skills.

### *Anticipatory adjustment*

Prior expectations or anticipatory adjustment can arise from previous international experience (preferably to the same country, for similar purposes), similar culture (low cultural distance), pre-departure cross-cultural training, and post-arrival cross-cultural training. However, for the anticipatory adjustment to be effective the expectations need to coincide with the actual reality and experiences (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). Anticipatory adjustment made resulting in false expectations may prove to have a countervailing effect. Thus, culture shock was also experienced within the western group. Although the cultural differences were not prominent, because no differences were expected, when they occurred they resulted in confusion and frustration leading to a culture shock. This experience coincides with the suggestion made by Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas (2004). Similarly, culture shock was experienced within the eastern group despite previous international experience to a western country because differences within western cultures were not expected.

Furthermore, those who were expecting differences without having a clear picture of how the dissimilarities would degenerate, but were prepared to meet the differences with an open mind were better equipped for adjusting than those who arrived with false expectations. The essence of successful anticipatory adjustment is the accuracy in expectations. If accuracy cannot be delivered it is essential to keep an open mind and prepare for the unexpected. Represents from the eastern group that had no tangible expectations, but was prepared to meet the unexpected with an open mind were better equipped in dealing with adjustment than those who unexpectedly experienced cultural differences.

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### *Language skills*

Although the English skills of Norwegians in general are of a high level and the courses offered for international students at NHH are held entirely in English, language barriers at various occasions led to frustration and slowed the adjustment. As stated by several of the respondents it is perfectly possible to live and study in Norway without knowing the language and task-oriented communication and networking were not subject to language barriers. However, the respondents still encountered some obstacles which made integration and interaction with Norwegians difficult. In addition those who were not used to using English in an academic setting had a harder time adjusting to studying in Norway.

For those students who were not used to using English when studying, respondents from the eastern group who did not have previous international experience, adjusting to studying in English took an extra effort. Hence previous international experience acted as a facilitator for adjustment to study. Separate English and Norwegian courses where host nationals scarcely represented in the English courses was experienced as an excluder and made academic networking with Norwegians more difficult.

The Norwegian language however seemed to have most effect on adjustment with interacting with host nationals. Not knowing Norwegian was experienced as an excluder directly in interacting with a group of host nationals as well as entering arenas which could potentially lead to interaction with Norwegians. Respondents from both the Western group and the Eastern group initially had difficulties finding a part-time job and joining student organizations because of the lack of Norwegian language skills. The difficulties in finding a part-time job caused frustration and stress. This stress was reported to go away once the respondent succeeded in finding a part-time job. The high level of living costs in Norway did affect all of the respondents in terms of getting used to another cost level and in terms of ration the income from their respective home country. Acquiring a part-time job provided an extra income reducing the economic stress as well as posing as a new arena to interact with host nationals and integrate into the Norwegian lifestyle.

Lack of skills in Norwegian also posed as a barrier to enter some of the student organizations at NHH. This was experienced through missing information about events and issues concerning the student organizations, as some of the information on the student

organization's website and some posters were available only in Norwegian. Furthermore, many of the organizations were perceived as being reluctant to accept international students into their group because Norwegian is the working language of these groups.

Moreover, respondents reported few problems in communicating with Norwegians one-on-one, however communicating with a group of Norwegians were associated with more difficulty. Jumping into a conversation held in an unknown language proved difficult and uncomfortable. In addition being the only non-Norwegian speaker in a group of Norwegians was reported as feeling uncomfortable as they were forcing others to step out of their comfort zone. More importantly with the emergence of Norwegian language skills the respondents reported to be able to pick up on cultural cues making it easier to adjust. Some knowledge of Norwegian with the ability and willingness to utilize the skills and desire to interact with Norwegians facilitated the adjustment as explained by Mendenhall and Oddou, (1985).

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Key findings

The adjustment process fit the culture shock cycle for some of the respondents and for some not. Cultural distance could not explain whether the culture shock cycle was accurate for the adjustment or not as there was an equal spread between the eastern and western group. However, culture shock and homesickness was more prominent within the eastern group. The study showed that expectations and accurate anticipatory adjustment were of greater importance in explaining culture shock than cultural distance.

Furthermore, language barriers were shown to be of great importance in terms of getting in contact and connecting with Norwegians. Both groups reported difficulties in terms of getting to know Norwegians and easier to form a network of other international students. Although there were some variations respondents found it easier to form networks with people from their own country (where there were any) and also people from the same region, common native language or cultural background. This was explained by having more in common with each other and not having to make a great effort to communicate.

### 6.2 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Based on limitations to time, budget and scope set for this thesis it was not possible to conduct the number of interviews necessary to generalize the findings outside of the setting. Nonetheless, the study provides a deeper understanding of the adjustment process within the setting and the findings were supported by available literature.

One suggestion for further research could be to extend this qualitative study by testing the findings quantitatively on a larger number of students.

Furthermore it could be interesting to do a case study comparing the language barrier and interaction with Norwegian students at NHH – Norwegian School of Economics with BI – Norwegian Business School where all the master programmes are held in English.

As the involvement in student organization at NHH by the respondents was minimal at the time of the interviews, this aspect has not been the focus of this thesis. For further research it could be interesting to explore the student organizations as part of international integration at NHH as the student organization would pose as a good opportunity to network and integrate.

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