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Tourism Geography
Transnational mobility and the formation of sense of place: a case of exchange students at the University of Helsinki

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People are internationally increasingly mobile which is why moving should be rather seen as a lifestyle than something exceptional and exotic as tourism research has traditionally viewed traveling. The new mobility paradigm in the tourism field in fact suggests that tourism should be seen as a part of everyday life. When people move more they are also in contact with more places. The new transnational research, that has predominantly been applied in migration studies, is interested in how mobile people form relationships with the different places that they have spent time in, in other words how they form a sense of place. Traditional migration studies has rather focused on how migrants settle in the new place, whereas the new transnational research is interested in how people can feel a belonging to many places at the same time, thus forming a so called multiple sense of self and perhaps feel at home in many places.

Exchange students represent one very mobile group of people. The exchange students desire an international experience whereas nations, cities and educational institutions see the students as an important asset in their aims of internationalization. Branding Helsinki an attractive student city was the topic of a work shop meeting in Autumn 2012 held between The University of Helsinki and the City of Helsinki. The significance of exchange-students for this brand was also highlighted. In this study exchange students are understood as educational tourists, and they were studied from the perspective of the new mobility paradigm as well as the new transnational research. The perspective is fresh because the general experiences of exchange students have not been studied a lot, let alone their sense of place.

The aim of this study was to examine the exchange students at The University of Helsinki in the semester of 2012-2013 if and what kind of sense of place they formed. Interesting was to examine whether they formed a strong sense of place because according to transnational theories acquiring a multiple sense of place is possible for mobile groups of people. The sense of place was defined through the concepts of emotional and functional attachment to place. The concepts were examined by analyzing how the students settled in Helsinki, if they felt at home, if they felt local and how they felt that the exchange affected their future mobility. Another aim of the study was to examine which specific aspects of Helsinki affected the sense of place of the students and to suggest how these findings could be of help in suggesting how to brand Helsinki an internationally attractive student city. As a method 25 semi structured interviews with exchange students between January and March of 2013 were performed. The method was suitable for this fresh topic because it allowed for the voice of the students to be heard. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis.

The results show that the students were emotionally and functionally very attached to Helsinki. They settled in well, felt at home and identified many positive tangible and intangible aspects of the city. This argues for the fact that they had acquired a strong sense of place. The students experienced the city in the company of other people, but the individual experiences were important too. The students did however not feel like locals in the city. The study nevertheless proved that in order to acquire a strong sense of place, one does not have to feel local. The background theories demonstrate that also temporary residents and visitors can acquire a strong sense of place. The findings imply that acquiring a multiple sense of place (in their home country and Helsinki) is indeed possible. The fact that the students felt that they were living a mobile lifestyle now and in the future also speaks for a multiple sense of place. The results show that the exchange students appreciate the friendly Finns, the climate, the greene Ness of the city and the working society in Helsinki. Therefore this study suggests that these aspects should be used to brand Helsinki an internationally attractive student city in order to accomplish the internationalization aims of both the City of Helsinki and The University of Helsinki.
Ihmisten kansainvälinen liikkuvuus on jatkuvasti vilkastumassa, ja liikkumisesta voidaankin puhua enemmänkin elämäntapana, kuin jonain poikkeusellisena kuten matkailututkimus on perinteisesti matkustamisen ymmärtänyt. Matkailututkimuksessa vaikuttavan uuden mobiilin paradigm mukaan matkailu tuluksi nähä osana jokapäiväistä elämää. Kun ihmiset liikkuvat enemmän, ovat he myös yhteyksissä yhä useampaa paikkaan. Uusi transnationalistinen tutkimus, jota on sovellettu lähinnä maahanmuuttotutkimuksessa, on kiinnostanut siitä, miten liikkuvat ihmiset solmivat suhteita niihin eri paikoihin joissa he ovat oleskelleet, toisien saaneen muodostavat paikkatunteen. Perinteinen maahanmuuttotutkimus on keskitynyt lähinnä tutkimuksen uusiin paikoihin sopeutumista, kun uusi transnationalistinen tutkimus on sitä vastoin kiinnostunut siitä, miten ihminen voi samanaikaisesti kokea kuuluvuutta moneen paikkaan ja kenties tuntea omaaansa monta kotia.


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1 INTRODUCTION

Internality has become the word of the modern western world. Being international is an important goal for individuals as well as cities and educational institutions. Globalization has shifted the competition between institutions from being just national, to being global. Places are not just competing on capital flows or market positions anymore. A highly skilled work force which is achieved by high standard education is proving to be an increasingly important competitive edge in the global operational environment (Opetusministeriö 2009).

Incoming student mobility is an obvious way for educational institutions to achieve a higher degree of internationalization, which, according to the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture, is an important goal in Finland (Opetusministeriö 2009). In this strategy exchange students are seen as a resource that supports the internationalization of higher degree institutions in Finland. The city of Helsinki has also recognized the significance that exchange students play in their aims of internationalization when stating that Helsinki might be on the world map but the world map is not in Helsinki yet. Not enough exchange students were seen to come to Helsinki when the report in 2008 was published (City of Helsinki 2008). The internality aspect is also significant in the strategic plan of the University of Helsinki for the years 2013-2016 (UH 2012). This strategy emphasizes the importance of exchanges students as a way of strengthening the internality of the university which is why attracting more exchange students to Helsinki is important.

This study draws some of its inspiration from a partnership workshop between the University of Helsinki and the City of Helsinki that I attended in the autumn of 2012, where thoughts upon how to make Helsinki an attractive student city were discussed (Leväaho 2012). Since my own interests lie in multicultural issues and I have been an exchange student myself, I felt like it would be important to also think about how the city could be portrayed as attractive for exchange students. This thought is also in accordance with the internationalization aims of the University of Helsinki. I decided to approach the topic by examining how the exchange students experience the city and what kind of relationship they form with the city. Interesting is how the exchange students that live only temporarily in Helsinki, form a sense of the place and what kind
of sense of place that is. Marketing a place and branding it, is at its simplest about recognizing what the target population thinks about a place and then trying to manage that image (Anholt 2011: 22) The study of sense of place naturally sheds light upon what the target population thinks about a place, which is why it is a well suitable perspective from which to suggest how Helsinki could be branded for the exchange students.

All human beings are connected to a place or several places, whether these places are where they were born or where they live now. The connections vary a lot and some places are even left in between, when people move around and move back to familiar places. We all form relationships with the places we encounter and this is what links us to the surrounding world; it is something that the renowned geographer Edward Relph (1997: 208) refers to as “sense of place”, which can in short be defined as the attitude one has towards a place (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001: 233). In the globalizing world people are moving around more and more, for reasons differing from work and studies to fleeing problematic situations. When people are mobile, thus moving and living in several places, relationships to place are naturally formed in not only the home, but many other places too. This study examines a mobile group of people, exchange students, and how they form a sense of place with the exchange destination in which they live in temporarily, and what kind of sense of place it is.

Place and its dimensions as a concept have traditionally played a pivotal role in geography. There is also a vast amount of literature on the place identity formation of migrants (see Malkki 1992; Ahmed 1999; Bash et al. 2006). Within migration studies, a new paradigm has emerged to describe a new kind of migrant that forms strong links not just in their new home but between the new and old homes. These so called “transmigrants” form multiple social ties and identities that link them to both the old and the new home (Bash et al. 2006: 1), something that Steven Vertovec (1999: 450) describe as feelings of being both a part of the new and old home, in a way, being “home away from home”. This paradigm is referred to as transnationalism.

Transnational research has been a major issue of the social scientific field and has often been discussed in the context of migration studies, but it has also been addressed within the cultural geographic field. The cultural geographic perspective on transnationalism is especially interested in how the fact that people move so much affects how they see
different places and relate to them (Mitchell 2009: 82). Vertovec (2001: 574) points out that acknowledging that migrants remain ties in their home country while building a new life in the place of immigration is not new in itself. What is new about transnationalism then? According to Vertovec (2001: 576) “Transnationalism does not represent an altogether new theoretical approach, but one that inherently builds upon a number of preceding ones”. What is new about transnationalism within migration studies is the focus on not just the relationship that the migrants form in the place of immigration, but the fact that they remain ties with the old places and how these new and old relationships exist at the same time (Vertovec 2001: 574).

In this study I suggest that the international exchange student could be studied from the framework of transnationalism, thus from similar theoretical premises as migrants. I argue so even if I see the exchange students rather as educational tourists than migrants of some kind. I base this idea on thoughts of Tim Coles, David Duval and Michael Hall (2005: 464) who call for a new theorizing of tourism that sees it as a form of temporary mobility since it has many characteristics that overlap with other types of temporary movements, such as migration. This definition is fruitful because it draws attention to the relationship that the students form with their host destination, without forgetting the relationship that they have with their home.

International student exchanges resemble migration to a large extent. Student exchanges, as well as migration, involve a movement between places. The individuals that are moving however remain emotional connections to all of these places. Despite of these similarities, students that travel for study purposes have not been taken into consideration in the migration literature (King & Ruiz-Gelices 2003: 230). King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 231) referring to King (2002: 98–99) think that student mobility should be rather called international student migration and that it should from now on be considered an important part of European migration. I believe that this goes for students from all around the world, not just Europe, because students everywhere are mobile these days. The authors (ibid.) state that student mobility is not motivated by economic reasons as migration traditionally is seen to be, but rather for leisure or educational purposes, which makes the students something that you called a transnational elite (Conradson & Latham 2008: 229). I believe that the fact that the motivations behind student mobility are different than in traditional migration is a reason why it has not been considered so much in the migration literature.
Student mobility is a population movement that has increased a lot and has proven to be very significant in the world of today. As King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003: 233) state in the context of European student mobility: “The promoters of EU integration have been acutely aware of the benefits that mobility can bring about in terms of facilitating cultural encounters that help to supersede old national rivalries and gain support for further steps towards integration”. I feel like this idea of a higher cultural understanding amongst peoples is not just a case of Europe but of the whole world. This speaks for why student mobility is so significant in the world of today. It is however not clear which temporary forms of movement should be called migration. Martin Bell and Gary Ward (2000: 97) do not go as far as calling for example tourism migration, but they state that it is highly comparable to it.

Tourism shares several unifying elements with migration. Michael Hall (2008) argues from a tourism geographical standpoint that it is time to start challenging what is seen as migration and what is seen as tourism. According to Hall (2008: 15) we should talk about individuals rather than tourists or migrants, because both groups of people are temporarily mobile and thus very similar to each other. Viewing tourism as equal to migration would allow us to recognize the complex ties and networks that tourists form with both their home and the temporary home (Coles et al 2005: 469). Both tourists and migrants remain tied to at least two places at the same time. Because the student exchange is so similar to migration, it is easy to acknowledge the similarities between tourism and the student exchange as well. The students also remain ties to their home, while living in another place that they form a relationship with. Student exchanges last only for a limited period of time, which is the case of tourism too. Combining leisure and study, student exchanges easily fit within the frameworks of educational tourism (Carr et al. 2003: 12)

The point of departure in my study is that exchange students are tourists who share the feeling of being home away from home with migrants. This means that the exchange destination might in fact feel like a home for the student. Besides these unifying factors between migration, tourism and student exchanges, the student exchange demonstrates some characteristics of its own too. A distinctive feature of the exchange students in comparison to tourists is that they tend to spend a fairly long time in the destination, which allows for them to get to know the destination very well and perhaps more deeper than the conventional tourist. In comparison to most migrants, exchange
students move out of free will, which is always not the case when it comes to migrants. I understand the exchange students as educational tourists that share a lot of similarities with migration. Therefore they can be studied from similar premises.

David Conradson and Alan Latham (2008: 229) as well as Bell & Ward (2000: 79) find that within the academic research on the movement of people across borders, the focus has mainly been on either what they call “transnational elites” or “developing world migrants” rather than “middling groups of transnationalism”, even if they could in fact be discussed in the same context because of their similar nature. With middling groups of people, Conradson and Latham (2008: 229) refer to groups of people who undertake some time abroad for gap years in either work or study purposes or other overseas experiences, rather than move permanently. Literature on these kinds of people does exist, but the focus has been on backpackers with working intentions or other types of working holidays, rather than students (see Inkson & Myers 2003; Clarke 2005; Allon et al. 2008; Fisher et al. 2009).

There thus is an evident void of papers concerning issues related to international student exchanges altogether. The papers that have been written on international students have examined students who finish their whole degree in a foreign country, rather than exchange students who spend only from a few months up to a year at the host destinations (see Chen & Kerstetter 1999; Schmitt & Spears 2003; Armstrong et al. 2003). Only a few of these papers however address issues of transnationalism and mobility, since they tend to focus more on how the international students perceive the host destinations from a solely tourist industrial viewpoint. In order to fill this void, I examine the ways in which the mobile lifestyle of the exchange students affects their feelings about the host destination as a place to live in temporarily. I will examine this by implementing theories that have their basis in migration. I also address the impact of mobile lifestyles on how the students identify themselves with the new place they encounter and in which way the place identities can be mirrored to feeling at home. My study thus offers an examination of a group of people that has not been studied much altogether, but especially not from the perspective of transnationalism. By doing this I allow the exchange students to be seen as more than tourists without forgetting that many of the experiences that the students go through are touristic in their nature.
This study consists of nine chapters. In the second chapter I will present the background of this study, by introducing the reader to the city and the University of Helsinki and also to how they have been marketing themselves recently. I will also explain the concept of international student exchanges and provide an overview of Helsinki as an international student city. I will then go on to discuss how studying the sense of place, can be of help in branding a city and thus marketing Helsinki to exchanges students. The third chapter presents my theoretical framework. I feel like it is necessary to first explain the central concepts of home and place because in order to understand what sense of place means, an idea of what place means is essential. The concept of home is closely linked to the concepts of sense of place and transnational theories, because one of the central ideas of transnationalism was the idea that a person might feel that they have both a home and a home away from home. The chapter will then go on to examine the theoretical ideas of mobility and transnationalism in the context of sense of place.

The fourth chapter presents the aim and the research questions of this study, as well as my philosophical standpoints as a researcher. As for the empirical part of this study, twenty-five semi-structured interviews with exchange student at the University of Helsinki were performed. This method will be presented in the chapter by examining its usefulness in relation to the aims of my study. In order to maintain the transparency of my study I will then go on to present in detail how I went about realizing the study. In the fourth chapter I will also discuss the reliability and validity of my study and how that might have been affected by the fact that I have myself been an exchange student. I feel like it was important for me to tell about my experiences, since they might affect how I look at the topic and what I expect to find.

In the fifth chapter I will present the results of the interviews with the exchange students according to the themes that arose from the background theories and my research questions. In the sixth chapter the results will be discussed. The seventh and concluding chapter states the main findings of this study, presents my suggestions on how my findings could be of help in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city, as well as my suggestions for further research on the topic.
This study explores how the exchange students at the University of Helsinki, go about making sense of the new city they are encountering when they arrive for their exchange sojourn and what kind of sense of place they form. Therefore I feel like it is important to shortly describe what kind of city and university the exchange students meet when they arrive. An overview of the international exchange students in the city and the University of Helsinki is also provided. This chapter aims at describing what it is to be an international exchange student. In order to discuss the relevance of this study to the field of tourism geography I am also going to discuss whether exchange students actually can be called tourists or not.

Traveling abroad in the purpose of studying temporarily is set to become increasingly important in the globalized world. It is especially the students at universities and other tertiary institutions who travel for study purposes (King & Ruiz-Gelices 2003: 292). Ulrich Teichler (2004: 395) who studied Erasmus students of the year 1998-99, however points out that proportionally the number of exchange students in the world had not risen, because the amount of exchange students had risen in the same pace as the amount of students in general did. On the other hand he (ibid.) states that especially in some parts of the world as in Europe, the proportion of students traveling abroad for a student exchange had risen, which was largely due to the world biggest international student mobility program Erasmus. The Erasmus program was founded in 1987 and the number of exchange students participating in the program has since been rising. In the year of 2011 the number of Erasmus exchange students in Europe was 231 000, which demonstrates a growth of 8,5 % in comparison to 2010. The Erasmus program concentrates on aspects such as adaptability, language, leadership skills and cultural awareness (Euroopan komissio 2012).

Many students wish to gain international experience both in a social and an educational sense and that in mind decide to spend a semester or even a whole academic year studying at a foreign university. According to the European Commission (2013) students will benefit from the exchange sojourn in many ways, not just on the academic ground. Benefits are considered to be skills to function in an intercultural environment, language skills and lessons regarding one’s self-identity, such as self-awareness and
self-reliance. It is also pointed out that students who have participated in a student exchange are more attractive on the job markets in the future. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 230) highlight the strong personal identity development that a year abroad can awake in a student, but also the fact that students become what King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 246) call “place-confident”. This refers to a person being so confident and familiar with a new place that he feels at home there.

As international mobility has increased, academic institutions are competing for students not just nationally but globally (Furedi 2011). Irma Garam (2001) conducted a survey for Cimo, The Centre of International Mobility in Finland (CIMO 2012), called “My Finland” that focused on the experiences of exchange students in Finnish higher degree institutions. Garam (2001: 33) argues that the primary purpose of student exchange programs is educational. Her study however shows that the students themselves in general felt that the biggest benefit of their time abroad was the personal and social development rather than the academic learning. For many students it was a conscious choice: if they had dedicated more time to studying they would have had less time for socializing.

Henna Hietaluoma (2001) conducted a similar survey for CIMO but on the exchanges students’ motivations to come to Finland. The students she studied arrived on their exchange in the autumn of 2000. Her study shows that the exchange students actually emphasized the role of personal growth and getting to know Finland and its culture as their primary motives for participating in the student exchange program (Hietaluoma 2001: 22). This implies that learning is important for the exchange students, but not necessarily only in the formally educational sense. Learning about the culture and everyday life of the host destinations was important for the students. This desire to experience things outside of the academic world is noticeable through for example their interest in traveling during their exchange. Half of the respondents said that they were looking forward to traveling in Finland and getting to know the Finnish culture.

There exists a vast amount of different exchange programs that students have a possibility to choose from when wishing to participate in a student exchange. A possibility is to participate in a student exchange program, such as Erasmus or ISEP (ISEP 2013). It is also possible to participate in an exchange outside an exchange program through an existing agreement between two universities. The agreement is
called a *bilateral agreement*, and makes it possible for students from the agreement universities to exchange students. In case there is no agreement between the universities that a student wishes to have an exchange between, a possibility is to go through the application process her/himself as a *visiting student*, or as they are also called *freemovers* (Visiting student status 2012).

2.1. *Are exchange students tourists or migrants?*
Mobile groups of people such as working holiday backpackers and exchange students are difficult to categorize into one group, such as for example “tourist” because of the dual nature of their being. Allon et al. (2008: 4) point out that these types of people are traveling for work, study and leisure purposes, which is why they are positioned somewhere in between tourists and workers. At times they are tourists, but when they are working or studying they are more immersed with the everyday world of work or studies.

Tourism and migration are both a part of a similar phenomenon where people move around in space and time, and thus they should not be discussed separately (Bell & Ward 2000: 97). Avoiding this separation would place exchange students under the umbrella of tourism, rather than typing it as migration of some kind. Duncan (2012: 115) in fact suggests that it is necessary to move away from seeing tourism as just short breaks. She suggests along with Sheller & Urry (2006) that also longer sojourns can be called tourism. Duncan (2012: 115) notes that this new differentiation is something that is especially prominent and talked for in the field of tourism geography. Duncan (2012: 113) mentions the notion of “*longer term leisure mobility*” when describing types of traveling, such as backpacking and the so called “*overseas experience*”. Student exchange sojourns fit quite naturally into this description as well since the students travel for fairly long periods of time and also incorporate other aspects than leisure into the experience, in the form of studies.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2007) tourism can at its simplest be defined as movement of people from one place to another for reasons that are either personal or professional. Hall (2005b: 17) argues that “*of significance to all concepts of tourism are concepts of space (i.e. travel away from a home area) and time (i.e. the time spent away from a home area)*”. There has been a lot of discussion within the tourism field about what the time limits within which we can still talk about tourism
are. The Finnish statistical center Tilastokeskus (2012a) defines tourism to be of a maximum duration of twelve months. UNWTO (2007) talks about visitors and defines those who stay a minimum of one night in the destination as tourists, whereas those visitors, who only stay for the day, are called excursionists. According to these definitions exchange students who usually stay in the exchange destination for a maximum of twelve months, could indeed be called tourists.

The exchange students of this study travelled to Helsinki not only for leisure purposes but also for educational aspects. According to Tara Duncan (2008: 182) backpackers and other types of gap year takers, such as exchange students, are in fact good examples of tourists that contribute to a new form of traveling where moving for work or studies can be combined with leisure mobility. Natan Uriely (2001: 6) calls for attention to tourists that combine motivations of both work and leisure and divides them into four types based on how much the traveling involves either motivation: 1) travelling professional workers 2) migrant tourism workers 3) non-institutionalized working tourists and 4) working-holiday tourists. I think that especially the working-holiday tourists, who according to Uriely (2001: 7) see the work as an experience rather than as a way to for example earn money; can easily be compared to exchange students who travel for both leisure and education, where the education is an interesting part of the exchange experience. Of course this can vary depending on the students’ individual motivations. What work tourism and exchange student tourism have in common is the combination of leisure and study/work. Conradson and Latham (2005: 229) call these types of mobile people “middling forms of transnationalism”; thus they seem to be seen as being somewhere in the middle between tourism and other forms of mobility, for example migration. Migration can be defined “to move from one country, place, or locality to another” (Merriam-Webster 2013). Migration is however a permanent form of movement whereas tourism has traditionally been described as a temporary mobility because tourists do not live at the visited area permanently (Bell & Ward 2000: 97–98; Hall 2005a).

Since the purpose of a student exchange is to a big extent educational, it can quite naturally be seen as a type of educational tourism. Educational tourism can be divided into two larger subgroups according to how big the role of the education is in the experience (Carr et al. 2003: 12). International student exchanges fall according to Neil Carr, Christopher Cooper and Brent Ritchie (2003: 12) into the second group which is
characterized by forms of educational tourism in which education is put first and the tourist experience is of secondary importance. As the findings of Hietaluoma (2001: 22) however demonstrated, education can mean other things than just the formal educational at the university. It can also mean learning about the culture and traditions of the place.

Whether a tourist that spends a few weeks in a destination, can form a similar relationship with place as an exchange student who spends a much longer time there is questionable. The time periods that exchange students spend in the exchange destination however vary too. Some students do a year of exchange when other only stay for four or five months. In tourism literature, the length of stay is perceived to have an effect on how satisfied the tourist is. When one stays somewhere longer they are usually more satisfied with the place (Neal et al. 2007). As Tuan (1975: 164) argues, acquiring a sense of place also requires time, because only that way can a person know a place really. Depending on how long someone stays in a place, it thus has different effects on the person’s relationship with the place. He (ibid.) does however claim that time is not enough for someone to acquire a strong sense of place; one has to be involved with the place too. I thus assume that exchange students, differ on one hand from the conventional tourists in that they spend a much longer time in the destination and on the other hand because they are more involved with the society because they lead an everyday life there and use similar services of the city as the locals do.

Carr et al (2003: 11) point out that student exchanges, in being a type of educational tourism that puts education first, are generally not perceived as tourism and what motivates the students are usually not touristic aspects. Again, the students can be compared to working travelers, who primarily travel for work, but also incorporate tourism into the trip. Carr et al (2003: 12) argue that exchange students should nevertheless be classified as tourists, because a lot of their actions include touristic behavior and thus they also impact the destination touristically and have effects on the regional development. In this study I will discuss the exchange students as educational tourists, because they fit to such a big extent into the definitions of a tourist.

Suvantola (2002: 72) wants to make a distinction between conventional tourists and another type of tourist that do not participate in conventional tourist programs, the backpackers. I also see exchange students as representatives of the type of tourists that
the backpackers are because they share similar characteristics of being young and traveling for extensive time periods combining leisure with work, or in the case of exchange students, studies. Suvantola (2002: 85) found that it is typical for young travelers to want to make a clear distinction between themselves and conventional tourists, which he thinks is because the students seek to define their identities. The young travelers then make a radical distinction between them and “all” the other tourists, which they see as mass tourists. This kind of radical distinction between the conventional tourist and the backpacker represents how the young travelers see themselves in comparison to other tourists, rather what the reality is.

2.2 Helsinki: an internationally attractive student city?

When considering what makes Helsinki a good student city for students from around the world, I feel that two things should be considered: the studies and the life outside of the studies. As Hietaluoma (2001: 22) established, exchange students are not only interests in studying during their exchange but a big motivational factor is the life outside of the studies. It is for this reason that this section will present both the University of Helsinki and the City of Helsinki as actors influencing the city as a student city. The two parties have been in cooperation since 1987 when a cooperation advisory board was established. The aim of the board is to coordinate and support the collaboration between the university and the city (City of Helsinki 2013). A collaboration project between the two parties that is especially relevant to this study was the partnership workshop in the autumn of 2012 with the theme an attractive student city that I participated in. During the workshop, the overall attractiveness of Helsinki as a student city was discussed and the importance in taking into consideration exchange students arose as well (Leväaho 2012).

Helsinki is the capital of Finland, located on the southern coast of the country, by the Baltic Sea. According to the Finnish population register office (fi. Väestökeskus), Helsinki is with its 604 380 inhabitants the biggest city of the country by population (Väestörekisterikeskus 2012). The University of Helsinki is the biggest university in Finland. In 2011 the university had 36 500 students, when the corresponding number for the second biggest university, Aalto University, was 19 300. The third place was held by the University of Turku with its 17 700 students (Tilastokeskus 2012b). The University of Helsinki describes itself as having “strong international connections” (Basic facts 2013), as well as a strong focus on being international which can be seen in
for example the fact that the university strives to provide many courses English in order to allow exchange students to participate in as many courses as possible (UH 2009).

It is possible to attend the University of Helsinki as an exchange student through various exchange programs. The requirement is that there ought to be a valid exchange agreement between the exchange students’ home institution and the University of Helsinki. The university also awards minor scholarships to students whose home universities do not have agreements with the University of Helsinki, in other words to visiting students or freemovers. The University of Helsinki takes part in the following exchange programs: Erasmus, Nordplus, Nordlys, University Bilateral Agreements, Faculty Bilateral Agreements, MAUI, AEN, ISEP, North2North, North-South-South, Freemover, CIMO Scholarships, EU-Atlantis/EU-Australia and visiting students (Jokela 2013a; UH 2009). During the semester of 2012-2013, the number of exchange students accepted to these programs was 1010 (Jokela 2013a).

The Erasmus program has been the most popular exchange program for incoming students to the whole of Finland (Garam 2001: 9). The biggest nationalities of Erasmus exchange students in Finland in the academic year of 2010-2011 were German, French, and Spanish (FI-Finland 2012). The popularity of the Erasmus program can also be seen at the University of Helsinki in the academic year of 2012-2013 with 676 exchange students arriving within the program (Jokela 2013a). The second biggest source of exchange students at the University of Helsinki are visiting students. How long the students stay in Helsinki varies a lot, but the minimum time of stay is three months. The students stay in Helsinki to a large extent according to the university semesters, thus staying for either three, five or nine months (Jokela 2013a). Some students however spend even a longer time in the country in order to explore the country.

The University of Helsinki provides a fair amount of information for the exchange students that have been accepted to the university. The university maintains a web site that is intended for exchange student and international students only (New students 2013) as well as a blog (Welcome to UH 2013). On both the web site and the blog it is possible for the student to find information about various topics such as housing, the student life, insurances and general information about what to do when arriving to the city. When the exchange students arrive in Helsinki, the main help they get are the tutors that introduce the students to the university and the life in Helsinki, as well as the
Orientation Fair that is organized twice a year, in the beginning of each semester. During the fair the students receive practical information and help concerning the studies and the life outside of the studies (New students 2013).

In the strategy of the University of Helsinki for the years 2013–2016, internationality is highlighted very strongly. An important aim in the strategy is to make the exchange students’ life in the city as convenient as possible both during their exchange and after. Because of this the university wants to provide enough courses in English for the students and also make sure that the attended courses will be counted as credits in the exchange students’ home university (UH 2012). In the strategy one important aim is also being amongst the top 50 universities in the world by 2020. The university sees the recruitment of both international teachers and students as a way amongst others to achieve the aim. In the year of 2012 the University of Helsinki was ranked number 78 in the QS Network ranking of top universities in the world (University of Helsinki rankings 2012). The QS network publishes university rankings since 2004 in order to provide information especially for students who would like to study abroad (QS University rankings 2013). To increase its visibility amongst these students it would be important for the University of Helsinki to improve its ranking. A higher visibility could definitely be of help in attracting more exchange students to Helsinki.

An exchange period is however about more than studying, it is about experiencing a culture and the life of the exchange destination. Therefore, the choice that the students make when choosing where to go for their exchange will have a lot to do with the place in general, in the case of this study, Helsinki. The student city is thus not just the university environment, but the whole city. In this sense, the choice that the students make is very similar to what a tourist makes when choosing a holiday destination. The University of Helsinki has acknowledged this which can be seen in videos posted on the university’s Youtube channel where one can find videos concerning the university life in Helsinki. Many of the videos, such as the one named University of Helsinki with close to 10 000 views, focus on images and the feeling of the city in general as well as leisure time activities, rather than just the actual studies (UH 2011).

Both an exchange student and a tourist need to identify aspects of different places that they like and further decide on one place depending on those aspects. The way Helsinki markets itself as a destination is thus a crucial fact that has an effect on how
attractive Helsinki is considered by the outside world and thus also the exchange students. Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau coordinates the destination marketing of Helsinki and also releases the tourism strategy for the city (HCV 2013a). During the time period of 2009–2012 the strategy focused on promoting existing strengths of Helsinki by separating them into the following brand elements: 1) a distinctive meeting place between east and west 2) architecture and design 3) culture and happenings 4) a city close to the sea and nature 5) competent, innovative and compact 6) human friendly and trustworthy (HMK 2008: 8).

During the last strategy period and especially in 2010 Helsinki City Tourist and Convention bureau focused on promoting Helsinki and its brand elements through marketing videos that were posted through their Visit Helsinki channel on various video-sharing websites such as Youtube and Vimeo (Rousku 2010). Altogether there are 23 videos to be found. Nine of the videos are portraying Helsinki as a whole, showing images and videos of young and happy people enjoying their time in a vibrant and green Helsinki. Two of these videos are showing Helsinki from the perspective of young people who play footbag and longboard through a green city with a vibrant lifestyle. The rest of the videos also show general pictures of Helsinki, but focus more on some specific theme. Four videos focus on design and the World Design Capital year in Helsinki, three videos on the LUX light event and two on gay attractions. The last three videos focus on the Tall Ships race event, gastronomy and the Kallio church. Five of the videos have more than 10 000 views on Youtube which demonstrates that they have been very popular amongst the audience (HCV 2013b).

One of the most watched videos of the Visit Helsinki channel has been the Helsinki – Our city is your city video, which has close to 41 000 views on Youtube. The video presents Helsinki in a minute with images of the city, people, buildings and Finnish products accompanied by information about Helsinki as well as catchy statements such as pure nature and forever young (HCV 2012). The statement forever young in fact describes the video very well because all the people presented in the video are young and look no older than thirty. The general feeling of the video is happy and carefree which is enhanced by the laid back music playing in the background. In the other videos of the Visit Helsinki channel the people are young as well, which implies that youthfulness is an important theme in the marketing of the city.
Something that most recently affected the image that Helsinki portrays to the world a lot was the World Design Capital year in 2012. Every second year the World Design Capital project selects one city in the world that has accomplished a lot in the field of design and in 2012 Helsinki was the selected city (WDC 2013; WDC Helsinki 2013a). During the year the city engaged in 500 different design related projects, and organized altogether 2800 design related events (WDC Helsinki 2013b). Besides promoting the importance of design in everyday life, one of the aims of the city during the year was to enhance the international knowledge of Helsinki as well as to catch the attention of international media (Jäkkö 2013: 21). According to Emmi Jäkkö (2013: 23) the marketing focused on promoting long-term design projects but the marketing was also seen within the tourism field when Helsinki was promoted as a design destination.

The World Design year was also important for the University of Helsinki. In connection to the World design year the university participated with a theme called Designing Society through Thinking. The university organized several events under the four main themes of: 1) passion to learn 2) green zone 3) oasis of science and 4) the student capital. An important and successful project that was organized during the year was the Think Corner (fi.Tiedekulma), a meeting place where the goal was to bring science into the everyday life and of reach to people, which in fact was also the main theme of the university when participating in the design year (Mattila-Niemi 2013; UH 2013). The four themes and its events were marketed with colourful images of young people. The marketing image of the green zone theme was of a young man surrounded by leaves whereas the passion to learn theme was of a young woman with fabric around her head which made her look like a rose. The student capital theme was of a young man covered in post-it notes (Figure 1) and the oasis of science theme of a young

![Figure 1. A marketing image of the University of Helsinki's world student capital theme during the World Design Capital year in 2012. (Source: Saksa (2011) ](image-url)
woman with a thick wintery hood on her head (UH 2013). The feeling of the images is cheerful and colourful and the people in the photos look happy.

The target group of my study, the exchange students, is one that has mixed interests of study and leisure. I believe that an effective way of marketing Helsinki to prospective exchange students is to study exchange students that have already been in the city. I think that identifying what aspects of the city have affected the relationship that the students have formed with the city will tell us a lot about what an exchange student appreciates about Helsinki. This in turn gives an idea of what are the important things that should be highlighted to students around the world in order to attract them to go to Helsinki for their exchange. Therefore I will in the following chapter present how the study of sense of place can be of use in branding and marketing a place to a specific target group, in this case Helsinki to students around the world.

2.3 Sense of place as a tool in place branding
In the partnership work shop between the University of Helsinki and the city of Helsinki, one of the topics was how the partnership could enhance the branding of Helsinki as an attractive student city (Leväaho 2012). Because the goal of both the University of Helsinki and the City of Helsinki is to enhance their internationality by amongst other things attracting more exchange students to the city, I decided to focus on how the student city branding would be such that it would attract not just Finnish students, but exchange student as well. When branding the city in a way that is as attractive as possible for students around the world, the chances that more students will come to Helsinki for their exchange are higher. I see it necessary to start with explaining what branding means. I then go on to explaining how branding can be applied to places and how the concept of sense of place is related to place branding.

Place branding has traditionally been a major issue of especially the tourism industry, and agriculture. Nations want to attract more tourists to their tourist destinations to increase incomes generated by tourism, whereas the agricultural scene is interested in promoting the places of origin of their products (Papadopoulos 2004: 38–39). However the interest of nations to brand themselves more widely has become more important in the past 15 years, when nations have wanted to attract foreign investors, promote their exports and attract a skilled labor force. Similar to attracting a skilled labor force has been the interest to attract competent foreign university and college students
When talking about branding, the context is popularly products, in other words product branding. According to Gregory Ashworth and Mihalis Kavaratzis (2005: 508) there is no unambiguous way to explain what product branding is, but certain is that a brand is not as simple as it is often assumed to be. A product brand is not only based on a slogan or the name of a product. A product brand rather includes all aspects of a product. As Sally Dibb and Cláudia Simões (2001: 217) put it: "Currently, there is general agreement in the marketing literature that the brand is more than a name given to a product; it embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs". A brand is thus about the big picture; how everything around the product is organized, how for example the people working in the shop that sells the product are dressed and so forth.

But how does place branding differ from product branding? Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2005: 508) explain place branding in short as "merely the application of product branding to places". This implies that the brand of a place includes physical and socio-psychological aspects of that place, in the same way as a product does. Place branding is considered an effective way to affect people’s feelings about places in order to achieve different objectives such as enhancing economic or political opportunities in that place (Papadopoulos 2004: 36–37). In this study, I understand the desired opportunities as mainly educational, because educating a work force that is not only talented but international is important in the globalizing world. Attracting more students to Helsinki is however at the same time also an economic and a political issue, because the students bring money to the city as well as affect the image that the city portray to the outside world.

Place branding is about identifying the qualities of a place that make it different, unique and better in comparison to other places. This way the place can promote those aspects in a positive light to the markets that they have identified as important (Ashworth & Kavaratzis 2005: 510). In this study the exchange students are the market, and the place is Helsinki. If the thoughts, views and wishes of the exchange students in Helsinki were better understood, that information could be used when trying to attract more exchange
students to the city. It is therefore important to recognize what awakes the student’s attention in the city.

To be able to brand a place it is thus crucial to know which aspects of that place are those that make it special in the eyes of the target group. Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2005: 506) argue that the concepts of place branding and sense of place are strongly connected to each other because every attempt to market a place by branding it includes the conscious intention to alter and create a certain sense of place. Examining the sense of place that the exchange students in this study have acquired, gives clues about what they see as the most important aspects of Helsinki. Promoting those things to the potential markets is an effective way of attracting more exchange students to the city.
3 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Sense of place, which is a central concept in this study, describes at its simplest people’s attitudes towards a place (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001: 244). Often the study of sense of place has focused on examining how people feel about the places where they are residents (Stewart & Williams 1998: 19), thus focusing on how people feel about the places where they live, their homes. This study however focuses on studying the sense of place of people that are not long term residents in a place. Home however, can mean different things depending on the context, which is why I will start this chapter by clarifying what I intend with the concept of home in this study.

In this chapter I will present the conceptual framework of my study. I will explain the meaning of place in the geographical discipline due to its importance to understanding the concept of place but also its fundamental importance within the geographical discipline. I will then go on to present how people experience places and form a sense of place and how this has been previously studied in the academic literature and what kind of new views there are on the topic. I will further go on to discuss the notions of mobility and transnationalism and their relationship. I further examine how the central concept of sense of place in this study relates to the notion of transnationalism.

3.1 The concept of home in this study
The concept of home and what it means to be at home is not a simple question. Home means different things for each person. Yi-Fu Tuan (1975) argued that the feeling of being at home helps to strengthen the sense of place for individuals. Therefore the concept of home has a lot of importance for this study. Tuan (1975: 164) argues that living in a place for a long time does not alone guarantee a strong sense of place. A person that has lived in a place for all of his live might have a weaker sense of place than a person who has lived there for five years. This is due to the fact that to develop a sense of place, one has to be personally involved with the place; time on itself is not enough. Sara Ahmed (1999: 331) expresses that transnational people, people who travel between many homes, are what makes it interesting to study: “what it means to be at home, to inhabit a particular place, and might call us to question the relationship between identity, belonging and home”.

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Home and belonging to a certain place are not concepts that have often been mentioned within the tourism field. This has to do with the fact that tourism has long been regarded as something outside of the everyday life; as something exotic and extraordinary (Tuulentie 2006: 148). The new mobility paradigm looks at this from a new angle. People are moving constantly which makes moving for a reason or another, also tourism, part of the everyday life (Sheller & Urry 2006). The blurring between migration and tourism makes the concept of home very relevant in the context of exchange students too.

Ahmed (1999) in the context of migrants discusses how traditional notions of home and identity are transformed when people travel and live between many places during their lives. Interesting is thus how the definitions of home can change when one leaves home. Ahmed (1999: 338) points out that one can have several homes, depending on how home is defined. There is for example the home where one was born, the other where one lives and the one where one grew up. Thus one has not to be from a place for it to be one’s home. Tuan (1975: 155) describes home as following: “We go to all kinds of places but return home, or to homelike places. Home is where life begins and ends; and if this rarely happens in modern society it remains an oneiric ideal”. I believe that the main point of the quote is that in the modern world, we are moving more and more towards living in different places, which is why the place where we born and die is more seldom the same place. For this reason, home is not anymore the place where we come from, but rather where we feel at home.

Home can thus mean different things depending on the dimension that is looked upon. Duncan Case (1996: 1) paraphrasing Geoffrey Hayward (1975) divides the definitions of home into five groups: “home as physical structure, home as territory, home as locus in space, home as self and self-identity and home as social and cultural unit”. Home can thus be defined on a concrete, but also on a more abstract level. Home can be the actual place where one’s house is and where it is located. On the other hand, a place that makes one feel at home because of identification with the place or because of strong social relations in the place can also be a home. Lynne Manzo (2003: 56) is on the same page when arguing that home can be seen as either literally one’s physical residence or on a more metaphorical level as many different places that people have relationships with. Manzo (2003: 57) further concludes that the notion of home is also used as a way.
of describing the feeling when people form a relationship to a place that makes them feel a belonging to it, or by feeling safe and comfortable in it.

In this study, I understand the concept of home to be a place that feels like home, thus a homelike place. I base these thought on the ideas of amongst other Tuan (1975) and Manzo (2003) that see the feeling of home as a subjective experience. Therefore home can be anywhere where the individual feels like at home. In this study I will also use something that I call the original home to describe the home that the exchange students come from. My study examines the sense of place of the exchange students’ in a new place for them, Helsinki. This is why I do not consider it relevant to further specify or investigate the other places in the students’ lives that they have formed relationships with. When talking about home, it can be discussed on different levels of existence such as the home building or the home country (Sillanpää 2011: 119). In this study, when speaking about the original home of the exchange students I am referring to a fairly high level of existence, the home country. Because students often move to other cities in their home countries to study, I believe that the students can feel at home in many places in their home country, not just where their family lives for instance. By talking about the original home as the students’ home country, the concept will include all the possible homes in their home country. I do however realize that if some of the students had roots in another country, they could feel at home outside of their current home country too. I did however not examine the family or living background of the students’ of my study other than regarding their nationality. That is why I will base the concept of original home on the nationality of the students.

3.2 The concept of place in this study
The concept of place is very central in my study as I am studying how a group of people form a relationship with place. The concept of place is fundamental in the geographical discipline and it has been discussed broadly and from several different perspectives within the field. To understand what sense of place means, an understanding of place as a concept is necessary. As Tuan (1975: 151) puts it: “Interest in place and the meaning of place is universal. The academic discipline that studies place is geography”. Even if it plays such an important role within the geographical discipline, it has been hard to find one unambiguous way to define it. Relph (1976: 8) argues that the concepts of space and place are strongly connected because when talking about space one cannot help but mention the concepts of place and sense of place too. Spaces work as the
context for places and the meanings given to these spaces grow out of the meaning of
the places within them.

This study focuses on the subjective experiences that the exchange students have of
Helsinki as a place. On the other hand I see that other exchange students can play a role
in determining how the individual experiences Helsinki as a place, because student
exchanges are known to include a vivid social life and thus many places are
experienced with others. This way the relationship that the students form with Helsinki
would have both a subjective and collective level. Supporting the idea of subjectivity is
Suvantola (2002: 30) who states that even if a clear definition of what place as a
concept is has not been established, the humanistic definitions hold in common the idea
that place does not exist neutrally and objectively within space. Place rather gets its
meaning from humans and is thus very subjective. Critiquing this very subjective view
of place are structuralists such as David Harvey who see place more objectively and as
something constructed trough processes and structures which define it, for example
social processes (Harvey 1990). In the context of this study, both of these ideas of place
are useful.

In this study I seek to examine the relationship between Helsinki as a place and the
exchange students and I think that by simply describing the relationship I am not
suggesting an absolute truth. I will draw conclusion out of the data if I discover some
things that occur often, but I am by no means claiming that my findings are the absolute
truth. I would rather call my study a snapshot of a part of the exchange students of the
world, and a snapshot of all the exchange experiences in the world. Amongst other,
Tuan (1977: 6) have however questioned whether studying such a humanistic and
descriptive topic as the connection between place and experience, allows for the
researcher to claim anything. I am thus not claiming but rather describing and
suggesting alternative interpretations.

3.3 Encountering places, identification with places and the development of a
sense of place
When we live, spend some time or visit a place, we always form some sort of
impression of it and at the same time some kind of relationship. Depending on the
experience, and on the other hand also the person, these relationships to places vary.
Often people do not however get to know new places alone, but in the company of other
people, which might also affect the experience. According to Suvantola (2002: 33)
tourists do not encounter places based on only what they see but instead the important is what kind of meanings they give to the things they see. The meanings that the tourist gives to places depend on many factors, such as what their intentions towards the place are or the framework that defines how they understand the meanings.

Place is extremely important in defining our identity (Suvantola 2002: 36). When we as human beings experience things, we get attached to and emotional bonds are created with the places that those things happened in. This does not mean however that we can only form strong bonds with places we are from. The important is really the feeling that one is “part of a place”, and at the same time that the “place is a part of us”. The place identity can be very strong for some people, which describe how much the place means to them (Suvantola 2002: 36-37). Suvantola (2002: 37) argues however that the place identity of a person is not created when one is young and then stays the same for the rest of our lives. He (ibid.) rather suggests that all places we have lived in leave a mark on us and our identity no matter if we have lived there for a shorter or a longer period of time. This means that new senses of places can be acquired throughout our lives. Harold Proshansky (1978: 155) describes the notion of place-identity at its broadest as those aspects in a person that define their identity in relation to a place. These aspects are formed both consciously and unconsciously trough different kinds of feelings, both positive and negative, that the persons has towards the place. It is important to note however that as the places change, the feelings towards them change too, which in it turns affects the place identity.

How does the concept of place identity relate to the concept of sense of place then? Psychologists Bradley Jorgensen and Richard Stedman (2001: 244) argue from an environmental psychological view that place identity is one of three so called place constructs, that helps defining the more generalized attitude that people have towards places, “the sense of place”. Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) studied the sense of place from similar premises as place in this study, because the focus was on a place that the subjects visit and do not reside permanently in: their lakeshore property.

Place identity describes how a person sees his/her relationship with a place. The two other place constructs are place attachment and place dependence. This division is however by no means absolute because the concepts do overlap at times (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001: 234 & 244). The overlap of the concepts can be seen in the arguments of Jerry Vaske and Daniel Williams (2003: 831) that rather see place identity and place
dependence as defining what place attachment is. To these authors (ibid.) place identity represents the emotional attachment to place, whereas place dependence is the functional attachment, thus how well physical aspects of a place satisfy the desires of a person. Tuan (1979: 410–411) approaches sense of place in a similar way by claiming that it is constituted of two meanings: the visual experiencing and the deep understanding and the involvement with a place which is reached when sensing a place not just visually but with all the other senses too. This requires time. Common for all of these definitions is that the sense of place is seen to be constructed by getting attached to the physical and visual aspects of a place, and also by getting to know the place behind the physical in a more deep and emotional manner. In this study I utilize this combined definition of sense of place.

The sense of place has traditionally been seen as something an individual acquires when forming an idea about a place. According to Patricia Stokowski (2002: 371) the post modernistic views on sense of place rather highlight the social experiencing of place. In this case the sense of place is not as much based on the place as a physical unit, but rather on intangible features of a place such as the social interactions and memories that were shared in a place. Stokowski (ibid.) is thus suggesting that the sense of place is socially constructed and that how people feel about places is strongly connected to what others feel about the place. Suvantola (2002: 71) is on the same notes when arguing that it is important not to separate ones experiences from the experiences of those experiencing a place with you, because the experience is shared with them. It is however important not to undermine your own personal experiences because no one else’s experience is more important than the others.

Tuan (1977: 403) also separates between the experiences of place that are individual and those experienced in a group. He does however not emphasize the social experience more than the individual. He rather sees that the collective place experience is affected by the way each individual in the group experiences the place. Suvantola (2002: 72) describes the shared experience that he had when traveling with other people that at its best “promoted a strong extent of intersubjectivity”. Tuan (1977: 403) defines intersubjectivity as follows: “the spatial experience that is defined by the presence of other people”. Richard Stedman (2003: 671) wants to question the social constructivist view on sense of place by suggesting that the tangible aspects of places should be regarded equally important as the intangible, since the physical aspects of a place are
what enable the social constructions in it. Tuan (1975: 152) explains that the physical aspects we see and the things we think of them are how we actively experience a place. The intimate feelings we then form on these thoughts are the passive experiences of place. Combining the ideas of these authors I feel that assessing both the tangible and intangible aspects of place is important, because I feel that the sense of place is constructed both individually and socially.

Relph (1997: 208) emphasizes that the geographical view on the sense of place is taking into consideration also the negative feelings that a person might have regarding a place, whereas other disciplines have traditionally more or less regarded only the positive attitudes as constituting a part of the notion. Stokowski (2002: 370) in fact call for an examination of also the negative sentiments that people have towards place, because when so much of the research focuses on just the positive aspects, essential aspects of place relations might be missed. As the attachment to place contributes so strongly to the definition of sense of place, it is clear where the emphasis on the positive derives from, since attachment is regarded as something positive. The place-identity on the other hand, can surely be both positive and negative depending on how a person identifies him/herself with a place. Relph (1997: 208) calls the positive sense of place “a strong sense of place”. As a geographer I understand and define sense of place in this study as both the negative and positive feelings that a person might have towards a place. If one has negative feelings towards a place, I understand it as complexifying the sense of place, rather than weakening it. Hence whether the sense of place is positive or negative, it does not change the fact that a relationship with the place in question exists. The relationship does therefore not have to be only positive in order for a person to have acquired a sense of place.

Psychologist Robert Hay (1998: 5) describes the qualities of sense of place with the same adjective as Relph: strong. A “strong attachment to place” can be formed according to Hay (1998: 5) only for people who have grown up in a place or at least lived there for a long time. Duncan (2012) on the other hand believes that even in a constantly changing world and changing environments people are in fact able to form strong attachments to places other than the original home. Baerenholdt et al. (2007: 139) are on the same page as Duncan (2012) when claiming that places can indeed have very strong meanings not only to the people that live in them but also to people that just visit for a certain period of time. Susan Stewart and Daniel Williams (1998: 19)
emphasize that even if the sense of place is strongly connected to what residents feel about the place, it is to be noted that tourists and other people visiting a place can also form very strong connections to a place. They (ibid.) say that “It is not the possessors of meanings that are local, but the meanings themselves”. This is contradictory to the argument of Hay (1998: 5) who specifically state that tourists are not capable of forming a strong sense of place.

Suvantola (2002: 37) claims that all places we live in in fact leave a mark on our identity. Relph (1976: 29) also admitted that people that are constantly on the move can actually identify themselves with a place fairly quickly and are thus not placeless just because they move a lot. It is to be noted however, that migrants often still long for their previous homes and thus often feel like they are never somewhere to stay for good (Clifford 1997). This can be the case for the exchange students as well because they are not staying in Helsinki for good, which might also affect how they form a relationship with the city. I utilize these ideas in this study too, suggesting that it is possible for the exchange students to form a strong sense of place of Helsinki and thus identify themselves with the city strongly even if they are only staying for a temporary amount of time.

Anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1992: 25) has studied refugees and the way in which this sort of what she calls “uprooted” or “displaced” people form place identities. It is widely recognized that people are in constant movement in the world of today. Because people are so much on the move, they do not always have lasting homes, which is why they “invent” new homes in places that they have been to, by remembering those places (Malkki 1992: 24). Malkki (1992: 37) draws on her discussion about refugees in order to suggest that identity should be seen as something that is always on its move. Malkki (1992: 38) does not want to undermine the strong bond of place and identity but rather thinks that “to plot only "places of birth" and degrees of nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them”. The roots that people have are thus very important, but feeling at home somewhere does not require for one to have roots there. Clifford (1997: 2) discusses the same topic by addressing mobility of people as “routes”. His ongoing theme seems to be contrary to traditional migration literature that highlights the roots of people as being more important for the building of a place identity. He is rather highlighting that both the routes and the roots should be considered as important. In this
study, I am focusing on the routes of the exchange students and Helsinki is a stop on their route.

3.4 The new mobility paradigm
At its simplest, the notion of mobility means according to Per Gustafson (2006: 19) "the overcoming of spatial distance". Traditionally geographers have viewed tourism as something exotic and out of the ordinary in contrast to everyday life. John Urry (1990) in his renowned work *The tourist gaze* has been in the forefront to promote this idea of tourism. Duncan (2012: 113) argues that this view on tourism is outdated and suggests that academics have turned to a so called "new mobility paradigm" because they no longer rely on the idea that tourism is the opposite to everyday life. The new mobility paradigm understands people as being in constant movement which makes tourism and traveling a part of everyday life (Sheller & Urry 2006; Duncan 2012). Urry was both admired and critiqued for the ideas introduced in *The tourist gaze* (see MacCannell 2001; Perkins & Thorns 2001; Jenkins 2003; Larsen 2005). In his later works he however developed his ideas further and in fact argued for a so called "end of tourism", discussing the way in which tourism is incorporated into all aspects of life. Urry (2008: xiv) stated that tourism should not be discussed as a separate phenomenon but as a part of everyday life. Somewhat confusingly Jonas Larsen & Urry (2011) however still discuss tourism as an opposite to everyday life and especially work, in the third edition of *The tourist gaze*.

In his later work, Urry (2008: xiv) in unison with Duncan (2012) suggests that a mobility paradigm is the right tool through which to investigate what Urry (2008: xiv) calls "multiple overlapping systems of life". With this he refers to the intersections of mobile people and mobile objects, ideas, messages and images. Fiona Allon, Kay Anderson and Robyn Bushell (2008: 2) in fact point out that all kinds of people, from students to refugees are more likely to intersect in the world of today, because everyone is so mobile. As the world has become increasingly mobile, there has been a shift from people moving permanently to moving around semi-permanently (Allon et al. 2008: 3). This type of semi-permanent movement is also characteristic to international student exchanges during which students reside in a foreign country for several months, however not permanently. Allon et al. (2008:4) point out that different kinds of mobilities, such as backpacking, student exchanges or working holidays, are thus significant objects of study in the contemporary mobility research. The topic is not
significant because it is a new phenomenon. The significance rather is that these mobilites connect people, cultures and places in a new way, by challenging prevailing assumptions of tourism and migration by questioning their locational and time constraints.

According to Duncan (2012: 115–116) mobility is not only supported by globalization but by the so called concept of transnationalism too. Gustafson (2006: 27) argues that the transnational perspective sees a strong relationship between place attachment and mobility, instead of denying the possibility of them both existing the same time as migration studies traditionally have. This perspective believes that mobile people can form place attachment with the new place they go to without losing the attachment and connection to the point of departure. According to Steven Vertovec (2009: 1) transnationalism is a concept that has been very popular in the academic literature during recent years, especially in the social sciences. He (ibid.) describes the notion of transnationalism at its broadest as “economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world”. Vertovec (1999: 448) is however concerned of the fact that transnationalism is studied within fields of very different nature. He feels that these studies have approached transnationalism from premises too similar to each other and therefore suggests that for example transnationalism of migrants and politics should be examined on theoretically different levels. This is why I feel that examining exchange students as a transnational group of their own is important. The concept of transnationalism will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

3.5 Mobility and place experience
I build this thesis upon ideas of Allon et al. (2008: 4) who examine how different kinds of mobilities, in their case backpacker mobility, are linked with notions of identity and space. The authors (ibid.) investigate how mobility in combination with identity and place construct and change spatial relations. I will combine these ideas with the ideas of Duncan (2008: 192) who suggests that being mobile may change the way people see themselves, thus, their identity and connection to place. She presents the idea that these groups of mobile people could form a multiple sense of belonging to place. I will find out whether the same thing goes for exchange students that also represent a highly mobile group of people. My target group differs from working holiday or gap year-takers in that they are not working, but studying and not “delaying their responsibilities
of adulthood” (Duncan 2008: 183) but rather working towards enriching their path towards a career.

Nick Clarke (2005: 12) notes that gap year takers such as working holiday takers or exchange students might feel belonging to not just the local community they are visiting. Many also form and settle in a community that consists of people who are in the same situation as they are. Petri Hottola (2006: 2) in his study on backpackers in India found that the backpackers indeed create so called “metaworlds” which can be compared to commonly discussed tourist bubbles. These metaworlds are worlds that are in control of the backpackers, rather than the local community, and can be seen as a way of escape from the cultural shock of the local community, a place in which they can take it easy. Having to constantly deal with learning new things in the local community can easily become too much which is why escaping to the metaworld might be pleasant at times (Hottola 2006: 3). As Suvantola (2002: 85) however mentioned, young travelers often want to differentiate themselves from the conventional tourists or the mass tourists. I thus feel like the metaworlds of the backpackers are perhaps comparable to tourist bubbles, but are not the same thing. This leads me to question how being a part of this kind of metaworld affects the sense of place of these backpackers and whether the sense of place is formed based on the local community or rather the metaworld? This is something I will investigate in the context of the exchange students of this study.

Tourism as a phenomenon has traditionally not been coupled with ideas of attachment to place, but rather as people moving in different places in the sense of only visiting them for a while. Seija Tuulentie (2006: 145) however suggests, that many tourists actually form very strong relationships with some places they visit and can even get so attached to those places that they can call them homes. This can then result in that they might want to buy a vacation house in the place or even go as far as moving there. Tuulentie (2006: 148) argues that this kind of thinking has made it possible to discuss tourism together with notions of belonging to place and feeling at home, which was not a topic before when tourism was seen as separate to the everyday life. In the world of today where everyone is in such constant movement, the home for some people is necessarily not anymore the actual residence, but rather another place where one feels at home (Tuulentie 2006: 148).
Duncan (2012: 115) suggests that globalization is a process that amongst other things raise questions about how people identify themselves spatially, in other words how they belong with, to and in place. She (ibid.) thus proposes that the mobility of people should be not only regarded from the perspective of globalization, but from the perspective of *transnationalism*. I believe that Duncan (2012) suggests this because belonging to place combined with globalization raises questions about how people that are mobile relate to places. Sutama Ghosh and Lu Wang (2003: 278) address the same topic when bringing up the notion of the so called “*transnational consciousness*”. They (ibid.) argue that each individual constructs this consciousness by her/himself, through sensing a feeling of multiple selves, which grow from a feeling of belonging to many places at the same time. Ghosh and Wang (2003) are building on ideas presented by Vertovec (1999) who discussed the concept of transnationalism by suggesting six approaches from which the concept can be studied. One of the six approaches, is what Vertovec (1999: 448) calls the “*type of consciousness*”. With this he (ibid.) refers to a “*dual or multiple identification*” that a person might feel with places when being mobile. He (ibid.) draws a link between the notions of belonging to a place and the notion of home when describing that a person who feels a multiple identification with place, can call another place than the original home a “*home away from home*”, something that he also calls “*diaspora consciousness*” (Vertovec 1999: 450).

Ulf Hannerz (2002: 220) builds upon the same ideas as Vertovec (1999) and Ghosh and Wang (2003) when claiming that in the globalized world, people are prone to feeling belonging not to just one place, but at least two or more. He argues that sometimes a person might not even know which place feels more like home (Hannerz 2002: 220). The ideas of Hannerz (2002), Vertovec (1999) and Ghosh and Wang (2003) support my study because exchange students are highly representative of a modern globalized and mobile person. According to the thoughts of these authors, I see exchange students as a very likely group of people to form strong bonds with several places at the same time.

Interesting is the process through which the place consciousness is formed and how initially a so called *outsider* of a place might possibly feel rather more like an *insider* and experience the place like the locals do. On the other hand it is important to note that an originally insider might also experience the place through the eyes of an outsider when for example acting as a tourist in their own city. Daniel Knudsen, Michelle Metro-Rolanda and Anne Soper (2007: 229) suggest that places have different meanings for
the locals and the non-locals, but points out that depending on what the place is used for, it can be interpreted in a touristic sense by either the insiders or outsiders. The birthplace for a local celebrity might for example be a very important touristic spot for the locals, when outsiders are not even familiar with the person, thus not the destination either (Knudsen et al. 2007: 229–230).

Duncan (2012: 116) claims, referring to Bronwyn Boon (2006) that people who have taken part in different types of gap years or overseas experiences, tend to develop an identity that is very flexible and that combines work and leisure, emphasizing that the leisure part of life is something important. Vertovec (1999: 451) talks about a "refusal of fixity" that people with a sense of multi-locality can feel. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 246) addressed the same issue when claiming that a year abroad during the educational path easily leads to expectations wherein the future withholds a mobile lifestyle.
4 RESEARCH COMPILATION

In this chapter I will present my research compilation. In the first section the aim of the study will be presented with the research questions. To be able to explain why I chose the research methods I did, I will also clarify the philosophical foundations that guided my selection of the methods. I will then go on to discuss why the use of a semi-structured interview is beneficial in studying the sense of place and why it was chosen for this study. Further I will describe the process during which the empirical data of this study was collected. The collected data will be presented in detail in chapter five.

4.1 Aim of the research and the research questions
The research subjects of this Master’s thesis are the foreign exchange students at the University of Helsinki during the academic year of 2012-2013. The aim of this study is to understand how the exchange students experience the city of Helsinki and what kind of sense of place they form during their exchange sojourn. The intention is to examine if the students feel familiar, homely and attached to Helsinki or if they rather feel detached and not connected with Helsinki and more like visitors. Interesting is, how the fact that they are mobile affects the formation of the sense of place. All of this is examined qualitatively through semi-structured interviews.

In this study, theories concerning how mobile groups of people form a sense of place are mirrored with the case of the exchange students at the University of Helsinki. This is an important interest of the transnational research that is interested in how people can feel connected to many places at the same time. I will find out how the exchange students experience Helsinki and what kind of relationship they form with Helsinki by answering my first research question: 1) *What kind of sense of place do the exchange students form during their time in Helsinki?* Duncan (2012) suggests that mobile groups of people can form so called multiple senses of self. This derives from the feeling of belonging to many places at the same time. I am thus interested in exploring whether this theory is applicable to the exchange students too.

I feel like it is important to examine not only what kind of sense of place the exchanges students form, but also how they construct that sense of place. To understand how they go about making sense of Helsinki is important in order to fully understand which aspects of the city affects the formation of the sense of place. This leads to my second
and third research questions: 2) how do the exchange students go about making sense of Helsinki as a place? 3) Are there some specific aspects of Helsinki that affect the exchange students' attachment to the city and thus the formation of a sense of place? Finally, I intend to be able to propose how the results of this study could be of help in branding Helsinki as an internationally attractive student city.

4.2 Philosophical foundations guiding the research

The aim of this study is to describe how the exchange students in Helsinki construct a sense of place and how they feel about the city as a place, mirrored by the theories of transnationalism and mobility. This topic positions itself firmly within the human geographical field because of the focus on a geographically restricted area which is characteristic to regional sciences. The focus of regional sciences is on describing the social and natural aspects in that area; focusing on the connection between these aspects and the place they happen in (Häkli 1999: 23). I am doing this by concentrating on how the sense of place is formed for the exchange students in Helsinki and which specific aspects of the city are those that make the sense of place unique for the place. My study however also has a minor normative and functional side to it which can be seen in my aim to suggest how the results of my study could be of use in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city.

My interests lie in understanding phenomena instead of trying to establish absolute and generalized truths about them. In this study it is in my interest to understand how the exchange students relate to and feel about the exchange destination as a place. This approach is also useful in my attempt to contribute to branding Helsinki as an internationally attractive student city. Information specifically on exchange students in Helsinki is relevant, not general theories about exchange students that would possibly not hold true in the case of Helsinki and thus be of no help in branding the city.

Human geographers depart from different methodological paradigms, for example positivism and humanism. Positivists believe that there is one absolute truth than can be discovered by measuring whereas the humanistic approach focuses on the meanings that people give to things. Depending on the personal interests, trends within the research field or influences from the society, the researcher picks his/her approach (Häkli 1999: 30–31). What guides the choice of the methodological paradigm perhaps the most is however the research questions, thus what is being studied. All paradigms
have their strengths and weaknesses, and therefore receive criticism from other approaches that feel that they lack some relevant point of view. My study does not represent one philosophical approach, but is rather combining two different approaches in order to make them complete each other in a way that can help me to answer the research questions of my study. Within the geographical field it has become more common to combine takes of different philosophical approaches in one study. Vuolteenaho (2002: 238–239) associates this change with the so called “cultural turn” that has its roots in the 1980s. Important of this change was that geography started to be influenced by other disciplines and thus became more holistic. This change could for example be seen in that geographers did not consider landscapes only as morphological facts anymore, but as places that could have symbolic meanings too. This change was a clear influence from approaches such as anthropology and iconography.

I think that the sense of place of the exchange students in this study is constructed through shared experiences with others. I however do think that the experiences of the individual exchange students are important in themselves too. The perspective of my study is therefore a combination of elements from both humanist and post-structuralist approaches. Post-structuralists share the same ideas as the structuralists in that the underlying social constructions of phenomena are important in explaining the behavior of individuals. On the other hand post-structuralists critique structuralists for not having taken into consideration that the social constructions are affected by the human mind (Häkli 1999: 104-105). Also humanists have criticized this because they believe that the subjective experiences of the individuals are important in themselves (Häkli 1999: 66-68). Post-structuralist approaches are those of constructionism and post-modernism. In this study I utilize constructionist ideas. These ideas are based on the thought that the experiences of individuals are socially constructed. These social constructions are however dependent on how the individuals interpret and understand them (Häkli 1999: 105). In that sense the constructionists share similar thoughts as humanists.

The humanistic approach is subjective in its nature, because of the focus on the thoughts of the individual. Because of this it is important for the researcher to stay close to the research subject in order to fully understand the meanings that the individual gives to things. This is why I felt that it was important to address the research questions through a method that gave a voice to the exchange students and gave me a chance to interact with them. The interviews were transcribed into text, and therefore my analysis
is based on those texts and the meanings that the exchange students voice through them. It is important to recognize that the researcher is affected by his/her experiences and knowledge about the research subjects. This influence is however not considered a fault as in the positivist approaches, but rather as a benefit and as something necessary in order to fully understand the research subject. The point of the humanistic approach is to not even try to assume anything about people, but interesting is how unexpected and even irrational life can be (Häkli 1999: 68-69).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the approaches that the theorists presented in this study have departed from. The strong focus on the lived and experienced place that geographers such as David Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan describe is very typical to humanistic geography where the interest is in finding the meanings behind pivotal concepts of geography such as place, space and landscape (Häkli 1999: 81). Geographer Tara Duncan has been in the forefront to promote ideas of mobility and transnationalism, combined with the very geographical term of sense of place. Sense of place is considered a notion belonging strongly to the humanistic geography, because the focus is on the ties that individuals construct to places (Häkli 1999: 82). Duncan focuses on a very humanistic notion, and her perspective is humanistic in that it assumes that individuals form a sense of place individually by living and experiencing things in a place. She thus highlights the individual which is a typically humanistic approach in geography.

My interest in the experiences of individuals is characteristic of humanistic geographers. I thus depart from the typical humanistic approach that emphasizes the importance of the experiences of the individual. I nevertheless follow the example of Patricia Stokowski because I am interested in the social construction of these experiences even if my study is based on a very humanistic concept, the sense of place. Stokowski believes that the sense of place is constructed not just through an individual’s experience of the physical place, but that the social processes happening in that place affect how it is perceived. Steven Vertovec share similar thoughts when highlighting that transnational people build networks between places. These networks require more than the mobile person themselves to maintain the ties between those places. Vertovec thus seems to suggest that the feeling of a multiple sense of place is socially constructed which is characteristic to constructionist approaches. My starting point is that social interactions with others guide how individuals operate. I therefore take great interest in
examining the shared dimensions of the behavior of individuals by taking into consideration what the experiences of the exchange students have in common. I nevertheless think that the experiences of individuals have a very subjective level as well. Exposing the individual experiences and the shared mechanisms behind them gives me a chance to explore how the exchange students get attached to Helsinki.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews in studying the sense of place
Hirsjärvi et al. (2010: 161) describe qualitative research at its simplest as an approach that aims at describing the real life. Important is to study the subject in a way that is as comprehensive as possible, because the qualitative approach sees the reality as multifarious. Another important feature of a qualitative research is how it acknowledges that the values of the researcher are always present, and thus objectivity is not a possibility. The method of this study is qualitative in its nature, because the aim was to understand and explain the research subjects.

The definitional difference between qualitative and quantitative research can be traced back as far as to the 1800s. The difference between natural sciences and spiritual sciences was seen to be that natural sciences explain and spiritual sciences understand phenomena. Based on this qualitative research should be discussed as an understanding type of research (Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2009: 28). Pertti Alasuutari (1995: 147) is on the same page when suggesting that qualitative research does not aim at proving that a phenomenon exists but rather thinks that it exists to explain the phenomena in order to understand it. The use of the word explain, seems to be somewhat contradictory to how Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 28) defined qualitative research. They (ibid.) however state that in common language explaining and understanding are not separated so much, which seems to explain to some extent why Alasuutari and Sarajärvi and Tuomi use the same word in such a contradictory manner. Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 28) in fact admit that explaining phenomena is firmly connected to understanding them, since every explanation brings us one step closer to an understanding of them.

Interviews are very diverse as research methods because of their flexibility (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 11). Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 73) point that an interview allows the researcher to control the situation much better than for example with a survey, so for example to clarify questions or repeat a question. I felt that an interview would suit my study well because some questions might not be understood by all respondents due to for example linguistic matters. In a face to face situation I would be able to clarify
anything that was unclear. The shared feature of different types of interviews, is that they all put the human being in the center of attention (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000: 11). Since the center of attention of my study is in fact the exchange student, an interview was a suitable research method, because it gave the students the voice that this topic deserves.

I decided to use a semi-structured interview because as is typical for an interview of this type, the target group was intentionally selected. The students were known to be exchange students, thus capable of answering the questions of my interview. Because of this, the number of interviewees does not have to be as big as in for example more structured interviews (Sarajärvi and Tuomi 2009: 85). As Irving Seidman (2006: 55) puts it: “The method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants”. Semi-structured interviews are usually pretty flexible in their structure, but are however more planned than open interviews and usually questions and themes are prepared in advance. It does not matter however in which order the questions are asked or if they are posed in the same way in all interviews as long as the same themes are covered with all respondents (Eskola & Suoranta 2008: 86). I felt like this was an advantage for my study, because with a topic so much based on people’s feelings, I felt that it was important to let them talk without interruption. This way I could for example change the order of the questions when the flow of the interview required it and the interview could be more relaxed and conversation like.

The topic of this study is fairly new in Finland and the exchange students are also a fairly new target group in reference to these specific theories, which is why I wanted to let the students talk about the topic as freely as possible, while still remaining in the setting of my study. I felt like a semi-structured interview allowed me to do so, because it made it possible for me to focus on the themes of my study, but not too strictly. That allowed for also unexpected information to come up, which is positive when it comes to a topic that has not been studied much. The sense of place of a person is a very personal feeling, but also an abstract concept to grasp. Because of this, I felt like I needed to approach the students by asking questions that made it possible for them to answer the questions freely, thus allowing for different kinds of answers. This way the interviewee
is not directed to answer in a certain way, which according to (Seidman 2006: 15) is one of the main ideas of a semi-structured interview.

The questions were planned according to five main themes, which derived from the research questions of this study (Appendix 1). Before finalizing the questions I performed a few test interviews to see how the questions worked in practice and whether they were understood correctly. Drawing from the results of the test interviews, I altered the questions a little bit, to finally end up with five themes. The themes are: The formation of the sense of place, Encountering Helsinki and making sense of the city, Factors in Helsinki influencing the formation of a sense of place, multiple belonging to places: home and “the home away from home”, Settling in with the exchange community and the local community and the Exchange students’ thoughts on their future international mobility. The themes of the study were also used when presenting the results of the interviews in chapter five. To make sure that I would gain credible answers of each theme in my interview, I approached each of them by posing several questions that were similar to each other, but using different kinds of formulations.

I approached the themes by forming questions that I felt would in common and understandable language produce answers about the themes. To explore how the students make sense of the city and thus start forming the sense of place I asked them what they did to make the city familiar for them, thus how they got to know the city. To approach what kind of sense of place they had formed in Helsinki I tried to reach what kind of feelings and closeness towards the city they had formed. To reach that I asked if they could call the city a home, whether they felt like locals, how they had settled in, whether they would miss the city back home and if they felt that they had settled in the local community or rather an exchange community if they felt that one existed.

To explore what about Helsinki affects how the students experience it, I asked them what characteristics of Helsinki affects their feelings and opinions of the city most, and if they would recommend the city for another exchange student and why. I thought that asking indirectly if they could recommend the city to someone else would bring their thoughts to a more personal and practical level regarding their feelings about their city that would allow them to freely express their feelings without having to so to say judge the city. These questions also helped me to approach my last research question concerning how the aim of attracting more international students to Helsinki, could
benefit from knowing which aspects of Helsinki form the exchange student’s sense of place.

Something very important that needs to be taken into consideration in this study is the language. The interviews were performed in English. English is not my mother tongue and neither the mother tongue of twenty of the interviewed exchange students. Naturally this evokes the question, to what extent did the language barrier affect how the students understood the questions and how much did it limit what and how they expressed themselves during the interviews? This question is one that can never be fully answered, but I made sure to avoid possible misunderstandings as much as I could. I did so by repeating questions when the student did not understand them or by asking further questions when I was not quite sure what the student meant. I am sure that to some extent the language definitely was a barrier for a full understanding between me and the interviewees and that has to be taken in consideration when evaluating the results of this study. I do however think that the communication between me and the interviewees was very successful because we understood each other well and all of the interview situations were relaxed and pleasant.

In this study I used content analysis as a method to analyze the semi structured interviews. Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 105–106) discuss what content analysis as a method really entails and notes that in the academic literature, both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been named content analysis. The authors (ibid.) would however rather call the qualitative analysis of text as content-analysis and the quantitative analysis of text as content differentiation. In analyzing the interviews in this study I focused on using content-analysis because I analyzed the interviews transcribed into text form. Content analysis is a method where the data is examined by finding commonalities and differences in the material by categorizing it according to for example the research questions (Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2009: 105). This method allowed me to examine the individual exchange students, but at the same time to highlight the things that they had in common, still taking into consideration the experiences that differed from the common ideas. I felt that this was important because I am studying a fairly new topic and felt that by using this method I can minimalize the chances of missing something important. I felt that a quantitative analysis could have contributed to acknowledging often emerging themes in the interviews, but it would not have been a useful tool to understand the themes more deeply.
According to Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 108–118) a content-analysis can be data-based, theory-based or theory-guided. Data-based analysis concentrates on the data and draws from it, whereas in theory-based analysis background theories organize the collected data. Theory-guided analysis also draws from background theories, but does not rely on the theories as heavily as the theory-based analysis. I am organizing my data according to my research questions which were in turn based on my background theories which makes my study clearly theory based. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000: 173) call the categorization process *theming*. Theming is about finding commonly rising themes in the data. These themes can be based on the already defined themes that were decided for the interview but it is important to note that also new themes that might arise from the data can be defined and as previously mentioned any exceptions should be taken into consideration too.

4.4 Realization and analysis of the interviews
For this study I decided to interview the exchange students that participated in a student exchange at the University of Helsinki during the academic year of 2012-2013. The decision to leave other universities in the city out of the study was made because the University of Helsinki is the biggest university in the city and also hosts the largest number of exchange students per year. I therefore felt that the exchange students at the University of Helsinki would represent the exchange students in the city the best. The intention was to include exchange students from as many exchange programs as possible of those present at the University of Helsinki to be able to have a research group and thus answers as diverse as possible.

One of the students included in the study was not an exchange student. She came to Helsinki on an Erasmus internship and did thus not participate in an educational exchange, but in a work related exchange. As established earlier in the thesis, work tourism and exchange student tourism do share the very similar motivation of combining traveling for leisure with something else, such as work or studies. Both the intern and the exchange student also have to deal with a similar experience of getting to know a new culture in Helsinki while at the same time learning what the study or work culture in the city is like. The student in question was doing her internship at the Department of Psychology at the University of Helsinki which also allowed for her to comment on the questions regarding the university, regardless of not studying. Two other students were technically not exchange students but rather degree students. These
students participated in the IMESS Master’s degree program, which includes a year in London and another year in Helsinki (The IMESS program 2013). The coordinating institution is however the University College London, which in practice made this particular student an exchange student in Helsinki.

I decided to approach the students by sending an interview request letter to the mailing list that all exchange students at the University of Helsinki can ascribe to: foreign-students@helsinki.fi. I sent the same email a second time two weeks after the first one in order to remind the students about my study. All exchange students at the University of Helsinki can ascribe to this list, but are however not automatically added to it and thus it is optional. It is therefore important to note that my email did surely not reach all the exchange students at the university. I also posted the same message on the Facebook page of the Erasmus organization ESN, ESN HYY HELSINKI and repeated the message a few times to get more participants.

I happened to meet an exchange student who told me that she is not on the exchange student mailing list because it receives too many emails per day. I asked her to participate in the interview and asked her to suggest me a friend for the interview. Thereafter I asked every interviewee to recommend me the next person to be interviewed. Thus a big part of the interviewees were found not only on the mailing lists, but through a so called snowball technique, which Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 86) explain as a technique where the researcher is introduced to new people by each interviewee. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000: 60) this ensures that the interviewees are relevant for the purpose of the study. This requires a so called key person to start with. In the case of my study the key person was the exchange student I happened to bump into. This technique suited my study well, because my study is qualitative which does not require a random sample of participants as a quantitative study does, but rather a sample of participants that are based on the purpose and theories of the study (Curtis et al. 2000: 1002).

I planned seventeen questions for my interview and all of those questions were asked from all interviewees (Appendix 1). The order of the questions was however often changed and sometimes the students answered two questions during one answer so all questions did not need to be verbalized. Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 75) acknowledge that the questions in a semi-structured interview always need to be posed with the goal to find answers that matter for the study, which is why I also posed some further
questions regarding the answers the students gave me when I felt that it had relevance for my study. During some of the interviews I had to rephrase some of my questions, because the students did not understand the questions as they were. Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2009: 75) point out that it is in fact up to the researcher to decide upon questions of accuracy regarding the semi-structured interview, and that depending on the study, the accuracy can change a lot. The interview was thus not as structured as the presented framework of the interview might suggest, even if I had in fact planned questions in advance and not just themes as can also be done in the case of semi-structured interviews.

All except one interview was performed at the city center campus of the University of Helsinki. Eighteen interviews were held in a group work room in the learning center Alexandria, five in the Kaisa library and one in the Minerva building. One interview was held at Kumpula campus. The interviews lasted from fifteen minutes up to thirty five minutes. I recorded the interviews with my cell phone in order to be able to transcribe the interviews afterwards. Before the interview started I asked the students if they had any questions about the study and answered all questions to make sure that the exchange students felt comfortable in the situation and knew what the study was about. The atmosphere during all interviews was relaxed and many students stayed chatting with me after the interview as well.

Whenever I had performed an interview I transcribed it immediately to avoid leaving all the transcribing into one phase, which might have proved laborious. Since the aim of my study was to analyze the thoughts of the students, not the language, I felt that the level of detail of the transcription did not have to be as high as to include remarks of for example sighs or laughter. I transcribed what was said word by word, however leaving out repetition of words, when the interviewee corrected a grammatical error or rephrased themselves, as well agreeing comments of me, the interviewer, such as the word okay which I had often repeated unnecessarily. Hirsjärvi et al. (2010: 222) in fact point out that there is no rule for how much in detail interview data should be transcribed. The detail of transcription always depends on the purpose of the study.

I started the analysis of the interviews by reading the interviews thoroughly several times. I then highlighted comments that related to the themes of my interview to see what was said about them. I then moved on to put together the comments that belonged to the same theme in order to summarize what was said about them and identified
answers that seemed to be common to many students. It is to be noted however, that the exchange students often expressed several opinions concerning a theme and therefore the answers do not exclude each other. I accompanied the data with excerpts from the interviews in order to demonstrate clearly what the students had said. I modified some of the excerpts by correcting significant grammatical errors, repeated words and unnecessary words such as “I mean, like, okay, yeah”. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000: 194) think that modifying the excerpts is acceptable, as long as the meaning of them is not changed. The amount of excerpts regarding different themes varies a little bit. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000: 194) suggest presenting a larger amount of excerpts when the theme is important is a good way to decide which excerpts to present. I followed this example and showed more excerpts when I was mentioning an important theme. On the other hand, I did not write out all or many excerpts if they were very similar to each other but rather expressed the importance of the theme in the text.

4.5 Reliability and validity of the study
A reliable study is one that can be easily repeated and one that would give the same results if someone else did it the same way. A valid study on the other hand is one where the used methods measure what was supposed to be studied. My study is qualitative in its nature and the interviewed exchange students represented about one percent of the whole target group which were all the exchange students at the University of Helsinki. Hirsjärvi et al. (2010: 232) argue that the reliability and validity of a study are concepts used rather in quantitative studies. When describing individuals or cultures as in qualitative studies, the researcher can easily say that each individual is unique which is why the same result would perhaps not be achieved when for example interviewing other exchange students as in the case of my study. Hirsjärvi et al. (2010: 232) however emphasize that both quantitative and qualitative studies should be analyzed in the light of how trustworthy they are even if on different basis.

A reliable qualitative study is one that is transparent in the way that the researcher reports in detail how the study was performed, as well as mentions possible errors that happened during the process. Important is also to always justify the interpretations that you make as a researcher (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010: 232–233). I feel like my study is reliable because I have in detail explained the whole process that I went through when collecting the data for my study. I also provide as many excerpts as possible to actually demonstrate what the students said. I also described what the interviews were like and
how the language possibly affected the understanding between me and the interviewee. A shortcoming regarding the reliability might however be that in the case of three interviews I forgot to assess some important topic and had to ask the students the question afterwards through email. This might have caused that the students did not remember anymore what they had said previously regarding the topic. Also, expressing something in written form is different from talking. This might have changed what and how these three students said what they did.

A valid qualitative research is one where triangulation is used. Triangulation means the combination of more than one methodology to study the same topic. Most often the triangulation of research methods is discussed. Using different methods and getting the same results shows that the results are valid (Hirsjärvi et al. 2010: 233). I did not use triangulation of methods in my study but rather the triangulation of theories. I approached the concept of sense of place through theories of transnationalism but also from the perspective of the new mobility paradigm. I definitely think that studying the sense of place from both of these perspectives enhances the validity of this research because it allowed me to study the topic in a multifaceted manner. Valerie Janesick (2000: 391–392) in fact wants to move away from seeing triangulation as so important and rather talks about “crystallization”, by which she means looking at a topic like a crystal from all the possible angles and in different circumstances. Janesick (ibid.) calls for a holistic approach to research and sees that incorporating other disciplines in a study is beneficial to better a study. I have done just that because the theories that I used in my study were familiar from migration studies. My theories were thus not new in themselves, but used in a new context. I think that approaching a topic that has not been studied a lot by using familiar and tested theories, makes the study more valid. I feel so because incorporating something that is known to work in another context, gives more validity to the new context.

Interpreting things is always a challenge, because every interpretation is subjective and thus is by no means the only correct one. There is always the chance that someone else would interpret the same data in a totally different way because of differences of personality or simply because of different backgrounds. In the case of my study, changing the interviewed exchange students could also change the data quite a lot, because each exchange student experiences their exchange in a different way. I did however discover many commonalities in the students’ answers which lead me to
believe that even in a group of other students these same commonalities might have arisen. By making sure that I keep the reader informed at all times about what and how I have done the study, as well as justifying all of my claims, I feel that I can say that my interpretations are trustworthy. I believe so, because the reader can this way follow my lines of thought and understand why I have made the interpretations I have made. I also followed my background theories when analyzing the material, which further guides the reader to understand where my interpretations come from.

I feel like the fact that I have been an exchange student myself might have affected how I interpreted things since the background of the researcher always affects the research they are doing. I have experienced a very similar experience as the exchange students I am interviewing had. In many cases the researcher has not had any personal experiences on the studied topic, which can be considered both a pro and a con. It is a pro because the researcher can more easily understand what the interviewees mean without them having to explain everything. It is however a con also because the researcher might expect that the interviewee has experienced the phenomena in the same way as the researcher has and lead the interview on false tracks. I believe that in the spirit of a qualitative research where the intention is not to even leave the author out of the equation, it is important for me to present my standpoints on the topic and also my motivations for writing my thesis on this topic.

As for my background I think that my own experiences as an exchange student in Italy in 2010 might affect how I feel about the research theme and the subjects. I however see it mostly as a benefit because I feel like my own experiences make it possible for me to understand the world of an exchange student better. I know what it is like to be in a new place and how difficult it can be at times when you do not for instance understand how some practical thing work. I also know what it is like to get attached to a new place. Personally I felt very much at home in the city of Padua in Italy and could still easily say that it is my second home. A definite disadvantage of this experience for my study is that subconsciously my own experiences might have led me to guide the interviews to fit my way of thinking or seek answers in the data that represent my own experiences. I tried actively to avoid this and rather attempted to use my experience as a tool for understanding the students better, not to guide them in any certain direction.

I feel like my study would definitely have also benefited from having a bigger sample size of interviewees. This way I could have perhaps drawn wider generalizations and
maybe also found something more that this particular group of exchange students did not express. I did however find a lot of commonalities between the answers of all the twenty-five students and during the last interviews I felt that I did not discover that many new things anymore. This leads me to believe that further interviews could have also provided similar answers. Because of this I felt that the interview data came at least close to reaching its saturation point.

My method of finding the interviewees, the snowball method, left me contemplating what the possible negative results of using that method might have been. Since each student suggested me further students to interview, I felt that it might have caused that the exchange students were somewhat likeminded. Usually people find themselves befriending people that are similar to them in some way. This might have affected the results. Since the students did however not grow up together but rather met because of the circumstances I do not think it affected the study in a very negative way. Many students were found via emails on the mailing list of the exchange students, or through Facebook, and thus not all interviewees were collected through other exchange students. Therefore I do think that the sample size varied enough.

When I started this study I thought that it might be possible to draw conclusion based on the nationalities of the students. I however found that I could not do that because the students came from so many different countries. I had only a few nationalities that I interviewed more than once, which I do not think is a valid base to make interpretations on. I do however think that the variation in nationalities made my research more valid because that way my study does not represent the opinion of one nationality or a few, but in fact eighteen different nationalities. It also goes to show that exchange students in general are not that different from each other around the world which I think that has a lot to do with their mobile lifestyle. They actually seem to have more in common than differences when they come to a new place where all the local people know the place and the exchange students do not.
5 THE EXPERIENCE IN HELSINKI AND THE FORMATION OF A SENSE OF PLACE

In this fifth chapter I will present the results of the interviews according to the five main themes which are based on the research questions of my study. Within each theme I introduce the most common answers that arose from the data. I also present the exceptions of the commonalities. The themes were thus based on the background theories, but within the themes I also allowed the interview data speak for itself. In the first section I will present the background data of the interviewees. I have marked the number of the students who mentioned a theme with brackets with the number of students inside it.

5.1 The research group
The number of exchange students who participated in the interviews was twenty-five. Five of the students were male and twenty female. The majority of the interviewees were thus female which might have affected the results of the study. What I noticed was that the interviews with the men were shorter than the ones with women, because the women explained what they said more thoroughly. The men seemed to express themselves more straightforward. I do not however see the imbalance of the sexes as a problem because my intention was not to examine differences between the sexes. I do however not want to undermine that the gender is an issue that will always be present no matter what is studied. A reason for the high number of women might simply be that they were more willing to participate in the study or that there actually is more women as exchange students in Helsinki than men. There are no statistics available on the gender distribution amongst the exchange students at the University of Helsinki from the academic year of 2012–2013. The statistics from 2011 however suggest that an exchange at the University of Helsinki is more popular amongst women than men because 65 % of all the exchange students were women in 2011 (Jokela 2013b). These statistics suggest that at least a partial reason for the high number of women in my study was because more women come to the University of Helsinki for an exchange.

The age of the students ranged from nineteen to thirty and the average age was twenty-four (Table 1). I feel like the age of the students was very representative because I interviewed both Bachelor students as well as Master students; so they were on different levels of their studies. I felt that interviewing students that were on different
stages of their studies was a positive thing because that way I was able to explore whether the age affected their opinions and feelings and thus also the formation of a sense of place.

Table 1. The age division of the exchange students presented in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Division</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-23</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-25</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-27</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 27</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the interviewed students nineteen were European, two Asian; three came from North America and one from Australia (Figure 1). The European students were thus represented widest. Europeans are in fact the largest group of exchange students at the University of Helsinki. This can be seen from that only the Erasmus students at the University of Helsinki represent 66% of all the exchange students at the university. This does not even include the Europeans that did not come to Helsinki through the Erasmus program, which makes the number of Europeans even higher in reality.
The students came to Finland through various exchange programs. The biggest exchange program was the Erasmus program. Eleven of the students were in Helsinki through the Erasmus program and one student through the Erasmus student mobility exchange program on an internship. One student came through the Nordplus program.
Four students came to Helsinki through a bilateral agreement between the University of Helsinki and their home university. There were three visiting students and two students who came through the IMESS program. These numbers follow the total number of the exchange students at the University of Helsinki, since for example 12% of all the exchange students at the University of Helsinki come through a bilateral agreement and 9.5% are visiting students when the corresponding percentage for the exchange students in this study were 16% and 12%. One student came through the ISEP program; one was a freemover and one through the ATLANTIS exchange program. These programs were also represented less amongst all the exchange students at the University of Helsinki.

The average length of stay in Helsinki of the interviewed students was seven months. Those who stayed for the shortest time stayed for five months, from January to May 2013 which was also the most common length of stay. The longest staying students stayed in Helsinki for twelve months (Table 2). These numbers correspond with the university semesters and some students came earlier to get to know the city or planned on staying longer to be able to enjoy some free time in Finland.

Table 2. The number of months that the exchange students stayed in Helsinki

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lenght of stay in Helsinki</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exchange students did not always have the possibility to study the subject that they major in in their home country, because there were not courses in the subject or they were not provided in English at the University of Helsinki. The students majored in
various fields of study in their home country. The fields that were represented were natural sciences (6), linguistics (5), psychology (4), history (4) and political sciences (2). There was further a law student, a student of public administration, a student of literature and humanities as well as a student of communication sciences and sociology.

Of all the twenty-five students only four did not live in housing provided by Hoas (Foundation for Student Housing in the Helsinki Region). Hoas was originally founded by the student unions in Helsinki and is a non-profit organization that co-operates with the student unions of the University of Helsinki and the Aalto University (Hoas 2013). These four students that did not live in Hoas apartments, rented private apartments in Hakaniemi, Tapulinkaupunki, Meilahti and Laajasalo and had found the apartments through people they knew or via announcements in newspapers. The rest of the students (21) lived in apartments provided by Hoas in Kamppi (14), Viikki (2), Pasila (2), Kannelmäki (1), Kontula (1) or Käpylä (1) (Figure 2).

![Figure 3. The parts of the city where the students had their apartment during their exchange (Modified by the author. Source: © MML, 2013)](image-url)
Fourteen of the exchange students had never been in Helsinki before their exchange. Seven students had been in Helsinki once. Most of the students that had been in Helsinki, had been there for leisure purposes, whereas one student had only had a stopover in Helsinki when returning to Canada from Estonia. Another student had been in Helsinki on a short summer exchange in a Finnish family. Four students had been in Helsinki more than once and most of them for holiday purposes or because they had friends in the city. One student said that she was a member of a student organization in Denmark and had been to visit their friend organization in Helsinki several times.

As for the reasons for choosing Helsinki as their exchange destination, I identified five main motivations: 1) Linguistic reasons, 2) the student liked the city, 3) it was a matter of conditions, 4) the education system or 5) because they saw Helsinki as an exotic new place that they would like to visit. Most students mentioned several reasons for coming to Helsinki. One of the main motivations to come to Helsinki was for linguistic reasons (6). Four students said that they had chosen Helsinki because they wanted to go to a place where they could study in English. Some of them did have other options rather than Helsinki but were still happy that they had ended up with Helsinki. Two students on the other hand wanted to learn Finnish which is why Finland was a natural choice for them.

*I would like to choose where I can study in English, and there was Helsinki from in the offers. There was Helsinki or England and I much more prefer the snow than the rain* (female 24, Hungary)

*I wanted to study in English and agreements with my home university, one of it was in Helsinki but I had recognized that my first choice was in Britain, Great Britain. But they didn’t give me the exchange. And Helsinki was my second option. They gave me it and I was happy for it* (male 30, Spain)

*Two reasons. First is because I study Finnish and second is because I’ve been here and I have some friends here so it was kind of obvious to come to Helsinki* (female 25, Hungary)

Another major (6) motivation to go to Helsinki for an exchange was that the students had been to the city before and liked it or had heard good things about it from others that had been in the city on holiday or for an exchange. These positive experiences and the positive recommendations pushed the students to spend their exchange in Helsinki.
Well last January when I saw the main building of the Helsinki University I thought that oh my god. I was thinking about Helsinki like probably for a Master’s program, so maybe an exchange program is a good opportunity to try it at least (female 21, Russia)

The thing is I’ve always known I’m going to live in Finland at some point when I was a kid. When I was twelve I had this little radio and I was listening to it and I heard Join me from HIM and I though “wow, what is that?” I grew up and I just started researching the Internet and found out about them and found out that they’re from Finland and I just got more interested in the country and I said that I will come to Helsinki at some point (female 25, Romania)

I’m a big fan of Scandinavia in general and I’ve been here to Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway before and yeah I really liked Helsinki when we came here before so (female 22, Germany)

Six students said that the reason why they came to Helsinki was not something they decided so much on themselves, but it was rather a matter of conditions. For some it was an obligatory part of their study program, or they had several other choices and the university made the final decision for them. Some students simply said that they chose Helsinki because their university had an agreement with the University of Helsinki.

The program specified that I needed to spend a year in America, a semester in Sweden and a semester in Finland. And I chose the University of Helsinki to be my Degree University. I had the choice of the other Swedish university too, but my degree research interests are more in line with the program here and so that’s why I chose it (male 26, USA)

I studied some Swedish at the University and I applied for Lund and Uppsala, and my exchange coordinators didn’t send anyone from my university there I think, the year that I went because they had already sent a whole heap. So my advisor told me to come to Helsinki because I could take sort of similarly being cultural subjects for my diploma in Swedish (female 21, Australia)

Four students mentioned that the main reason why they chose Helsinki for their exchange was the high quality of the education or the subjects that they could study. One student said that he chose Helsinki because at the University of Helsinki it was possible for him to study similar subjects as at home.

Because the University of Helsinki has good educational system and before my friends came here and studied and yeah, they like Helsinki very much (female 22, Turkey)

Because they have many of the same subjects that I have back home. Because I specialized within, yeah, certain areas of law back home, before I came here so it was mostly the same subjects so that’s the main reason why I picked it (male 25, Norway)
From friends I heard that it's a really nice place to live. Like in general the Scandinavian countries are really nice so I was curious how the life really is here and I also heard that the school system is really good here (female 22, Slovakia)

Finally, three students said that they chose Helsinki because it was something different from what they were used to, something exotic. These students felt that going to a country that they did not know so much about was exciting and it felt like a challenge.

I wanted to go to the Nordic countries like ... it was kind of a mystery as in that it's not very famous, like very popular in France. It's usually England or Ireland or so. So it was curiosity (female 20, France)

It's to me and to the people in Japan, we don't really have any idea of where Finland is or what this country is all about and I wanted to step into a new country that I don't have any clue about or isn't even in the media or anything. So experience something new and challenge myself and how it would feel like to live here in Finland (female 22, Japan)

I think in Spain we are kind of used to doing the same things every day so when we go to another country, we try to find something different. So it was okay. I had different choices, like really far from Spain. It was Finland and Iceland. And yeah Iceland maybe it's too far so I came to Finland. Because we want something different, like also cold weather and then we are here and it's true. It's totally different I think from Spain (male 21, Spain)

In order to find out how well the University of Helsinki did with welcoming the students, I asked the exchange students if they were happy with the help and information that they got from the university before and during their exchange. All twenty-five students agreed that in general the help and information provided by the University of Helsinki was very good or good. One student was however dissatisfied because she felt like she only got help if she asked for it. Two thirds of the students mentioned the tutor that the university provided as something very positive that helped them. The tutor had helped them by sending information beforehand by email and by showing them around when they first arrived. The tutor was also an important and safe person that the students could ask help in order to get organized with all the important details when they first arrived. The tutor thus seemed to be one of the most important and helpful things that the university provided.

When I came here, the university put a tutor for us and the tutors helped us so much (male 30, Spain)
I find that the university is being really helpful in the tutor system that they have. We don't have anything like that at my home university. You just figure it out for yourself. So that was really really good. And I still talk to my tutor all the time (female 21, Australia)

We had a Finnish student who was taking care of seven or maybe eight of us and taking us to the registration office and saying “okay, this is what you do in the beginning”. So we took care of everything in the beginning, registering to the police, and getting the student ID and the travel card and you know so, in that sense things were made easy (female 25, Romania)

Overall the students were very pleased that they got so much information sent to them beforehand. One student said that he missed the orientation week that the university organizes in the beginning of each semester, but that he was still able to manage really well with the information that had been sent to him beforehand. The students that did attend the orientation week, were very pleased with it. Many students said that they got all the necessary information there which made it really easy for them to start their exchange. One student felt that the university really makes a good effort with welcoming exchange students and it is visible that the exchange students are important for the university. Several students also mentioned that the exchange coordinators were motivated and helpful and answered their emails promptly. One student did however say that it had taken several weeks for the university to answer his email whereas another one said that her thesis advisor never let her hear of himself when she sent him an email. A few students said that they did not use the tutor and coordinator services of the university, but they felt that it was a good thing that there was an opportunity for that.

They are very proud I’d say to have foreign students here so they do a lot to make us comfortable and to enjoy like the life here and so they organize many things (female 20, France)

I went to this orientation fair that the university organized and it was perfect. It lasts three hours maybe and in those three hours I got all the necessary information, I mean, every aspect of my possible problems, or just my life here was covered and I didn’t even have questions after that. So it was perfectly organized (female 23, Russia)

So I came here and we got all information in emails, the main ones. So we got everything like, how I should pay the house rent, okay it's not exactly the university but the university offered us homepages for finding the Hoas apartment and they gave us all information that we really needed in the beginning by emails. Some pdf information I guess as well. And then when we came here and we had that orientation day it was very helpful (female 24, Hungary)
They sent me a very nice letter before I came here with lots of information already about things that are here, like the library and this user account, where to get it and the student union. This was very helpful and also augmented the want to come and the curiosity and I got quite some contact to this international coordinators who were very, how to say, motivated, that replied always quickly (female 26, Germany)

Even if the students were pleased with the help of the University of Helsinki in general, they did acknowledge some aspects that they would have liked to have more help with or that they were dissatisfied with. What was mentioned most often (5) was the accommodation. The reasons for the complaints varied though. A few students would have liked to have more help with finding an apartment because they did not get one from Hoas. The rest of the complaints regarding the housing were more matters of Hoas but the complaints were targeted at the university, which is only co-operating with Hoas. One student said that it was a shame that all the exchange students are put in one building, which then reduces the chances of getting to know Finns. Another student was dissatisfied because she was not allowed to change rooms in the Hoas building as Finnish students are and the third one wished that it would be possible to know a little bit earlier whether Hoas does provide an apartment for you or not.

They [the University of Helsinki] are not very helpful with the accommodation thing because I went there [international relations office] and they just didn’t do anything so… they just said that they would for example send me an email or something trying to help me but they didn’t (female 20, France)

I’ve noticed that in the dorms, where all the foreigners are put together and the Finns are completely separate. So I don’t understand that. So were they afraid that we’re gonna wake up the Finns in the middle of the night with our noise? I don’t know how that works really. I was kind of upset when I saw that (female 25, Romania)

I waited quite long until they told me if I had a place with Hoas or not. That was I think six weeks before I left. So I was a bit stressed out because I knew that finding an apartment in Helsinki is not the easiest thing, so I was a bit stressed if I wouldn’t get a place with Hoas I would have to look for something for myself and I didn’t know how to do that from Germany. So that was quite short notice. That stressed me out a little bit (female 22, Germany)

The other things that the students were dissatisfied concerning the University of Helsinki were very individual. Topics that however rose from the data were the selection of courses, Weboodi, the website of the university and the learning agreement. The students felt that it was difficult to get information beforehand about which courses were available for them to take. The students felt that the fact that they could not access
Weboodi before they arrived worried them. Weboodi is a website where the students can register to courses and keep track of their courses and credits. One student said that she would have been happy if someone had informed her not to worry about Weboodi that it is possible to choose the courses upon arrival in Helsinki and that Weboodi will be explained during the orientation week. Several students also mentioned that the website of the university was difficult to understand because there is so much information. The fact that not all the information on the website is translated into English was seen as a problem as well. Two students said that the university should understand better that the learning agreement is really important in many universities abroad, so more help with changing the agreements and making sure that they are correct, should be provided by the University of Helsinki.

*The one thing I was really worried about was Weboodi, because until I came here I didn't realize how I can take the courses, because at the time I didn't have an account* (female 19, Ukraine)

*Beforehand I looked at what courses they had trough the homepage but it's not like everything is updated there and I wish that I could have logged into the Weboodi beforehand so I'd know what more courses there are available for the exchange students and what kind of courses there are in English particularly* (female 22, Japan)

*The web page is horrible. I hate it. It's so difficult to find information. And of course there's so much information so it's difficult to structure* (female 28, Denmark)

*I'd say the only barriers for some things, especially some student's sites, it's only written in Finnish. Obviously that's not a bad thing but it does make it slightly difficult to, as only being able to speak English, to find out about stuff. I try my best, sometimes it's a bit difficult* (male 22, England)

Summarized, the exchange students that participated in this study came from very different backgrounds culturally and educationally. They were of differing ages, all however younger than thirty-one years. The motivations to come to Helsinki varied and for some the choice had to do with general factors that could be found in other countries too, whereas others specifically wanted to come to Finland. The students were fairly satisfied with the help that they got from the University of Helsinki upon arrival, but there were also some complaints. I suggest on the basis of the complaints that the university make a bigger effort to improve the web pages to be more clear and have all necessary information in English. The course selection should also be available for examination before arrival because many universities abroad have strict rules about the
learning agreement. Since the University of Helsinki is in co-operation with Hoas, the university could try to be of bigger help for the students regarding the accommodation.

5.2 The formation of the sense of place: encountering Helsinki and making sense of the city
To find out how the exchange students start the process of forming a sense of place in Helsinki, I asked them how they went about getting to know the city when they first arrived. Almost all of the interviewees (22) stated that their primary way of getting to know Helsinki when they first arrived was to simply walk around without a destination. They did so to see what there is to find and to learn what the city looks like. Important was to know where the basic amenities such as the supermarket or the closest bus station are. Finding their way from home to for example the university was something that many students tried to figure out during the first days too. One student said that she was walking around to get to know her surroundings to find things that she wanted to visit later.

I spent two or three of the first days I guess just sightseeing around trying to figure out where stuff was, taking buses and trams and getting lost all the time (male 25, Norway)

Well the first priority was getting the bus pass and once I got the bus pass I could ride out and do anything. I guess after I had that, I just tried to figure things out for myself, without asking anybody. Getting a mobile phone plan, going to the store to buy food…finding where my classes were gonna be...all of the amenities that you would associate with home, or what I chose to get familiar with first (male 26, USA)

I remember I would go on walks. First I started in Kontula and I just walked and walked and walked. And I found some cool things like a skating park and a place where we can go cross country skiing (female 21, USA)

The first, probably the first stuff I did, I was trying to walk everywhere. Walking walking walking. I was thinking, oh god I cannot get lost, but I had a GPS in my phone (female 19, Ukraine).

Well the first thing I did, because obviously in the beginning it was very difficult to interact with all the people, I just went and walked by the lake, I was jogging a lot just to observe (female 25, Romania)

Another topic that arose strongly from the interview material was that getting to know the city was something collective that was shared with other exchange students, the company of the tutor assigned by the University of Helsinki or Finns. More than half (17) of the exchange students mentioned that they were getting to know the city accompanied by other people which indicated that the social contacts with other people
plays a big part in the experience of getting to know a new city. When walking around the city the students were thus seldom alone. This had naturally an effect on which routes the students chose and what caught their attention since depending on who they toured the city with, they had a different kind of background knowledge about Helsinki. This finding corresponds with the ideas of Suvantola (2002) and Stokowski (2002) who emphasized the social dimension of getting to know a new place. The experience is most often shared with others and is thus also affected by how other people feel about the place. Ten of these students mentioned the tutor that the university assigned to them as one of the most helpful things when trying to get to know the city. These students felt that it was informative to have someone who knows the city and the university to show them around and to help them to organize the administrative things. Nine students mentioned other exchange students as important in getting to know the city, including all of the six who also mentioned the tutor. Six students said that they rather focused on getting to know locals in order to get information about where to go and what to do.

*My tutor helped me and well I’ve got some friends from different cities from all over the world. We became friends, and it was quite convenient to do everything together* (female 21, Russia)

*I went to some Erasmus events, and so yeah, it was very easy to know people because everybody wants to have new friends and everybody starts to talk with you and it was not very hard to settle down here* (female 27, Germany)

*We had this tutor group that was organized by the students that study at my faculty, so we were in groups of six people with one Finnish student and they showed us around the first couple of days and they also had the orientation week. It was I think basically three days after I arrived. And so they showed us the whole university and yeah, also with some friends or other exchange students we just walked around the city the first days* (female 22, Germany)

*I was just trying to walk around, meet some people who already know some places to show me. So that’s the main thing* (female 22, Slovakia)

I wanted to explore if the exchange students’ approach to forming a sense of place of the city was different from that of a conventional tourist who stays in the city only for a short period of time and use their time to mainly visit tourist sites. This is why I asked the exchange students whether they focused more on tourist sites or everyday life activities when getting to know the city. I base this distinction on the thoughts of Suvantola (2002: 85) who argued that young travelers such as backpackers often want to differentiate from the conventional tourists, that they perceive as mass tourists. The
distinction is very black and white but represents rather the ideas of the students than the reality. A significant finding was that I identified two sets of answers that divided the exchange students: those who were interested in discovering the tourist sites of the city (8) and those who were not making an effort to visit tourist sites (17). This finding seems to correspond with the findings of Suvantola (2002). Eight students, when familiarizing themselves with the city, focused on getting to know tourist sites such as Suomenlinna, Seurasaari, the Lutheran Cathedral and the historical center of Helsinki. A couple of students had also visited museums and the other churches in the city center: the Uspenski Cathedral and the Temppeliaukio church. The majority of these eight students (5) did not provide with a reason for visiting the tourist sites in the beginning, but rather seemed to see it as self-evident, thus as a normal thing you do when you go to a new place. Two of the students felt like they should do the touristic things during the beginning of the exchange, like any other tourists. When the city would be more familiar, they could move on to the more special parts of the city, and perhaps visit things that many tourists would not visit because of lack of time or information. One student said that she visited the tourist sites because it was convenient as she lived close to for example Seurasaari.

Yeah I think [I visited] quite a lot [of tourist sites], like Seurasaari, Suomenlinna and the museums: the Kiasma, Ateneum, The National museum, the natural historic museum. Then I went like around Pasila, to Kumpula, all around the center; the Senate Square, the two cathedrals (male 21, Spain)

When I get to know the city then I can go to more specific places but at first yeah, I just did the tourist things (female 20, France)

The other significant group of seventeen students that I recognized was those who said that they did not really visit that many tourist sites. It was obvious however that all of these students had seen some of the main sites in the city such as the Lutheran Cathedral, but not many more things. The focus for these students was much more on discovering the “non-touristic” city. The reasons for doing so were varying. Seven of the students said that they were trying to avoid touristic activities because they wanted to know the everyday life of the city, the “real” Helsinki that you cannot find on a tourist map. Three students said that they were simply not looking for tourist sites and did not know what should be seen, and thus visited tourist sites only if they happened to bump into something. Another two students mentioned that getting to know the tourist
sites was not important for them in the beginning, because they thought that they would have time to visit them later or they were waiting for better weather. Five students said that they had already seen the sites before when they had visited Helsinki earlier, which made it less important for them to explore the touristic Helsinki this time.

*I made a clear line between what was touristic and what was trying to be a part of what's going on here, like a daily life and things that I thought that would be inappropriate for me* (female 23, Russia)

*I haven't been like on a bus tour or I haven't been to Seurasaari yet. I keep meaning to go but I just, I don't know, like I'm more interested in going to cafes and like little things than like the formal touristy stuff* (female 29, Canada)

*When you came here as a tourist you have other interests, other timing and you'll live in different places. Now you have like your home and you need to furnish it, to make friends. When you are a tourist it doesn't really matter because you're here for I don't know, maybe a week* (female 23, Russia)

*As the university is quite in the center and the historic center, it just arrived to me that I was in front of some sites and I discovered: “oh, okay, this is what I heard about in the course, this is this place and I'm in the middle of it, cool!”* (female 26, Germany)

*I decided that I can go for a walk to a kind of not very touristic place, because I can be here as a tourist any time, because I'm staying here for a year* (female 19, Ukraine)

*I haven't visited any tourist sites because I've already seen many of them and I think I will do more of the tourist type of stuff when the weather is warmer* (male 26, USA)

In order to further shed light on the process of the formation a sense of place in the new place, I asked the students how long they felt it took for them to get familiar with the city and what affected the feeling of being familiar with it. It is to be noted that eleven of the interviewed students had spent a maximum of three months in Helsinki during the interviews, thus they had arrived in Helsinki in January 2013. The rest of the students had arrived in the summer or autumn of 2012 and thus they had been in the city from five to ten months during the times of the interviews. It felt natural to assume that there would be a difference in how the students that had spent a shorter or longer time in Helsinki felt about the familiarity of the city, leaning on the ideas of Neal et al. (2007) and Tuan (1975) who argued that a higher satisfaction and a sense of place can be acquired only by spending a long time in a place.

Striking was however that the difference between the students who had been in the city longer and a shorter time, was not that big. I did however notice that those who had arrived in January 2013 seemed to have familiarized themselves with the city a little bit
faster than the other ones. Five of the students that came to Helsinki already in the
autumn of 2012 felt that it had taken them a few months to get to know the city and six
said that it only took them from a few weeks to a month. Two students said that they felt
instantly familiar with the city whereas on the other hand two stated that they did not
feel familiar yet. This was noticeable as opposed to those who had spent here a
maximum of three months, because only two said that they did not feel familiar with the
city yet. This, even if these students had had much less time to familiarize themselves
with the city. Four of the students that arrived in January 2013 said that it only took
them a few weeks to feel familiar, four that it took a month and one that she felt
instantly familiar. It thus seems as though the students that had been in Helsinki a
shorter time felt familiar with the city a little bit quicker.

[It took me] quite a few months, especially because of the language thing. Just little
things you don’t know like when they’re asking for bags at the grocery store and you’re
trying to just do your groceries in Finnish but then you don’t understand. It took me
forever to know that “kuitti” was the check (female 29, Canada, who had stayed in
Helsinki since August 2012)

I think to me around about one or two months. First I needed to make friends and then I
felt like I need to get to know the city or like I was able to get to know about the city
with my friends and I thought that was the way best for me to get to know and to feel
better and to feel comfortable living here in Helsinki (female 22, Japan, who had stayed
in Helsinki since August 2012).

Oh, I’m not, not yet [familiar with the city]. I mean, sometimes you convince yourself
that you know how things are going or how everything works and then it just turns
around and it’s completely different and it’s not what you thought it would be (female
23, Russia, who had stayed in Helsinki since September 2012)

I think it was very, how I said, it was real fast. Like on the first week I think we were
happy with it (female 24, Hungary, who had stayed in Helsinki since January 2013).

Well probably a little bit more than a week I guess…it’s pretty similar to Bergen and
Oslo or back in Norway so it’s not that large really (male 25, Norway, who had stayed
in Helsinki since January 2013)

Well actually I don't even know how to answer this question, because it's never been
like I was worried about something, maybe just the first days (female 21, Russia, who
had stayed in Helsinki since January 2013)

Two weeks was enough for me and I know the city now and the transportation is so
simple here. Metro, tram, bus which is good to me. And I know the city now (female 22,
Turkey, who had stayed in Helsinki since January 2013)

As the excerpts demonstrate, the aspects that the exchange students felt that affected
how long it took for them to get familiar with the city varied quite a lot and many
students mentioned more than one thing that affected it. The meaning of feeling familiar in a city thus clearly means different things for different people. More than a half (16) of the students thought that the feeling of being familiar with the city derived from being able to find their way in the city. When they felt that they could find places and knew where they were, they felt familiar with the city. Another important aspect was understanding how everyday life things worked, such as knowing how to operate in a supermarket. The level of social contacts created also affected the feeling of familiarity, since five students said that the social contacts were the reason they did or did not feel familiar with the city. One student said that she separated the feeling of being familiar between two things: feeling familiar as in knowing people and missing it when you go away, as opposed to knowing your way in the city. This student said that she felt familiar in the first sense very quickly but that she still did not feel familiar in the second sense. This demonstrates well the fact that it was not a completely clear thing for all students, whether they felt familiar or not.

[I felt familiar] when I didn’t get lost anymore and easily can go to the station and the bus stop that I always use (female 21, Japan)

After a few weeks I felt very good because I knew how things worked and everything was good and I had had time to get to know people as well and to go out. It feels like, not home, but a good place to live (female 20, France)

I think there are two sides of it. One is to be familiar with the city which came quite early I would say. And the second thing was to be able to get to know the city and to orientate yourself in the city which is a really long process and I still feel like I cannot orientate myself in Helsinki a lot (female 24, Czech republic)

As for the reasons that the students felt familiar with the city, I did not find any significant differences in those who stayed longer and those who stayed a shorter time in Helsinki. Both groups of students mentioned both the feeling of knowing where things are, as well as understanding how everyday things work. The finding that the students who arrived in January 2013 seemed to get familiar with the city quicker might have to do with the fact that they have less time in Helsinki all in all. When they know that they will have only a limited period of time in Helsinki, they will perhaps try to get to know the city quicker in order to be able to experience as much as possible. A few students actually expressed their need to see “enough” during their time in Helsinki, and they hoped they would have time to do everything.
To summarize how the exchange students went about forming their relationship with Helsinki it can be said that it is a very social process. The students experienced the new city collectively by sharing it with other exchange students, Finns or a tutor. In general the students felt that getting to know the city was best done with randomly walking around, in order to find the most interesting points of the city. All students did see at least some sites that tourists in Helsinki normally visit, thus sharing some characteristics with conventional tourists of Helsinki. It looks however like a bigger part of the students rather focus on non-touristic activities, which certainly differentiates the exchange students from the conventional tourist. For most of the students it did not take longer than a few months to feel familiar with the city. For them the process of forming a sense of place had thus started quite quickly. Only a few students did not feel familiar with the city at the time of the interviews. Since feeling familiar with a place is only one part of the sense of place, I do not think that it implies that these students had not formed a sense of place already. Their sense of place was simply not as strong at the time of the interviews.

5.3 Factors in Helsinki influencing the formation of a sense of place

Because Helsinki is the target city of this study and the intention is to suggest which aspects of the city should be highlighted when marketing the city to exchange students, it was meaningful to ask the students questions regarding Helsinki and what in the city affects the formation of a sense of place. The students were asked which characteristics of Helsinki affect their feelings and opinions about the city the most. Aspects of Helsinki that the exchange students pay attention to also arose as a topic when the students expressed what they think they will miss about the city. All students said that they think they will miss Helsinki when they go back home. The students were also asked if they would recommend the city to another exchange student and why. All students said that they would recommend Helsinki to someone else. By grouping the most common answers I identified four major topics under which I placed all the answers. The four topics are: 1) The infrastructure of the city, 2) The Finnish people, 3) Personal factors and 4) The climate.

5.3.1 The infrastructure of the city

When reflecting over aspects of Helsinki that affected their opinions and feelings of the city, the exchange students often referred to different infrastructural aspects of the city regarding how the city works as a place to live in. One third of the students (9) said that
they think that the city is a good and comfortable place to live in whereas four students said that they thought that the infrastructure of the city is good. These two answers are very general in their nature, because infrastructure as a concept includes a wide range of topics. All students apart from one however commented on some infrastructural aspect of Helsinki in one way or another which is why it was easy to shed more detailed light on which infrastructural aspects makes the city such a good place to live in for the exchange students. The infrastructural aspects that were commented by the students were: 1) the social infrastructure, 2) the governance infrastructure, 3) the transportation infrastructure, 4) the recreational infrastructure, 5) the green infrastructure and 6) the waste management infrastructure.

More than half of the exchange students (17) mentioned the University of Helsinki as a positive aspect in Helsinki. The university education is a part of the social infrastructure of the city. Since the interviewees are students it was not surprising that the educational system was something they commented on. That is why it was striking that the rest of the students did not express their opinion on the university themselves, before they were asked about it. The most common reason why the students liked the university was the high quality of the education and the educational system that worked well. Also the flexibility of the university got appraisal, for example the fact that the students were able to join classes after they had started, substitute an exam with an essay and that the professors were easy to approach. Three students also mentioned that they appreciate that the student are really taken into consideration widely, which could be seen by the comfortable spaces in the library, the high standard facilities and the several events organized for the exchange students. Related to the university was also the opinion of two exchange students who admired the fact that education in Finland is free and that everyone has equal opportunities to be educated.

*You sort of mix and match any courses you want and you can do courses from other subjects if you want to make up the credits. It’s a better system I guess but it does require you to be a lot more self-motivated* (male 22, England)

*The University of Helsinki has a good educational system* (female 22, Turkey)

*The whole package is just great really. The city is awesome, the university is even better than back home* (male 25, Norway)

*If I was telling someone, another student at my university to come here then [I would say that] the education system is fantastic…. And the facilities are fantastic. I don’t know, they’re probably only a part of the facilities of my university in Australia but the education system here is free.* (female 21, Australia)
Two often reoccurring themes were the safety and the calmness of the city, thus aspects regarding the governance infrastructure. Five students felt that the city was safe and eight students said that they liked that the city is calm and quiet and the fact that people are not rushing. One student mentioned that her feeling of safety derives from the fact that she feels like the Finnish people are honest, which can be seen in that people do not cross the street during red lights or travel in the bus without paying the ticket. Another student mentioned that she feels like she could leave her phone somewhere and expect it to be still there when she returns. The feeling of calmness was based on the fact that there are not many people on the streets which gives everyone their own private space to be in. The calmness was also experienced through the silence which made the city seem peaceful, especially for those students who came from a bigger city and were used to noise.

*It's just more orderly, like you just know, it sounds weird but in England and Canada I always have in the back of my head “watch your safety” if I’m walking at night, like make sure there’s no one sketchy. You just never know, but I’ve never had that feeling in Helsinki so it's a sense of security that I’m gonna miss that I’m not gonna get when I move back to Toronto* (female 29, Canada)

*I’ve actually never felt here like I worry about something or I’m afraid of something or been lost, it’s very safe* (female 21, Russia)

*I was surprised because it’s very quiet actually. Especially for a capital. I mean it’s smaller than my home town but still you hardly hear any honking or people talking loudly. It’s a very quiet and laid back city and I have the feeling that people are not so much in a hurry. It’s more relaxed and slow* (female 22, Germany)

*Here nobody is running. I can say that everything is calm for me. Because people are working, they are doing their job, they don’t hurry anywhere but everything is in time.* (female 19, Ukraine)

The transportation infrastructure of the city was mentioned by over half of the students (15). The students appreciated that the network of public transport is extensive, easy to use and that the timetables of different modes of transport match each other. One student mentioned that it was very convenient that one travel card covers all the modes of transportation within the city, instead of having to buy separate tickets for buses, trams and trains. The fact that the timetables are kept fairly well, was also something that a few students mentioned as highly positive. Three students however felt that to
learn how the public transport system works was laborious and difficult. Some students (5) said that they the city was easy to move around in because it is so small, which did not always make it necessary to use public transportation.

*Transportation: terrific. Buses are awesome. You can get around really easily. They do a really good job of making sure people can get from point A to point B. And if you have a car, of course the car is king, but you can still achieve almost the efficiency that you would get with a car with public transport, which I think is any city transportation planners dream and they have done a good job at what they are doing (male 26, USA)*

*The public transport is amazing. And it's all kind of super integrated which is really nice. Because again in the UK like the buses are completely different to the trains and they never match up in a way that doesn't leave you standing around in the cold for twenty minutes (male 22, England)*

*I like for example the public transport. It's much better than in my home city, like more frequent and it's kind of fast also (male 21, Spain)*

*The public transport here is sort of relatively easy to use considering there's one train line (female 21, Australia)*

*The really really big problem for everyone in Finland in general is the way of public transport. That's a very big mess, it's very badly done. So that was really hard and I still fight with it sometimes...I mean the system is totally wrong, it doesn't count with strangers in no way. I mean all those stops are for request but when you are going somewhere new, how you would know in advance that you should stop here (female 24, Czech republic)*

The recreational infrastructure of Helsinki was also mentioned by many students. A part of the students (6) said that they appreciate that the city offers a lot of different activities to do, such as for example ice skating and cultural events. The fact that there was always things going on was something that one student mentioned especially. A positive aspect was considered that many activities are free. Three students mentioned that the opportunities for eating and drinking out are good and pleasant, whereas one student especially appreciated the opportunities for shopping quality products which she said was highly unusual in her home country. For one student however the limited opening hours of the shops was very negative because he felt that it restricted his everyday life. Another problem within the area of recreational infrastructure was the high cost of living that was mentioned by a few students (3). These students felt that the high prices made their standard of living lower, stopped them from doing certain things and also forced them to watch their budget strictly.

*I'm actually blown away by how much stuff, I guess because 2012 was the world design capital year, there was. I don't know how I ended up with this pile of books but there*
was always something on. I had a friend come in September and then another come in November and there was just so many events that were very well, I thought, advertised. I knew always what was going on. There’s so much stuff to do that’s generally free (female 29, Canada)

In my city there are not so many cultural events and this kind of stuff. Helsinki is really big and you have many opportunities for anything you want to do and for example this is one of the things I will miss (female 22, Slovakia)

I think the cafes are really nice. You have really good cafes close to the center (male 21, Spain)

The prices are really hard though, it gets hard. I don’t wanna say my standard of living is worse than Canada or England, but it is. I cannot afford to do things. That’s a big part of why I haven’t done touristy things, I cannot afford to do them (female 29, Canada)

A theme that arose from the answers of the interviewees was the appreciation of the green infrastructure. Altogether eight students mentioned that something that they really love about Helsinki is the nature. The students seemed to be surprised about the fact that a capital city such as Helsinki can be so green and the access to nature can be so quick and easy. Living in a green environment had a positive effect on the students. One student for example mentioned that whenever she felt like she needed a timeout from writing or studying she would walk out of the door and immediately be close to the nature, which she felt was very relaxing.

I think the nature aspect is quite important for the whole country and it gives a really fresh air, good atmosphere, and it’s very comfortable to live in. In Japan you would find some nature around places from time to time but we don’t really consider it to be as important as it is in Finland or we don’t support, or have like a foundation or organization that helps us keep the nature as it is (female 22, Japan, who lives in Kamppi)

You live like in the country side, of course there is the motorway and more cars maybe but when I look out of my window, it’s a tree and there are birds coming and you hear birds singing…and you live so close to nature, this is what I always missed in the last years and yeah I think that not in every city you find it like in Helsinki (female 26, Germany, who lives in Tapulinkaupunki)

The architecture of the city was something that shared the opinions of the exchange students. Four students said that they really enjoyed the way the city looks architecture wise and two students especially appreciated the older buildings in the city. For one of the students the reason was that she preferred the Art Nouveau building style and for a
North American student the old buildings felt special because in her home country there are not buildings that old. Two students felt like the architecture was too modern for them in general even if they did enjoy the older buildings of Helsinki. For one student the architecture of the city was something that she disliked, because it was not beautiful in her opinion.

_I like this Art Nouveau architecture and it's nice to discover those buildings_ (female 26, Germany)

_When I go through the streets and watch I see the buildings, or the architecture, I really like it. It's different for me. And even for example when I go my usual way, each time I find something different that I've never noticed before_ (female 21, Russia)

_I think that I have to admit that architecture wise Helsinki is not the most beautiful city. Like especially in Pasila it's not a very nice area. It's mainly like grey and brown blocks_ (female 22, Germany)

The waste management infrastructure was also mentioned in the answers. Three students appreciated the efforts if the city of Helsinki to keep the city clean; also from snow. Another student said that she enjoys that it is custom to recycle, and mentioned the use of plastic bags as an example. In her home country, Turkey, people use a lot of plastic bags whereas she felt that in Helsinki, it is not as common which is a good thing.

_I really appreciate that the leadership of the city is trying to keep the city clean of snow all the time, but it's not their fault that it's snowing all the time_ (female 25, Hungary)

_In my home town we use plastic bags often, but here we have to bring our own bags. It's different for me. And of course it's so nice, because it's recycling_ (female 22, Turkey)

The infrastructural aspects of Helsinki mentioned in this section have a strong connection with the concept of sense of place. The infrastructure of the city is a physical characteristic of the city. I see it fruitful to understand the sense of place to be constructed of both the physical aspects of a place, and the social interactions in it. The physical aspects are the ones that make the social interactions in a place possible in the first place. The fact that the students mentioned so many infrastructural and thus physical aspects of Helsinki supports the argument of Stedman (2003: 671) who called for recognition of the importance of the physical aspects of a place when discussing the sense of place.
5.3.2 The people

The second major topic that arose when discussing aspects of Helsinki that affected the exchange students feeling about the city was the people living it, thus both the other exchange students as well as the Finnish people. I will first present the feelings that the students had about Finns. These feelings were both positive and negative, but a positive to a bigger extent, because fifteen students associated Finns with positive things. Five students mentioned negatives aspects of Finns, but four of them mentioned something positive too. Something that many students expressed was that their opinions about Finns were often a little bit negative in advance, because they had heard a lot of rumors about Finnish people being cold or reserved. Many students said that these assumptions did not turn to be true for them whereas one student said that this stereotype had kept her from talking to Finns because she was scared that she would not get a good response.

*I don’t know if it’s maybe because it’s mentally ingrained now, because people said in the beginning “don’t be surprised if it’s hard to befriend a Finn, like they’re shy or they don’t like to do small talk”. So in my head that just makes me scared to approach* (female 21, USA)

*I saw a little bit of the “standoffishness” of Finns that everyone warned me about but it’s not really that true, they’re much more warm and welcoming and I really feel like I have friends here and I’ve adopted* (female 29, Canada)

Over half of the students (15) did mention that they really liked the Finnish people. Amongst these students the reservedness was mentioned, but not as a negative aspect. What was most commonly said was that the Finns always seem to be ready to help them when the students ask something and the Finns were genuinely concerned about the well-being of the exchange students. Another aspect of the Finns that was highly respected by the students was their honesty. The Finns were seen as people who do not cheat and that can be trusted. Many of the students mentioned general aspects of the Finns, such as that they are friendly, warm and welcoming which is a definite contrast to the stereotypes that the students had heard from beforehand. Something that a few students mentioned was the tolerance of the Finns with which they meant that they had never felt excluded because they were foreigners, but rather felt that they were sometimes even welcomed more because of it. One student also said that she likes the fact that people keep to themselves so everyone can have their own space.
I think that the people here are very open minded and they are very helpful. If you ask something normally, and they can’t speak English, they always help you. That’s something really nice. I think that people are used to exchange students or people from abroad. And they are really friendly, even if they are shy but when I ask something they will always answer and help you. (female 27, Germany)

I think people here, like Finnish people in general are really nice. Even if in general they sometimes are a little bit more cold, or a little reserved. But if you get to know them, this is my experience, like when I get to know them they are really really nice people (female 22, Slovakia)

The people are really nice, it seems or it feels really open to me. Like people are really...I think I’ve never felt excluded as being a foreigner or anything. So yeah, it’s really open and tolerant I think (female 22, Germany)

The people they don’t stay very very close to you. Oh god I really enjoy it. Because everybody has properly space and own space because in Ukraine, everybody’s staying very close (female 19, Ukraine)

The negative opinions about the Finns were not as many as the presumptions that the exchange students had would imply. Altogether only five students mentioned negative experiences with Finns. Internationally there are rumors about Finns being shy and not talkative and maybe not very friendly. What the interviews showed in this research group is that to a large extent, these assumptions are not true at all, or at least they could be changed when getting to know Finns. There was only one student that did not mention anything positive about Finns, but rather was dissatisfied with them because she felt that especially in crowded places, they behaved rudely. The other four students, who mentioned something negative, did not seem to have a completely negative image of the Finns, because they all mentioned something good too. The negative things were thus aspects of the Finns they had noticed, not the whole picture. The shyness and reservedness was what was mentioned as negative. This made it difficult for the exchange students to interact with Finns at times.

What I don’t like here is whenever I go to some crowded place, such as Kamppi, people seem to be very impolite (female 25, Hungary)

The few Finns that I made friends with, I feel that I can really talk to them. So it’s really hard in the beginning to get under that crust, you know under the first layer of ice and then the first layer of cold water but at some point you reach a core which is interesting. And I like that (female 25, Romania)

People here are also simple I think. They don’t hide a lot. Yeah some of them are shy, like the first time, but once they talk they don’t hide their feelings, they just speak honestly, yeah. Honesty. Sometimes it hurts me, it’s a little bit of a culture shock. But I like the simplicity or honesty. I really respect that (female 21, Japan)
An aspect about the Finns that several students (7) mentioned was the fact that almost everyone in Helsinki speaks English. The students saw this mainly as a positive thing, because this made the environment easy to be in because most of the students did not speak Finnish. This made it easy for the students to manage with the everyday things in life. A few students did however say that the fact that the Finns speak English so well is both a pro and a con. This was the case for two students who really wanted to learn and speak Finnish, but said it was difficult because so many spoke English.

*For exchange it’s [Helsinki] really good. Everybody speaks English* (female 24)

*It’s a nice thing here that everybody speaks English, it doesn’t matter where you go, people speak English* (male 21, Czech Republic)

*This is a pro and a con. Everything is in English so I haven’t had to use Finnish and my Finnish has gotten worse* (female 29, Canada)

The last distinctively important point that a part (4) of the exchange students mentioned was that they felt similar to the Finns in various ways. Three students said that they thought that the Finns share similar characteristics with themselves or their own nationality when it comes to behavior or mentality. One student said that she felt close to the Finns because her mother tongue, Hungarian, was so similar to the Finnish language.

*Being alone here is nicer, I don’t know why. It’s maybe because the country is smaller. I get this feeling like, it’s probably a stereotype but you know like Finnish people are somehow lonelier or appreciate more some kind of solitude and Spanish people don’t. So here when I feel lonely or whatever, I feel more like sharing that feeling with rest of the people* (female 23, Russia, who described herself as not a very social person)

*Sometimes I think we have even the same culture or the same mentality. Yeah, I think we are not that shy as Finns are. I think that people abroad usually say that we are also a little bit cold at the beginning and need more time and that’s the same here* (female 27, Germany)

*The Finns, for me they are quite similar to Czechs. Like we do those indoor activities and we do sport and...so when I just went for a walk or cross country skiing it was like at home. With the difference that at home we don’t have a sea which you can do cross country skiing on* (female 24, Czech Republic)
When the students were asked what they would miss when they go back home, it was clear that the social contacts were something very important for the experience in Helsinki. Eight of the students said that they will miss the social contacts they made in Helsinki, referring to the other exchange students that they had met during their exchange. The students spent a lot of time together and thus most experiences were collective rather than experienced just by the individual exchange student. This way not just the Finns that are a steady part of Helsinki, but also the other exchange students became a part of Helsinki and the experience and also affects the way in which the students look upon Helsinki as a place.

*Of course the city is always linked to the people that you get to know there and I know that I already would miss the people that I got to know here* (female 26, Germany)

*[The most] I will probably the relationship with my companions* (male 30, Spain)

*First of course [I will miss] the people and friends I made here. Being on ERASMUS it’s just like a whole universe on its own. I think it’s just the dynamics and how people interact it’s just something very unique* (female 22, Germany)

As the previous section demonstrated, the physical factors of Helsinki definitely affected the way the exchange students felt about the city. I however called for an understanding of the sense of place to be seen as a sum of both the physical aspects and the intangible social memories made in a place. This section goes to show that in the case of these exchange students, it was in fact so. The social interactions in Helsinki included both experiences with the locals, as well as with other exchange students. The people and the interaction with them was thus something that affected the student’s feelings about the city a lot. These findings support the arguments of Stokowski (2002) who argued that the sense of place is partly socially constructed, thus created through interactions with others. This way people also affect each other’s’ sense of place.

**5.3.3 Personal factors**

As a third and important topic when discussing aspects of Helsinki that affected the exchange students feeling about the city, arose various factors that I felt were very personal factors of the student. Therefore I felt that I could not but separate them under the topic of personal factors. The personal factors varied from comparisons with the students’ individual housing situations at home and here, to the overall experience or the exoticness of the city which was due to the cultural differences compared to their own cultures.
It was common for the exchange students to compare their background to the situation they had in Helsinki. To a big extent this goes for all the experiences in Helsinki because how people experience things is always at least partly a result of their background. Often however the students did not directly express that they were comparing something in Helsinki to the way things are at home. Three students said however that one thing that really helped them with settling in in the city was the fact that Helsinki felt so similar to their own homes. The students came from Norway, Canada and Hungary. One of these students said that it is easy to like the city and feel familiar in it, because everything feels so similar to what it is at home. On the other hand four students mentioned that they felt that they liked Helsinki because it is so different from their own culture, thus the exoticness, which made it a little bit mysterious. Two of these four students were from Germany and the other two from Spain and England.

Of all the places where I have lived in addition to my home city, this is the place which is most really similar and the people are so nice, yeah. I really like it here (male 25, Norway)

It's totally different I think from Spain so...the weather, the people also, how you study for example, like this. It's kind of different the little things (male 21, Spain)

I think it's [Helsinki] also quite exciting just because it's different as well (male 22, England)

Each person experiences things in her/his own way, even in the same conditions. Therefore I think that the descriptions of the everyday life, the overall experience and atmosphere, were something very personal. For many students (11) the experience as a whole and the exchange student lifestyle was very important. “Just being here” was valued a lot as well as the overall memories created. The students also seemed to value the normal everyday experiences like having habits such as taking a certain tram, going to a certain café or buying food from a certain grocery store. Creating a routine felt nice for the students and it was something that contributed to the overall atmosphere.

I have my habits like take the metro the tramway to meet people, go to University, so yeah...I think I will [miss Helsinki] (female 20, France)

I think it happens in every place you go to spend a lot of time. You have your people here, you have your favorite places...you know your favorite cafes, favorite restaurant or places to visit. And then you go home and you know probably you’re not going to go back (male 21, Spain)
Some students named very specific things when describing what they like and what they would miss about Helsinki. They talked about certain streets, specific locations, a specific cafe, flea markets, the Töölö district or Mäkelänrinne swimming center. It goes to show that the things that affect how a person feels about place can be very specific and individual. This means that the sense of place that one creates has a strong individual level, even if the experience is shared with others and might be affected by it.

5.3.4 The climate
The fourth major topic that arose from the interview material with the focus on aspects of Helsinki that affect the student’s sense of place was the climate. Contradictory to many common stereotypes of the Finnish weather being bad, one of the main positive aspects that the students seemed to highlight was in fact the climate. A very probable reason for this is the fact that the students who chose Finland as their exchange destination knew what the climate was like and were thus not the kind of people who do not enjoy the cold climate. Four students mentioned that the geographical location of Helsinki at the sea was something they considered very positive. One student felt that the air coming from the sea made the air in the city very fresh. Others simply enjoyed the presence of the sea because their own home country does not have a coast.
Well a big aspect is its position at the sea. Because I’m from Munich and there’s no sea at all. So that’s one thing I really really like. And I even can see the sea from my room so it’s really nice (female 22, Germany)

And it also looks very pretty visually with the parks and the people and being by the sea (female 25, Romania)

Eight of the twenty-five students said that they really enjoy the weather in Helsinki and that they will miss it when they go back home. The students were very aware of the fact that often the Finnish climate is seen a little bit negative, because they expected me to be surprised that they actually liked it. The most common reason for why these students enjoyed the weather was the snow, which four students mentioned. The fact that the weather was dry and cold was something that the students liked and the climate was also seen as pleasant because some of the students simply liked the winter. One student said that the climate was special for her because it was so different to the climate in her own country, whereas another student was completely mesmerized by the frozen sea.

I think [I will miss] also the weather, it sounds ridiculous, but like England didn’t have winter last year, or I didn’t experience one, so this is more my speed I guess (female 29, Canada)

I like the weather, I know it sounds strange, but after living in England I can definitely tell that Finland has more sun and more light. Because everybody was telling me: “oh you’re gonna see how depressing it gets”. I didn’t get depressed at all in the winter. I thought it was brighter than England. It’s definitely colder, but the sun is shining so I feel happy so that’s good (female 25, Romania)

One aspect of the climate that was mentioned a lot was the snow. Four students said that they really liked the snow. The reason for this was that they did not have snow in their home country, which made it special for them in Helsinki.

[I will miss] especially the climate actually. I kind of like the dry cold and the snow. Whereas in England it’s just mild. (male 22, England)

Helsinki it’s a nice city and I love the snow of course. And I think also that the snow or the weather influences everything here and that’s different to my home country. We have also strong winters, but not that strong and not that long. Sometimes we have snow, but not that often. And here everything turns around the weather: “how’s the weather today?”, if it’s sunny or not. And that’s something that really influences the people and even my day and I really realized after two or three weeks without sun that sometimes it’s really hard. But on the other hand it’s also something nice. I think you can be more close to the people because you spend a lot of time inside and you try to do something so you don’t become depressed (female 27, Germany)
There were however students that were not happy with the climate. Seven students mentioned negative things when addressing the climate in Helsinki. One of them did however mention something positive too. The biggest problem with the climate was the darkness, not the coldness or the snow so much. In fact a few students said that they did not mind the cold or the winter but disliked that it was so dark all the time and that the sun did not come out so often. The climate was definitely a reason why a few of the students could not see themselves move to Helsinki in the future.

*I guess I’ll start with the weather because that’s something we all live in. I would love if the sun would come out just one day a week, or half a day, just an hour* (male 26, USA)

*Maybe sometimes [a negative thing] is just the weather, because I don’t mind cold but I need more light you know and when it’s very cloudy all week… So this is for me the only minus, but I know it’s getting better so it’s not very horrible* (female 22, Slovakia)

*And maybe coldness [is something that I don’t like in Helsinki]. It’s too cold. Even if this year seems to be very warm. But still for me it’s cold* (female 21, Japan)

To summarize this chapter it can be said that the aspects of Helsinki that had left an impression on the exchange students were very diverse. There were however many common topics that the students mentioned: infrastructure, the people, personal factors and the climate. The emphasis that the exchange students put on the people during their experience strengthens the ideas of Stokowski (2002) and Suvantola (2002) who argued for the importance of the social aspects in forming a sense of place. They think that whenever a person encounters a new place, they usually share that experience with other people, which in turn affects how the person experiences the place. Suvantola (2002: 71) and Tuan (1977) did however claim that the personal experiences of each person should not be undermined because everyone’s experiences are equally important and they affect the collective idea of place. The fact that I identified personal factors in the data corresponds with the ideas of individuality.

Many of the things that the students mentioned were physical aspects of the city which corresponds with the ideas of Stedman (2003) who called for an emphasis on the physical aspects of a place when discussing the sense of place. He thought that the physical setting allows for the social life to happen which makes it so important. I defined the sense of place as the attachment to both the physical aspects of a place and the emotional meanings behind them. The fact that so many physical aspects were
mentioned in a positive light, implies that what Vaske and Williams (2003) called functional attachment to place, or what Tuan (1977) described as a physical attachment to place, is true in the case of the exchange students. This implies that at least that one part of what defines a strong sense of place, was fulfilled for the exchange students of this study.

5.4 Multiple belonging to place: home and “the home away from home”
In the previous section I examined what factors had contributed to affect the sense of place of the exchange students. In this section I will examine what kind of sense of place it is that the exchange students then formed in Helsinki. I decided to approach this topic by examining how attached they had gotten to the city during the exchange, how well they had settled in and what had affected the settling in. These concepts represent the emotional attachment to place, or the deeper meanings behind the physical place, which I defined as a part of what a sense of place is in addition to the physical attachment to place. Whether the students felt at home in Helsinki was a very relevant topic and whether they did or not, what affected that feeling of being at home. Another angle from which I studied the relationship that the students had formed with the city was by asking them how local they felt in the city or if they did feel local at all.

When it came to settling down in Helsinki, none of the students said that it had been particularly hard. The group of twenty-five students was divided between those that felt that it was very easy from the start (17) and those who thought that it was a little bit difficult first but pretty quickly felt that they settled in well (8). It was evident that many things affected how well the exchange students settled in Helsinki. I did however notice that a majority of the students (14) mentioned that how they settled in was affected by their social contacts, thus what their relationship with either the Finns or the other exchange students were. When the students felt that they had a satisfying social life they felt settled. Some students mentioned that the common housing of the exchange students and the general interest of exchange students to meet new people, made it very easy to meet new people. This in turn made it easy for the students to settle in.

_The first week was a little bit hard, also because of the weather. Because there was no blue sky and it was really depressing because I really love like hot weather. So I really needed to get used to it. I was really tired all the week and I didn’t feel so well. But then it got better. Also by like meeting new people, then it was okay_ (female 22, Slovakia)
I think it was quite easy [to settle in], especially because I live in Domus Academica and there are a lot of exchange students and nobody knew anybody at the beginning so yeah, we got a long quite well and I think it was quite easy (female 22, Germany)

I went to some Erasmus events, and so yeah, it was very easy to know people because everybody wants to have new friends and everybody starts to talk with you and it was not very hard to settle down here (female 27, Germany)

I think it's also easier [to settle in] if you know some locals. So you always have somebody to ask if you don't know where to go (female 22, Germany)

The other major aspect that affected how the students settled in was how similar the city and the culture were in comparison to their own country, which is something that three students mentioned. One student said that because she came from a big city it was very easy to settle in in a city that was even smaller, whereas two students thought that what made the settling in so easy was the fact that the Finns felt so similar to their own nationalities. For those that felt like it was difficult to settle in at the beginning, a few mentioned that it was in fact the cultural differences and the new language that took some time to get used to.

I lived with two from Spain actually; I think they have a harder time than me to adjust to what it's like to live here, because it's so similar to Norway. There are not that many cultural differences and yeah, everything is mostly the same, how it works (male 25, Norway)

The city is almost the same like I'm at home, just in another city (female 24, Hungary)

I feel really comfortable but I think that's also in comparison to other girls in my program who are from Vietnam and China and Romania, and there's no, I don't think, cultural similarity, versus even Canada Finland it feels like I'm in Canada it's just full of Finns or something. It does! (female 29, Canada)

At first it was kind of difficult, because of the language. Because well it's a nice thing here that everybody speaks English, it doesn't matter where you go, people speak English. But us Spanish people, we are not famous of speaking really good English, so it was kind of difficult, but then you get to know people and everything is nicer. But at first it was really really difficult. Because it's not the same if you go to a country that is kind of similar, for example for me, going to Italy. It's easy, it's kind of the same. But coming here is like another world. So I think at first it was difficult to settle here, but then it was nice (male 21, Spain)

Those who said that at the beginning had some trouble settling in did not always know how to explain what it really was that made it hard. As the previous excerpts however show, the students who did have some trouble settling in in the beginning were often those that did not meet friends immediately or those that came from a very different
culture. What arose from the material also was that the students that had problems with organizing some basic amenities of life or understanding how things worked, had a harder time settling in at first.

In general when you arrive, there are so many new things...for example I didn’t know how Unicafe works and like very very basic things and it just takes very long to see all the different systems (female 22, Germany)

No it's not [difficult to settle in] because of the city, it’s just because of the accommodation. I didn’t get anything from Hoas, so I just I had to find something by myself and it’s kind of difficult in the summer because all students look for something so it was very difficult. I changed apartment three times. Now it’s really fine because I will stay in this one until the end, but first it was kind of difficult. Just to change again and again (female 20, France)

Questionable is however how each student might perceive the concept of settling in, because it can be perceived in different ways, which makes the concept problematic. When I asked the students how they felt that they settled in in Helsinki, most of them seemed to understand the question as I had intended, which was to ask them how they felt that they made themselves comfortable and accustomed to the city. It must be acknowledged however that the concept of “settling in” can easily be mixed with the similar concept of “settling down”, which rather means to more permanently stay in a place and make home there. Some students even said “settling down” which makes it slightly confusing what the students actually meant. I felt that for some students that did not speak English at their mother tongue, the difference between these two concepts might be blurred which would explain the mixed use of these two concepts. The two concepts do however both indicate a positively strong attachment to the city, which is why I feel that a misunderstanding of the concept would not distort the data too much.

In order to discover how strong of a sense of place the exchange students had formed in Helsinki, I asked them if they could call Helsinki a home. According to the ideas of Tuan (1975) and Vertovec (1999) the concepts of home and belonging to a place are strongly connected. Vertovec argued that a person possesses a multiple sense of place, when one can call another place than the original home, a home. Tuan on the other hand claimed that when a person feels at home, it strengthens the sense of place of the person, because home is a strong center of meaning for a person. The answers show that the majority of the students (16) feel that they could call Helsinki a home. One student said that she was not quite sure and answered both yes and no. When the students that
felt at home in Helsinki were asked what home meant to them, the most common answer was that the people made it feel like home. Altogether seven students said that because they were satisfied with their social connection in Helsinki, it made them feel like the city was their home. One student even said that she felt very much at home during her first semester in Helsinki when she had friends but during the next semester, when her friends had gone home, she did not feel so much at home anymore. For many students it felt homely when they felt safe and comfortable interacting with other exchange students as well as Finns.

"I can [call Helsinki a home] and again it's the people that I have met because of my program and because I live in an international students building. Part of that is other people, like not Finns, but at the same time it's the Finnish people who have brought us in, like friends in our Masters have invited us to parties and shown us how things are done in Finland so I think that is a big part (female 29, Canada)"

"A second home. Of all the places where I have lived in addition to my home city, this is the place where it's most similar really and the people are so nice, yeah. I really like it here (male 25, Norway)"

"I really feel like at home. It's kind of a yeah, abstract feeling because you can say that I feel happiness or I feel sadness. I feel very easy to go anywhere and I really feel easy to speak with Finnish people (female 19, Ukraine)"

Another interesting result was that several (5) of the students described that they especially felt at home when they went away from Helsinki for a while and then came back. The students had either been to their home country for the Christmas holidays or some other reason or traveling to the nearby countries such as Estonia. The time spent away from Helsinki and then returning made it evident for the students that they city had indeed become a home for them.

"I went home for Christmas and then I came back in January. It felt really good and it was like coming back home. It was a really good feeling that I already knew where everything is and just came back to my apartment, yeah, felt like a home (female 22, Germany)"

"I feel here even now very comfortable, like I'm at home because on the New Year's holidays I was in Ukraine and it was kind of strange because something felt wrong and I said to my mom: “oh God I wanna get back home”(female 19, Ukraine)"

"I was in Denmark just recently. I'm living in Malmö and I call all of these places home. And then I was visiting friends in Denmark and being like “oh yeah I'm coming home now”. But I really had this feeling...I just came back [to Helsinki] yesterday and I really had this feeling of coming home. So for me definitely it's home (female 28, Denmark, (lives in Sweden at the moment)"
Especially when I go to another country outside Finland and come back to Helsinki and I feel comfortable: “wow I’m home!” That makes me call Helsinki home (female 21, Japan)

Something that made some (5) of the students feel at home was what they described as feeling comfortable. For these students the concept of comfortable meant many things, such as calmness of the city, getting used to different aspects of life, being able to freely do things they want to do or having the basic amenities of life that they had at home too. Other students mentioned similar things as well even if they did not describe it in the context of feeling comfortable. Feelings safe, having your own space, being free to do what you want to do, feeling that it is easy to do things and feeling happy and pleasant were things that the students said that affected their feeling of being at home in Helsinki. So overall feeling positive and good in the city was something that contributed a lot to the feeling of being home.

[Home is] a comfortable place where I have the amenities and the resources that I have become accustomed to previously and these are the things that make me happy. So it’s not just the city, it’s the atmosphere, it’s the people, it’s the food, it’s the how easy things are. Whether or not it takes half an hour to wait for the bus or just five minutes for the bus. I mean all of these little things contribute to the feeling (male 26, USA)

I’ve been living here for quite a short time so I think I got used to some aspects of the life here that make me feel comfortable. And in that way, it is home. It’s a place I don’t want to go out from. It’s like I like to be here even though there are a lot of things I don’t understand and I might feel lonely or have fewer friends than back at home or whatever, even though all these things, I do feel comfortable here (female 23, Russia)

Home means when you feel peaceful or pleasant in an area. It means home. If you’re not happy, it doesn’t mean home, I think. I feel like that here and happy and I can call it home (female 22, Turkey)

Helsinki is home for me because it has this where you feel safe and where you have your own space and this feeling relaxed and you can close the door and this is safe place in some way. I still have many of my things in my apartment in Malmö, there’s a girl living there now, but I was there and I really didn’t have that feeling of actually belonging there even though it was my furniture so there was something missing. So things like where you put your soul or something. It is kind of difficult to explain because it is kind of abstract (female 28, Denmark)

There was however also differences amongst the students who did feel at home in Helsinki. Some (5) did call Helsinki a home, but did clearly emphasize that it was only a temporary home or an “Erasmus home”, which gives the idea of a temporary home that lasts only during the exchange time. They did so because they knew that they were
going back home, that it was not for good. This shows that the feeling of being at home can be a temporary phenomenon and not only connected to steady place where one lives for a long period of time.

*I’m quite sure that I like to be here and I can call it home for this period of time when I’m here. But I wouldn’t move here* (female 25, Hungary)

*This is a temporary home for me so I’m making home where I am…I think I would call Helsinki my temporary home because I know that I’m going to be leaving in I guess about three months, but I would call it home right now* (male 26, USA)

*Helsinki is* like an ERASMUS-home, absolutely (female 24, Hungary)

For the rest of the exchange students (8) that said that they did not feel at home in Helsinki, the reasons where very similar to those who did feel at home. Six of the students that said that they did not feel at home in Helsinki said that it was because they felt that they did not have enough social connections or because their family or friends from back home were not in Helsinki. Some of them did however think that Helsinki can definitely feel like their home after a certain amount of time when they have gotten to know more people or have broader social connections than at the time of the interviews. One student felt like she did not know the city well enough to be able to call it a home, whereas one said that she simply did not feel at home because the city was too modern for her. Another student said that she would have liked to find a job, get an apartment and meet more people. Only then would she be able to feel at home.

*Maybe I will have the feeling later but I still don’t feel like at home here. Still more like a visiting…I think maybe if I would meet more people who would be really close to me then I would feel at home, because when I was [in Holland for my exchange] the last semester it was also the same period of time but I would call that place a home. Even after a month. Because I found connections there really fast. So for me the place I can call home, it’s like I even feel really connected to the place. And Helsinki it’s a really nice place, I really like it here, but I still don’t have enough connections to really make it feel and exactly call it home. But this is a thing which I know can still happen and to have this feeling. Like in this point it’s not yet that strong* (female 22, Slovakia)

*No I don’t think home, but maybe it’s because it’s been only a few months. It’s not like somewhere I have roots, you know. I don’t have family here and I have friends but the friends they go away then so it’s not you know like, a steady place* (female 20, France)

*I think I want to [call Helsinki a home] but because I haven’t seen as much as I think I should’ve seen before I think I can call it a home, it’s not a home yet but I feel like by the end of May it will definitely be a home. And I’m going to be very sad to leave…it’s like this feeling of “yeah, this is my city” and I can if someone wanted to come with me, walk with them and be like: “this is… this is where this is”. Almost like an ease of
In order to find out more about what the feeling of being at home meant for the exchange students, I also asked them whether they could call themselves locals of Helsinki. What was striking was that only five of all the twenty-five students said that they felt like a local of Helsinki. Only three of these students had also said that they felt at home in Helsinki, whereas the two others had said that they did not feel at home. This means that most of the students that did feel at home in Helsinki did not feel like locals of the same city. The ones that did feel local felt so because of very different reasons. Two thought that they knew the city well enough to be able to give directions to others. One of them had said she felt at home and the other one that she did not. Another two said that they felt as locals in their heart, because this experience was so important for them. Neither of them had said that they felt at home in Helsinki. Having habits and living in the center of the city was the reason why the fifth student felt so much like a local. She had also said she felt at home in Helsinki. A few of these students did however mention that they were not sure whether the Finns would consider them as locals even if they did so themself.

I really want to [call myself local] but I don't know, like from my side, yes I can, because even sometimes I can help people to find some places or know that you need to take a certain tram to a neighborhood or something like that. But I'm not sure that Finnish people can say the same, because that's true, I can feel like a local but I can't look like it, but despite this I feel like a local one...and I’m proud that I’m from Helsinki for this year (female 19, Ukraine)

Well deep in my heart I definitely feel something like that [like a local of Helsinki]. I have no idea how I'm perceived by the Finns in terms of how I look or how I behave, I don’t know what they see in me (female 25, Romania)

Whenever I say to people where I live I say I live in Helsinki. Because it’s for one year so I just, you know, it’s just something important in your life so I just, I will remember it like for the rest of my life (female 20, France)

What were then the reasons that most of the exchange students (20) did not feel like locals of Helsinki? The single most common reason (9) for it was the Finnish language. Most of these students did not speak Finnish at all whereas a few did speak it a little bit but did not feel like they spoke it well enough to feel like a local. Since the Finns, the locals in Helsinki speak Finnish, but the exchange students do not, they felt different from the locals and thus not locals themselves.
Not yet [do I feel like a local]. I’m like a tourist I think. But of course maybe a month later, maybe I feel local here. If I knew traditional things and improved my Finnish a little. It seems local to me. Because people talk Finnish here and we can’t understand and if you don’t understand it means you are not local. I think we can improve our Finnish. (female 22, Turkey)

I’m not able to speak Finnish and that’s the problem. That’s also the distance. You will always feel the distance between the exchange students and the locals because yeah, normally we cannot speak Finnish. And I think even after some months here, it’s not really possible to speak Finnish because it’s too hard to learn. And I think it’s really difficult to feel local here because I think you really need to speak the language. Otherwise you will be always more distant than other people (female 27, Germany)

The second most important reasons why so many exchange students said they did not feel local in Helsinki was the fact that they did not feel like they had lived here long enough to be called locals. Eight students thought that it takes more time to be a local, because that way you also know the place better which makes you feel more local. When you spend more time in a place you also develop routines that you do not have after only a short time in the city. Two students did however mention that they did not feel like tourists, but not like locals either. They felt like something in between.

I wouldn’t say local but I’d say resident. Depends what you mean by local. A resident I guess, because I do live in Helsinki but I think it will take a couple of years to feel like a local because you got a feel for the city but you’re still as an outsider, rather as, somebody...as a local. I guess. I think if I spent more time here. Especially if I’m learning the language would obviously help a lot with that. I did try Finnish but, my skill with languages... (male 22, England)

No, not yet [do I feel like a local]. It would take me some years I guess. But no. I think these things take longer. I think I’m going to apply for jobs up here as well when I’m graduating and I think that if I get a job up here and live here for a year or more. I think for me it’s more that I know that my stay here is ending. I have this like deadline for when I’m going home. And I think if I had a job I think it would really change the way I was thinking about my stay here (female 28, Denmark)

Not yet, no [do I feel like a local]. Maybe I, if I knew more places to go out to drink, the haircutter you go to every month. You know like this, have more regularity and more places that you go to regularly (female 26, Germany)

Another reason for not feeling local that three students mentioned was that they did not feel that the Finns considered them as locals. Their feeling of being or not being local was thus based on how the locals perceived them. The students talked about the way they look and thought that they were not perceived as locals because they were not blonde or because they looked like a foreigner.
I can say I’m not a tourist anymore, but not so much a local. When somebody, like a baby watches me very strongly and I feel like: “ah okay, I look different” and also I cannot speak Finnish very well so that makes me feel like I’m not local (female 21, Japan)

Whenever I go to a shop or whenever I try to ask something I feel away from like the other people, I’m like treated as a foreigner although I live here as an exchange student so I don’t feel a resident here in Helsinki still. They speak English or sometimes I don’t know if it’s a manner thing but they allow Finnish customers first before me. Maybe it’s just that person but it’s happened quite often so I still feel like maybe because I’m an Asian and not like from a European country they think that I’m completely off or like an outsider for them (female 22, Japan)

In this study I defined the sense of place as the attachment to the physical and visual of a place, and also by knowing the place behind the physical in a more deep and emotional manner. Summarizing this chapter I am suggesting that the majority of the exchange students have formed a strong emotional attachment to Helsinki. My argument is based on the fact that such a big part of the interviewed students referred to Helsinki settled well in the city and also said that they feel at home. This goes to show that Helsinki has a deep meaning in the minds of the students and that a lot of emotions are attached to it too. These students were capable of feeling at home somewhere else than in their original home, which makes Helsinki according to Vertovec’s (1999) ideas a so called “home away from home”.

It is however evident that the home experienced in Helsinki is different from what the students feel when they are in their original homes, because they did not feel local in Helsinki. Most of these students did not feel local because of linguistic reasons or because they felt that they had not spent enough time in Helsinki. In the home countries of the exchange students these factors are for sure not an issue. This finding supports the argument of Tuan (1975) who thinks that time affects the formation of the sense of place. As for these students the times that they felt that were “enough to feel at home” varied a lot and both those students who stayed in Helsinki a longer and a shorter time was amongst those who said this. My findings show that what a long time means depends completely on the person defining it. As Tuan (1975) argued living in a place for a long time does not in itself guarantee a strong sense of place. A person that has lived in a place for all of his live might have a weaker sense of place than a person who has lived there for five years.
5.5 Settling in with the exchange community and the local community

I wanted to understand better in which kind of reality the sense of place of the exchange students is formed. My interest is based on the observations of Petri Hottola (2006; see also Clarke 2005) who has recognized that backpackers form so called “metaworlds”, which are backpacker realities that they create when spending time only with other backpackers or spending time in westernized bars when backpacking in Asia. These realities are rather backpacker realities than local ones. He recognized however that often the backpackers live in both worlds. I asked the exchange students whether they felt that some sort of exchange student community exists and if it does what might be the reason for it. I also asked the students what their own part in this community was.

A clear result was that all the twenty-five exchange students thought that an exchange student community of some kind definitely exists. The students recognized that there were several factors that affected the existence of this community. Most often (12) the students mentioned the accommodation. The exchange students who get an apartment from Hoas are all placed in the same houses which contribute to the fact that exchange students live with other exchange students rather than with Finns. Many of the students felt that this was a shame because it made the interaction with Finns difficult. Several students however thought that it was fun living with the other students and that it fostered a very close community between the exchange students.

I guess because we live in the building that is only for exchange students and the exchange students don’t have much experience with other degree students, other Finnish students and it's really hard for us to communicate or have the chance to meet with the new Finnish people (female 22, Japan)

Especially where I live because there are so many in the building that are exchange students and...because at least the first two or three weeks I didn’t really see any locals at all (male 25, Norway, who lives in Kannelmäki)

So probably they form their own groups and the fact that a lot of international students live together in a very small place in a residence, and then you have the Finnish students living everywhere else. I live in Domus Academica and we have different buildings, I live in the Finnish building. It’s really nice, it’s so quiet. But then you have two buildings of international students and, there’s no communication between them. It’s the international students that have parties all the time and what not and then you have the Finnish building and there are very few Finnish people that come to the events of the international students and vice versa (female 23, Russia)

Yes, especially in Domus Academica where they all live together and with the tutor group we did a lot of activities there together. But I think it’s also possible to get into Finnish groups or international student groups with also Finnish people and I think it’s also nice but I would say they [the exchange students] have their own kind of group
thing here. But it's really not a bad thing, I think it's a bit of a pity that you don't live together with Finnish people or don't really get to know them but it's still possible (female 22, Germany)

It helps that we're all in the same building. And there are some other exchange students about; they tend to come to our building. We have a residence committee and Finnish people don't really get too involved in that so it's mostly exchange students. I mean some of them do. It's nice to see them but it's mostly exchange students. And in our building it's only exchange students and most of my friends here are not from Finland. On ERASMUS. It's quite nice actually; it's nice making friends from all over the place as well as having sort a couple of people from back home (male 22, England)

Another major reason for the existence of an exchange student community that twelve exchange students recognized was that exchange students are drawn to each other because of the similarity of their situation. The students are in Helsinki on their own without their friends and families from home and therefore they reach out for other people who are in the same situation. They felt that it is easier to approach someone who is in the same situation rather than approach Finns who have their own life and the city is already familiar for them whereas it is new for most of the exchange students. The exchange students have a different kind of schedule than the Finns and different kinds of interests which is why many students thought that it is easier to be with other exchange students. One student called the exchange student community “the Erasmus-world” because she felt that the exchange students live in a different reality than in what the locals do. In this reality the exchange students have fun together, go to parties, to events organized by the Erasmus organization ESN and enjoy their time without leading a so called normal life with duties such as for example a job.

Yeah, Erasmus students have their own group. And we always do events and I think we are like brothers or sisters because Erasmus students are always not local people. So we are in the same situation and for me it's okay and it's nice. So we can communicate nicely (female 22, Turkey)

I know that the international students, I feel like they definitely have a community or I know my friends are all international aside from my tutor, my Finnish tutor, and I guess it's this whole, we band together thing, because this is a new city for us and so you wanna band up with other people that don't know what they're doing (female 21, USA)

I think in any foreign country there will be the kind of lack of language and the cultural understanding of the country, I mean sort of people without that, gravitate together. Most speak, I mean all exchange students, speak English. So it's kind of like even though we're all from completely different countries, there is a common language and common sort of not being from Finland (male 22, England)

It's its own world. I always call it the ERASMUS world, it's so special (female 27, Germany)
You're kind of in the same situation with all the other exchange students so it's so much easier to just to...and there are so many different things like arranged for the exchange students as well with their pub crawls and touristy stuff and these trips to Lapland or whatever. So I think it's the easiest solution somehow (female 28, Denmark)

Six students mentioned that they felt that because the exchange students attend classes in English, there are not many Finnish students present, which also affects the possibilities to meet Finns instead of only exchange students. All of the students attended classes in English and according to them these classes only had a few Finnish participants.

I have a lot of friends, exchange students too, you know it's easier to find friends from exchange students because we are sitting in the class and “oh I'm an exchange student, oh I’m too, great!” Yeah, something more in common, and you have more things to talk about (female 19, Ukraine)

We have less chance to meet Finnish people or students here because obviously they don't come to those classes that we have (female 25, Hungary)

I think it's just living together, the tutor groups and as we can only take courses in English, there are also almost exchange students in the courses so that's maybe another reason (female 22, Germany)

Even if all exchange students recognized that an exchange student community of some kind definitely exists, the answers were various when I asked if they felt that they were a part of this community. Six students said that they did not feel that they were a part of the exchange student community. These students with one exception did however mainly have exchange students as friends. The reason why they did not include themselves with the so called exchange student community was the fact that they associated the community with the kind of exchange students who party a lot, drink heavily, attend only program intended for exchange students and spend time only with exchange students. It seemed as though this kind of exchange lifestyle was strongly connected with being an Erasmus student which demonstrates that the Erasmus program carries a certain stigma. Where these assumptions come from did not remain clear to me, but I have however noticed that this is an image that also the media carries. Mike Young (2009) addressed this topic in an article about the exchange students at the University of Copenhagen. According to the Young the party-stigma lives amongst the media and the students, but he thinks this should be considered twice because the students themselves do not want to live in a reality like that, which is what I found in my study as well.
The students that did not feel like they were a part of the stereotyped exchange student group rather stayed with a smaller group of exchange students and organized their own program. Some of these students said that they had had enough parties in their life already and did therefore not feel like a part of the exchange student community. I also noticed that the students who said this were more often students that were older than twenty-four. The existence of a so called exchange student community was thus not only based on the fact that exchange students spend time together. They saw the exchange student community as a stereotyped exchange student world where the exchange students only spend time partying and participating in events that are organized for them. Especially for older students that were already past the “wild days” of their life, the idea of being included in a community of this kind was not seen as an attractive choice. This kind of lifestyle would not include meeting Finns or getting to know the Finnish culture, whereas these students really wanted to get to know Finns.

*I don’t really experience it [the exchange student community] because we have our group, like the small one is five people, the bigger one is ten, fifteen. And we didn’t attend a lot of Erasmus-programs; we just made our own programs so I wouldn’t say that it’s a very exchange student community* (female 24, Hungary)

*I must say that I didn’t came to party, and I had the impression that an exchange semester for most people is partying and traveling all the time and as I was working it was not so easy for me to take part in this student life and I’m 26 and I’m almost finished so I don’t really feel like a student like this anymore* (female 26, Germany)

*I’m not a member of it [the exchange student community]. No. But I heard a lot about exchange student problems or exchange students partying every night. I don’t live in a Hoas apartment. I live in a student dorm, most of them are internship, but they don’t study at the University anymore, so literally they are not exchange so yeah, [I am not part of the exchange student community] because I live in that apartment and I tried to be friends with Finns more than exchange students, because I can see exchange students in the class every time so that’s why I don’t feel that I’m a member of the huge group* (female 21, Japan)

Most of the exchange students (19) did however say that they felt like they were a part of the exchange student community. It was however evident that the students did not want to be seen as the stereotyped “Erasmus exchange students” since thirteen of these students said that they had made a real effort to get to know Finns during their exchange and did not see themselves as full members of the exchange student community. They had participated in programs which promote the interaction between exchange students and Finns: the ALICE-program and the Buddy program, or simply by trying to meet Finns at the university or somewhere else. Most of these students did however
acknowledge that being a part of the exchange student community allowed them to learn about other cultures and get to know people from around the world, thus very positive aspects. Four students mentioned that they felt like a part of the exchange student community. These students wished to get to know more Finns, but they felt that it was difficult. One student said that she did feel a part of the exchange student community, but of not of the stereotypical one, but those students who are really interested in Finland.

Oh yes. I think that’s one of the general things of exchange students that they sort of cluster together. Which is why I’m making an effort to make sure that I actually go out with Finnish people and do sort of Finnish things. Because it seems, I’m in Finland I should make a sort of an attempt to be with Finnish people because it’s their town or their country. They’re gonna know certain things and have certain experiences that I’m not gonna get with the exchange students, because we sort of don’t know 100% what it’s about, what should we do. What’s the most interesting thing around, interesting places (female 21, Australia)

I’m trying to be a part of that [the exchange student community] because when I’m thinking about “I will not go to any parties with exchange students, I will go like with my Finnish friends or the local parties”. I think that in this moment I’m losing this part of the ERASMUS program because there are a lot of cool and crazy things that exchange students are doing so I’m trying to mix the two, to be there and there you know (female 19, Ukraine)

There are different groups when it comes to the exchange students. First you have the ERASMUS students who are maybe 18, 19, 20 and I don’t interact much with them because I’ve had my drinking phase earlier and I came to Finland first of all to get some peace and quiet after England, so the ERASMUS group who goes out partying and binge drinking; not my thing anymore. And then you have the students that come here because they were really interested in Finland and I’m really happy to have found them. There’s not that many, in terms of it’s not easy to find each other. But they are a distinct group I think (female 25, Romania)

I think I’m kind of half. Because I like that I can meet very different people from different countries and also, I have many Finnish friends so I’m meeting these kinds of ERASMUS students or people like this and also Finns (female 22, Slovakia)

Only four students said that they were a part of the exchange student community without saying that they were not fully a part of it. These students seemed to enjoy different dimensions of the student exchange metaworld. Getting to know people from all around the world, thus other exchange students, was an important part of this world. When it comes to different place dimensions of the metaworld, the students enjoyed: 1) spending their time in the Hoas buildings with other exchange students 2) ESN events 3) bars and 4) the university. They saw it as a very fun and positive thing that they got
friends from other countries so they learned about other cultures and they enjoyed the events that were organized for them by the Erasmus organization ESN. These students did not seem to carry the same prejudice about the Erasmus program as many of the other students did.

Summarized it was evident that the exchange students recognized that some kind of exchange student community existed in Helsinki. It was however clear that most students associated the community with a stereotyped image of exchange life which many saw as a typical Erasmus exchange. I could sense a negative attitude towards this type of Erasmus life because most of the students tried to make sure that I knew that even if they were a part of this community, that they also wanted to get to know the “real Helsinki” and Finns. It thus seems like most students that come to Helsinki live in a reality which combines elements of the Finnish culture as well as elements of a very multicultural exchange student culture.

5.6 Exchange students’ thoughts on their future international mobility

It was in my interest to find out whether the exchange period that the exchange students spent in Helsinki affects the way they see their future mobility considering life in general, studies and work. This was interesting to me because Vertovec (1999: 451) argued that people who feel a multiple sense of place might feel that they do not want to settle down in one place in the future, but rather like to move around a lot. Duncan (2012: 116) who referred to Bronwyn Boon (2006) claimed that exchange students might form an identity that makes them very mobile and pushes them to combine career and leisure in their future. I wanted to examine if the sense of place created in the exchange destination affect how the students see their future mobility. Interesting was also if the students can see themselves returning back to Helsinki, because Helsinki would naturally benefit from receiving well educated international tax payers, that have experience of the city already.

What the interviews showed is that almost half (11) of the twenty-five exchange students did lead a very mobile lifestyle already before the exchange in Helsinki. These students said that they think that the exchange in Helsinki will only strengthen their desire to lead a mobile lifestyle in the future, but that the desire was something that they had had in them already before coming to Helsinki. Having been previously mobile and wanting to be mobile had thus also affected their decision to come to Helsinki. A few students said that they do not think that the experience in Helsinki will change their way
of thinking but that it definitely enhances their skill level which makes their dreams of international jobs and a mobile lifestyle more possible.

Oh actually my parents' live abroad so my plan is to go and so it's not because of this exchange. Of course I think it [being in Helsinki] has an effect, but it was more because I would like to work there and I have this chance still in University to experience to use the professional language. That's why I came here so it was never like a choice to come here to learn for work in abroad (female 24, Hungary)

Well I already had it before this, because I'm the person that really loves traveling and I did have this also before so that's one of the reasons I came here also. Because I want to see as much as places as possible and also I don’t know where I want to settle down so I want to see more places so I can really compare and kind of decide where I want to stay in the end. But yeah so...I think even coming here it then makes me more to want to explore other places (female 22, Slovakia)

Yeah, totally [feel like this will affect my future mobility] but it was already before so. It just makes it more true, so yeah I really want to. I think it is very good experience to travel, even live for a few months is already great so I think I will do it again. Even next year. I already did, signed up for a job abroad (female 20, France)

As I said I already moved from Denmark to Malmö so I have this part in me already. I'm trying to learn Finnish and that is also because I hope that it can help me to get a job basically. Of course it will also make it easier for me to get a job up here. So it's not so much of my person that has changed or anything, it's more that the skills that I got here are going to help me. So it's not as much that it opened my eyes for the world or anything it's more that I acquired some skills that I want to be able to use (female 28, Denmark)

The majority of the students (13) did however say that they definitely thought that the exchange in Helsinki has affected the way in which they see their future mobility. Eight of these students felt that being in Helsinki had made them realize that working or studying abroad is a realistic possibility in the future. Some students said that it had also made them think where they might want to settle down in the future, and a couple saw Helsinki as a valid option. Other students rather focused on the personal change that they thought the exchange had on them as an experience. They felt that the experience widened their horizons and opened their eyes for the world and all the other cultures out there. These things were considered very positive amongst the students.

This experience is really important in a lot of ways. Now I feel like I can go for my Master’s for example to another country and I plan to visit not only Helsinki while staying here, but I will go to Sweden during the holidays and to Norway, to Estonia of course I should go, visit them. Yeah and when you feel like you can be comfortable in not your home city, yeah of course it will help you to travel, like to change places of living. So you're like a universal citizen (female 21, Russia)
Yes, I think especially I’m already thinking about going on an exchange in my Master’s program because I’m at my Bachelor’s now. And yeah I can imagine living somewhere else for several years easier now and I would say I’m in a kind of traveling enthusiastic fever so yeah that really motivated me to go to another place sometime here and there (female 22, Germany)

It [the exchange in Helsinki] has sort of opened my eyes that it is possible to travel and sort of study and work abroad. It always seems like quite a daunting prospect, but it’s actually a lot easier than it seems (male 22, England)

Before, every summer I went to different countries, but it’s kind of different because now during my student year I went to St. Petersburg and Stockholm, to Tallinn. So you travel quite a lot so you have that concept in your mind so you want to do it. And also after this year you know quite a lot of people from different countries and from different cities so probably in the next five six years you’re going to travel and meet these people again and know other countries. I have some friends who went last year in ERASMUS, and all this year they are traveling a lot but before they didn’t travel so. I think it changes people quite a lot (male 21, Spain)

The students were also asked whether they think that they could return to Helsinki in the future for studies or work. About half of the students (12) said that they could see themselves work in Helsinki in the future. A couple students did however mention that they would not want to work in Helsinki permanently but only for a temporary amount of time. The reason for this was the weather that one student disliked and the lack of enough social connections. Most of these students had however already considered the option of working in Helsinki or they were very willing to stay if they got the opportunity for it. The reasons for wanting to work in Helsinki were various, but what mainly attracted them was the fact that they liked the city. Other aspects that came up were that things work well in Helsinki, the salaries are good, it is possible combine work and maternity, the city is not too “businessy” and that the society in general works well. A few students said that they also could see themselves working in another city in Finland or even in another city in Scandinavia.

Ah yes, I can [see myself work or study in Helsinki]. But not like forever. Only for some time or maybe if I found a boyfriend I could be here longer but not forever. Jobs are very very well paid. You really get what you married. I think it’s also kind of user friendly like it’s not a problem to combine work with maternity. That’s very good and also the attitude of workers, I mean those...how are they called? We call them like “white collars”. Like everybody is in suit and looks very business and very busy. This is something you don’t meet here a lot. And this is nice (female 24, Czech Republic)

Yes. I would like to [work in Helsinki]. Yeah if the opportunity arose I would definitely come back and take it (female 21, USA)
Yeah [I would like to work in Helsinki]. I don’t know if I’d like a smaller city, but like then again I’ve never been to Turku or Rovaniemi or anything crazy, but Helsinki, especially as an Estonian, and still having family in Estonia and having Estonian citizenship. I don’t think I could ever work there like, it’s just not developed enough for me, like coming from a country like Canada with like free health care and stuff it’s just not good enough. That sounds awful but Helsinki is in a totally different level. And again with the English and the internationalism of Helsinki it just would make more sense, to live here (female 29, Canada)

Yeah I would be, I would be [interested in working in Helsinki]. I’m just amazed that the society is really advanced here. Everybody speaks English, people are well versed and international politics and news and stuff. People here are generally pretty progressive. It’s an educated population that’s in this city and it shows. Stuff works and you know when you turn on the water, hot water comes out. Even simple things that you take for granted really work well here. So anyway, from an infrastructure standpoint I think highly of Helsinki and I would come back if anything was but those amenities (male 26, USA)

Four students said that would have looked very positively on opportunities of working in Finland but they felt that it would not be possible because they did not speak Finnish. These students thought that it would not be possible to find a job in Finland without knowing Finnish or even if it was, one would feel much excluded from the colleagues and other people without being able to speak Finnish. For this reason some of the students really wanted to learn the language. One student said that he would be happy to work in Helsinki if he could work in English. Four students said that they would rather not work in Helsinki because they would either like to work in a new place that they have not been to before or simply work in their home country.

I don’t know because the problem from my point of view is really that I truly believe that if you don’t speak Finnish, staying here doesn’t really make sense in terms of working. You can always study here and there are a lot of degrees in English if you want to study but for a foreigner that is outside of the European Union, staying here is legally possible only with a purpose so you need to pursue a degree or having work, like official work so otherwise it is impossible to stay. And if you don’t really speak Finnish it’s not only years less in terms of working, I mean, you’re going to be unable to communicate with your co-workers (female 23, Russia)

Maybe I should know Finnish first to work here. That would be a problem but if I can, yes, I can imagine (female 24, Hungary)

I think it is really difficult because here to work you need to know Finnish. It depends on the work, but most of them, you need Finnish. And I have to say that Finnish is a very difficult language. So yeah, if I can work in English, yeah why not? But in Finnish
I don’t think so. Yeah because I tried to study it last semester, for four months, and it was kind of difficult (male 21, Spain)

I don’t know [if I could see myself working in Helsinki]. Maybe if I have the opportunity. I know French people who went to Helsinki to work and they don’t speak Finnish so I guess it’s possible, but yeah I don’t know, maybe. Or maybe I will try something else, because I like to discover different things and not to come back (female 20, France)

Four students also mentioned that they would really much enjoy coming back to Helsinki for holiday or to see another season that they missed while they were here during their exchange. They also seemed eager about the prospect of bringing their friends or family to Helsinki to show them what they had experienced.

yeah yeah yeah [I can see myself returning to Helsinki] even like to show it to my family, because not all of them will come so maybe like to travel during summertime because I won’t be here for summertime so I want to come back during summertime (female 20, France)

Maybe in I don’t know 2 or 3 years or something [I could return to Helsinki]. When I go back to Japan maybe compare some things that are different and come back again to Helsinki and see more and experience a new way of looking at Helsinki and hopefully find a job that will relate with Helsinki in Japan. Maybe work in a company that connects these two countries together so in that sense I also want to come back here if it’s possible (female 22, Japan)

This section shows that the exchange students examined are definitely mobile and will continue to be mobile in their future. A big part of the students had lived a mobile lifestyle already before their time in Helsinki. To me this means that talking about tourism as a part of the everyday life, and thus turning to the new mobility paradigm that is supported by amongst other Sheller and Urry (2006; see also Duncan 2012) is highly justified. In the previous section I suggested that the exchange students had formed a strong sense of place in Helsinki because they felt attached to the city both physically and emotionally. Because they were capable of acquiring such a strong sense of place somewhere else than in their home, I suggested that they had acquired a so called multiple sense of place. The results of this section only strengthen my argument. I base this on the ideas of Vertovec (1999) who argue that people who experience a multiple sense of place tend to be very mobile and refuse to become fixed and settled with one place. For many of the students the thought of staying in only one place in the future, when they felt a strong connection and a sense of place to more than one place, felt foreign. These findings have a strong base in the discussions regarding identity,
transnationalism and mobility. Ghosh and Wang (2003) discussed a so called transnational consciousness, that a person constructs when feeling a belonging to many places. A belonging with many places is created when a person is mobile enough to have had the chance to create such strong relationships with other places than their original homes. This was definitely the case for the exchange students interviewed, which is why I claim that the students had acquired a transnational consciousness.
Based on my analysis I found that the sense of place of the students was constructed by experiencing physical aspects of Helsinki in the company of other people. The experience was thus socially constructed and collective but each student’s individual experience on the other hand affected the collective experience. The students had formed a strong emotional attachment in Helsinki which could be seen from that they easily settled in and also felt at home. They did however not feel like locals in the city even if most of them desired to be seen as locals. All the students recognized the existence of an exchange student community, but they were not keen on being seen as a part of that community. The reason for this was the negative stigma exchanges carry in the minds of the students, which is similar to the negative image they carry of conventional tourists which they see as mass tourists. They therefore wanted to differentiate themselves from the conventional tourist too. The students of this study were a very mobile group of people and the exchange in Helsinki was but a part of their mobile lifestyle that would continue after the exchange as well.

The interviews demonstrate that when getting to know Helsinki, and thus starting the process of creating a sense of place in the city, the exchange students used their senses variedly. The students walked around randomly watching, hearing, feeling and smelling their new environment. Based on the perceptions that the students got from doing so they formed opinions and feelings about the places that they had experienced. These findings are supported by both Tuan (1979: 410) and Suvantola (2002: 33) who argue that people get to know new places by experiencing them with all their senses, not just the visual sense. My findings imply that when the students start the process of making sense of the city, they do not simply base their perceptions on the physical environment, but also the deeper meanings behind the physical environment.

The data shows that the sense of place of the exchange students was formed both by experiencing the physical environment of the city, but also by socializing in that environment. I feel that the relationship between the physical environment and the social environment can be seen as reciprocal. I think so because Helsinki was a new city for most of the exchange students and therefore it provided a surface and opportunity for the students to spend time in together getting to know it. This way the physical environment of Helsinki made the social interactions between the exchange students
possible and this leads me to assume that the perceptions that the students formed of the city, were not just a result of their own ideas about the city, but that it was rather collectively constructed and thus also based on what the others thought about it. The students said that getting to know the city was a good opportunity to get to know the people they were going to share their exchange with simultaneously. On the other hand it was not just the physical environment of Helsinki that affected the social relations between the exchange students, but the social relations also guided the way in which each student perceived the physical environment.

The individual experiences of each exchange student were important in themselves. Even if a lot of the experiences were collective and thus many students experienced similar things, each student interpreted the city differently because of their varying backgrounds. This could be seen in the small details that the students talked about. Some students mentioned a specific café or a flea market when discussing the things they liked in Helsinki. Because I used the snowball method to collect my interviewees, some of the students knew each other and had spent time together in Helsinki. Even so, their interpretations and feelings concerning those experiences were different. I feel like the way each student felt about the city played an important role as a piece of puzzle in creating a collective feeling of the city for the students, which gives importance to the individual experience as well. I base my thoughts on constructionist ideas that give importance to the ideas of the individual because social constructions are always dependent on how the individual understand those constructions (Häkli 1999: 105). The results thus show that both the individual and the collective dimensions of the perceptions of the students affect their sense of place.

In this study I identified the main aspects of Helsinki that had affected the feelings and opinions of the exchange students. The data reveals that the characteristics of Helsinki affecting the students the most were both tangible and intangible factors of the city. Some of the most reoccurring tangible aspects of the city that the students identified as positive were the University of Helsinki, the public transportation, the greenness of the city and the subarctic climate. The snow was especially appreciated. On the other hand the harsh climate was at the same time the most often mentioned negative aspect of Helsinki. Summarized, the students appreciated Helsinki as a small green city with a pleasant climate where things work well starting from the education to other infrastructural aspects.
The positive intangible factors that the students recognized were characterized much by the people that the exchange students met in Helsinki. Both other exchange students as well as Finns, seem to have affected the feelings of the students at least as much as the physical environment did. Almost half of the students said that they liked the Finns and thought that they were friendly and helpful. The language skills of the Finns were also appreciated and many students even said that they felt similar to the Finns in some ways. The interactions with the Finns that the students had had were thus mainly positive. The Finns are a permanent part of Helsinki, which is why I think that the positive image that the students got from interacting with them reflected on the overall feeling about the city positively and contributed to forming a stronger bond with it. Important is to note that the also the other exchange students played an important part of the exchange sojourn, not just the Finns. It seemed as though the exchange students saw the other students as a part of Helsinki as much as any other characteristic of Helsinki, because during their time in Helsinki the other students were indeed a part of the experience. One student even mentioned that she had felt at home during her first semester when her exchange friends were around but the second semester when the others had gone home; she started to lose the feeling of being at home. I feel that the positive experiences with the fellow exchange students, despite them not being a permanent part of Helsinki, had a huge effect on how the exchange students perceived the city. The students were all very happy with the multicultural group of friends that they had gotten in Helsinki, which I think is a contributing reason to why so many of them also felt at home in the city. Other intangible factors that the students identified as positive were the feeling of safety and calmness in the city. I consider this an intangible aspect because it was a feeling which might not always be a result of the actual situation. Summarized, the students appreciated Helsinki as safe and calm city with friendly locals and a nice group of multicultural friends.

In this study I defined sense of place to be constructed through the functional or physical attachment to place as well as the emotionally deeper attachment to place. The students experienced a lot of positive tangible and intangible aspects of Helsinki, which argues for the fact that the functional attachment to place was fulfilled. I approached the emotional attachment by examining how settled and at home the students felt, and if they felt like locals of the city. A finding in the data that I think is rather striking is that none of the exchange students felt that it was difficult to settle in Helsinki. I find this
surprising because Helsinki does differ quite a lot geographically, culturally and climate wise, when comparing it to the home countries of the exchange students. A part of the students said that they had minor difficulties in the beginning because of the different culture or because of organizational aspects, but that it quickly changed for them. The main reasons why the students settled in so well were the social contacts that they had, thus the intangible aspects of the city, as well as the feeling that the city is similar to their own home somehow, thus tangible aspects. The effortlessness of the settling allows me to assume that Helsinki was a comfortable and good place for the students to be in. These very positive feelings towards the city suggest that the students got emotionally attached to the city fairly quickly.

A strong emotional attachment to Helsinki was not visible only through the fact that the students seemed to have settled in very well, but also through the fact that the majority of the students said that they felt at home in Helsinki and could call it a home. Something that surprised me a lot was however that almost none of the students said that they felt like locals of the city even if they definitely could say that they felt at home. The students seemed to have the desire to be local, but did not feel that it was possible because they did not speak Finnish or the fact that they did not look Finnish.

But does a strong sense of place require that the students have to feel like locals of Helsinki too? As Stewart and Williams (1998: 19) argue, visitors and tourists of a place can definitely have a strong sense of place, even if the place in question is not where they reside permanently, because it is not the possessors of the feelings that have to be local but rather the feelings they feel. This argument implies that feeling local is not obligatory in order to construct a strong sense of place. I understand it as a different thing to be local and feel local. Because the exchange students lived in Helsinki for a certain time, I would definitely say that they were locals of Helsinki for that time. The feeling of not being local was mainly based on that the students thought that the “real locals”, the Finns, did not perceive them as locals because the students did not speak Finnish or did not look Finnish. From the answers of those few students who said that they felt like locals of Helsinki, it was evident that they felt a bit unsure calling themselves that since they were not quite sure if the Finns perceived them so. This leads me to think whether many other students in fact had felt the same, but did just not express it because they felt insecure to do so.
If the exchange students did not see themselves as locals, then what were they in Helsinki? As I said, I feel that the students were temporarily locals when they lived in the city. One of the arguments of this study was however that exchange students should be considered as a type of educational tourist, which does not easily lead on to think of a local. Am I then contradicting myself when calling the exchange students both locals and tourists? I do not think so. I think that being local does not exclude being also a tourist. An educational tourist is different from a conventional tourist. An educational tourist usually spends a longer time in the destination than a conventional tourist and the life includes more everyday life elements because the motivations for the trips are different. I do however feel like the definition of a tourist is popularly constrained to mean only the conventional tourist who spends a week in a tourist destination. What I noticed from the interview answers was that the students did not want to be seen as the stereotyped “dumb” tourist, but rather as a person who is interested in the culture and life of Helsinki. A part of the students were definitely trying to differentiate themselves from conventional tourists by avoiding visiting tourist sites and pushing themselves to do things that they felt that the “everyday Finn” would do. This corresponds with the findings of Suvantola (2002: 85) that showed that young travelers often connect the term tourism with mass tourism which they experience as a way of traveling that does not leave room for developing oneself. Since traveling is a way for the young people to define their identities, they want to be seen as something else than that, and therefore disliked them being called tourists.

I nevertheless believe that these exchange students should be placed in the category of educational tourists, because what these students seemed to want to achieve, fits well with the definition of an educational tourist. Carr et al. (2003: 12) characterizes educational tourists as people who value the education before the tourist experience. I think according to the findings of Hietaluoma (2001: 22) that education does not only refer to the official university education but also the getting to know the culture of the destination, as well as the locals. This lifestyle includes such a wide cultural learning that the tourists can easily be called locals at the same time. I do not want to undermine the fact that conventional tourists also engage in learning experiences, but rather claim that those learning experiences are different. The conventional tourist has less time in the destination than an educational tourist, which is why they often focus on getting to know attractions planned for tourists, rather than engaging in activities that the locals
engage in. It is this aspect that separates the exchange students from the conventional tourist.

This study strengthens the ideas of Ahmed (1999) that home can have several meanings depending on how it is defined, and that the mobility of people is something that especially redefines the concept of home. The interviews clearly show that to possess the feeling of being at home, one does not have to have lived in a place for a long time, nor even be a permanent resident of the place or feel like one. The exchange students of this study said that one of the most important reasons why they felt at home were the social connections they had in Helsinki. When the students had friends and people they could turn to, it made it feel like home for them. It is this feeling that also Manzo (2003: 57) talks about: home can be a place that just feels like home. The social connections with the other exchange students are definitely not a static part of Helsinki, which leads me to question if a strong sense of place can be formed wherever one has a social circle of people that they feel satisfied with. Some of the students mentioned having Finnish friends as well, which on the other hand can be seen as a more static part of the city. The majority of the students however spent their time with only exchange students, or mostly exchange students. Interesting was also that many students seemed to especially notice that they felt like home in Helsinki when they had been in their home country for the Christmas or visited another country nearby, and returned. In this case the proverb “Distance makes the heart grow fonder” definitely seems to hold its case. The feeling of being comfortable in the city was important for the students too, because the comfort made them feel free to do what they wanted and they felt that they knew how they could accomplish those desires. The students also experienced that the city did not prove any threats to them which allowed them to feel safe and at home in the city.

I believe that the sense of place that the exchange students had acquired in Helsinki is however not fully comparable to the sense of place in their original home. Yes, both the original home and the exchange home is defined by the feeling of being at home, but what the feeling is based on is different; these are two different homes. The original home of the students is the country they are from and where they have their family and friends and are definitely locals. I also imagine that the students not just are locals in their original home but feel local too. A lack in my assumption is however that I did not ask the students what made them feel at home in their original home. A few students did however spontaneously mention that they felt at home in their original homes because
that is where their family and loved ones were. One student even said that the geographical area did not matter so much to her; it was rather the people in it that mattered. On the other hand, one student said that for her home was a place with history. Clearly the original home of a person can feel like home for differing reasons. I therefore dare suggest that a strong sense of place can be based on very different things, but also includes similar elements such as the importance of people in the place. My findings thus imply that when a person has acquired a multiple sense of place, he/she has formed strong but possibly very different bonds to various places.

Stereotypically Finns often see themselves and their country in a negative light because of the harsh weather and the fact that the people is not as social by its nature as are the peoples in more southern countries of for instance Europe. This stereotype was known among the exchange students too. Considering this I was very surprised to find out that the comments about Helsinki that came from the exchange students were mainly positive. Excluding only a few students, the overall impressions were all very positive and the students seemed to be very happy with their experience in Helsinki. When contemplating upon this result I came to the conclusion that a reason for this might be that the students who participated in my study were those that felt positive about their experience in Helsinki, whereas those who perhaps are not so keen on Helsinki did possibly not want to be interviewed. I think that if the students did not like Helsinki or feel good in the city; they might not want to share thoughts about their experiences in the city either. This might have caused the results of my study to be slightly distorted and perhaps too positive.

During the interviews the atmosphere was very positive and friendly; this was a lot due to similarities between me and the interviewees. We are of about the same age and are all students. Because the atmosphere was so friendly I felt that the students might not have wanted to offend me as a citizen of Helsinki by expressing their possible negative thoughts on the city. Therefore when the students did say something negative, I felt that the comments were much sugarcoated. This is why I might have falsely interpreted their experiences as more positive than they in reality were. I also see it as a possibility that some students left the negative things completely unsaid in order to not offend me. I feel that a lack of negative comments has possibly lead to the fact that something essential was missed. Relph (1997: 208) argues that the place-identity of a person can be either negative or positive. The negative thoughts only complexify the sense of place.
rather than weaken it. Thus, even if a positive attachment to place is an important part of the sense of place, the negative thoughts of a place are important too. This is why I feel like possibly missing out on negative thoughts from the students, might have caused that the results of my study showed a stronger sense of place amongst the students than it actually was. I however believe strongly that this is not true, because I cannot see why the students would call a place a home if they secretly had a lot of negative opinions about it.

All of the students recognized that exchange students in Helsinki had definitely formed some kind of community of their own, which one student even referred to as the Erasmus world. The usage of this expression made my thoughts quickly move to what is in tourism literature often discussed as “the tourist bubble”, a mass tourism destination. In this bubble the tourists only or mostly interact with other tourists, visit places designed for them and do not necessarily get in contact with anything authentically local. It is of course questionable what is authentic and not, but this is the general stereotype. The Erasmus world that the students were describing was very similar. A world where the students want to only interact with other exchange students, only want to party and do not care about the local culture.

The mass tourist destination is shunned and looked badly upon by especially young travelers (Suvantola 2002: 85) even if these people in fact often do take at least to some extent part in these realities. The mass tourist destination is seen in negative light because the people in them are considered shallow and ignorant. In contradiction to the assumptions of Clarke (2005) and Hottola (2006) that had discovered that backpackers often take part in so called backpacker communities or meta-worlds, I found that many of the exchange students in my study did not want to be connected with the exchange student community at all. Most students said that they were only to some extent part of this community. The vibes that I got were that the students did not want to be affiliated with the kind of exchange student that does not care about getting to know the “real culture” in the same way as Suvantola (2002) had found that backpackers do not want to be affiliated with mass tourists and the tourist bubbles they live in during their holidays. The exchange students seemed to share the same very negative black and white image of the exchange students as they shared on conventional tourists.

Interesting is that I did not actually identify any student in my research group that admitted leading an exchange life like the Erasmus world that they were describing. It
left me thinking that maybe this typical Erasmus student is nothing but a stereotype, or whether my interviewees did perhaps just not happen to include an exchange student of this type. Be that as it may, on the basis of the data I believe that the reality that the exchange students lived in does not differ too much from the reality in which the Finns live. I believe so because only so few of the exchange students actually expressed that they felt like a part of this “fake” exchange reality.

Most of the exchange students of this study were not mobile only because of the exchange in Helsinki, but they seemed to lead fairly mobile lifestyles altogether which supports the ideas of mobility theorists such as Duncan (2012) who believe that being mobile is part of the everyday life nowadays. A majority of the students said that their exchange in Helsinki did indeed strengthen their eager to travel a lot, but that the motivation to travel did not start in Helsinki. As Vertovec (1999: 451) puts it, people that have a sense of multi-locality can feel a sort of refusal of fixity which seems to be quite evident in the case of these students. My intention was to discover whether the students felt that this experience would affect their future mobility, but what I thus discovered was that this exchange was already a part of several students’ mobile lifestyle. This finding supports the ideas of mobility theorists such as Sheller and Urry (2006) and Duncan (2012) who see tourism as a part of the everyday life because people are so much on the move. Not all students were however as well traveled as the majority was. These students nevertheless said that the willingness to travel had always been there and the exchange in Helsinki just made it true. Only a handful of students did actually say that the exchange in Helsinki opened their eyes and for sure changed the way they see their future mobility in life and career. I do not want to undermine this handful because they demonstrate that an experience like an exchange certainly has the power to affect the future mobility of people.

A majority of the students looked positively on work opportunities in Helsinki in the future. They saw Helsinki as a developed place where things work and where it is easy to combine leisure with work. However, most of the students who wanted to work in Helsinki, wanted to do so simply because they liked the city. An often rising theme was however that the students saw the difficult Finnish language as a barrier to being able to work in Helsinki. It seemed as though these students did not believe they would learn Finnish, nor that they would be able to find work in English. This is why I suggest that the students should be informed more about the work opportunities in English in
Helsinki, in case more international work force is wanted to attract to the city. Most of the students were willing to work in the city, but did not even seriously consider it because they thought it would not be possible. If the students were informed about the opportunities, more of them might return or stay for work in Helsinki.

The fact that the students had so many positive experiences of the physical environment of the city argues for the fact that the functional attachment to Helsinki was fulfilled. The fact that the exchange students settled in Helsinki so well and also felt so much at home demonstrates a very strong emotional attachment to the city. These findings argue for the fact that the exchange students in this study had acquired a strong sense of place. To me this confirms the ideas of Tara Duncan (2008: 192; 2012) who believes that in our constantly changing globalized world, people and especially those that are mobile, are able to form a sense of place in more than one place, thus forming a multiple sense of place. The exchange students in this study formed a very strong sense of place in Helsinki, which is not their original home. The fact that the students also seemed to be leading a very mobile lifestyle and saw their future as very mobile too, also argues for the fact that they had acquired a multiple sense of place since Vertovec (1999: 451) believes that this kind of refusal of fixity is typical for people with a multiple sense of place.

To summarize the interviews and highlight something specific as more important than other things in Helsinki felt difficult at first. The students mentioned many things that definitely affected their view upon the city and all of the opinions felt important. In order to suggest how the city could be branded to attract more exchange students, it is desirable to present a few main points that were most common amongst the interviewed students. I will therefore present three main points that I think could be taken in consideration when pondering over what kind of city the exchange students want to be in. The characteristics of Helsinki that affected the students’ sense of place were both social and physical.

The most commonly mentioned tangible aspects were the University of Helsinki, the public transportation, the greenness of the city and the subarctic climate. Intangible aspects that the students highlighted were the calmness and the safety of the city as well as the relationships formed with the other exchange students, but also the Finns who were seen as friendly and helpful, especially because they were always capable to help since they speak English so well.
Using the climate of Helsinki to brand Helsinki might as the first thought seem adverse because a subarctic weather is normally not seen as a positive asset in marketing a place. The results however show that the majority of the students in this study liked the climate and the snow especially. Even those who did not like the climate so much appreciated the different experience in comparison to their own country. By pointing out the positive aspects of a subarctic climate, the students that perhaps do not come to Helsinki because of the weather might think twice about their choice. What the answers of the exchange students show is that they think that winter and snow are beautiful and also allow one to practice different wintery sports such as skiing and ice skating. What was emphasized in this context is that regardless of the cold climate, nature can be experienced easily in Helsinki because the nature is always close which makes the city pleasant to be in. I thus suggest that Helsinki be branded the wintery beautiful city with nature always at hand.

The exchange students appreciated that the society in Helsinki works well and that they could trust that things work. The students especially mentioned the education system which in the case of these students was based on the experiences at the University of Helsinki. The students appreciated the high quality of education as well as the flexibility of the university. Another aspect that goes under the same category is the public transportation that so many students felt that works extremely well. In many cases the public transportation made the life for the students easy with regards to both moving around for leisure, as commuting to the university. I suggest that these are aspects that should definitely be highlighted when attracting prospective exchange students to the city. These things touch the everyday life of the students, which is why I believe that it will definitely attract exchange students to Helsinki. I thus suggest that Helsinki be branded the city where things work well which is evident especially through the high quality of the education system and the well-functioning public transport.

Finally I suggest that an emphasis should be put on highlighting the positive aspects of the Finns. Many of the students had heard negative stereotypes about the Finns in advance and I can only imagine the number of students who have not come to Helsinki because of these stereotypes. Against all stereotypes, the exchange students really liked the Finns. The city was also considered safe and calm which is definitely also a characteristic of the residents of Helsinki. The students felt safe because they
experienced no threats in the city, which is why they did not need to watch their back. The calmness of the people and the calm pace of their lifestyle was also much appreciated by the exchange students. I thus suggest that Helsinki be branded the calm and safe city, with friendly and helpful people. The other exchange students should however not be forgotten because they posed such an important part of the experience. Important would thus be to emphasize that Helsinki also provides a great opportunity to meet people from all around the world.

When comparing my branding suggestions to the marketing and branding efforts made by the City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki there are clear similarities, but also some differences. The youthfulness that was evident from the marketing videos of both the city and the university is something that the exchange students did not highlight especially and therefore was not included in my branding suggestions. What the students rather mentioned was the calmness of the city which is something not often connected to a vibrant youthful life. It actually seems as though the students prefer the calmness of Helsinki, because that is something rare in other capitals around the world. They did however appreciate the friendliness of the Finns, which is something that the marketing videos of the university and the Helsinki tourist and convention bureau also promoted when showing happy people in the videos and using human friendly as an important brand element in the marketing of the city. I think that the exchange students are attracted to the calmness of the city in the same way as other tourists coming to Helsinki and Finland are. I am not suggesting that the youthfulness of Helsinki is not important for the students, because surely it is. I rather want to emphasize that that for many students the calmness and silence is something very attractive, not just the vibrant and youthful life of the city.

The importance of the nature and the greenness of the city that the results of my study demonstrate are in definite accordance with the Helsinki City Tourist and Convention Bureau that uses the brand element a city close to the sea and nature. In their marketing videos the nature is also an important and visible part. The University of Helsinki also promoted the nature aspect of the city with its theme Green zone during the World design capital year 2012. The closeness to the nature in Helsinki thus is something that has already been noted as important when branding Helsinki, and should further also be incorporate when branding the city for exchange students.

The exchange students of this study were very happy with how well the society works
in Helsinki, including the educational system of the university. Promoting the excellent quality of the education is in fact naturally something that the university has done in for example their marketing videos on Youtube. The campaign that the university led during the World Design Year in trying to bring science closer to the everyday life, as well as promoting the city as World student capital demonstrates the efforts already made. Naturally a big part of the exchange period is about the studies. The students did however mention other things, such as that the transport system in Helsinki works well. This is something that neither the Helsinki City Tourist and Convention Bureau or the University of Helsinki have focused much on in their marketing. Tourists do not spend that long in Helsinki which is probably one of the reasons why a working society is not as important to emphasize. For exchange students who spend a longer time in Helsinki it is however definitely crucial. The students naturally also use different kinds of services than the tourist, because they spend their everyday life in Helsinki. This makes it important for the exchange students that everything works well.

Brand elements that Helsinki City Tourist and Convention Bureau promoted, but that I did not find to be especially important amongst the exchange students in this study, was the importance of architecture and design. One student actually mentioned that she did appreciate the design and high quality products in Helsinki but that they were too expensive to her budget. I think that that might in fact be the reason why the exchange students did not find design especially important. Some of the students mentioned that they were on a tight budget during their exchange period because of the high prices in Finland. Design of course is not just about design products, but can also be seen in how well things work, thus a working infrastructure. In this sense the design aspect was considered important amongst the students too. The everyday design of the city worked well in the eyes of the students, and made the city functional for them.
7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of my study was to provide an overview of how the sense of place of the transnationally mobile group of exchange students is constructed and what kind of sense of place they do form. I wanted to emphasize what specifically in Helsinki affected the formation of this sense of place. This interest was based on the fact that an aim of this study was to suggest how the results could be useful in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city. My research method was a semi-structured interview that I performed on twenty-five exchange students at the University of Helsinki. These students spend different periods of time in Helsinki during the academic year 2012–2013. I analyzed the results of my interviews in the light of the research questions and the background theories that I used.

In this study I defined the concept of sense of place through the functional and the emotional attachment to place. The exchange students of the University of Helsinki definitely got very emotionally attached with the city. This was demonstrated by the fact that they settled in Helsinki well and the majority also said that they felt at home in the city. They also had mostly positive things to say about the tangible and intangible aspects of the city which implies that the students felt also functionally attached to the city.

I did however find that the exchange students did not feel like locals of Helsinki. Following my findings and the ideas of Stewart and Williams (1998) I suggest that the definition of sense of place should not be restricted to be considered something that only a permanent resident of a place can acquire. The results of my study argue for the fact that feeling strongly attached or feeling at home in a place does not require for one to be a permanent resident of a place, nor that one feels like a local. In a world where people are increasingly mobile, this means that strong relationships with place will be formed in an increasing number of places even if these places are just temporary stops in these people’s mobile lives. It has already earlier been recognized that migrants form strong bonds with both their original homes and their new homes (see Ghosh & Wang 2003; Bash et al. 2006). This study however focused on another type of mobile group of people, the exchange students that Conradson and Latham (2005) defined as middling groups of transnationalism. This middling refers to the fact that the exchange students are somewhere in between migrants and tourists. I discovered that placing the exchange
student underneath the concept of educational tourism highlighted their dual nature of being. These students are not permanent residents of the place they visit, but they however immerse themselves in the everyday life of the place very strongly. I thus suggest that the concept of sense of place can be discussed in the context of not just migrants, but tourists too because my study shows that the exchange students and educational tourists that I interviewed formed a strong sense of place in Helsinki.

The fact that the exchange students formed such a strong sense of place in Helsinki, leads me to conclude that acquiring a multiple sense of place is definitely possible. Helsinki was a home away from home for the students, and a place that they had settled in well and felt attached to. The interviews also revealed that the students were a highly mobile group of people and the experience in Helsinki for most of these students was a part of their mobile lifestyle. These findings support the ideas of Duncan (2012) who believe that people who move a lot between different places are able to form multiple sense of place. According to Vertovec (1999), a person that has a sense of multi-locality might easily refuse to be fixed to one place. This was precisely the case of the exchange students of this study because they seemed to have been very mobile already before the exchange in Helsinki. They were neither very keen on settling down in one place but rather moving around in the future too. Therefore I think that these students have in the past and will continue in the future, to form more strong relationships with the places they have visited or will visit.

I believe that when a person has acquired a sense of place so strong as to be able to call a place home, as was the case of the exchange students in this study; it is a relationship that one does easily leave behind. This is a thought that represents the basic idea of the new transnational research. Vertovec (2001) argues that the new transnational perspective strongly focuses on how people can feel a belonging to many places at the same time, whereas previous research often assumed that when the new home feels like home, the old home is not home anymore. The students of my study did talk about their original home and their home in Helsinki, which goes to show that they felt at home in both places at the same time.

When getting to know Helsinki, and thus starting the process of forming a sense of place in the city, what the students mainly did was walk around sensing the city and usually they did so in the company of other people. Mostly these people were other exchange students but a part of the exchange students had Finnish friends too. In fact it
was a more than few who consciously looked to be in the company of Finns in order to get to know the “real” Finnish culture. Both the physical environment of the city as well as the social relations in it thus contributed to start the formation of a sense of place for the students. Helsinki provided a place where to form new social relationships, when at the same time the relationships shaped the opinions of the city towards a collective view of the city. The students’ individual experiences thus affected the others students’ views upon the city.

One of the aims of my study was also to be able to suggest how the results of my research questions could be of use in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city. One of the most important finding was that the exchange students appreciate the calmness and silence of Helsinki, which is something that I think should definitely be taken into consideration when branding Helsinki to students around the world. The youthful and active lifestyle is definitely something that the exchange students want too, but on the other hand they also seem to appreciate the fact that Helsinki is not like every vibrant capital city in the world, but rather unique in that calmness can be found too. The other branding suggestions that I proposed were the climate and the closeness of the nature, as well as the working society. These suggestions correspond with what Helsinki City Tourist and Convention Bureau as well the University of Helsinki have already done in their marketing. My findings support their importance to the Helsinki brand. Something that could be highlighted even more to students is the working society, because they as temporary residents appreciate it more than for example tourists who stay in the city for only a week do.

7.1 Further research on the topic
I think that my study provides an excellent opportunity for others interested in similar topics to develop the ideas I presented, and also focus more in depth on certain areas of my study. The research group of this study had not been widely studied before in the context of sense of place. This study provided an excellent opening to the studying how tourists, who are not temporary residents of a place, form a sense of place. There definitely is a need to examine more the true time limits within which it is still possible to form such a strong sense of place as the exchange students of this study did. To be noted is that some of the students said after only a few months in Helsinki that they felt at home. This suggests that the students formed a sense of place very quickly. This offers a good opportunity to ask, how fast is it possible to acquire a strong sense of
place and in what conditions is it possible? Can a tourist that spends two weeks in a destination in that time already form a sense of place?

In addition to studying the temporal aspects affecting the sense of place of the exchange students, I think that the experiential level of the students would be interesting to examine too. One of the things that possibly had an effect on the exchange students in this study is the level of experience of Helsinki they had before they came to the city for their exchange. I did ask the students whether they had been to Helsinki before, but most of the students had not. I did not discover any significant differences in my study between those who had been in Helsinki before and those that did not. The only noticeable difference was that those who had been in the city before did not visit tourist sites when getting to know the city. On the other hand, it is possible that the students who had not been to Helsinki before knew a lot about the city through reading about the place or by the effects of marketing. In this study I did however not investigate how much they knew about Helsinki before coming and where they had found the information from. I feel like it would have been interesting to examine what kind of mental images the exchange students had about Helsinki before coming and how that possibly affected the sense of place they formed. Therefore I suggest this to be studied in further studies concerning the topic.

I do acknowledge the inadequacy of my study in providing a more generalized framework that could be used to study transnational groups of people and how their lifestyle affects the formation of sense of place. A reason why my research is limited in this sense was the fact that one of my aims was to provide knowledge on what specifically in Helsinki affects the formation of the sense of place of the exchange students in question. This knowledge was particularly interesting and important in the case of my study because I wanted to be able to suggest how the results of my study could be of help in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city. I would therefore gladly welcome further research on this topic in a more generalized context with less focus on a specific location, but rather on the overall structure of the formation of a sense of place amongst exchange students. This could for example be done through interviewing Finnish students who have been on an exchange. This way it would be possible to find out how they went about forming a sense of place if they did form one, and what kind of sense of place that is, regardless of where they had been.

In my study I used triangulation of theories rather than triangulation of methods. I
believe that the validity of this study could have been further enhanced by also using a
supporting method to the interviews. My actual intention was to use a visual research
method in combination with the interviews, but I could not in the ends fulfill the plan
because of time and organizational issues. I believe that for example analyzing
photographs that exchange students have taken during their exchange could definitely
shed further light on the sense of place of the students and perhaps even show
something that the interviews did not tell. I feel like visual research is very interesting
and can bring something very new and different to many things, especially on how
people perceive places, since the experience is very visual. The visuality of things is
also very important in the geographical field which is evident in the strong tradition on
studying landscapes. I therefore call for further research on sense of place that would
make use of visual research methods and that could this way perhaps bring new
dimensions to the study of sense of place.

Something that could be further studied is whether the very positive attitude towards
Helsinki amongst the exchange students that I discovered in my study is actually true. I
think that this could be examined better if the research subjects would be approached in
a more objective way than personal interviews, such as questionnaires. This way the
students would not have to hide their negative feelings or feel rude or ashamed in case
they expressed something negative.

7.2 Final words
I started this research with an ambition to study a fairly new research topic on a
completely new target population. Studies concerning the connections of transnational
mobility and sense of place have been emerging in the recent migration literature, but it
is still a very fresh topic. When it comes to tourists and such “half-tourists” as exchange
students it was Tara Duncan (2012) who expressed the need to study this topic in the
context of this specific target population. I consider my study successful because I
succeeded in shedding light on how the exchange students at the University of Helsinki
formed their sense of place and what kind of sense of place that is. I also feel like my
study has succeeded in questioning the concept of sense of place and who can form one
and where. My study has shown that educational tourists can indeed form a strong sense
of place which is something new in the tourism field where discussions concerning
home and sense of place has not been regarded, because traveling has been considered
something exotic and outside of the everyday life.
The research questions of this study were: 1) What kind of sense of place do the exchange students form during their time in Helsinki? 2) How do the exchange students go about making sense of Helsinki as a place? 3) Are there some specific aspects of Helsinki that affect the exchange students' attachment to the city and thus the formation of a sense of place? I additionally aimed at proposing how the results of my research questions could be of help in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city. The exchange students did definitely form a strong sense of place in Helsinki which led me to believe that the exchange students had acquired a multiple sense of place. The students formed their sense of place collectively by exploring the physical city. The individual level was however important too, because the individual experiences affected the collective idea of Helsinki as a place. The specific and most important aspects of Helsinki that caught the students' opinion were the climate and the closeness of nature, the Finns and the other exchange students, the functioning society and the calmness of the city. These aspects are those that I suggested as the main branding elements that could be of help when branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city.

The results of my study are strongly connected to Helsinki and I can therefore not claim that my findings can be applied to exchange students globally. Despite this I firmly believe that my results can provide a very welcome introduction to what the study of transnational mobility in connection with the concept of sense of place is and that it can serve as a good example for succeeding studies within the topic. One thing that I desired to accomplish with this study was in fact that; to introduce this new angle to a very traditionally geographical topic such as the sense of place. I also wanted to be able to perhaps inspire someone else to follow a similar path.

I think that even if the strong focus on Helsinki makes this study somewhat limited, it is on the other hand also another reason that makes this study successful. I believe so because this way I made helpful use of the results of my study by suggesting how it can be of use in branding Helsinki an internationally attractive student city. By doing so I managed to further justify the importance of my topic as an important research topic. I am not suggesting that the topic is not important in itself, but I do consider it relevant to acknowledge how such a theoretical topic can be of practical use as well.

Everyone on this planet, lives or has lived somewhere, spends or has spent their time somewhere, is born somewhere and has visited some place. Thus everyone also has some sort of relationship to some place. In a world where people are moving more and
more, people come in contact with more and more places during their lives. This study has contributed to studying one of these new places. What this study shows is that the argument of Suvantola (2002) who believes that all the places we have lived in leave a mark on us, no matter if we have lived there a short or a long time seems to hold its case. A mobile world and the contact with many places do therefore not diminish the impact that places have on us but rather increases the number of places that have left a mark on us.
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Appendix 1. The interview questions that were presented in varying form to the interviewed exchange students.

1. Had you been to Helsinki before your exchange? If yes, what was the purpose?
2. Why did you choose Helsinki as your exchange destination?
3. How did you try to get to know Helsinki, make it more familiar for yourself?
4. Have you visited any tourist sites within the city? If yes, which ones?
5. When, if it did, did Helsinki start feeling familiar to you? If it does not, why?
6. How do you feel like you have settled in in Helsinki?
7. Could you call Helsinki a “home”? Why/why not?
8. What does “home” mean to you?
9. Do you feel like a local of Helsinki?
10. Do you think you will miss the city when you are back home?
11. Do you feel like the exchange students have their own community? If yes, how do you see yourself in relation to that community?
12. What characteristic(s) of Helsinki has affected your opinions and feelings about the city?
13. Do you think that your exchange period will affect your future mobility somehow concerning both general life and work?
14. Can you see yourself returning or staying in Helsinki? For what purpose?
15. Would you recommend Helsinki as an exchange destination for someone else?
16. Which services at the University were most helpful for you before and during the exchange period?
17. What would you have liked to have more information of or more help with before or during the exchange?