



## Development of intercultural competence in exchange students during a COVID schoolyear

*A research into the process that exchange students in the Netherlands go through towards developing intercultural competence and the role online education plays in this process.*

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## Abstract

This study aims to identify the process exchange students go through towards the development of intercultural competence during a schoolyear influenced by COVID-19. Seven interviews were carried out with non-Dutch exchange students who have been studying in the Netherlands since August 2020 at the earliest. During these interviews previously described variables impacting the development of intercultural competence were discussed and evaluated, with some variables being rejected and some accepted based on this specific cultural context and timeframe. Additionally, new variables were identified. Eventually, four parts of developing intercultural competence were identified: *attitude*, *immersion*, *reflection* and *adaptation*. Attitude is an example of a new variable that arose from the data. Immersion has been previously discussed in academic research but is divided into two new parts in this thesis. Reflection has been previously discussed but is attributed a much larger role in this thesis than in previous articles and the same goes for adaptation. Online teaching turned out to be a mostly negative influence on the development of intercultural competence as it reduced the amount of interaction the exchange students experienced.

# 1. Introduction

Over recent years, globalization processes have decreased the relative distances between various people and cultures around the world (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). There are many different reasons behind this process. One example is the development and spread of information technologies like the internet and social media which made almost instant communications across the globe possible. Additionally, the efficiency of commuting around the world has increased; breaking down physical and cultural boundaries. This is also apparent in the growing number of exchange students around the world, according to the Migration Data Portal (2020) there were 5,3 million active exchange students in 2017 against 2 million in 2000. Thus, the amount of intercultural encounters happening on a daily basis is growing.

Logically, problems may arise during intercultural encounters. For example, politeness strategies differ all around the world and someone could be unintentionally offending someone from a different culture because of these differences. So, a certain set of intercultural knowledge and skills is needed to avoid problems during intercultural encounters and make people surrounded by a foreign culture able to handle day-to-day situations.

This set of intercultural knowledge and skills is what Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) define as *intercultural competence* (ICC). Their definition of the concept, which has been generally accepted, in academia describes intercultural competence as “*the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts*” (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020, pp. 347). In this article, the most dominant variables impacting the development of intercultural competence are listed. Most of these variables are the product of *cultural immersion*. Cultural immersion is when the exchange student is able to fully dive into the host culture and surround him/herself with it (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). Cultural immersion will be further explained in the theoretical framework.

## 1.1 Problem statement and research question

Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) identify studying abroad as the most dominant and most important variable impacting the development of intercultural competence. Studying abroad is especially efficient for developing intercultural competence when the exchange student actively engages in *cultural immersion* (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). This finding is also supported by the article of Hubbard and Rexeisen (2020).

The problem in the current state of knowledge in the research field of *intercultural competence* resided in the fact that most studies were carried out pre-COVID-19. As the pandemic changed intercultural encounters, and especially one of the main variables impacting intercultural competence (studying abroad), the state of the academic field is not current. What is meant with changes by COVID-19 regarding intercultural encounters for exchange students is, for example, the fact that students took courses online instead of the traditional way of education and almost all places where people came to socialize were closed or regulated in a way that intensive contact with people from the host culture was made nearly impossible. In other words, the existing literature in the academic world only focuses on a way of approaching an exchange that was made impossible during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no knowledge of how and if exchange students are able to immerse themselves in the host culture and there is no knowledge of how and if exchange students even developed intercultural competence during their stay abroad during a COVID schoolyear.

This study aims to understand how exchange students in the Netherlands developed intercultural competence, despite suffering the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of online teaching in this process will be discussed in-depth and this study aims to fill gaps in the knowledge about processes regarding the development of intercultural competence for exchange students during a COVID-schoolyear. The variables mentioned in the existing literature will be evaluated on their relevance by exchange students in this new context and new variables will be added to the existing framework described by Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) and others. This study will be performed using the following research question:

*"How did foreign exchange students and internationals in the Netherlands develop intercultural competence during a schoolyear affected by COVID-19?"*

## **1.2 Relevance**

This research builds on previous research putting the previously described concept of *intercultural competence* and affiliated concepts like *cultural adaptation*, *cultural immersion*, and *acculturation* in a different cultural context and a different timeframe. The different cultural context is the Dutch culture and the different timeframe is the era of COVID-19.

Putting the known knowledge in different contexts will broaden the current academic knowledge on the subjects on hand, and especially the COVID-19 context can be seen as a valuable addition to the current academic landscape. In all ways of speaking, COVID-19

changed the world. Social life changed in the sense that venues and other locations where people came to socialize either closed completely or were strictly regulated, and education went into the transition from traditional education to online education. The concept of *intercultural competence* and the affiliated concepts were predominantly, if not entirely, based on the notion that exchange students were able to fully participate in social activities and engaged in traditional education. These concepts need to be revisited and retested considering the COVID-19 era with online education and scarce opportunities to engage in social activities, which makes the research proposed in this article academically valuable.

The fact that online education is still very much present in modern-day society – and may never leave, it is important to understand its consequences on the development of intercultural competence of exchange students. Are there different concepts or variables that influence the development of intercultural competence since COVID-19? Are there previously described concepts that may not be applicable anymore during the COVID-19 era? Questions like this are implied in this research and can form a useful contribution to the current state of academic knowledge on the subject.

As will be shown in the subsequent literature review, there are many academic papers available on the concept of *intercultural communication* and its affiliated concepts. The field of research has been broadly defined, but as the findings of Kang et al. (2019) show it is relevant to keep testing and evaluating the previously described concepts in different times and different contexts. This is exactly what this research paper functions to do.

Previous articles about intercultural competence are written in specific cultural contexts, for example, the article by Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) focuses on exchange students in the United States and Ramirez (2019) based his research on Colombian studies. This counts the same for the articles that researched *cultural adaptation*, Ng, Wang, and Chan (2019) focused on Chinese students and so did Kang et al. (2019). These articles will be further discussed in the theoretical framework. This study will add a rarely researched culture to the variety of cultures looked at in previous research: the Dutch culture.

Moreover, the articles mentioned in the literature review are either written pre-COVID-19 or did not focus on education during COVID-19 but rather on traditional education. As COVID-19 changed everything in society, it is important that there is an understanding of how exchange students functioned and culturally developed themselves during this period where education was not given traditionally but online.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this part of the thesis, the previously described variables of developing intercultural competence will be discussed. Intercultural competence will be discussed by dividing it into three relevant parts: on-site interventions, immersion, and adaptation. Additionally, a description of the current academic field of online education will be given here. In this section, the sub-questions will be formulated and substantiated.

### 2.1 Intercultural Competence

The central concept of this thesis is *intercultural competence*. A brief description of the term has already been given in the introduction of this thesis but this part gives a deeper insight into the concept and what it exactly entails. As multiple scholars tried to define not only the concept of intercultural competence itself, but also which variables are relevant for developing intercultural competence in different contexts, it is important that a clear overview is given of the concept before discussing the methods of how this research will be conducted.

In this thesis, the aforementioned article written by Bagwe and Haskollar in 2020 functions as the basis of the discussion of the concept of intercultural competence. This article has been chosen since it coherently lists all the relevant variables when it comes to developing intercultural competence and is relatively recently written. Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) performed a literature review on articles that describe different variables impacting the development of intercultural competence. Using a constructivist paradigm in their literature review, Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) analyzed the usability of each article carefully before making a selection of 48 articles that were able to be used in their study. The selection of the usable articles was based on whether or not the assessed article used the Intercultural Development Inventory properly (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). This is a 50-point assessment tool that measures the perceptiveness of intercultural differences of a person (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). If the article used this tool properly on the participants of the experiment it performed, and by doing this discovered one or multiple relevant variables for developing intercultural competence, the article was selected. Eventually, Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) came up with a selection of 48 articles in which 11 variables of intercultural competence were discussed.

The 11 variables impacting intercultural competence included the following:

*“intercultural training programs, previous intercultural experience, studying abroad which*

*has two sub-variables: on-site interventions and cultural immersion, language training, duration of intercultural experience, gender, age, education level, linguistic capability, geography, religious/denominational affiliation, and race/ethnicity*” (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020, pp. 347). Of these 11 variables, 3 variables were discussed in most articles, which were *studying abroad, gender, and previous intercultural experiences*. As this thesis is not a gender study and *previous intercultural experiences* seem like a very logical way of developing intercultural competence along with the fact that the research group in this thesis consists of exchange students, here the main focus will be on the *study abroad* variable. Using most of these variables in the interviews performed in this study while leaving space for new variables to arise, the first sub-question which consists of two parts is formulated:

*SQ1: Which previously described aspects of the development of intercultural competence are less prevalent and important during COVID schoolyears and which new aspects are more prevalent and important?*

Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) claim that studying abroad can be one of the most influential variables on developing intercultural competence. However, Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) argue that an exchange semester needs to be combined with *on-site interventions* and *cultural immersion* to reach the maximum potential of the development of intercultural competence. The on-site interventions can be seen as taking little breaks, or just taking time in general, to reflect on the exchange so far and to take a moment to comprehend what has been successful and what has been less successful thus far in the intercultural interaction or exchange. Cultural immersion happens when the exchange student is fully surrounded by the host culture and is able to interact extensively with locals (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020).

### **2.1.1 On-site interventions**

The first important part of making studying abroad positively influence your intercultural competence is having on-site interventions (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). On-site interventions are defined as “*on-site trainings implemented as a part of a study abroad program as an effective way to gain intercultural competence.*” (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020, pp. 353). In other words, going on an exchange is not enough, exchange students need to be able to think about and learn from their experiences to succeed in developing intercultural competence. This argument is underlined by the fact that, according to the authors, there have been experiments performed in which a group of exchange students actively engages in reflection in control groups during their exchange and other students do not. The exchange students who



actively reflected in the control groups eventually showed higher levels of intercultural competence than the group who did not actively reflect (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020).

Consequently, on-site interventions can be seen as moments to reflect on the experience so far, a statement which is supported by Hagar (2018). Using a constructivist paradigm, this article analyzed the role that reflection has in developing intercultural competence. This article used the findings of reflective journals to use as the basis of the interviews that were later performed with the participants of the research (Hagar, 2018). The group of participants consisted of mainly Saudi exchange students following courses over a longer period in the United States (Hagar, 2018). An interview was performed before the exchange and after the exchange and lead to the finding that students who, during the exchange, reflected on the exchange regularly were more inclined to show signs of intercultural competence than ones who did not (Hagar, 2018). The students reflected on *critical incidents*, which refers to “experiences specifically identified by the participants that “made a difference” in their understanding and development of cultural and intercultural situations” (Hagar, 2018, pp. 94). So in other words, the participants who reflected on situations where the cultural framework of their own did not match with the cultural framework that was necessary in the situations eventually showed more signs of being interculturally competent. This finding is closely linked to the idea of on-site interventions proposed by Bagwe & Haskollar (2020).

The necessity of *on-site interventions*, or in other words reflection, described by Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) and Hagar (2018) leads to the formulation of the second sub-question.

*SQ2: What role does reflection play in the development of intercultural competence for exchange students during a COVID schoolyear?*

As the interview itself can function as an *on-site intervention* or reflexive moment for the participating exchange students, a third sub-question is added:

*SQ3: To which extent do the exchange students feel interculturally competent in the Dutch culture?*

### **2.1.2 Cultural immersion**

The second important part of making studying abroad positively influence your intercultural competence is actively engaging in *cultural immersion* (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). Cultural

immersion can take on many forms, for example in the form of homestays and cultural learning (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). Homestays are when a person of another culture stays in the home of a person native to the host culture for a period of time, and cultural learning entails actively learning about a culture through courses or hands-on experiences. Either way, the principle of immersing yourself in the host culture entails actively engaging with the host culture by interacting actively with locals and putting yourself in situations where the host culture is dominantly present. For example, visiting the homes of locals (homestays) gave the students a prolonged exposure to the host culture, created the opportunity for asking questions, and for gaining an understanding of cultural values, which act as proper ways of building up intercultural competence (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020).

This idea of immersing oneself in the host culture as being a dominant factor in developing intercultural competence when on an exchange is fully supported by the article written by Ramirez (2019). His research was performed with a sample population of 158 Colombian students who went on an exchange in different countries, predominantly Germany, the United States, France, and Spain (Ramirez, 2019). Using a positivist research paradigm consisting of two questionnaires, one before and one after the exchange, Ramirez (2019) suggests, just like Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020), that mere exposure to a new culture does not necessarily lead to developing intercultural competence but that the student must actively engage with the locals and the host culture. According to Ramirez (2019), in order to develop intercultural competence from an exchange period, students need to actively expose themselves to the host culture and the locals. Ramirez (2019) expands on the idea of cultural immersion being a dominant factor in developing intercultural competence by explaining what happens to students who do immersive themselves in, and expose themselves to, the host culture. He describes the concept of *acculturation*, which is the process that exchange students experience when they immerse and expose themselves to the host culture which leads to cultural and psychological change (Ramirez, 2019, pp. 59). These cultural and psychological changes are what is being measured during quantitative research on intercultural competence, just like the research done by Ramirez (2019).

In the article of Berger et al. (2019) the concept of acculturation is further explained and used. In a research done within the positivist paradigm, they used questionnaires on 223 Erasmus exchange students to analyze the acculturation process of the exchange students (Berger et al., 2019). They defined acculturation as the following: *“those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups”* (pp. 739).

The "subsequent changes" mentioned here can be seen as the psychological and cultural changes described by Ramirez (2019). In this article, a high degree of acculturation, so many psychological and cultural changes, resulted in *assimilation* into the host culture which refers to having a connection and emotional link to the host culture and consequently leaving behind some parts of your original cultural frameworks to being absorbed, as it were, by the host culture (Berger et al., 2019).

A similar quantitative research on cultural immersion and acculturation to the one by Ramirez (2019) and Berger et al. (2019) was performed in the article by Hubbard & Rexeisen (2020). Using a positivist paradigm, the authors performed an experiment using surveys with people who have been on exchanges in previous years to test how they culturally immersed themselves and how that affected their exchange period (Hubbard & Rexeisen, 2020). The results showed that students immersed themselves in the host culture through various ways, like entering a student club or doing volunteer work, which impacted the "*host culture knowledge acquisition*" in a major way (Hubbard & Rexeisen, 2020, pp. 351). So just like Ramirez (2019) and Bagwe & Haskollar (2020), this article states that to become knowledgeable and experienced with a host culture, students need to immerse themselves in the host culture, which then leads to students becoming interculturally competent.

Although these findings seem to be conclusive there needs to be a nuance placed on both the presented findings of Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) and Ramirez (2019). Both of these articles suggest that immersing yourself in the host culture during the exchange improves the development of intercultural competence, but both also state that going on an exchange without actively exposing yourself to the host culture also improves the development of intercultural competence (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020; Ramirez (2019). In the article of Ramirez (2019) statistical analysis is performed to test all of the hypotheses of the questionnaire. H1 is the prediction that exchange students will increase their intercultural competence, H2 is the exchange students with more intercultural contacts will increase in intercultural competence more, and H3 is the difference in change of intercultural competence of engaging students would be higher than with the non-engaging students (Ramirez, 2019). All of the hypotheses were confirmed which means, in this case, going on an exchange will, either way, improve your intercultural competence, but immersing and exposing yourself to the host culture will improve it more (Ramirez, 2019).

### **2.1.3 Cross-cultural adaptation**

The previously described process of *acculturation* can lead to cross-cultural adaptation (Ng,

Wang & Chan, 2017). Kim (2001) functions as a classic text when it comes to cross-cultural adaptation and defines cross-cultural adaptation as "*the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to a new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environment, establish or re-establish and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments*" (pp. 31). In other words, cross-cultural adaptation happens to an exchange student when he or she gets integrated into the host culture. According to Ng, Wang & Chan (2017), cultural adaptation consists of two dimensions: *sociocultural adaptation*, which refers to having the competency for handling daily social problems in a culturally accepted way, and *psychological adaptation* which refers to being able to achieve emotional satisfaction and well-being in a new culture (Ng, Wang & Chan, 2017).

According to Kim (2001), cross-cultural adaptation is not merely a process of adding new cultural elements to one's identity, but old cultural values and elements are abandoned and replaced by cultural elements of the host culture. This shows when a person in a certain situation reacts differently and based on the cultural elements of the host culture, whereas the previous, abandoned, cultural elements would have provoked a different reaction (Kim, 2001).

Kim (2001) describes the process of cross-cultural adaptation using two models: *the stress-growth-adaptation model*, and *the structure model*. Stress-adaptation-growth refers to the stress that a person in a new cultural environment experiences (like the *critical incidents* described by Hagar (2018)), after which a person reflects on the situation and grows to know how to handle the situation in the future which makes them adapt to the host culture (Kim, 2001). Important for this model to function properly is to actively engage with the host culture, a finding also supported by Ng, Wang & Chan (2017). In their article, using a positivist paradigm, they state that engaging and interacting profusely with locals is a major factor in *cultural adaptation* (Ng, Wang & Chan, 2017). So just like the previously discussed theories about *cultural immersion* and *acculturation* engaging and interacting actively with locals and the host culture, in general, is a major deciding factor in the success of cross-cultural adaptation.

Kim (2001) describes the different components of cross-cultural adaptation with the *structure model*. This model consists of six "dimensions" or determining factors, which are: *communication competence, host social communication, ethnic social communication, intercultural transformation, environment, and predisposition* (Kim, 2001). According to Kim (2001), these are the most dominant factors in the success of adapting to the host culture. Communication competence refers to the "newcomers'" ability to communicate (Kim, 2001).

Host social communication refers to having the possibility to socially interact with locals and interact with the host culture, a claim supported by the findings of Ng, Wang & Chan (2017). Ethnic social communication refers to having the possibility to connect with people from your own ethnicity/culture within the host culture (Kim, 2001). Intercultural transformation refers to being able to transform your original cultural background into a mix of cultural values of your original culture mixed with values of the host culture (Kim, 2001). Environment refers to the social environment a culturally adapting person finds him or herself in and to which extent this environment allows a person to adapt to the host culture (Kim, 2001). Predisposition refers to the internal state of affairs of a person that may positively or negatively influence their cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001).

Although Kim (2001) functions as a foundation article for the concept of cultural adaptation, it is a relatively old article and that means the findings of the article need to be tested in different timeframes and different contexts. This is exactly what Kang et al. (2019) do in their article. Using a positivist paradigm in their experiment with questionnaires on Chinese exchange students they tested whether or not all of the six determining factors of cross-cultural adaptation are still relevant in modern times and different contexts. Kang et al. (2019) found that of the six dimensions only five are relevant in their researched context. All of the factors except for *ethnic social communication* showed significant positive relations with the cross-cultural adaptation process experienced by the students (Kang et al., 2019). It showed that communicating with their own ethnicity/cultural background made them happier, but hindered the process of adapting to the new culture (Kang et al., 2019). What this shows is that it is extremely useful and relevant to keep testing and using theories in different contexts and timeframes, in line with the aims of this thesis.

## **2.2 Online education**

As the research question states, this thesis focuses on the development of intercultural competence during a schoolyear that is affected by COVID-19. Probably, for most students, the most notable influence that COVID-19 has had is the switch from traditional education to online education. Marachi & Quill (2020) define this change as “the transition from the culture of the book to the culture of the screen”(pp. 429). In other words, students have been learning how to deal with a whole new type of education since COVID-19 has affected education.

However, the process of making education more and more online is not limited to when COVID-19 kicked in. In 2019 – the study was carried out before COVID-19 – Poell,

Nieborg & Van Dijck already described a similar process which they called “*platformisation of education*” (pp.1). In this article, they showed the growing importance of online platforms and underlying data structures for modern education. Additionally, Jarke & Breiter (2019) also described a very similar process, which they referred to as the *datafication of education*.

The aforementioned development of the growing importance of online tools for education has as a consequence that companies like Microsoft gain more and more influence on how education is structured through the designs of their programs (Poell, Van Dijck & De Waal, 2016). Most generally, the vision of big companies on how education should be structured differs from the vision of universities and schools so this leads to what Van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & De Waal, M. (2018).call *a clash of values* in the revised version of their book.

This *clash of values* is most noticeable for the students who are experiencing it firsthand, as they need to get used to a whole different type of education. The contradiction in this is that, according to Van Dijck et al. (2018), students are the group receiving less attention when it comes to their evaluation and experiences with the whole process. Because this thesis is predominantly about intercultural competence, these two aspects are combined in the fourth and last sub-question:

*SQ4: How did online education affect the development of intercultural competence?*

### **3. Methods**

In this section, the operationalization of the research will be discussed. Firstly, the interviews and interview techniques will be discussed and after that, the creation and description of the interview group will be discussed. Consequently, an in-depth description of the data processing will be given.

#### **3.1 Semi-structured interviews**

To understand how exchange students and internationals develop intercultural competence during COVID schoolyears, and how they perceive the role of online education in this process, ethnographic research has been performed. For this research semi-structured interviews were carried out based on the book of Holstein & Gubrium (1995). A semi-structured interview is a form of interview where a combination of pre-thought questions and improvisation is used. By using this technique the interview generally is more fluent, dynamic, and feels more like a conversation to the participants which is important because it makes them feel at ease and more open to describing personal experiences (Brinkmann,

2013).

The only form of structure that was used in the interviews was a division of different parts of the interviews based on the three-part segment division described by Galetta (2012). The first part of the interview consists of broad questions that were used to get the reflection of the participants going. In this part, the participants were asked to evaluate their stay thoroughly, and describe characteristics of Dutch culture that they noticed. The middle part of the interview is where the relevant concepts were discussed, this is the longest part of the interview. The concepts are explained to the participants if necessary and the ideas of the interviewees about these concepts are discussed. In the final part, these concepts are linked to the personal experience of the students.

A topic list was created before the interviews were performed. This topic list was used as the backbone of the interviews, as well as the guideline through which the interviews were performed. The topic list was structured in a way that the main concepts of the thesis (eg, *intercultural competence, cultural adaptation, and immersion*) were discussed in a logical order, as to make the interview as clear as possible for the participants. The full topic list can be found in the appendix attached to this thesis.

Seven interviews were performed via Zoom and they were between 26 and 36 minutes long. The participants will be more broadly discussed later on in this method section. The choice to be doing the interviews via zoom was deliberate and well-thought over. This way both the interviewer and the interviewees were comfortable in their own trusted environment and most possible distractions would be eliminated. In the end, this turned out to be true and the participants all came across as relaxed and cooperative.

The questions that were posed during the interviews were non-directive and relatively open. By keeping the interview open and the questions non-directive the interviewer avoids filling in the answers for the interviewees. The interviewer and interviewee would generally discuss a concept and then try to connect that concept to the own experience of the interviewee in their host culture.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants that were interviewed for this thesis were all Non-Dutch exchange students or internationals in the Netherlands who started living here either in August 2020 or August 2021. Therefore, none of the interviewees have experienced the Netherlands without any COVID-19 regulations, which was a requirement during participant selection. All of the interviewees have studied during this period at a Research University in the Netherlands, such

as Utrecht University and Technical University Delft. Additionally, all of the participants have experienced multiple types of education in the Netherlands, varying from online education to traditional education and all the hybrid forms in between.

Some problems arose in this part of the process. As it turned out most exchange students and internationals were hesitant to participate in the interviews, as posts in Facebook groups and WhatsApp were marginally responded to. The limited response, in combination with the fact that two participants canceled their participation last minute, is the reason that the number of interviews is not as high as previously desired. In the end, as previously stated, a total of seven interviews were conducted.

The group of participants was formed by using purposive sampling, as described by Baxter and Babbie (2003). This sampling method involves a process of selecting participants carefully based on some necessary characteristics. These characteristics included: being non-Dutch, studying in the Netherlands at university level, not having experienced the Netherlands without COVID-19 regulations, and being fluent in English as that was the language used in the interviews.

The group of participants was very multicultural, it included two Americans, two Spanish, one Romanian, one German, one Greek, and one Italian. None of them had the experience of living in the Netherlands before other than short trips. They all had various reasons for coming to the Netherlands, for example, some of them came for financial gain and some of them to join a highly ranked university, but also one common reason among them all: getting to know Dutch culture.

### **3.3 Data processing**

After the interviews were performed, the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts included every literal utterance made in the interviews by both the interviewee and interviewer, details like tone and pitch were not included. The transcripts were coded based on the three-step coding method by Strauss and Corbin described in Babchuk (1996). This method, as the name implies, involves three steps of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This procedure was carried out by using coding software NVivo.

In the first step of coding, open coding, every single utterance is given a label in the software. These labels are very close to the text itself and provide a little summary of what the coded utterances entail. Because seven transcripts needed codes, and the interviews were all quite resourceful, eventually the dataset grew to include over 130 open codes.

In the second step of coding, axial coding, little relations between open codes are



identified and related open codes are put together under one category. Using this method most of the 130 open codes were divided into eight categories.

In the third step of coding, selective coding, the categories are divided into themes. These themes function as the direct representation of what is discussed in the interviews. Eventually, two themes were identified and the eight categories were divided between these two themes, six in one theme and two in the other. The themes are the basis on which the research question and sub-questions are answered. The themes, categories, and codes will be deeply discussed in the following section.

## 4. Results

The results section is divided into two parts, as this thesis is meant to provide insights into two different but related processes. The first process and part of the results is the development of intercultural competence of exchange students during COVID schoolyears. Here the process and steps towards the development of intercultural competence will be explained. The second part is meant to discuss the overall role of online teaching on intercultural competence, both as a positive enforcer and as a blockade. These two parts are the themes that arose from the data, as previously described in the methods. The findings presented here will be connected to the existing literature in the subsequent discussion section of this thesis.

### 4.1 Development of Intercultural competence during a COVID schoolyear

The process of developing intercultural competence during COVID schoolyears for exchange students in the Netherlands goes through four factors: it starts with **attitude**, then goes to **immersion** which, through **reflection**, leads to **adaptation** and eventually intercultural competence. This process was more or less the same for all interviewees, however the way they filled in the steps of the process differed. All of the interviewees felt like they were, at the time of the interview, interculturally competent when it comes to Dutch culture. They felt very confident moving through day-to-day situations in Dutch culture and felt like they understood how to communicate properly with Dutch people. This answers the third sub-question because, clearly, the interviewees felt interculturally competent in Dutch culture to a high extent.

#### 4.1.1 Attitude

The first step towards developing intercultural competence that was identified based on the interviews is having a certain attitude going into the exchange. The interviewees mentioned the importance of the fact that they felt like they were open to learning during the exchange. Having an open mindset and an active attitude resulted in that they could adjust to Dutch culture rather quickly.

This also refers to letting go of stereotypes that you know of the country, similar to the idea of predisposition by Kim (2001). If you already have a preconceived image of a certain culture and hang on to that image, then it is very difficult to integrate into a host culture. You must actively want to get to know the host culture and refrain from image-forming in an early stage of the exchange or even before the exchange starts. This is shown perfectly by the following extract from the interviews

*“I think what's important with intercultural competence is the ability to listen and empathize. And just, yeah, go into situations with an open mind and not label people and cultures immediately, just because you have certain experiences.”* – Transcript 2

The exchange students also expressed that they think that an active attitude toward learning the language of your host culture is a very important first step. As the use of language can be very resourceful in identifying cultural traits, having an active attitude in this helped to develop intercultural competence greatly.

#### 4.1.2 Cultural immersion

The second step of the process of developing intercultural competence for the exchange students was being able to fully surround themselves with Dutch culture, and get a hands-on experience. This is what in the theoretical framework was described as *cultural immersion*. For the exchange students this was unanimously the most important part of developing intercultural competence quickly, as they felt like you must experience a culture before you can get competent in it. The two most dominant ways of immersing themselves in Dutch culture were **socially** and **through arts and history**.

Social immersion was identified as the most dominant way of immersing in a culture. This refers to diving down into Dutch culture and getting to know Dutch culture through

social occasions and events. By speaking and surrounding themselves with Dutch people the exchange students felt they got their first actual introduction to Dutch culture. Social immersion would mainly happen through parties, roommates, social media, and work. The role of the university was predominantly negatively mentioned during this part of the process as most participants did not immerse themselves through their education because most of them experienced a lot of online education and additionally followed very international programs which prevented them from interacting a lot with Dutch people.

Social immersion is where most interviewees mentioned their experience with culture shock and critical incidents. By interacting one-on-one with Dutch people or through meetings at work the interviewees got a lot of experience with how Dutch people tend to interact in different contexts. Sometimes certain moments during these interactions would surprise the interviewees, for example, the experience that Dutch people tend to get personal quickly and that Dutch people seemed to be very direct. The former but mainly the latter would result in something that the students would describe as culture shock or a critical incident.

Additionally, social immersion was made harder because of the language barrier. According to the interviewees, Dutch people tend to speak Dutch with each other even when a foreigner is standing close by. This made them sometimes feel excluded and sometimes prevented them from really interacting on a deeper level with Dutch culture. However, social immersion remains the main factor of cultural immersion, as is explained by the following extract:

*"That's like the main time that I learned Dutch things, especially during my year in March, now that I've been surrounded by Dutch people, that's when I really learned a lot. Definitely, most of the things that I learned about being Dutch is from talking to people in social settings."* – Transcript 3

The other, less dominant but still very prevalent, factor of cultural immersion is immersion through arts and history. This factor was discussed by the more, self-proclaimed, introverted interviewees and the interviewees who studied technical programs. Also, this factor was made more dominant because COVID-19 prevented the exchange students oftentimes from immersing themselves socially so instead they resorted to this.

Immersion through arts and history entails everything about Dutch culture that can be seen as Dutch heritage. This could entail visiting museums and experiencing Dutch art or getting familiar with typical Dutch food (e.g. stroopwafels and bitterballen). Additionally, the exchange students tended to immerse themselves in Dutch culture through celebrating and experiencing Dutch traditions, like Kingsday. This way of immersing into Dutch culture is portrayed by the following extract:

*"And I think that's a really good way to learn Dutch culture, try different food experiences, like, like museums that are around which isn't really Dutch culture, but like, also Dutch culture. So I think that's really useful. I would say I'm an introvert. So I don't like doing like Dutch party scene."* – Transcript 6

#### **4.1.3 Reflection**

Reflection as the third step toward intercultural competence comes directly after the predominantly social, cultural immersion and is especially related to the critical incidents that were experienced. While socially immersing themselves in Dutch culture, the students will eventually experience something that surprises them. As previously described, this could have various causes, but for the interviewees this was mainly because of Dutch directness and the Dutch way of interpersonal contact in general.

After the interviewees experienced this directness and Dutch interpersonal contact they tended to reflect deeply on that situation. They would ask themselves why a certain event happened and what their contribution to it was and how it should be approached in the future. By evaluating this and most of the time discussing their experiences with Dutch people or with other exchange students they would develop a deeper understanding of Dutch communication and Dutch culture in general. This answers sub-question two, as reflection apparently plays a major role in developing intercultural competence for exchange students during a COVID schoolyear. Reflection was used as a tool to overcome uncertainties and problematic encounters and prevent them from happening in the future. This is shown by the following extract:

*"I mean, definitely, like reflecting after you have an encounter is important, because it can help you to, like, better understand how to interact with people in the future. Kind of just like learning."* – Transcript 4

#### 4.1.4 Adaptation

Cultural adaptation is the last step that the exchange students took toward being, or declaring themselves, interculturally competent. Cultural adaptation in this context mainly meant two things: either the exchange students started to inherit and implement characteristics of Dutch culture into their own framework, or the exchange students stopped experiencing culture shock or critical incidents because they developed enough knowledge and experience with Dutch culture to not get surprised anymore.

Cultural adaptation where they would implement characteristics of Dutch culture in their own framework consisted, for example, of starting to ride bikes and having dinner at six. Also, practical matters are included here, such as getting used to predominantly using card payments instead of cash and getting familiar with how to arrange a bank account or a public transport subscription. Mostly, this would refer to getting used to, and implementing parts of Dutch characteristics regarding interpersonal contact. The exchange students started to adapt to, for example, Dutch directness and Dutch humor. Therefore they would not experience culture shock and critical incidents anymore as they adapted to a certain Dutch way of interpersonal contact. This is portrayed by the following quote:

*“But this year, because I joined March, and I work only with Dutch people and there's only one other international in my in my team. I can learn how to take the Dutch directness and I, I embrace it now. In actually, I started being direct myself.”* – Transcript 5

The changes in interpersonal contact with Dutch people combined with knowledge of, and experience with, Dutch culture has as a result that the exchange students are able to move through day to day situations and that they, at all times, can avoid problems during intercultural encounters with Dutch people. This would make them interculturally competent, thus the process from the start of an exchange to the development of intercultural competence during a COVID schoolyear has been deconstructed.

#### 4.2 Role of online education

The role online teaching plays when it comes to developing intercultural competence is two-fold. On the one hand, according to the interviewees, online education played a certain

positive role in this process as an enforcer of intercultural competence. But on the other hand, the more dominant and prevalent assessment of online education was as being a blockade of developing intercultural competence. In contrast with the previously described part of the results, this part showed variation instead of a predominant cohesion among interviewees. This section can be seen as the answer to sub-question four as it shows exactly how online education affected the development of intercultural competence. In the following section, the two opposing roles of online education will be discussed.

#### **4.2.1 Online education as a blockade of developing ICC**

The most dominant role of online education during the development of intercultural competence that was identified after the interviews was as a blockade. Most interviewees considered online education as disruptive and felt like their cultural immersion stopped when education was only given online. The main reason for this was the lack of social interaction that the exchange students experienced during this period of education.

The interviewees experienced online education as superficial. They could oftentimes only connect with their peers on a basic level or when group work needed to be done. The absence of interpersonal contact with people from the host culture made the exchange students feel like their cultural immersion temporarily stopped during online education. In this case, they would only be able to immerse themselves through immersion through arts and history. The halt of social immersion and interaction is described in the following extract:

*“Yeah, so that aspect of it was quite difficult, if anything, purely because when you lack in-person lectures, you do not have those small moments in between where you sit next to a random person and say, “hey how is it going?” you know?”* – Transcript 1

Additionally, the exchange student expressed that online education enforced the language barrier that was between them and becoming interculturally competent by learning the language. As earlier discussed, according to the exchange students learning the language is a very important first step toward becoming interculturally competent. Exchange students felt like online education stopped them from learning the language quickly, as lectures were given in English and they could not pick up on little Dutch words and phrases during social

immersion anymore. This lack of language learning was identified as a big negative factor of online teaching for the development of intercultural competence.

#### **4.2.2 Online education as an enforcer of developing ICC**

A relatively small positive role for online teaching in the process of developing intercultural competence was mentioned by some of the interviewees. This positive role was mainly attributed to the fact that the exchange students noticed that the university showed initiative to increase student involvement in Dutch culture, more than they thought the university would have done if traditional education was possible.

A very often mentioned example of this initiative by the university is structurally being partnered up with Dutch students during projects. Multiple students mentioned that their professors deliberately, if possible, partnered foreign students with at least one Dutch student for all projects. Even though these projects were mostly online this greatly enhanced contact with the host culture for the students. This extensive contact with Dutch culture is earlier described as the main starting point in the process of intercultural competence.

Another initiative that was mentioned is the Buddy Go Dutch initiative. This initiative was, similarly to the previous example, designed to make the exchange students familiar with Dutch culture by assigning them a Dutch "buddy" who could show them around and help them with day-to-day situations.

Additionally, according to some interviewees, online education helped with developing intercultural competence because it showed how Dutch people tend to deal with problems. Because online education is still relatively new, not every professor or student has the technical capacity to prevent any form of technical problems that may arise. Experiencing and learning about how Dutch students and professors dealt with such problems was,

according to the interviewees, a very valuable experience in learning about Dutch culture.

This is shown by the following extract:

*“Yeah, I actually think on one side, it's also it also helped me, let's say diving into the Dutch culture, because it helped me understand how do Dutch people deal with problems. So when a technical problem arose, I saw how you dealt with it.” – Transcript 1*

### 4.3 Model of intercultural competence development

A model has been constructed (see figure 1) based on the results found in the interviews. This model is a visual representation of the steps the exchange students took toward becoming interculturally competent in Dutch culture. The model of intercultural competence development can be seen as a summary of the abovementioned results.

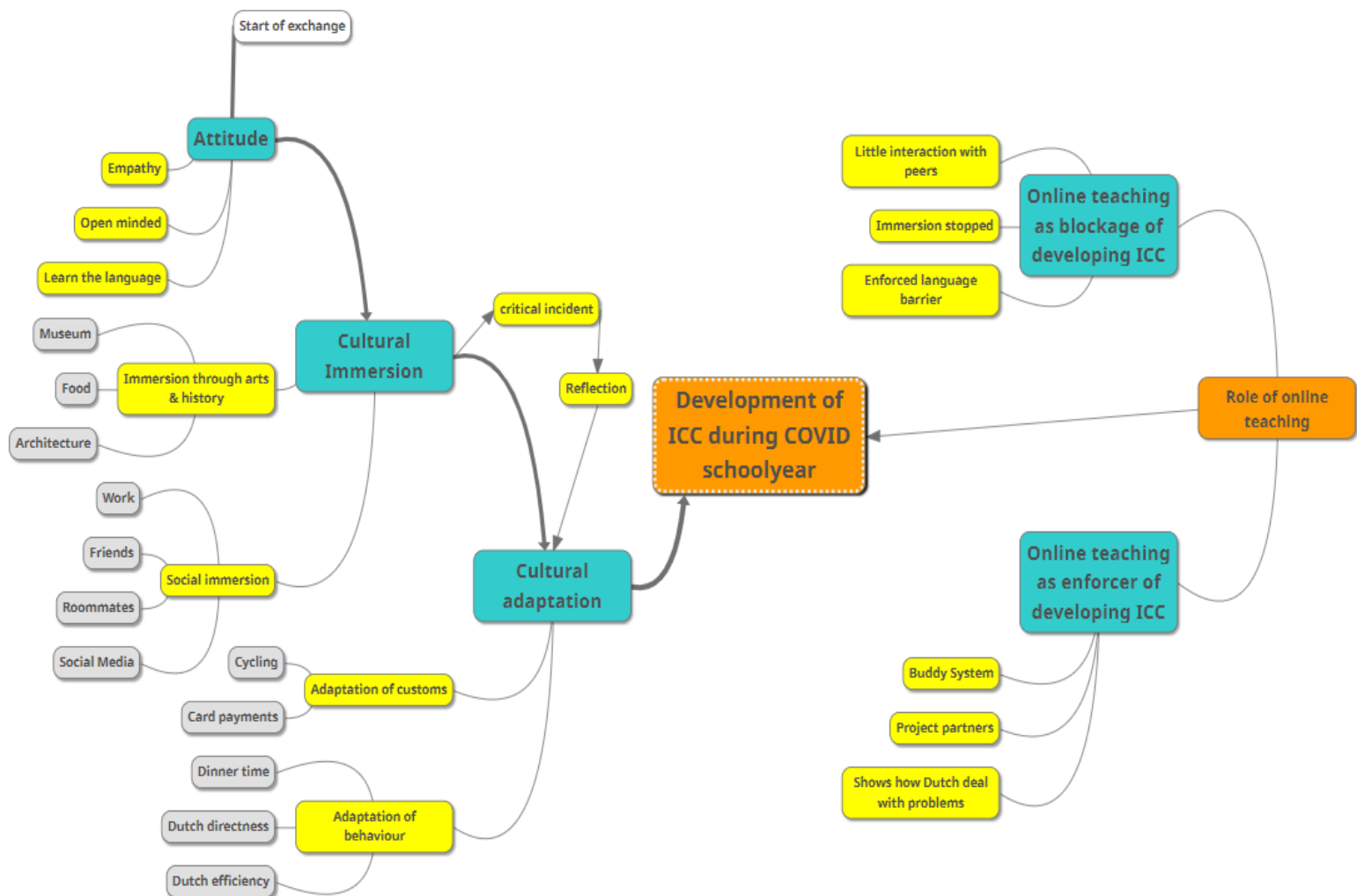


Figure 1: Model of intercultural competence development



## 5. Discussion

This thesis aims to understand the process that exchange students follow to the development of intercultural competence during a pandemic in the Netherlands. New variables in this process arose, and other previously described variables were partially debunked. This section can be seen as the answer to sub-question one as it describes which previously described aspects of the development of intercultural competence are less prevalent and which original and new variables are more prevalent during COVID schoolyears.

For starters, the variables that Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) described were: “intercultural training programs, previous intercultural experience, studying abroad which has two sub-variables: on-site interventions and cultural immersion, language training, duration of intercultural experience, gender, age, education level, linguistic capability, geography, religious/denominational affiliation, and race/ethnicity” (pp. 347). Also, cultural adaptation, described by Kim (2001) is also counted as a variable for developing intercultural competence. Intercultural training programs, gender, age, ethnicity, and religion were not mentioned by the interviewees in this thesis as being integral in the process of developing intercultural competence, or not mentioned at all. Previous intercultural experience, the duration of intercultural experience, education level, linguistic capability, and geography were mentioned, but not enough to form a big part of the results.

However, on-site interventions, cultural immersion, cultural adaptation, and language training were mentioned profoundly by the interviewees. Logically, studying abroad was also mentioned a lot, but as the interviewees were all exchange students or internationals this was no surprise. On-site interventions, or reflection, played a major role in the step between cultural immersion and cultural adaptation. Cultural immersion was seen by the interviewees as the preferred starting point of the process. Cultural adaptation was seen as the final step toward being interculturally competent, and language training was seen as a way of fully integrating into the host society quicker.

Additionally, attitude came forward as a very important variable in the development of intercultural competence which has not yet been attributed a big role in the process by previous scholars. Also, the mostly negative role online education plays in the process can be added to current literature. Moreover, I propose a division of the previously described variable of cultural immersion into social immersion and immersion through arts & history, as there were clear distinctions among the exchange students on how they chose to culturally immerse

themselves.

Furthermore, the results in this thesis show a great similarity with those posed in the article by Ramirez (2019). In his article, Ramirez discusses the concept of cultural immersion and stresses the importance of the fact that mere exposure to a new culture does not necessarily lead to developing intercultural competence but that the student must actively engage with the locals and the host culture. The mentioning of “actively” can be seen as a form of attitude that was described in this thesis. However, in contrast with this thesis Ramirez does not stress the importance of this part alone. The engagement with locals part of his description is greatly similar to the social immersion variable described in this thesis and the engagement with the host culture is similar to immersion through arts & history. The psychological and cultural changes that Ramirez (2019) describes as acculturation were also mentioned profoundly by the exchange students but were, in this thesis, more connected to and gathered under cultural adaptation.

The process of cultural adaptation was mentioned heavily among the interviewees. Every exchange student experienced some form of cultural adaptation, and in this process almost all of them experienced what Hagar (2018) calls critical incidents. These critical incidents are “experiences specifically identified by the participants that “made a difference” in their understanding and development of cultural and intercultural situations” (Hagar, 2018, pp. 94). Therefore, in the process of adapting culturally to Dutch culture, every exchange student experienced a moment that mismatched with their own cultural framework which surprised, shocked, or caught them off guard. For most exchange students, as previously mentioned, this happened when they first experienced Dutch directness. In his article, Hagar (2018) showed that the exchange students in his research group who experienced such a critical incident and reflected on it showed more signs of intercultural competence afterward than the ones who did not. This finding is also closely linked to the results in this thesis. What can be added to this research based on this thesis is the fact that Hagar (2018) does not discuss the step of cultural adaptation extensively and this thesis proposes that it should be greatly discussed in such contexts. This resides in that this thesis shows that the reason the exchange students who reflected seemed to be more interculturally competent is because through reflection they could adapt more easily to the host culture. While Hagar (2018) mentions cultural adaptation, this thesis proposes that reflection should be seen as inherent to the process of cultural adaptation, and thus should have a bigger role in the academic description of developing intercultural competence through reflection.

Additionally to *reflection*, Kim (2001) described six different components that need to be present to make cultural adaptation succeed. These components are: *communication competence, host social communication, ethnic social communication, intercultural transformation, environment, and predisposition* (Kim, 2001). Communication competence was mentioned a lot, as multiple exchange students mentioned that they mostly adapted to Dutch communication behaviors. Host social communication is very similar to the, in this thesis described, variable of social immersion as it is about being able to socially interact with locals. Ethnic social communication was also mentioned profoundly as the exchange students sought out contact with people of their own ethnicity to reflect together. Intercultural transformation, or the mixing in of cultural values of the host culture in your own framework, was also discussed multiple times as the exchange students saw this as the essence of adapting culturally. (Social) environment was also discussed profoundly as this was the part on which COVID-19 has had the most influence. The social environment where the exchange students could experience cultural adaptation was limited greatly by COVID-19 as education became (partially) online and social events were closed or heavily restricted. Even though this component was heavily influenced by COVID, it is not completely irrelevant as the exchange students found ways to create a certain social environment anyway through social media or roommates. Predisposition can be seen as very similar to attitude, described in this thesis. One must let go of preconceived ideas about the host culture and enter immersion with an open attitude and mindset to be able to culturally adapt. Hence, all of the components described by Kim (2001) were also mentioned in this thesis, some directly and some indirectly.

The relevance of this thesis was perfectly portrayed by the research of Kang et al. (2019). In this research, the components proposed by Kim (2001) were all tested in different cultural contexts, in line with the aims of this thesis. The article by Kang et al. (2019) only accepted five out of the six components described by Kim (2001) in contrast with this thesis. While Kang et al. (2019) rejected the component of *ethnic social communication*, this study accepted all six components. In their research, it showed that communicating with their own ethnicity during an exchange made them happier but hindered the process of adapting to the new culture, while that was not the case in this research. Moreover, *ethnic social communication* was a dominant component in comparison to some of the others.

Contrasting with what the article of Van Dijck et al. (2018) poses, the exchange students did not mention experiencing a *clash of values* during online education. In other words, they did not feel like the influence of big companies on the structure of online education bothered them. However, they did allude profoundly to the undeniable role online

education plays in the development of intercultural competence. This, mostly negative, role did not relate to the growing influence of big companies on education but related more to the deprivation of interaction that online education causes. Simultaneously, this thesis complements the article by Van Dijck et al. (2018) as it provides the insights and evaluations of students on online education Van Dijck et al. (2018) mention the need for.

## 6. Conclusion

In this thesis, the process that exchange students follow towards becoming interculturally competent and the role of online education in this process have been displayed. This process, displayed by the proposed model of intercultural competence development, answers the main research question posed in the introduction of this thesis. Exchange students in the Netherlands during a COVID schoolyear develop intercultural competence through a process with four components: *attitude, immersion, reflection, and adaptation*.

From the start of an exchange, and preferably before that, it is important to keep an open mind and an active attitude towards the host culture. One must let go of preconceived images and stereotypes of the host culture and have an active attitude in learning about the culture. Also, an active attitude in language learning is important as that was seen as a way of speeding up the integration into a host society and eventually the development of intercultural competence in that society.

Consequently, step two towards developing intercultural competence is that the exchange student must immerse him/herself in the host culture. This entails that the exchange student must surround him/herself with and dive down into the host culture. This is an imperative first step towards getting to know the host culture which can be achieved through two separate processes: social immersion and immersion through arts and history. Social immersion implies experiencing the host culture through engaging frequently and extensively with locals by, for example, attending social gatherings and through social media. This thesis shows that social immersion is the most dominant and efficient way of cultural immersion, an idea that is supported by Ramirez (2019). A smaller group chose to not socially immerse, or could not because of COVID-19, and instead culturally immersed through visiting museums and experienced Dutch culture through arts and history.

Additionally, step three towards developing intercultural competence requires reflecting on the experience. This idea was previously described by Bagwe & Haskollar (2020) and Hagar (2018). However, in this thesis an even bigger role is attributed to

reflection. Reflection is the tool that exchange students used to adapt to Dutch culture. During (social) immersion, the exchange students would experience a *critical incident*, as described by Hagar (2018). This *critical incident* is something that happens or that people in a foreign culture will experience that clashes with their own cultural framework. In this cultural context that was manifested mostly through *Dutch directness*. The exchange students would experience this form of interpersonal contact as surprising and unfamiliar, but everyone adapted to it because they reflected on it. Sometimes this reflection would be done alone, just by thinking over a certain event or intercultural situation and sometimes reflection would be done with others to give meaning to a certain situation together. When reflection was done together this was mostly done with people of their own ethnicity, an idea supported by Kim (2001).

Ultimately, the exchange students would reach the final step toward becoming interculturally competent in Dutch culture by experiencing cultural adaptation. They would take away characteristics of Dutch culture and implement those characteristics in their own framework, or adapt to the culture in the sense that they would not experience *critical incidents* anymore as they developed enough knowledge about and experience with Dutch culture that they could expect and predict certain behaviors and adjust their own behavior accordingly. This is seen in this thesis as the final step towards developing intercultural competence, as their knowledge of and experience with Dutch culture combined with the convergence towards a certain Dutch way of interpersonal contact results in the fact that the exchange students were able to move through day to day situations and that they can avoid problems during intercultural encounters with Dutch people. This would define the exchange students as interculturally competent in Dutch culture.

In addition to the research question, sub-questions have been formed which have been answered throughout this thesis. Sub-question one was constructed to find out which previously described variables in the process of intercultural competence development were less and more prevalent in this new context and which new variables arose. In this new context a lot of previously described variables were debunked (e.g. intercultural training programs, age, and gender), and others were added or given a bigger role (e.g. attitude, reflection, and social immersion). Additionally, sub-question two refers to the role reflection plays in this process, and in this thesis it has been proven that reflection plays a massive role in this process as it is the tool to go from immersion to adaptation. Moreover, sub-question three was formed as a reflexive question and referred to the degree to which the exchange students feel interculturally competent in Dutch culture which turned out to be a high degree.

Most exchange students felt very interculturally competent and the only negativities towards this that were discussed were related to the language barrier and online education. Sub-question four was formed to describe and include the role of online teaching in this process. The role of online teaching was diverse, some students attributed a positive role to online education in the development of intercultural competence but most students attributed a negative role to online education due to the severe lack of interaction in comparison with traditional education.

This thesis can provide an addition to the academic field of intercultural competence because it adds a new cultural context and timeframe, the new cultural context being Dutch culture and the new timeframe being a schoolyear influenced by COVID-19. However, this research has its limitations. These limitations reside mostly in the sample size. The research group used in this thesis is smaller than previously desired, as exchange students studying in the Netherlands were not as eager to participate as initially expected. Follow-up research in the same cultural context would be valuable if it uses a larger group of interviewees and at the same time follow-up research in a different cultural context would be equally valuable. The model of intercultural competence development that this thesis proposes can be used to test in these different cultural contexts. It is important that new cultures are added to the knowledge of intercultural competence development to keep expanding the research field and that previously described variables keep being tested in these new cultural contexts, as this thesis did.

In conclusion, the degree to which exchange students during a COVID schoolyear in the Netherlands develop intercultural competence is influenced by four variables: *attitude*, *immersion*, *reflection*, and *adaptation*. Online education, although having some positive influences, has a mostly negative influence on this process as it reduces the amount of interaction the exchange students have with the local culture.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Transcripts

#### Transcript 1

##### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dutch, netherlands, spain, culture, people, restrictions, problem, university, architecture, experienced, noticed, delft, hear, lots, english, organized, online, museum, learn, expecting

##### SPEAKERS

J., Interviewer

##### Interviewer 00:02

Okay so I want to start by asking you if you are aware of the fact that it will be recorded. And you don't mind me using your data during my thesis, you will remain completely anonymous.

##### J. 00:20

Yes, I am and yes, I hereby authorize you.

##### Interviewer 00:23

Thank you. Thank you. Okay. And do I say Javier?

##### J. 00:28

Yeah, yeah, but don't don't worry too much about the pronunciation.

##### Interviewer 00:32

Okay, okay. Can you? Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What's your country of origin? What's your reason for going on exchange stuff, stuff like that.

##### J. 00:41

Okay, so well I am Spanish. I was born in Spain and all my family's from there. And I am an architect. I studied architecture in Spain. But yeah, although I got my architecture diploma, and I actually got a job, I decided to come to the Netherlands because the job was not very well paid. Were lots of hours. And also it was more on the engineering side. I was designing facilities for buildings. And I really didn't like it that much, it was great for the time that I was there because I learned a lot about facilities and designing of plumbing and firefighting system and also acclimatization, and ventilation. But I was really interested in in landscape architecture. So I applied for Delft Technical University, which is like the top architectures school in mainland Europe. And they accepted me and Well, here I am.

##### Interviewer 01:57

Okay, okay. That's a great story. So you have always been interested in, in architecture and designing?

##### J. 02:06

Yes. Yeah. Yes. From the very beginning, since I was little, maybe this was influenced by my parents, because both of them are engineers. And when I was little, they would let me (unintelligible) so i got used to that pretty early on.

**Interviewer** 02:25

Okay. Okay. So it's something you grew up with. And your main reason for coming to the Netherlands specifically is because of the high rating of the Delft University?

**J.** 02:39

Yeah, the reputation of the university and also, because I also got accepted in some other places in Britain, and Ireland, but I preferred the Netherlands not only because of the quality of the university, but also because believe it or not, it was cheaper. Cheaper. Yeah, because well, Brittain might have been a good option before the Brexit. But once Brexit kicked in the admitting fees just rocked and Ireland I don't know why but Dublin apparently is a horrible place to find accommodation in it is even worse than the Netherlands. I've heard that yeah. I also have a friend who has lived in Dublin and she said, it's like, you pay hundreds of euros for like a closet maybe. Yeah, yeah, that's what i saw. So I decided that the Netherlands were much better in so many aspects you I hardly ponder it.

**Interviewer** 03:50

Okay. Nice. Okay. And how long have you been in the Netherlands now?

**J.** 03:56

Well have been since August, the last year. Okay. So that's six months. Right?

**Interviewer** 04:03

Okay, and give me a little evaluation of your stay so far. Tell me a little bit about how you experienced it. Your first couple of weeks coming here, like did you experience culture shocks?

**J.** 04:18

No. Yeah. Not really. I actually think I blended in pretty well. I can not speak Dutch yet, of course. So I would say that the language is my greatest barrier. Other than that, I found it a very welcoming place. The one thing that struck me a lot when I arrived here was, let's say, a different look on COVID and the different policies because when I came in Spain everyone had to wear face masks. And there were lots of restrictions. And then I landed here, and it wasn't compulsory to wear a face mask. There were not any restrictions in summer. It was very different. And yeah, afterwards, we got this sort of lockdown in the winter. But they didn't have it in Spain. So that was sort of, yeah, you know, some different way of managing the the epidemic.

**Interviewer** 05:29

Yeah, I heard something that there was like big news in the Netherlands that Spain was one of the first countries to stop treating COVID as a pandemic, but more so than as like a flu or as an endemic disease. And we were talking a lot about how we wanted that, that approach. So the differences are interesting. Yeah.

**J.** 05:52

Yeah. Well, in our case, it's more of it is not that we have really managed to properly treat it as a flu, but it's what we want to Yeah. Effectively, we are not there yet.

**Interviewer** 06:11

Yeah. Okay. So. Yeah, okay. So comparable, maybe it's not a super major topic anymore. Like, we don't have face masks here anymore. But it's still there. People still get COVID. Yeah, it's not nothing, it's not gone. Let's say that. And when you got here, I can imagine that it's, as I did on my exchange, that you immediately want to drown yourself in the host culture, and you immediately want to get to know Dutch culture. How did you do that? Did you engage in a large social life? Or what were your active ways to get into know the Dutch culture?

**J.** 07:06

Well, I tried to engage in social life as much as I could. But I, you know, I really, really wanted to learn more about Dutch culture. But most of my attempts were partially frustrated because of the COVID measures. Because for example, one of the things that I really wanted to do was to go to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and also to the Vermeer Museum here in in Delft, but I wasn't able to go because they were closed down. The same is with the townhall in Delft, like I knew it beforehand, before coming to the Netherlands, because it's a famous building that you study in history or architecture, but I haven't been able to be there. And to me, that's also culture, the history is also culture. But I've tried to do as much of I have been able, hanging out with Dutch people, and improving as much as I've been able my biking abilities, which has been sort of, yeah, if you came, you can see how far I've come in that department. And I've also tried to learn Dutch expressions and words and the other day I was even able to ask for two leaks at the market in Dutch so I'm very proud.

**Interviewer** 08:32

Okay, okay, Can you give me an example of a sentence or two or a couple of words that you have already learned? Because Dutch is not an easy language to learn.

**J.** 08:43

Yeah, it's not an easy language, but it sort of looks a lot like English in some words so yeah, I knew the name of most things that you can find in the supermarket like water melk roomboter. Yeah, that and I can say a small (unintelligible). Like, ik wil een koffie or something.

**Interviewer** 09:16

Okay, well, that's great to hear that you have already learned like the basics of Dutch language.

**J.** 09:23

Still, I know that I'm slaughtering the pronunciation but I'm on my way.

**Interviewer** 09:28

Of course, yeah. No rush in that. Almost everyone in the Netherlands speaks English well. So you will be fine. And so you wanted to culturally immerse yourself with like history and art on one hand, and on the other hand, engage in like a social life with people, as I would say it but COVID measures made it hard

**J.** 10:00

Yeah, exactly. Because suddenly you couldn't... because we have these big things in the Bouwpub. We go there on Thursdays. It's our pub inside the university. But of course, when

the restrictions arrived we couldn't do that any longer. Another thing I tried to do to immerse into the Dutch culture, and that was sort of, yeah, let's say cultural leap to me is the, yeah, the eating times. Because for example, you have dinner at a much different time as we do. Yeah. So yeah, but I've slowly become used to that. And now most days, I have dinner at six o'clock or seven o'clock.

**Interviewer** 10:44

you're used two to three hours later, maybe?

**J.** 10:47

Yes, I was used to three or even four hours later. But I mean, you eventually get used.

**Interviewer** 10:57

So you already adapted to that basically. That's also something that I want to talk about; the concept of acculturation and cultural adaptation. I want to give you like a little definition of it, acculturation is a phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, so in this case you and Dutch culture, with subsequent changes in the original patterns. So, that is something that you experienced there, right, for example, with dinnertime, but are there any other changes in your behavior that you that you have identified that you could talk about?

**J.** 11:47

Yeah, I will say like, there are minor changes, because this is not as different as I thought it would be, but yeah, I have adapted to, for example, your public transportation system, which is different to, to ours. And also the way of paying things that also is something that is very different. Because, yeah, when I arrived here, I noticed that most people don't use cash money. We are very used to cash and actually there is a whole culture of always having cash with you in Spain. But you don't have that in the Netherlands, you you pay by card more numerous times. And I think that's also why you have such a small number of ATMs compared to Spain, because in Spain, you find like an ATM in each corner. Maybe not in each corner, but always. But here, you you really don't and you pay through the internet, lots of things. And yeah, by the way, getting a bank account that was very hard. Yeah. Yes, yes.

**Interviewer** 13:05

Because of what?

**J.** 13:08

Yeah, because, apparently, well, I tried with different banks. In the end, I got my account with (hidden), because they said they could give me the information in English. They don't always do but still. But the procedure to get an account is totally automatized. And although I get that for some people it works wonderfully, for me it does not because as a foreigner, I don't have the same kind of ID cards as you do. So I had to resort to my passport. And with the passport he didn't work so well. And I actually had to go to Alphen aan den Rijn for a bank employee to do it for me.

**Interviewer** 14:00

Yeah, yeah. Oh, oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I expected it to be much easier in the Netherlands. I always seem to see us or our society as structured really well and well organized but if I hear this, then not so much.

**J. 14:18**

Well, I would say that in the rest of regards, you're very well organized. All the foreign people that I know has had problems with with their bank account.

**Interviewer 14:32**

The well-organized part that you just mentioned, is that something that stood out to you when you came to the Netherlands or was there already have like an image sort of that in your head?

**J. 14:44**

Yeah, I was sort of expecting that stereotype. Yeah, because yeah, in Spain, we have this stereotype about all the northern European countries that you are very tidy and very organized. So I was sort of expecting that, I actually was very surprised because you are very organized but also by work ethics. People here do respect a lot of free time, weekends and stuff. I already knew some of it because my father actually worked at Schiphol Airport for some engineering project years ago, I mean, and when he came back to Spain, we asked him how it was working with the Dutch people, because we had this idea that it must have been, like, incredibly easy. The first thing my father said is that people are crazy. At five o'clock, they just stand out from the desk, going home.

**Interviewer 15:47**

Yeah, yeah, I recognize that I recognize that. It's also like, I used to work at the gym, and my, my shift ended at three. And if my, the person who would replace me wasn't there by three, I would actually get angry. And so I can really understand that. I also wanted to quickly talk to you about online education. Have you ever experienced online education in the Netherlands?

**J. 16:16**

Yeah, during the lockdown of the universities, everything was online. And also for a long time in the first quarter, we also had online lectures that we could follow from wherever.

**Interviewer 16:31**

Yeah, yeah. So you have experienced fully online teaching modes, and you have also experienced hybrids, right? Which means you were able to go to the university, but also add some classes online. And how did that, that, according to you effect your the possibility for you of getting to use to Dutch culture? The fact that you couldn't go to university?

**J. 17:00**

Well, of course, it was step back lets say, especially in terms of learning more Dutch words. But other than that, I think the U Delft pretty much handled it. And yeah, the thing is that you are you are restrained in terms of social interaction. That's the real problem. But regarding education, I didn't really notice any important or significant reduction of the quality or anything like that.

**Interviewer 17:40**

Okay. And you, you would say that you have been able to immerse yourself in Dutch culture, even though the fact that education was online, it was not an issue with immersing yourself culturally in Dutch culture, because you had other ways to do it?

**J. 18:00**

Yeah, I actually think on one side, it's also it also helped me, let's say diving into the Dutch culture, because it helped me understand how do Dutch people deal with problems. So when a technical problem arised, I saw how you dealt with it. And that was also sort of surprising, because, yeah, as I've told you, in southern Europe, we have this idea that you are very methodical, but also like, very squared if you get what I mean. And I noticed that you aren't really like that; you can improvise. And you have like this insight of, "well, let's try this". And let's see how it works. You don't, you are not afraid of trying different things.

**Interviewer 18:55**

So in your head, you had the idea that if we encounter a problem, everybody's just like, Okay, this is what we're going to do and everybody knows what we're going to do. But in reality, it was more flexible?

**J. 19:10**

Yeah. And that was very surprising. And actually, it's one of the things I admire the most.

**Interviewer 19:23**

So in that regard, you could also say that because of Covid you saw how we Dutch people deal with problems. And now, you are more interculturally competent for Dutch culture, because you also know how to behave yourself when there's a problem arising?

**J. 19:46**

Yeah, I would say so. It's like, I've been driving with you when the tank was in the reserve side so that's also a very interesting way of dealing with culture.

**Interviewer 20:01**

Yeah. Okay, nice. This is all very interesting. I've written almost an entire page already because of your answers it's really... I find it really interesting. What I finally want to talk about is my basically the leading concept of my thesis I named it earlier as well and that's intercultural competence. What that basically means, as the two words basically already say, is that you are competent, or develop that competency to handle yourself in day to day life in your new culture. So, you grow accustomed to knowing how to behave, or how you should deal with issues or problems. Could you give me a little self evaluation of your intercultural competency, how do you see it? With regard to Dutch culture, do you feel competent to handle day to day situations, and not accidentally offend someone or something?

**J. 21:13**

Well, as for me, I always say I'm a pretty offensive person, per se, because I have this very dark humor. But actually, you're handling pretty well. So, but yeah, the thing is that I, so far, I think, yeah, I am doing pretty well. But I wouldn't consider myself competent until I know your language. I think that's like the thing that would make me reassured about my own competence.

**Interviewer 21:48**

Would that be that reassuring to you? To know the language? But I can imagine that you can also manage yourself day to day with English. And it is more about how you use that English... how could I say that..... that you know how to behave in certain situations without accidentally being impolite or knowing that you are being polite. And that's also going to be reachable with English only, right?

**J. 22:26**

Yes, yes. So far, I haven't. I haven't, like stumbled or on anything that I didn't mean to be offensive. Yeah. So. Yeah. Yeah, I would say that so far, my social interactions with people have been quite like I planned them.

**Interviewer 22:48**

Okay. And do you also reflect on it? Or did you reflect, reflect on intercultural situations that you have encountered, for example you going to the supermarket in the Netherlands for the first time and something goes wrong, or you don't understand something, do you come home and you think to yourself, like, "Okay, how should I do this differently in the future?". In other words: do you reflect?

**J. 23:21**

yeah, yeah. Many times many times. Yeah. Because, you know, you end up learning lots of things. Like, for example, one of my first weeks here, I was invited to a party. I went to the party. I didn't know anyone at that party and it was not allowed. they were sort of illegal back then. So because there were lots of people, and they were there. So I went there and someone called the police. And I was expecting lots of us to get arrested. But they didn't they just told us to go.

**Interviewer 23:57**

Yeah, it's always warning first.

**J. 24:00**

Yeah, exactly. So next time, I'm going to check if I can go to a party or not. Oh, yeah. secondly next time I know that the authorities aren't really stern here. So also, for example, yeah. I don't know if Kim has told you this. But in the first quarter, I was with her in a group work. And we had to go to this place in The Hague, which was sort of a protected area, but none of our teachers told us and I was collecting samples of leaves and branches and stuff. And when we were already finishing some guard caught me and he was very harsh with me. And I really thought that I was going to get arrested, he asked me for my teacher's name and I had to give them their names, I thought that they were going to get arrested too. So I was in this complete breakdown. Like, I've been only one month here and I am already getting arrested.

**Interviewer 25:22**

Okay, but that didn't happen.

**J. 25:24**

Yeah, that didn't happen. And actually, when I talk to my professor to apologize and say that actually, I was forced to give them their contact they said "oh, never mind I mean they are just doing their work, but nothing is going to come out of this.". There's not going to be a lawsuit or anything like that.

**Interviewer 25:42**

No, no, it's just a tap on the fingers like "Hey, don't do that again". But I can imagine that he was being really harsh with you, because it's also a typical Dutch thing to try to scare someone in not doing it anymore, but without actually punishing him. And I think that's what happened to you. But bottom line is you use reflection a lot to grow intercultural competence as you said. And so you, when it comes to your own evaluation of your competency, you

would say that you you feel quite competent to handle day to day situations but for your own feeling it doesn't feel real until you really learn the Dutch language as I, if I understand correctly.

**J. 26:39**

Exactly. I would say that. I yeah, I drive the highway, right. On the slow lane.

**Interviewer 26:47**

Yeah, yeah. Okay, because learning Dutch is not something you will do in in a day. But it's, I can imagine that it's really a good thing to to learn. Are you interested in staying longer?

**J. 27:03**

yes. I wish I can. I mean, after finishing this, the master, I mean, I need to get a job here. But I would love to stay here because I really like this country and i did not expect to like it this much!

**Interviewer 27:24**

Okay, yeah. Well, that that is great to hear, actually, the weather is starting to look good over the last couple of weeks also. So that's, it's also great. And now that since a couple of weeks, maybe a couple of months, most of the COVID restrictions have been lifted, have you noticed in yourself like that your intercultural competence has grown a lot since then.

**J. 27:54**

Yes, yes, definitely. Definitely. Because for example, we, yeah, as a group, when we started the year, we sometimes we would hang out but not many times. And when we were already starting to know each other, was when the restrictions kick in, and now they are off. So it's now that we can go out together and it is now that we can talk outside the class environment and now we can, yeah, go to a party or to have a beer to a bar or something like that. It's now that you can really hang out with people. Yeah.

**Interviewer 28:34**

And and before the restrictions, you could also like when the restrictions were already there, you could also hang out with a small group of people. So I can imagine that you grew some Dutch competence already then. But as you said, it really started when the restriction is lifted when you do whatever you want, again, basically what you say

**J. 29:01**

exactly. When, when we were locked down, I really couldn't hang out with most of my Dutch classmates, because many of them went back to their homes. Yeah.

**Interviewer 29:16**

And now the restrictions have been lifted. And you can see you want to see you can go to whichever museum you want to go.

**J. 29:26**

Well, I'm still waiting to have the time to go to the museum.

**Interviewer 29:31**

I was just about to ask, have you been able to visit a museum that you really like already or



**J. 29:36**

not yet, but it's because the material is very time consuming, but I really plan to do it. And one thing that I love doing is walk in the Old City of Delft, and yeah, getting more used to the Dutch architecture and stuff and another thing that surprises me a lot is the different way that you handle tradition, for example, because one thing that really struck me was like secondhand shops here have really things that we would consider antiques in Spain. And that would cost like, twice the price they ask here. Okay. Yeah. So that's, I think that's because people don't consider them as valuable. Yeah. Like, they feel like they can replace it.

**Interviewer 30:32**

They look at it differently. They have a different attitude.

**J. 30:36**

Yeah, exactly. I don't know if and that has to do with the whole situation of the country being under sea level and that you have plans to yeah, get rid of all of your things. And as many of my other classmates said, "well, in the worst case, is we move back to Germany". So yeah, so you are not interested in keeping like the old furniture from your grandmother? I don't know if it has to do with that or not.

**Interviewer 31:05**

it may. I don't know. I don't know. Can I recognize myself in in what you say? Yeah. Yeah, I really do. I have asked you everything that I wanted to ask. I feel like you're a really valuable resource if I can call you that. Do you have any questions for me? I'm not offended if you don't have any, but I wanted to give you the opportunity to ask anything you want.

**J. 31:41**

that's fine. Right now, nothing on the top of my mind, really

**Interviewer 31:44**

no problem at all. what I'm going to do is I'm going to transcribe, I'm going to type out this whole conversation. I'm going to code whatever you said and I will send you a file of our coded transcript. And then you can have another option of saying "I do not want this statement in there. I do not want this in here.". So you have complete freedom of everything. And thank you very much for for this interview.

## **Transcript 2**

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

dutch, culture, intercultural competence, experienced, netherlands, lockdowns, immerse, directness, immersion, talk, thesis, cultural immersion, intercultural, groups, online, people, traits, aware, icc, master

### **SPEAKERS**

Interviewer, Ar.

**Interviewer 00:00**

Okay the recording started. I already got your consent form. But I also need to ask you on record that you are aware that you are being recorded right now. -Yes, I am.- And you also are aware that your information will be used in my thesis anonymously? -Yes, yes.- Okay. Thank you. So we already met for like, an hour or so. But my name is Jaap. I did my last six months in Finland. And there I grew to be really interested with exchange students and the whole concept of internationals. And when I needed to write my thesis I was like, why wouldn't I just write about exchange students coming into my country. So that's why I'm interviewing people, like yourself. And can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been in the Netherlands? What do you study?

**Ar.** 01:03

Yeah, so I moved here in August, last August. With the goal of doing this master's, I did my bachelor's in Austria, in translation, and I was looking for Master options, because I didn't want to stick to translation, because I was always more interested in like, the intercultural aspect. And then I found this master's intercultural communication here, and I immediately knew that it's exactly what I want to do, so this is why I moved here to do that.

**Interviewer** 01:44

Okay. And you say, you have been here since last August. So you have experienced the COVID measures? -I have.- So you've been to uni, right? Or has it been hybrid, have you also experienced, fully digital teaching?

**Ar.** 02:08

Um, all of that. Block one was entirely on campus. Yeah, as far as I can remember. And then block two was on campus, and sometimes online, and then January was hybrid. So I got a taste of everything.

**Interviewer** 02:30

Okay we'll talk a little bit more about that later. To start it off, basically, I would like to ask you about a little evaluation of your stay so far, so how have the Native people been, university, social life. Tell me about please.

**Ar.** 02:55

So generally, I'd say my experience has been very positive. Especially regarding the university, I feel like I'm very welcome. And also, that I can, if I need something, or there's something going on, I can approach people and they will help me whether that's university staff, or even students that are living here for quite a while and know what's it like and how things work and stuff. So overall, very positive. Apart from uni, the housing situation was very difficult. I'm sure a lot of people have been saying that, but also for me, I experienced it. And I like last year already, I knew that it was going to be hard because I have people from the Netherlands and they were all like, "you know, Utrecht is like Amsterdam right now". So I was prepared, but I still was surprised in the beginning that it seemed impossible at times to find a place to stay. So that was a problem for sure.

**Interviewer** 04:01

Okay. Okay. I can imagine that. For everybody. The housing situation is terrible in the Netherlands right now. But I'm really glad to hear that your overall evaluation has been positive. -Yes.- I can imagine that in the past... what is it, seven months that you have been here... you are able to give your own good evaluation of Dutch culture. Have you

encountered things or do you have any ideas in your mind about things that are typically Dutch in your eyes, you can be stereotypical as you want.

**Ar. 04:41**

So before I moved here, my like, let's say stereotype or like my image of the Dutch was that they were very open and tolerant, you know? And then when I moved here I experienced more things or I was told even by Dutch people themselves that the Dutch are very direct and the Dutch are very efficient. And those things I didn't like, know before, or I wasn't aware that those are like traits, stereotypical traits that also like the Dutch themselves title themselves with. Obviously, I'm aware that it's all stereotypes and you can't make general assumptions about the whole population, I think, especially as an ICC student but I mean, to some extent, you know, you do see those traits here and there. The efficiency, the directness, but I also like those traits, I learned from them, I think.

**Interviewer 05:55**

And I'm glad you mentioned us as ICC students, because we're going to have an approach in this interview, we have like a really essentialist take approach of culture, but that's like, the only proper way to make some of this work, or otherwise, you can't really talk about culture.

**Ar. 06:17**

Exactly.

**Interviewer 06:18**

So we just have to be oblivious.

**Ar. 06:21**

Yeah we are aware of the fact that it's essentialist.

**Interviewer 06:29**

So it's no problem at all. So, you mentioned Dutch directness, you've, you've mentioned the overall way of conduct of Dutch people. Was that something you need to get used to?

**Ar. 06:53**

I think both the directness and the efficiency are things that I was, those were kind of new to me. That's why I also said that it's I like those traits, because I learned a lot as well. Let's just... if we take efficiency, for example, in, in writing, right, academic writing, yeah. From my backgrounds, when we used to, like when we write academic stuff, it's like very wordy and long sentences also, because that's a German characteristic, I think in writing. Yeah. Whereas I think, in Dutch, like the academic writing is more efficient, more short, more compact, and I like that as well.

**Interviewer 07:48**

It's more straight to the point maybe?

**Ar. 07:51**

Exactly. Straight to the point.

**Interviewer 07:53**

yeah, maybe that also links to the idea of Dutch directness like, exactly stereotypically, we don't want to tell you stuff you don't need to know, I guess. But the impression that you have

gotten from Dutch people and the evaluations that you give, they are quite common and sometimes quite accurate in my eyes as well. So that brings me to one of the bigger concepts of my interview, that's cultural immersion. And that is that you... I think, you know, what cultural immersion is... but that you're able to dive down and surround yourself in the host culture. And the things you just said, you can't know that without having been able to do that. Can you tell me how you were able to culturally immerse yourself in Dutch culture?

**Ar. 08:49**

Um, I'd say, the first thing that comes to mind is being in contact with Dutch people or with people that have lived in the Netherlands for a long time, whether that's through people at uni, or my work environment, stuff like that. I also, I must say, like, I actively, always seek to immerse myself into the culture. So whenever I go somewhere for a longer period of time that's not my home country, I actively seek contact with local people in order to really like experience the culture, I suppose.

**Interviewer 09:35**

So you actively try to surround yourself with host culture. But yeah, I can imagine that. Like right now, that's really possible, no problem at all. but you, as you previously talked about, experienced the COVID measures and you experienced online teaching. Were those days or weeks where you're immersion just stopped or did you find other ways to do it?

**Ar. 10:05**

that's a good question. I. So before the lockdowns, I already knew some people that I kept in touch with throughout the lockdowns. But one thing that I added, let's say to the whole immersion of the process was, like, familiarizing myself with Dutch art and culture, because that's also what has to do with my side job that I do next to my studies. So getting to know a lot about art and museum exhibitions about Dutch artists. And like that kind of surrounding I learned a lot about Dutch culture and arts and I think that maybe wouldn't have happened to that extent, if it weren't for the lockdown, let's say,

**Interviewer 11:03**

Through art you also can take away things of Dutch history. For example the Rijksmuseum is basically a history lecture through arts. So I think that's a really interesting point that you mentioned there, because the previous interviews that I've done, they mostly as you did, talked about social life, like ways of immersing yourself in Dutch culture through social life talking with Dutch people, as you said, but most of them told me that their immersion and their, their their affiliation with Dutch culture just stopped to a halt during COVID. And I think it's nice that you've found other ways. And what is the role of online teaching in this? Do you normally think that the university is a really good place of immersing yourself in a culture? Or do you think that's not the case? Because ICC is really multicultural study?

**Ar. 12:17**

Um, generally, I do think that the university is a good place to immerse yourself with the culture. Well you're right about the point about our masters being a very international masters. On the other hand, what I did appreciate in the beginning was that when groups were formed, for the teamwork, that in most cases, they really tried to have at least one Dutch person in all these international groups. And let's say, yeah, that's, that definitely that was a good tactic, in a sense, to get in touch with someone at uni that is Dutch. Um, but, yeah, and then online teaching. Let me think I don't, I don't personally link the online teaching we had with immersion into the culture, if that makes sense.

**Interviewer 13:19**

Yeah, it's not really possible through the screen.

**Ar. 13:22**

No, at least I didn't experience that. I'm sure it's possible in a way, but I didn't experience that.

**Interviewer 13:32**

And especially in combination with that, the online teaching. If you're in an online teaching group with only Dutch people, you might even then get some immersion or some adaptation, but if you're in an online teaching environment with a multicultural group, it gets double as hard, I think. -Yeah, I agree.- But you have been able to immerse yourself in culture, that's something that I can conclude, right? Also during COVID in really creative ways. That's really interesting. And as you probably know, something that flows out of cultural immersion is cultural adaptation. That you through immersion, you see, typical characteristics and over the course of a longer period of time, you start to take parts from the host culture and integrate them yourself? Have you actually experienced something like that? Have you taken the Dutch directness for example?

**Ar. 14:42**

Um, well, I think, to some extent, yes. As I mentioned before, I do appreciate those stereotypical traits of the Dutch culture that we mentioned. And especially the directness because as a person, I'm very... I've always been, like very diplomatic. And I think sometimes in life, it is good to be direct and going straight to the point. Also, when working with other people, you know, it's, it's very efficient. So I wouldn't say that I'm an expert at directness at this point. But I've definitely tried to, to adopt it in a sense. And, yeah, adapt myself also to my surroundings, because oftentimes, when... because in my work environment, there were a lot of people that mostly were Dutch. And they communicate that way with each other, you know, being direct and straightforward, and all of that. So in order to fit into that working environment, I also had to find this way of communication for myself.

**Interviewer 15:53**

So you would say that because partially, as you already said, you already liked Dutch directness and you found it to be more efficient to also just implement it instead of enabling other different kinds of conversation techniques. It was just do what they do, basically?

**Ar. 16:29**

You're right about that it is kind of easier to just adopt it.

**Interviewer 16:36**

Yeah. And there's also nothing wrong with it. Right?

**Ar. 16:41**

No, I don't think so. No.

**Interviewer 16:43**

And do you feel like... it might be an assumption that I'm going to make... but do you feel like the fact that you adapt some parts of Dutch culture is through the immersion parts that we just talked about, you wouldn't have the one without the other?

**Ar. 17:06**

Yeah, I think they come together. Yeah, for sure. And another point is that, you know, because I'm saying, "Okay, I adopt these traits" in order to fit in and to immerse myself into the culture, but at the same time, because I also carry my traits from my cultures, I like to talk about them with the Dutch, for example, and say, you know, in a stereotypical way "Greek people are this and that", or "Austrian people are this and that, and we would communicate that in this way". Just so you know, have an exchange going on of worldviews and like, yeah, behavior,

**Interviewer 17:30**

you basically have mixed framework in your head right now.

**Ar. 18:02**

Yeah, always.

**Interviewer 18:09**

There's also a concept of acculturation and I think that is basically what you just described, the literal definition is "those phenomena, which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in original patterns of both groups. So you you were Artemis before you came and now you're Artemis made of like a mixed framework or code of conduct.

**Ar. 18:48**

Maybe, that is the beautiful thing you know, because we always like we have these opportunities to just take in this input from different people in different cultures and I find that fascinating. So I also like actively seek that in a sense.

**Interviewer 19:04**

I can imagine, I will say until like a year ago I would not really have understood what you just said but my own exchange really brought it up to me. The interest in experiencing different cultures even though they might be local. It's just interesting to see how how we're all the same in a sense but how we also have our little differences. And then at the same time, basically what we just talked about is that if you place one person inside another culture, it will slowly grow towards it or maybe come together. The main concept my thesis is intercultural competence. Simply said this basically means that you're able to handle the day to day situations. You can handle your way in your host society without having a native by your side to explain everything. Do you feel interculturally competent in the Netherlands?

**Ar. 20:26**

I do, because I think what's important with intercultural competence is the ability to listen and empathize. And just, yeah, go into situations with an open mind and not label people and cultures immediately, just because you have certain experiences. Yeah, so I think empathy plays a big part in that. And I think that, I think that I'm good at it. You know, there's always room for improvement, probably,

**Interviewer 21:04**

of course, but according to you, you can manage yourself in most of intercultural encounters, or all of them by being open minded, and by maybe being a bit observant in the beginning, maybe,

**Ar. 21:26**

exactly. Observant is a great word for that yeah.

**Interviewer 21:29**

Okay. Good. Well, this very interesting. Also, intercultural competence... in the literature that I've implemented in my thesis, so far, reflection plays a big part. A big role for reflection in the sense that you start to think about intercultural encounters in your, in your, in your host culture. Have you experienced anything like that, like an intercultural encounter? And then you got home and you start reflecting about like, "Okay, what, what just happened"?

**Ar. 22:12**

let me think, definitely, maybe always, you know, maybe, yeah, almost every day, I'd say, you go out and you see something or you meet people, you talk to people, and it makes you reflect. Going back to that directness, again, I remember, in the beginning, when I started working, and my boss was always, like, very honest, and very direct with his feedback. So, and I wasn't used to that, because in my previous countries where I was living, that's not really the case, especially in the beginning, as a boss, you're more like kind. But here, I experienced, like, direct feedback and stuff. And that, at first kind of shook me a little bit, not that it was super negative, I was just not used to it. And that, again, made me reflect on why he expressed himself that way, and why I was kind of shocked by it. And then I came to the realization that doesn't have to do with that he wanted to hurt my feelings or anything, it was just his way of telling me what he thinks. And it was meant kindly. So stuff like that. I hope that answers your question.

**Interviewer 23:35**

yeah, it does

**Ar. 23:37**

Yeah, little interactions you have here and there and you experience something you kind of don't expect. And then you think about why it surprises you, you oftentimes come to the point that, you know, it's just different ways of expressing and communicating

**Interviewer 24:00**

yeah, it's a great answer, because what you told me is that it starts with the immersion part, where you are at work with Dutch people around you, then you get this like this, this thing happens. Maybe you could call them a minor culture shock of the Dutch directness and then you will reflect about it. And like, Okay, "why did this happen?" "Is it going to happen again?" And then you adapt it and grow to be interculturally competent for for that aspect? Because the next time it happens, you can put it in a really different perspective.

**Ar. 24:43**

Exactly, that's, that's all right. And the next time it happens, you're not this shook anymore. Yes. Like the first time like you've already kind of grown your competence.

**Interviewer 24:56**

Yeah, yeah. And then the next step is you to being able to handle it. And the step after that, in which I would call you fully intercultural competence is when you start giving him directness back.

**Ar. 25:10**

Yeah. The exact same way. Yeah.

**Interviewer 25:15**

He says something to you and you'll be like "No, listen to me". -Yeah, sure.- Okay great. Great. I like this, I have asked you everything that I wanted to ask, I think we checked all all the boxes of the intercultural competence process. I think if I can reduce you to that, I think you'll be a very useful resource for me. -I'm happy to hear that-. And I'm gonna transcribe this interview, I'm gonna code it and then I will send you your transcript back. If you don't care, you can just say "okay, it's fine". But I'd like you to have a little read through it and check it and then it provides you the possibility saying "Hey, I did not mean this like that, or, Hey, I want this redacted". You have complete freedom. And what I also wanted to mention is that during this whole process, even after I submitted this, you can always say, "I don't want to be included anymore", and then your entire attribution can just be removed. All right, you're in complete freedom. Okay. And then I would like to thank you very much for this interview.

### Transcript 3

Mon, 4/11 4:04PM • 27:54

#### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dutch, people, netherlands, culture, bit, thesis, uk, english, intercultural, experience, lived, person, imagine, online, students, direct, randomly, situation, big, redacted

#### SPEAKERS

R., Interviewer

**Interviewer 00:00**

Okay, so this interview is for my master thesis. I did my first six months of the master in Finland as an exchange student. And I there I became really interested in exchange students and how people find their way in a new environment, all the while studying and actually contributing to society in a way. So for my master's thesis, I decided to include exchange students but then focus on my own country. Which is why I'm interviewing people like you. Do you want me to call you (redacted) or (redacted)?

**R. 00:42**

You can just call me (redacted). That's my officially, like in all official documentation my name is (redacted) but everyone calls me (redacted).

**Interviewer 00:50**

Yeah when (redacted) sent me your contact it was also listed as (redacted). Okay, okay. Great, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been here? Where do you come from? Why did you come here?

**R. 01:04**

So I'm half Greek, half British. My dad's Greek. My mom's British. But I grew up in Saudi Arabia. And I was born in Malaysia. So all my life, I've lived in somewhat of an international community. I only started living in Europe when I did my bachelor's, which was in the UK, in Scotland. And I did that for four years. And then I came to the Netherlands after that. So I came in 2020, September of 2020, something like that. And yeah, I've been here since. I



studied biomedical engineering. And I did my first year of my masters, and then I started working at a dream team project called March, which I started in August of last year.

**Interviewer** 01:59

Okay. Okay. So you came here around September 2020. Right in the middle of COVID measures, right? You came into a closed society, right?

**R.** 02:11

Yeah well, that was like, I think COVID measures were a little bit reduced because of the summer and with the good weather the things were reduced. Like when I arrived, I didn't have to self quarantine or anything like that. But yeah.

**Interviewer** 02:25

Okay. Yeah. And after that? You've experienced full lockdown, and you've experienced freedom, right?

**R.** 02:36

Yeah. Yeah, full lockdown. I've had to quarantine probably... I think I've had a quarantine for a total of like, a month.

**Interviewer** 02:47

And online teaching as well?

**R.** 02:49

Yeah, my whole first year was online teaching, only maybe two in person classes. And then I had like a few presentations here and there.

**Interviewer** 03:05

Okay, well, we're gonna get back to the online education part in a minute, because I hear that you have a very, very intercultural background. And, well, that's great, because that's exactly what this interview is about. And there are a few leading concepts that I will use in my thesis that are sort of the guidelines of my entire research, basically. Because.... I can imagine that you arrived here, September 2020, it was not a fully full lockdown, but COVID was there. And I can imagine that someone like you being someone with a really intercultural background, that if you come to a new environment, it is important for you to immerse yourself in host culture to really get to know host culture and dive down into Dutch culture in this case. Can you describe some ways of how you did that? How were you able to get to know Dutch culture?

**R.** 04:13

Yeah, so that aspect of it was actually quite difficult, if anything, purely because when you lack in person lectures, you don't have those small moments in between where you sit next to some random person and say, "Hey, how's it going?" you know? So for me without that, that was quite hard, because of course, when I went to the UK, I had a similar situation. I didn't know anyone in the UK. I felt that's how I met a lot of people, just doing projects together, but you don't have that cohesion when it's all online. So a few other things that I did were my study association. They set up like some drinks and stuff towards the beginning of the year. So I tried to go to those a lot. Oh, Um, but of course, I think probably around November, October they stopped because lockdown measures were slowly coming back in.

**Interviewer** 05:10

Were those sessions with other internationals or with mainly Dutch people?

**R.** 05:18

Yeah, well, actually a lot of those sessions, I would say a majority of the people there were international people to go into those drinks. And yeah, like, throughout my first year, a lot of the interaction I had with new people was actually with other international BME students, biomedical engineering students. So like, I know very few Dutch biomedical students, but like, all my friends from my study are internationals from different places around Europe and stuff like that. I also came, I forgot to mention this before, but I came to the Netherlands with a friend of mine that I met at university in the UK. So at the very least, I had that initial point of contact with someone that I could go to and be like, "hey, I want to hang out", but I had no other friends in the very beginning so that, at least for me, was a godsend. I was also lucky in that some of my flatmates were also Dutch or had lived in Netherlands for a long time. So that was another way that I could really learn a little bit more about Dutch culture. Just ask my flatmates. And like for Kings Day, for example, we do the classic thing of drinking a lot and then going outside if it's nice weather

**Interviewer** 06:42

wearing orange.

**R.** 06:45

wearing orange, yes, yes. Orange face paint as well. We went really over the top. Yeah. It's not that many of us were Dutch, but we thought hey, whatever. At least we fitted in.

**Interviewer** 07:02

Okay. So you were able to immerse yourself in Dutch culture, basically?

**R.** 07:07

I would say, not immersed, because I couldn't really surround myself with that many Dutch people, I had a few like one or two flatmates that were Dutch. But the rest were also international students just because of ? that I was living in from my first year. So of course, I tried my best but yeah, the lack of meeting Dutch people meant that it just was hard to learn those small things, you know. So that was quite difficult for the first year. And then in my second year, whilst I've been working at March, almost everyone in the team is Dutch. So this way, I learned a lot more about the culture because yeah. Just inherently. So that was good. And I actually quite liked the experience so far. It was quite nice. And it's interesting now when I go and hang out with my other friends from biomedical engineering, and then I tell them these like Dutch things and they are like "what the fuck is this?".

**Interviewer** 08:12

example? Examples?

**R.** 08:15

Yeah, like a "spies", a lot of these are going to be party things, but like "spies"? -Yeah, yeah.- The other BME students are like, "what I had not heard of that". So that was interesting. Yeah. And then also some of like, the Dutch sayings like in English, we say, make a mountain out of a molehill where you say, you take an elephant from a mosquito or something along those lines. Yeah, that's like that. I like to use that in English, like directly

translated because the other people in March directly translated it. I think it's quite funny. What else?

**Interviewer** 08:54

Can I ask the same question but a little different. I can imagine that, as you said in the beginning, immersing yourself or surrounding yourself in Dutch culture was a bit hard. But then after you joined March you could surround yourself with Dutch people more. This is gonna be a really stereotypical question. But can you think of some things that in your experience are typically Dutch?

**R.** 09:23

Um, the color orange? Just one of the things that I've noticed is that Dutch people like to just drink beer for the most part. In the UK, for example, they drink all sorts of alcohol where mainly in the Netherlands is just beer in my experience. Yeah, people are different. But you know, also the fraternities. I don't know if that's like the same thing in Utrecht. But in Delft, they're quite a big thing. Yeah, that was something that I didn't know was such a big thing in the Netherlands and didn't really know how big it was when I was here for my first year, but after meeting more Dutch people, I realized they're really big thing. So that. And when it comes to behavior, is there like a typical Dutch behavior or interpersonal contact? Yeah, definitely, I always find that Dutch people are, on the whole, just quite happy, just in general, quite happy and bubbly people. Yeah, happy, bubbly, and generally quite loud. I would say those are like the three main characteristics. Just... also very friendly, you know, like people often will like, like, on the bus or a tram, for example, maybe someone will like start talking to me randomly in Dutch, and they seem fine enough, but then I have to be like "oh I do not speak Dutch". Sometimes I feel like then there's a little bit of that bubblyness lost, because now they have to change to English and maybe they're a bit scared of randomly speaking English when they didn't expect it. That's another thing.

**Interviewer** 11:21

Do you notice.... because you have been here 7 or 8 months already right now.... Something that is described in the academic world of what my thesis is about tells you that when you can surround yourself to a certain extent with your host culture (so in your experience, Dutch culture) it's very possible that you start to inherit qualities or inherit ways of being or handling day to day situations. Basically, that you observe, in your case, observe Dutch culture, you recognize parts of it, and you take away some pieces, and you put them in your own frame of reference or your own behavior. Have you noticed that with yourself?

**R.** 12:16

I, for myself, I don't think I have noticed that too much. Another classic Dutch thing that I forgot to mention before is being quite direct. And in my work, I find that I also have to just be a bit more direct. I don't know... I would say it's not a subconscious thing yet that I just kind of do it naturally. But I feel like I have to be there more direct than I would in the UK, for example. But as for other things, I don't know if I do anything that differently. For me, in general, I'm not used to get influenced by like how other people do things just because I've always been in an environment that people always do different things. and I will stick to like, how I learned it, if you will, maybe sometimes I'll change like, some things, but I don't really notice that much. The main thing that I really changed, like, for example, my accent never really changes. The only thing that I changed that I know for certain is when I was in the UK, in Scotland, they say wee for like small things. And that's one of the small things that I started doing. But I didn't really do that much more in Scotland. And I don't think I do that much more this year, like more Dutch things subconsciously, anyway I don't really notice them.

**Interviewer 13:50**

You have been able to recognize certain behavior, for example, what you mentioned the Dutch directness, and you're able to maybe implement it partially on the basis of convenience. Like if they talk to me like that, then it's better for me to talk back to them. And maybe the same counts for what you said that you started to say wee in Scotland, that is just adjusting to your new situation. Okay, well, that's very interesting, because I also think that the fact that you do not really adopt any aspects of the host culture, resides from the fact that you have been really intercultural your whole life. And I think that may bring along a certain mindset, because, as you said, "Everyone around me has always like, behaved in a certain way that is not similar to mine." So yeah, that's very, very interesting to me. When it comes to online teaching, I can imagine you first coming here, and the classes and universities are closed, it is really hard for you to get to know Dutch way of doing or Dutch culture. How did you experience that? Did you find a way for online teaching to tell you something about Dutch culture in any way, or was that not possible for you? What was your experience with that?

**R. 15:41**

Yeah, so I don't know if during the online class, I learned too much. Maybe a little bit more on just how to understand the accent. I guess it wasn't really something too hard to begin with. But some of the professors have quite a thick accent. So there was a bit of adjustment to that, I suppose. Yeah. Just trying to think. I guess also some of the examples used during the lectures like historical examples of engineers that have made interesting things. I can't remember now what the name of the guy is, but there's a person I think he lives in The Hague, or somewhere between the Hague and Delft that makes machines that move with the wind on land. I don't know what his name is, but he's quite famous in the Netherlands, from what I understand. So some small things like that. I learned, but not that much more, I would say. Yeah, and like, there wasn't really much interaction with other students beyond just like, projects and stuff. And when it was online, a lot of people didn't really like, stick around have a chat kind of thing. They just kind of show up on Zoom call and then leave when everything is decided.

**Interviewer 17:01**

Yeah. So with online teaching, your connection with Dutch culture did not really improve. You did not get to know the culture more by online teaching. Did that change? Did that actually change when you could go to the universities again? Or still not as you wanted?

**R. 17:30**

Yeah. So during my first year, the university didn't open up much for in person stuff at all. Like, I think I was on one of the few courses that just didn't really have the resources to quickly change like that. So I didn't really have any in person classes at all. So even like... I had a few projects on campus, so that way, I saw what the campus was like. But yeah, other than that, not so much. We had like, me and my friend had a group project... my friend that I came with, from the UK... and I had a group project with this one Dutch girl, and we asked her a few things about that. I can't really remember now what we asked her but I guess a few things about like the Netherlands in general? So, yeah, but beyond that, not really much extra learning of Dutch culture,

**Interviewer 18:30**

Okay. Well, because I can also kind of imagine that for biomedical engineering.... When you have lecture, you don't come to the lecture to get to know Dutch culture, you come here to

learn about biomedical engineering. And yeah, I can imagine.... like in previous interviews, the thing that was mentioned most about getting to know the culture was through social settings. Do you agree with that? Because you have mentioned a bunch of social settings because also the things you named as typically Dutch, almost every one of them was related to parties. So I can imagine social settings was also a big factor for you in getting to know Dutch culture.

**R.** 19:17

On that note, do you agree with social settings being the best way of immersing yourself. Has that been your experience in every new culture that you have? Definitely. That's like the main time that I learned Dutch things, especially during my year in March, now that I've been surrounded by Dutch people, that's when I really learned a lot. Definitely, most of the things that I learned about being Dutch is from talking to people in social settings, okay, and then someone saying something in Dutch, like they don't know what the English word for it so they say it in Dutch and then they try to like directly translate it, which ends up being funny and stuff like that. Yeah, for the most part for sure. I would say like when you have in person classes, the classes themselves are not so much cultural thing, maybe some like, examples from the country of whatever they're trying to teach you. But it's more like before the class when you're waiting to go in or after class, those small social things as well. Sometimes they teach you some small things.

**Interviewer** 20:27

Those little chats, a little interpersonal contact. Yeah. Okay. Okay. And the main, basically, concept of my thesis is intercultural competence. And the words are pretty self explanatory, it basically means that you are able to deal with day to day situations and able to function within a host society without having to have a native by your side to help you guide around social settings. Do you see yourself as an interculturally competent person? And if so, why?

**R.** 21:21

I would say yes. Mostly, because a lot of Dutch people speak English that really helps with this situation, because, like going to other countries as well, like for travel and stuff like that, if you can't communicate with people, and they don't speak English, and you don't speak their language, then you have a big problem there. And that, in my experience has been why you would ever have a translator with you or someone who you know speaks English from your parents know this person from their work, and they speak the local language, so you go around with them, and they order food for you or whatever, stuff like that. But fortunately, in the Netherlands, people people speak really good English, better than most British people. So that aspect, then outside of that, like, if the communication is there, most of the interaction is the same as many other places. (Unintelligible) personality side maybe trying to be polite and yeah mindset is also very important. Yeah, and like Dutch people being more directive and more loud and you'd have to accept that just how they are.

**Interviewer** 22:33

Language is in this case, in my opinion, merely the tool that is used in social events. To be interculturally competent that means that you can also observe behavior and recognize which behavior is asked for in which situation. So do you also think of yourself as intercultural competent within that respect? That you do not have situations where you are accidentally impolite or something I don't know.

**R.** 23:11

Um, I don't think I, I don't think I've had any impoliteness or anything like that. I would say one of the main things is when people randomly talk to you, and then expect a response from you, and then you have to say, "Oh, I didn't get it," sometimes, then people are like, a little bit confused. But sometimes that's a bit confusing, but then I see like, yeah, they want to just chat. So I understand that. Yeah, I'm trying to think of other things on the politeness front. I think it's not too much of a problem.

**Interviewer 24:03**

There's also like a... there is something like a universal politeness code. I think among the cultures you have experienced except for the Saudi Arabian one, they are not really that far away from Dutch culture. If you're used to that it's easy to be polite in Dutch. There are some common rules, I guess.

**R. 24:33**

Yeah. Yeah. And like, I guess, like in the UK, you have to be a little bit more polite, or else people are more agitated. Where in the Netherlands I feel like it's a little bit like the Greeks, like you can make like a joke that maybe you didn't mean in the UK, but here we were, like, that's really funny, and it's something similar to the Greeks. They kind of make jokes like that and you will laugh because they understand that joke. So maybe that's a benefit for me that I already kind of know how I feel. And that probably would be something that if I was just British, I would probably have a hard time with... randomly being offended by someone even though he did not mean to.

**Interviewer 25:21**

Also, as I explained to you the intercultural competence concept. A big part of that, according to the literature, is reflecting on experiences. When you're immersing yourself in the culture you're going to experience a moment that makes you think, like, "Okay, what happened?" "Why was that person so direct to me, for example?" From that point, you start to grow because you start to think, "Okay, why did this happen to me?" "What was the purpose?" Do you recognize yourself in that? Do you reflect on intercultural encounters?

**R. 26:06**

Yeah. On the directness thing, definitely. When I was first here, and like talking to some people, and just them being direct, of course, I knew coming here that that people are direct, but hadn't exactly experienced it. And yeah like, it didn't offend me. But of course, we still got a bit taken by surprise. I can't say I have like the example but I definitely remember thinking okay, they will just say what's on their mind so I just have to know that that's a thing and don't be surprised by stuff like that. So definitely reflecting.

**Interviewer 27:07**

I basically asked you everything that I wanted to know. And if I can reduce you to that, I think you're going to be a very useful resource. For my thesis I think it's very interesting to talk to somebody with such an intercultural background as you i i envy it. I have been in the Netherlands my whole life and only the past six months I've experienced what it's like to live abroad. And it was an eye opener to me, so I'm really interested in people like you if I can say and I would like to thank you very much for participating in this interview.

## Transcript 4

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dutch, netherlands, people, culture, biking, masters, intercultural communication, reflect, thesis, immerse, nice, united states, bicycle, life, thinking, utrecht, bit, vaccinated, friends, wanted

### SPEAKERS

Interviewer, S.

#### Interviewer 00:00

First of all, I wanted to... I already got your consent form... but I always want to mention it on record that you are aware that you are being recorded right now. -Yes, yes.- And you are also aware that what you're going to say will be used as data in my thesis? -Yes.- Okay, great. Well, normally, I give a little introduction about myself and what I do. But you already know, since we are in the same thesis group, I will just keep it really short. It's just that I, during my own exchange, I started to grow really interested in exchange students. For my thesis, I thought it was easy and interesting to focus, to put the focus on exchange students, but then in my own country, which is why I'm interviewing people like you. So first of all, could you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where are you from? Why are you here? Where are you in the Netherlands? Stuff like that?

#### S. 01:04

So my name is (redacted). Um, so I'm from Boston in the United States. And I went to university at the College of Charleston, South Carolina. And then I decided to come to the Netherlands to get my bachelor's because I told my mom that I wanted to travel after I graduated, and she told me that I should get my masters first, because if I travel, I'll never come back. So I told her and we'd compromise and I would go get my masters abroad. And I chose the Netherlands because, well, I really, I've only I've only been here for 2 days when I came to visit Amsterdam for two days when I was studying in Italy in 2019. But I've never been to the Netherlands other than that effect. And I really liked like the way of life and the biking and it just seemed like a really active culture. And I also wanted to do my master's in intercultural communication. And I asked my advisors at my school in the US what the best or what was a good program for intercultural communication, and he said that the one in Utrecht was the best. So, I applied so, yeah.

#### Interviewer 02:36

Okay, so, you have always had like an interest in staying abroad and being elsewhere, maybe?

#### S. 02:46

Yeah, my family is like pretty international. So I would like... I think the first time I went overseas was when I was one and we went to visit my family in Scotland. So I've always been traveling from like, really young age. So I think that probably sparked my interest as well.

#### Interviewer 03:05

Okay. Yeah, I really think that could be the case that you were nurtured into like this interculturally curious person. When it comes to the Netherlands, your coming here was mainly based off the fact that Utrecht University was recommended by your supervisors. - Yes, yeah.- And so as you said, you already had like a two day experience of the Netherlands. Can you tell me a little bit more about that first introduction?

**S.** 03:43

Um, yeah, so my friends and I, we went, or we were on a trip for our abroad program in Brussels, and we took a train to Amsterdam for the weekend. And I don't know. I mean, I know that everybody that comes to visit the Netherlands are like "we got to go to Amsterdam". I know that because everybody who comes visit me is like, we have to go do that. And I really, it was just like, a whole different way of life. Like, I don't know, it's just such like an open minded culture and just like really, like tolerant, I'd say, like, a tolerant culture. And I don't know, I've never seen like the red light district and... I don't know, it's just a crazy experience to like, see something so different from what I grew up in. And I also I think the Dutch people are very welcoming and they're really nice and funny, and I also love the bikes and just being able to like, I don't know... it just seemed like such an open minded culture. I never been to the Netherlands before but I mean there is so much more to the Netherlands than just Amsterdam. So I'm really glad I came and been able to travels around and see different parts as well.

**Interviewer** 05:03

So you mentioned a couple of times, it's really "different than what I'm used to". But after that, you mainly named positive experiences about, about the Netherlands. Is where you come from... don't you associate that with positive things? Or can you explain those differences a bit better?

**S.** 05:22

Um, yeah, I mean, it's definitely I mean, I just love, I guess, like the differences. I do, like the United States and living there, but I feel like, it's, like, kind of two different worlds. I feel like in the Netherlands or in Europe, it's like, I mean, in the US, I mean, you hear just more languages on a daily basis. It's like you're walking down the street and kind of people that you see, you don't know if they're Dutch, or if they're Spanish or Italian or French. I don't know, it's just like a really much more international environment. And in the United States, like, if you're walking down the street, you just assume everyone's American, everybody speaks English. And here, it's kind of, it's a lot different, like you never know, what you're going to come across, or who you're going to be talking to, or where they're going to be from. Yeah, yeah, so it's just a lot different in that way. Like, it's kind of everything's kind of more unexpected, I guess. And I also really enjoy, like how I kind of feel like life is like slowed down a bit here. Like it's not as rushed. I kind of like how it's not like, go, go go. Also in the United States, like transportation and stuff, the public transportation isn't as great and you kind of have to like, or where I grew up, you have to drive, you have to, like drive a car to get pretty much anywhere. Like, it's not like you can just ride your bike to your friend's house, like you have to drive your car. So I think, also like being able to be outside and, like be more active. I like that a lot more. And it's a lot different from the United States. I'm not saying I don't like living in the United States. Yeah, it's just a lot different environments.

**Interviewer** 07:13

I can really recognize myself in what you just said. For me growing up, it has been so normal to... like in my street of the 50 houses like six or seven or eight friends of mine were living there. So it was always just by biking towards one of my friends. And I can't imagine that you



need to ask your parents to drive you around, stuff like that. Yeah. But the overall evaluation of your study so far, I presume has been positive.

**S.** 07:50

Yeah, it's been really nice. Yeah, it was like, it was kind of hard in the beginning, because I didn't know anyone and I was living alone. And this school here is a lot more difficult than in the US. I mean, at least this school is. And the education is just, it's just more intense. I think our Masters is also just really condensed, so yeah. Yeah, it was, it's been really nice. I feel like a lot of people moved here during the beginning. So a lot of people are trying to get to know new people, even though everything was closed because of COVID. So I was kind of in these, like, group chats on WhatsApp, or I got put in these group chats on WhatsApp. And the names I forgot. But it was like group chat would just be like, "Oh, we're gonna meet in the park for drinks". So that was really nice to have and to be able to, like, go out and do things. But yeah, at the beginning, it was kind of lonely. But I feel like a lot of people were trying to get to know other people, because everyone has kind of been in the same boat of like, moving here and during COVID and stuff like that.

**Interviewer** 09:09

Yeah. During my own exchange I also really noticed everybody... everybody's in the same, as you said, boat as you are. Everybody's trying to get out there to make social life to make friends. But you arrived here, around August maybe?

**S.** 09:31

Yeah, I got here, August 31. Or August 28. The end of August. Yeah.

**Interviewer** 09:37

Okay. And that was a period of time where there were not a lot of COVID restrictions, right, or were they coming back in that period of time?

**S.** 09:48

I think there weren't as many COVID restrictions, but... Oh, what happened was like they started doing the QR codes, like you have to have the QR code to get in and I had... in the United States they literally give you like a piece of paper that says you've been vaccinated. So nobody here would take it. Yeah, so it was open when I first got here, but I just didn't really know that many people here so. But then they'd started doing the QR codes, things and they wouldn't let me in because it was just piece of paper. And then I had an appointment at the office to get my US COVID certificate, like, I don't know, transferred to an EU COVID certificate but the only office to do that in like all the Netherlands was in Utrecht, so all of the international students had to go to this office. So it took... I had to wait two weeks to get an appointment to get my QR codes. I couldn't go anywhere for two weeks. And then after those two weeks, everything started shutting down. So yeah, kind of like that.

**Interviewer** 10:58

That's terrible. Especially to know that you are vaccinated, but you don't have the proper registration here. That's very frustrating, I think,

**S.** 11:14

yeah. It's really annoying.

**Interviewer** 11:18

Like you have it, but you can't use it.

**S.** 11:21

I mean, I could go to like, the library and the supermarket. And there were like, some coffee shops, where I just like, it's, I just showed them it and they'd let me in. But not like any bars or restaurants or clubs or anything like that.

**Interviewer** 11:46

Okay I wanted to know that because I can imagine that, as you said, you are a person with a lot of interest in international situations and intercultural relations maybe. So I can imagine that it's very important for you to be able to immerse yourself in the culture, like straight from the beginning, but as you said, you didn't have I have a lot of social life back then. And then when it started to grow, you could not do anything. How did you immerse yourself culturally?

**S.** 12:22

I think our masters kind of helped with that as well, because they saw at the beginning... they put us in groups in block one. And we were like, in those groups for the whole entire block one and block two. But so the group I was in, in block one, was a German girl and a Dutch girl. And so we spent pretty much like, all day, pretty much every day, because we were working on our projects and our research. So I think, like, at the beginning, that's kind of how I started getting immersed because I had, like, people that I was working with very, like, often. And we would just like, go get food or like, go to the park after just hanging out and stuff like that. And then also, our masters gave, its I think the university also has a program, it's called "Buddy Go Dutch". And it's, they give international students a Dutch buddy to like, hang out with so they also had like, they have like, events kind that would be like at a bar or something. And you go with your Dutch buddy, and like, meet new people and learn more about the culture and stuff. And also, the Dutch girl I was in my group for our masters like, really helped me because I asked her questions about getting a bank account or getting, like a chip card or getting like, I have a swapfiets like I was just asking like all these questions about how to immerse myself or how to like, get or like, kind of get my life like situated.

**Interviewer** 14:05

Did you experience that as being hard in the Netherlands? I talked to a person last week, who experience a lot of troubles with getting a bank account.

**S.** 14:22

Yeah, it was like a lot of steps you had to do so I had to get I had to get like a residence card. And then I had to get the visa or to get the BSN and then I had to get the residence card. And then I like I had all these different appointments to go do for like registering and Identification And I think I got my BSN and then I got my residence card, and then I could get my bank account.

**Interviewer** 14:46

Okay, so it was a lot of steps, but it was not hard.

**S.** 14:51

It wasn't hard. I mean, like sometimes everything was in Dutch. So Google Translate helped a lot. I think that was probably the hardest... that a lot of the stuff was all in Dutch. And it was just kind of annoying to have to do all of these steps and like, just I wouldn't say it was very hard. It was like very tedious.

**Interviewer 15:19**

Oh, yeah. In foreign society. I can imagine... but that buddy go Dutch thing. That's really interesting that you mentioned that I have not heard that one before. But I have heard people talk about how they were able to immerse themselves in Dutch culture by the way to how you told it by being into in groups at the university and always being partnered with at least one Dutch person. Yeah. Buddy Go Dutch sounds really amazing.

**S. 15:51**

Yeah, it is. It's really nice. And they were also at the international orientation week, and they were like, kind of they were there. And they're like handing out flyers and stuff like that. Yeah, it was really nice. And I think that at the beginning of our masters our professors, specifically put one Dutch student in each group. Yeah, so nice.

**Interviewer 16:13**

Yeah, I've heard that one before. Yeah, I don't know for sure. But it can't be a coincidence anymore. Like almost everybody told me that. So okay, you were able to immerse yourself in Dutch culture, maybe not as quickly as you wanted to, but you eventually you were able to. And we're gonna get a bit stereotypical and essentialistic here, but you have given me some aspects of Dutch culture that you noticed as typically Dutch; I've heard tolerant, welcoming, and you even mentioned happy. Are there other things that you noticed that in your eyes or in your experience have been typically Dutch? Or typical characteristics for Dutch culture?

**S. 17:16**

Well, I don't know Dutch, but I've had some friends who told me "like start laughing when they hear people talking". I don't know. I feel like Dutch people are really funny. Even though I don't really understand what is going on. And very tall.

**Interviewer 17:41**

why do you think they're funny?

**S. 17:44**

Funny, I don't know. I just think it's like a different type of humor. Like, kind of goofy but serious at the same time. And also the Albert Heijn is very Dutch.

**Interviewer 18:11**

You give me quite a lot of examples. So don't break your brain over it's it's only that I asked again because I wanted to go to the next big concept of my thesis, which is cultural adaptation, you basically observing and seeing parts or characteristics of a foreign culture or host culture and you adapting to it you basically take parts of the host culture and you integrate them in yourself basically. Is that something that you have experienced? Like that there have been some changes in how you behave here or how you interact with people that you can attribute to cultural adaptation? As you, as you said, started riding a bicycle or something like that?

**S. 19:09**

Oh, yeah, I was thinking I think that's the biggest thing I've done: started riding a bicycle. Yeah. In all types of weather, I think. Yeah, that's the newest. I mean, last week, I was like biking and it started hailing. I was like, I never would have I've never imagined biking in a hailstorm. I've never thought I would ever be biking.

**Interviewer 19:32**

Dutch people say when they need to bike through bad weather "we're not made of sugar" because. Because sugar will melt in the rain and "oh, we're not made of sugar". But you actually started doing that as well?

**S. 19:48**

Yeah, yeah. Well also I don't have like I'm also waiting for the student allowance for my chip card. I'm still waiting for them to approve that. So I've just been biking also to save money. And also because I don't get free transportation... I know that Dutch students get free transportation... so yeah, I've been biking a lot just to save money as well. And also I've noticed that like, whenever it's sunny people just kind of stand outside in the sun. I mean, after living here, I kind of understand why, especially through winter. Yeah, so I think I've started to appreciate the sunlight a lot more. I appreciate bicycles a lot more.

**Interviewer 20:50**

We don't get a lot a lot of sun here. So you when the sun's out, you actually see people actively enjoying it.

**S. 20:59**

Yeah, I guess people will just be like just standing yeah.

**Interviewer 21:06**

Sometimes someone next to them also the same. But when it comes to you adapting to Dutch culture, the only or maybe the most prevailing one is that you started riding the bicycle a lot and also having like, changing mentality maybe because as you said, you you would never expect you to ride a bicycle during like a hailstorm or something.

**S. 21:36**

Yeah, I think I think I've become more like, maybe just kind of just more not like open minded but like, actually open. Flexible maybe. Yeah, yeah, a lot more flexible or just a lot more like easygoing, or like, kind of whatever happens happens, like roll with the punches kind of. Yeah. A lot more like that.

**Interviewer 22:08**

And, okay, is that something you would attribute to you being in Dutch society?

**S. 22:16**

I think it's maybe Dutch society, but more or less just moving to a different country, as well. Just like trying to figure out how to navigate life. It's just kind of like, you got to roll with the punches and see what happens. But I also think a lot of people will kind of have that mentality here anyways, or being here has probably like, promoted it a bit more.

**Interviewer 22:44**

And you mentioned that, according to you, open mindedness and your attitude is important when getting to know a foreign society. It's interesting because the, the main concept of my thesis, as you probably already know, is intercultural competence. Like are you able to handle day to day situations in a host culture without having a native by your side? Are you good enough in interpersonal contact in your host culture? Do you feel interculturally competent when it comes to Dutch culture?

**S. 23:35**

I think I do. I think I'm learning to understand it a lot more. Yeah. And I also think, I mean, I feel like Dutch sometimes sounds like English, but then it's written and it just looks like I have no idea what's going on. So I think I'm definitely learning how to act kind of and more like kind of integrate, I guess. Like how to try to make it look like I am not American, or make it less obvious I am not Dutch.

**Interviewer 24:21**

Well, that's really hard to spot anyway, I think that's a lot easier to spot during like intercultural encounters. But do you feel like the fact that you have an open mindset really attributes to you developing intercultural competence? Being observant at first maybe.

**S. 24:52**

Yeah, yeah. I think your attitude and like the way you go into moving to a different country. Your attitude... and going in, like, you have no idea what's gonna happen, you don't know the language you don't know. I've never been to Utrecht before (unintelligible) like just having an open mind and like, understanding that you're not going to understand a lot. Yeah, like kind of accepting the fact that you're not going to have any idea what's going on for a bit. Like, just having that kind of mindset going in, really helped. Because if you go in thinking that "this is going to be so easy, like, everybody here knows English, so it's just gonna be fine." Likethat would not be a good mindset to go into this.

**Interviewer 25:43**

And does that come along with... I might be making assumptions here... but does it also come along with reflection, like, you come here with an open mind and you come here with like an attitude of wanting to learn basically. And then like an intercultural encounter happens, and you start to reflect on it like, "Okay, what just happened?" "Why did they communicate this way?" For example. Is that something you've noticed that reflection plays are a big part?

**S. 26:24**

Yeah, definitely. I mean, I've kind of like been in conversations and stuff. And maybe like, I've said something some way that doesn't like resonate the way that I want it to. And then I'll be thinking about, "Okay, the next time, I'll use like, different words". And the next time, I'll just think about what I'm going to say a little, I think I've definitely had to think a lot more about what I'm going to say before I say it, I like, kind of reflecting, maybe before it even happens, but definitely reflecting after. For example, I went to a party at Tivoli the other night. And I was with, like, six Dutch people, and they all are friends. They all speak Dutch to each other. And I was just like, still able to, like, hang out and have fun with them, even though I didn't really know what's going on. And I think I'm even, I'm probably still reflecting on that experience. Yeah, I mean, definitely, like reflecting after you have an encounter is important, because it can help you to, like, better understand how to interact with people in the future. Kind of just like learning. I mean, I think I know how to interact with people, but just like learning better I think the way that you say things is important, because it could be misunderstood or something like that. Or it just might not come off the way that you want it to. I think I've had to reflect a lot on that. And also, just like kind of, like norms and stuff like that like or just Yeah, kind of Yeah. Okay.

**Interviewer 28:22**

So the bottom line is that you actually, like actively reflect on our situations, as you said, you intend to maybe even over reflect. Okay, okay, that's really interesting. And, yeah, if I can reduce you to that, I think you're a really valuable resource. I asked you everything that I wanted to ask.

## Transcript 5

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dutch, netherlands, thesis, romania, talk, experience, people, culture, encounters, immerse, situations, learn, direct, started, noticed, called, studying, feel, speak, intercultural competence

### SPEAKERS

D., Interviewer

#### Interviewer 00:01

Okay, so my name is Jaap, I am going to do my master's thesis at Utrecht university. Last six months I have lived in Finland. And since then I have grown very interested in internationals and exchange students, because I got to experience it myself. But then I want to put focus the on people coming to my country. So that's why I'm interviewing people like you. Thank you very much for for the interview. We're just going to talk a little bit about how you experienced your stay when you first got here and how you immerse yourself in Dutch culture. And I need to say that for the record that you already filled in your consent form, but you are aware that it is being recorded and that your data is going to be used for my thesis.

#### D. 00:59

Everything's fine.

#### Interviewer 01:00

Nice. Um, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where are you from? How long have you been in the Netherlands?

#### D. 01:07

Yes, of course. So my name is (redacted). And my full name is (redacted), I am from Romania. And I've studied since 2021 at Enschede at the University of Twente. And, yeah, I've been living in the Netherlands for one year and a half, a bit more than a half. But yes, since September 2021. And in the first year I was studying electrical engineering. And now since this August I moved to Delft and I put my studies on hold and now I started doing a Dream Team called March.

#### Interviewer 01:53

Nice. Okay. Yeah. Because we know each other through Puck, who was also done on March, yeah. Okay, so you started in Enschede in 2021. So I can imagine online teaching...

#### D. 02:08

.... wait. 20? No. 2020 20? Wait. 20? Yes. 2020. I'm sorry. 2020 2021. So in 2020 I started living here.

**Interviewer** 02:26

Two academic years basically.

**D.** 02:28

This is my second academic year. Yeah.

**Interviewer** 02:31

I can imagine that when you first got here.... there were a lot of COVID restrictions or not? You were coming in in the middle of online teaching? -Yeah.- Okay, so let's put that on hold for one second. I want to know how you experienced your stay here when you first got here. Did you experience any culture shock? Or what were some aspects that made you go "oh, I didn't know this". Please tell me.

**D.** 03:01

So the first thing that struck me was the weather because people told me it rains a lot here. And I was like, "Yeah, I can handle it. How bad can it be?". And then it was raining every day. And I was okay this is unbearable. And we had only online classes. We only had like the labs physical and it was once a week. And yeah. At the beginning, I didn't know how to ride a bike. So I came with my ex boyfriend and he taught me how to ride a bike. And I also hit a car. The first time I got on the bike, and honestly, what really impressed me was that the owners of the car first asked me if I was okay. Not started yelling at me as it would have been in Romania. No, they're like, "are you okay, is everything fine?". And then they asked me if I have insurance. And of course I didn't. But I gave them my phone number and they never called back. So I guess it wasn't that expensive.

**Interviewer** 04:20

In Romania, you are used to a more aggressive response?

**D.** 04:25

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**Interviewer** 04:27

Yeah. Okay. So that was one of your first encounters with maybe a bit of culture shock?

**D.** 04:37

Yeah, it was... wouldn't call it a shock because I see a shock in a negative way. So I was impressed. Pleasantly surprised.

**Interviewer** 04:46

And have you since then, reflected a lot on that situation? The main topic of my thesis is a concept called "intercultural competence", which basically implies that you grow to be more accustomed to the habits of the people in your host culture and that you can handle yourself in day to day life situations. And a major part of the academic world about this is that people keep on reflecting on intercultural encounters that they have, and did you notice yourself doing that?

**D.** 05:35

I do not know about this specific situation because they were so careful with me that they made sure first I was okay I didn't think what I could have done better. I was like, "Whoa, this

is this is great. I like that.". So I only thought about how nice it was that people acted that way. But because I was pleasantly impressed I did think about it and afterwards I told my parents "Yo, this is what happened. And this is how people reacted. "

**Interviewer** 06:23

Does that also make you... encounters like that which make you think about differences between what you are used to and what you are encountering here. Do you think that that also makes you culturally adapted to Dutch culture that you, like, handle future situations with the knowledge that you might not get the aggressive response that you are used to?

**D.** 07:03

Yeah, yeah. So now, I know that if something bad happens, I won't be approached aggressively and people will be like "let's solve these things in a human way". Not screaming at each other. But yeah, I wanted to say something, but I forgot...

**Interviewer** 07:29

That's no problem. What's important for me is that situations that happened, make you handle other situation future differently, because of the knowledge that you have gained through the process.

**D.** 07:47

Yeah, but I don't think this example is relevant for that. I think what's more relevant is that, for example, because I only encountered with Dutch people during the laboratories or during the projects that we had. I was kind of shocked that people were very direct. Because if you meet someone on the street, and you need help, they will happily help you. But when it comes to forming friendships with people, they sometimes are very direct. And I'm like, "you could put that way nicer". And because I had so little contact with Dutch people in my first year, I didn't adapt to that. But this year, because I joined March, and I work only with Dutch people and there's only one other international in my in my team. I can learn how to take the Dutch directness and I, I embrace it now. In actually, I started being direct myself. And honestly, when I went back to Romania during Christmas, and I started being direct my friends, they were like, "What the fuck are you a bitch". But yeah. During COVID no, I just couldn't adapt to that.

**Interviewer** 09:13

Okay that's also something I want to talk about that right now is that, as you said, in the beginning of your stay during the height of COVID, you could not really immerse yourself in Dutch culture, right? -No, no.- What obstacles did COVID provide for you? That you could not go to university or?

**D.** 09:44

Yes, both of them. And I did make some friends, even though we only met during the projects and had to work together for the project. But because they were Dutch and nothing was going on because have COVID in the weekends, they would just go home to their parents place. And I couldn't hang out with them. Because after the project, they would just go home, we didn't have any place to go. Because I lived with my ex, I couldn't bring them home. And no one suggested, "let's go to my place". So I feel like because of COVID people were also more closed, let's say not very socially, maybe because they were afraid.

**Interviewer** 10:31



Maybe careful.

**D. 10:33**

Yeah. And we couldn't bond more. Only, yeah chatting during the project as much as we could, because we just had to work on stuff. So yeah.

**Interviewer 10:47**

And that changed as you said, talk me through that change? How did how did the immersion, the dive in Dutch culture, begin with the restrictions being lifted? What did you do to immerse yourself?

**D. 11:07**

With the team we started organizing dinners at some people's place, or we started going to bars and just start talking and telling about yourself. And then they would sometimes couldn't find the English word and say it in Dutch. And then we will get to the Dutch specific words like "gezellig". And I think I started understanding more and more and more, and seeing them eat for lunch sandwiches with peanut butter, and how do you call the sprinkles? -Hagelslag- And I started seeing more of what Dutch people are like, but back in 2020, we didn't have lunch together. People would just go and see other friends they had they wouldn't have lunch with me. So yeah. I didn't have the chance to sit with them and watch them in their natural habitat, you know?

**Interviewer 12:25**

Yeah, yeah and really get first hand experience of the new culture. But I I'm glad that you eventually managed to do that through March. And if I understand it correctly, to summarize a bit; the main reason that you could immerse yourself in Dutch culture and could observe, if I may call it that, is because of when the restrictions lifted, you could really get the hands on experience. -Yeah.- Because before that, it was just you in your room, and you could work with people on projects for university purposes but it stayed on that superficial level, I can imagine that must suck. That must feel really bad. If you come to a new country, and you cannot really find your way in it. Did you experience it like that?

**D. 13:36**

Well, it wasn't because the people weren't open to it, it was because they were maybe careful of COVID and stuff like that. So I don't feel like the people were the obstacle more like COVID and not having social activities.

**Interviewer 13:52**

Yeah. So we can I can conclude that in your case COVID is the main reason why you couldn't immerse yourself before, so now online teaching is not there anymore I can imagine...

**D. 14:20**

But I can say something about it, I have been to an open day I think a month ago or in the beginning of March at Eindhoven. And I experienced like the day studying it physical. So I was in the, in the lecture room with people from second years or third years. And I just met I think, more than 10 or 15 people were and everyone was sharing. It was open. Everyone was "oh, and where are you from?". Oh, and "are you interested in this study?". So I could see what it's like to be in a physical lecture. It was the only difference so I can, because I

have that open experience, I can say that it is a huge difference between online teaching and attending physical lecture.

**Interviewer 15:12**

And everybody was probably also more eager for social interaction because everyone experienced it the way you did. -Probably.- So I think it's great that you were able to immerse yourself in Dutch culture. The next part, the next essential concept flows as a consequence of immersion. And that's, as we talked about already, that is adaptation. That you really start to take aspects of Dutch culture and you put them in your own day to day handling of situations. As you're already mentioned you were more direct to your family in Romania. Do you have more examples of that? Can you talk a little bit more about that?

**D. 16:18**

One example that came to my mind is when I was skating with some friends and it was getting cold, and I had to put my gloves on and instead of gloves, I said "Handshoes". Yeah. I also enjoyed like, the party Dutch music. And I can say, I'm not sure if that's called if that can be considered as getting some dutchness? But yeah, yeah. And what else what else?

**Interviewer 17:04**

So maybe something with person to person interactions? Are there Dutch aspects that you really use yourself? Or learned yourself? Maybe when it comes to politeness? Maybe? Or avoiding impoliteness? Maybe? I you don't know anything that's fine as well. We already talked about how you're learning to ride a bike. You being more direct. So you have given me already a lot of examples. I just wanted to know if there was any more. But it's, it's completely fine if you can't remember anything, if something pops up, let me know. So I already explained to you the main concept of my thesis, intercultural competence. So you being able to really handle day to day situations individually, so without being with Dutch person, do you feel interculturally competent when it comes to Dutch culture? Like, do you feel like you can live here for for the rest of your life without experiencing cultural issues?

**D. 18:40**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

**Interviewer 18:44**

Okay. And was it also like that when you couldn't leave your house?

**D. 18:51**

No, definitely not. No, no, no, no, no, actually, I felt like I couldn't. I couldn't adapt. Yeah. I feel like I didn't understand the people. I feel like I also didn't have any friends. So I was kind of low. So yeah.

**Interviewer 19:17**

You said it felt like you didn't understand people. And being interculturally competent is exactly that. It's understanding how people will react or how people will behave in certain situations. And you felt that you grew in that process?

**D. 19:39**

Yeah, yeah, definitely. Yeah.

**Interviewer 19:41**

Okay. And at first, it was a little bit down, but then COVID restrictions lifted and you could go and learn through social events and to go in to work to march. Are you able to speak Dutch, have you learned that a bit?

**D. 20:07**

Actually, I did a course in my first year, I should speak as A1 level but because I couldn't practice with anyone I kind of forgot. But yes, I can, I can more understand that than speak it. But yeah, I can just as reply short sentences in Dutch, for example. And one other thing I experienced was that people this year, tried to help me learn. We had like a dictionary for me and the other internationals. And they just put words in there that could be used in social contexts. More like informal words.

**Interviewer 20:55**

Yeah. Okay. So and that helps you. And maybe because people in the Netherlands speak English very well learning the language is not really that important for actually being able to handle day to day life, but maybe it has something to do with confidence that if you are able to speak some Dutch that you are more confident to engage in such intercultural encounters.

**D. 21:32**

That's true. Yeah, that's true. Okay. But what I noticed is that the people... if they notice you have a different accent they're just gonna switch to English. You're gonna need to, you're gonna need to tell them, "I want to learn Dutch". "Can you maybe try to have the patience to talk to me in Dutch?". Yeah. But yeah, I noticed people are very eager to help.

**Interviewer 22:01**

I mean, that eagerness actually denies you to learn Dutch, they actually make it impossible for you to learn Dutch if they keep switching to English.

**D. 22:12**

Oh, yeah. But also when your purpose is to actually learn Dutch they are also here to help with that. So yeah, you need to mention it, "like, I want to learn Dutch, so maybe talk to me in Dutch not in English". But I noticed they don't have a problem with it.

**Interviewer 22:36**

Okay. Okay. So, there is kind of a cooperativeness in Dutch people that you have encountered? Can you name some typically, maybe stereotypical Dutch things in your experience?

**D. 23:05**

I think it also depends on the region. And like, we're in the Netherlands you're talking about because in Enschede people did horse riding a lot. And I see that because it's more like in the countryside, and I saw it. Yeah, yeah, I saw that as more like a typical Dutch thing. What I also noticed, but again in Enschede and not here, is that if you compare the Netherlands to another country, they will kind of get mad. Yes, like, one example is when we were working on a project last year and I was like, I was just stating that I'm cold. And explaining why I'm cold. Because at that time of the year, it's warmer in Romania than in the Netherlands and the guy goes, "but you're in the Netherlands now".

**Interviewer 24:17**

Maybe he was trying to be funny. I think he was trying to be funny.

**D.** 24:26

Yeah, yes. But I didn't notice that here. So that's why I think maybe it depends on the area that people are from. Yeah. I think also definitely skating, like ice skating. Oh, yeah. I think sailing as well. And the fact that people are very active, they sport maybe every day, and they try a lot of new sports and new things. I'm not sure. In Romania at least it's not the case. And I don't know, in other countries, but I noticed that in the Netherlands people are very active.

**Interviewer** 25:05

Okay. And that's also also something that you tried to do in the Netherlands, like, exercising as a Dutch person? -Yeah. Yeah, yeah.- So cycling, hagelslag and exercising and being direct are Dutch things that you noticed, to summarize? -Yes- Okay, so I have basically asked you everything that I want, I really feel that you're going to be really valuable resource for my thesis. And you should know that after I transcribe this document, I will do three stages of coding. And I will send you the the document of all the things you have said and how I coded them. And if you don't care, then you can just say "okay, fine". If you're interested, you can check up on it a little bit. You have all the freedom to contact me and tell me if I did something wrong. And with that, you always also have the opportunity to just step back and say I don't want to be used in your thesis anymore. -I don't think that's going to be the case though-. No, me neither. We we did not talk about a lot of controversial stuff. So thank you very much for your interview.

## **Transcript 6**

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

dutch, culture, people, netherlands, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, utrecht, exchange, directness, plan, nice, professors, competent, university, ukraine, adapt, housing, person, experience, immerse

### **SPEAKERS**

Interviewer, Ab.

**Interviewer** 00:00

Good, the recording has started...

**Ab.** 00:05

... I like how it gives me the option to leave the meeting.

**Interviewer** 00:08

Haha okay, okay, well I already got your consent form; Thank you. I always need to ask on records that you are aware that you are being recorded right now. And that you are aware of the fact that what you say will be used in my thesis as my data, although anonymous. -Yes-. Well great, my name is Jaap. I did my first semester this year abroad in Finland as part of the Eurocampus program. And that was my first exchange and there I grew to be really interested by the whole process of exchange and the concept of internationals. So when I returned to Utrecht I decided to focus my thesis on exchange students coming to my own

city. So that's why I'm interviewing people like you. Okay, tell me a little bit about yourself. Who are you? What are you doing? Where are you from?

**Ab.** 01:14

So I am (redacted). I am originally from the States, three hours south of Chicago, a city called Peoria, Illinois. I did my first exchange during my Bachelor's where I spend a semester in Wales in the UK, then I... it is not really an exchange but my other international experience is I spent two years living in the one of Ukraine doing youth development work. And now I'm doing my master's abroad in intercultural communication, because I think, studying that, in general, you should maybe do an exchange, and maybe not do that in your home country. But also, I think I just prefer not being in the US. So, yeah.

**Interviewer** 01:59

Really, elaborate a bit on that please?

**Ab.** 02:03

I think over the last five years, I've only spent a year back home, maybe a year and a half. And I just, I mainly do it for public transport. But I think overall, I enjoy the pacing of life a lot better outside of the US. Live to live not live to work.

**Interviewer** 02:26

Live in more hedonistic way? -Yes- So I'm having I have a really experienced intercultural person in front of me right now?

**Ab.** 02:37

Maybe Maybe!

**Interviewer** 02:40

Very interesting. And how long have you been in the Netherlands?

**Ab.** 02:45

Yeah, I just moved when I the master started.

**Interviewer** 02:47

Okay. So, August,

**Ab.** 02:50

August 2021.

**Interviewer** 02:52

How was your housing process?

**Ab.** 02:55

I have SSH. So I live in (redacted), if you know where that building is? So it's the culture center for UU and it's really nice. It's right near the city center and we have really nice windows.

**Interviewer** 03:12

That's all that matters, windows! Can you give me a little evaluation of your stay so far? How do you find the natives? How is your stay so far? What are your experiences?

**Ab.** 03:29

Um, overall, I really have enjoyed my stay. I think, for people, at least from the countries I lived in, it's not too hard of a transition just because of the access of English. So if I stay longer, I'll probably try to learn some Dutch. I don't think it's a requirement for now, which I think is really nice. I think university, there hasn't been too many butting heads with professors or the administration on things. I think overall, everyone is very welcoming and easy to work with.

**Interviewer** 04:09

You have been able to find your way rather quickly. And maybe partially due to the fact that in the Netherlands, almost everybody speaks English.

**Ab.** 04:18

Yeah. And I think there's a lot of accessible material online. So I actually applied to do this master's program right after my bachelor's. And I ended up choosing to go live and work in Ukraine for a while. And I think I wouldn't have been as prepared then as I am now, because I was able to watch more videos and learn about like the housing crisis, and I was able to be proactive about those things. I think I had a relatively easy time finding housing, but I think if I hadn't done that research and read up, I wouldn't know. So I think that's maybe the one downside for my experience. I think transparency early on about housing really should be happening.

**Interviewer** 05:04

So your housing has been relatively easy compared to others because there have been major struggles.

**Ab.** 05:09

Yeah, I think the only reason mine wasn't is because I already applied for the SSH launch of their short term housing and I was like literally on the website practicing going from book, to the refresh button to the Book button. And so I was able to get something but like, if I didn't get that, I don't know if I would be, it would have been as easy.

**Interviewer** 05:31

Okay. So you were lucky with that, I think, or not really lucky as you actually work for it. So you came here around August, and I believe I was in Finland by then. But I believe that there were not a lot of COVID restrictions at that time, right? -There was only public transport, I think.- Yeah. And in the winter, it went full. Full lockdown. -Correct- Okay, okay. Are you, as an ICC student, familiar with the concept of cultural immersion? -Yes- That you're basically able to dive down into the host culture. And a person who is as interculturally oriented orientated as you I can believe that it's very important for you to immediately dive down and immerse yourself in your host culture. How did you do that, in this specific case, in the Netherlands?

**Ab.** 06:33

I think what was really helpful was, because of COVID, there were these networks on Discord. So then, when I arrived, I was able to join like, an Utrecht University discord channel and like a sub channel about like LGBTQ plus, and etc. And so I think that was really helpful. It allowed me to go to like a meetup and etc. And then ICC hosted their in person stuff, which was really nice. I don't know if I necessarily right away dived deep into Dutch culture, just

because I think there was still a little bit of hesitation, and not necessarily because I went from the US where we think had some more regulations, or we were getting about to go into more regulations because of the summer spike. So I think there was still a little bit of hesitation. But I think the discord server and then ICC really did facilitate, like, a surface level immersion, if that makes sense. So familiarity, not necessarily like immigration.

**Interviewer 07:36**

Yeah. Okay. So getting to know the culture, maybe better. Okay, so that's very interesting, those are elements that have basically not been mentioned before, because I heard you mentioned Discord and the role that university plays in this. I had a lot of complaints basically, about the fact that the university was mostly online, or has parts that were online. How did you actually experience that? The part where you couldn't go to the university in your host country?

**Ab. 08:16**

I think that's a perfect time for me if I'm going to be honest, because it was when the rainy season hit. So I was completely okay with it being online, I definitely think it did affect like how the ICC program works, too because we do a lot of group work. And so I think it did affect being able to really integrate with your peers on a level like... when I think we had in person stuff a lot more we were able to really get to know one each other. But like, I had group members with whom the only discussions were the group projects. And so I think that really did impact it. I also think there was a couple professors who didn't know how to use hybrid systems. So like when we were starting to reoffer hybrids, because numbers are spiking again, there was one professor who wouldn't set it up herself. And so like we were, we were then tasked with bringing colleagues into the environment, which I think is a weird thing when you're trying to take notes, but also at the same time, make sure someone's also able to participate. Yeah. And you think by as late in the pandemic as I joined, that these things would have been kind of like, formalized and have a process set in place. But I think that's the weird part of them starting to relax is maybe people forgot the importance of it.

**Interviewer 09:40**

Yeah, yeah. So online teaching did not do much for you?

**Ab. 09:47**

I liked it. It should always be accessible, especially for people who suffer from things like depression, anxiety, etc. It's a nice way to still participate in class without necessarily having to leave your house. But I think it did impact. Yeah. And I think sometimes not making a choice (unintelligible) also had an impact. Like the first block, though we didn't have COVID regulations, some people were still like testing positive or not feeling comfortable going into classes. Like I was vaccinated in the US and I think it was approaching like, right, when people were starting to say like, "the vaccine isn't as useful after 10 months, etc" and I was approaching 10 or 11 months because I was vaccinated really early. But the Netherlands didn't offer boosters. And so like, there's also these in between where there should probably be accessible to those who don't feel comfortable coming to class. Yeah, but because the university had pulled back the regulations, hybrid wasn't really enforced. So it was weird.

**Interviewer 10:56**

Okay. So interesting this role of the uni that we discussed and that you told me about. So you've had experience where you got to know Dutch culture but I have not really heard you say that you were able to immerse yourself, Have you immersed yourself and have you been able to?

**Ab.** 11:20

I think mainly because of two ways. First way is dating. I have like tried dating, and then I've like, pulled back and now I'm like, trying it again. And I think that's a really good way to learn Dutch culture, try different food experience, like, like museums that are around which isn't really Dutch culture, but like, also Dutch culture. So I think that's really useful. I would say I'm an introvert. So I don't like doing like Dutch party scene culture. So I haven't done that. But I do think that has helped me, at least, interact with local and learn things like the basic principle of like, waving to the Bus driver when you leave. And then second, I think my internship really helps. So it's a very diverse organization. I think there's still a lot of Dutch culture that finds its way in, because I would say, there's still around 45% Dutch people at the company. And so that's been really helpful even just like socializing, learning, like different do's and don'ts in the work culture. So, yeah, but I also think all the restrictions are gone. So what does it been possible working remotely? Probably not.

**Interviewer** 12:48

Yeah, yeah. So you name like the social aspect of immersion culture, which also something that is written about a lot in academia about this. And as someone who started to get a lot of experience with Dutch culture, do you have anything that you can say... we can get as a stereotypical or especially essentialist as we want here... are typical Dutch things or typical characteristics of Dutch culture, in your experience so far?

**Ab.** 13:27

Um, when you're on your bike, you assume you own everything, sidewalk included.

**Interviewer** 13:35

Oh yeah you can bike where you want.

**Ab.** 13:37

Not even just the bike lanes, like if you're on your bike, you get to go first, even on the sidewalk.

**Interviewer** 13:42

Yeah. Do you bike a lot?

**Ab.** 13:46

I do not, I hate biking,

**Interviewer** 13:48

You have not integrated that?

**Ab.** 13:50

I work for a micro mobility company, but I hate biking haha.

**Interviewer** 13:57

So you have not adapted to that typical Dutch thing yet? Are there any other typical Dutch things that you could think of?

**Ab.** 14:05



I think with planning. So like trying to set a plan with someone who's Dutch, who has like months in advanced plans. I don't run into this with everyone. But I think before the restrictions were lifted, I was able to make more off the fly plans like with one on ones or like, you know, just meeting up. But now as restrictions are back people's social calendars are filling up even more.

**Interviewer** 14:38

Have you been able to adapt to that? Like I can imagine in the beginning when you want to plan something and they pull out an agenda? Like okay, when in two months? Are you free? That's quite weird to experience. Have you in any way adapted to it?

**Ab.** 14:51

I don't mind making long term plans. So like, I have a friend who we just hung out this past weekend and we were like, Okay, let's plan three, four weeks in advance for when we'll hang out again. And I don't mind doing that I think where I can adapt is when I've realized it is a nice day out I didn't have any plans, and I want to do something. And so I think that's where the problem comes in. But I think like for people I regularly enjoy hanging out with I don't mind taking long, just like plans in the future. But I still don't plan my social calendar super filled.

**Interviewer** 15:28

So you have been able to, like understand it, or maybe expect it in some cases, but it still is not where your preferences lie maybe?

**Ab.** 15:41

Yeah. Because I don't like being scheduled in.

**Interviewer** 15:46

Are there any other typical Dutch things that you wanted to discuss? I find it really interesting what you are saying right now. So if you have any others? We can also continue and if something pops into your mind...

**Ab.** 16:04

I think the rest would just be like food. But like, I don't, it's just like, it's only really I've run into this with Dutch men. Okay, and them saying that Dutch food is really delicious. And then you eat it. And it's like, these bitterballen have no flavor. Okay, yeah, that's about all I can think of.

**Interviewer** 16:25

A Dutch way of behavior maybe? During interacting, maybe you have noticed anything? Like interpersonal contact with Dutch people?

**Ab.** 16:46

Yeah, I mean, I could say the average thing with directness but I think I, myself am very direct. So I don't necessarily attribute that to Dutch culture.

**Interviewer** 16:55

You did not need to adapt to that, because you already know. I think that's a big, big plus when you come to the Netherlands because I talked with a lot of people who were really blown away by that.

**Ab.** 17:12

So thankfully, during my undergrad, I also did intercultural communication, but more from a communication studies aspect and this book is why I chose to pursue living or working and or studying in the Netherlands, because it talks about directness and I suffer from social anxiety. So I'd rather people tell me straightforward.

**Interviewer** 17:37

Then you are in the right place in the Netherlands! Are you direct yourself as a person?

**Ab.** 17:46

I think in certain instances, yes. I strive to be. In other instances, like, I'm direct when it comes to like, if we're setting a plan, and I don't like your idea I'll say it, but I'm less direct about like my own needs. So that's what I need to get more direct at.

**Interviewer** 18:02

Is that something that has changed or maybe could change when you surround yourself in a Dutch culture that's mainly focused on directness?

**Ab.** 18:09

I think it is slowly changing. Like, right now I'm casually seeing someone and I think we set the standard for like, open, honest communication. And so like, I'm being forward and direct, like, for example, thankfully, they already had plans this weekend, but I was like, "I can't hang out this weekend". It worked out.

**Interviewer** 18:30

Yeah. Then everybody knows what they can expect. Okay. So we have discussed the immersion in Dutch culture, adaptation in the Dutch culture. You mentioned a different way of the Dutch people plan things. Also certain mindset and directness. As an intercultural communication student, I think you are familiar with the concept of intercultural competence? Because that's the main concept of my interview, basically, that you're able to handle day to day situation without having a native by your side. To what extent do you feel interculturally competent when it comes to Dutch culture in specific?

**Ab.** 19:30

I would say overall, pretty competent, because I wouldn't say in the grand scheme of things, it's that drastically different from my own culture. Yeah. I think like for example, today, I recently added a subscription to my NS ov chip card, and I didn't realize that when you have the I don't remember what the dude called it, but it's like when you add a subscription and you have like the discount during peak hours, and so I wasn't sure what was going on with my card. And so like I first like checked, but then I went in action and just asked the question. I think even just knowing where to go kind of shows you're somewhat competent. I wouldn't say I'm already there because like if I was fully immersed, I would have already known what this meant but the fact that I bought a subscription and have a personalized OV chip card shows some sort of integration. Yeah. I think I'm at the point where at grocery stores even though I don't like if they respond to me in Dutch, I know to the extent what they're probably saying to me, because I frequent them enough.

**Interviewer** 20:37

And they talk to you in Dutch so you blend in.

**Ab. 20:39**

That is because I am white and blonde. But, um, like the other day a friend was visiting. And someone like I think someone said something to her in the end, like she hadn't really said hello, or anything in the conversation. and she asked her if she wanted a receipt and although I don't understand Dutch contextually I knew what she was asking.

**Interviewer 21:03**

Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah. I think that is a showcase of intercultural competence that you're able to fill in uncertainties.

**Ab. 21:14**

Yeah. Or like, also just being willing to like, because I think, like, for example, I was at Amsterdam Centraal the other day, I was just listening to music and the police walk up. And so like, they said something and I was like, the confidence to also say, like, "I don't understand, I speak English". And be okay with that. It's also sometimes, like, good as well.

**Interviewer 21:37**

And it's not weird to not speak Dutch in Amsterdam.

**Ab. 21:40**

Yeah. And like, Yeah, cuz I think back when I first started traveling, I felt ashamed to like, need to speak in English.

**Interviewer 21:50**

Nobody expects you to learn a native language.

**Ab. 21:54**

And so it's like being okay with that and it's also because Amsterdam and Utrecht by extension are very international cities. And part of getting accustomed is understanding that the cities operate in both languages to accent. I have not gotten used to getting mail only in Dutch from the government. But I realized that I don't pay any of the extra tax like the extra taxes so I can just throw that mail right away.

**Interviewer 22:21**

Of course, not even look at it, if the color is blue, just throw it out.

**Ab. 22:28**

I also have a GP here, I have a Digi Id and I got my booster vaccine here. So in those regards in like bureaucracy, I'm pretty integrated.

**Interviewer 22:37**

Yeah, and you can really handle the day to day situations, which is why I think we can hereby declare you interculturally competent.

**Ab. 22:47**

Yeah. But like when I was in Utrecht and had an allergic reaction. I didn't know what to do.

**Interviewer 22:53**

That's a panic situation. Yeah. So. Okay, so room for improvement there. The next time you get an allergic reaction, and you're able to handle that, and you survived.

**Ab.** 23:10

This does remind me of a point I do not understand... another stereotype is like Dutch doctors being very like apathetic to your problems.

**Interviewer** 23:21

Is that the case in your experience?

**Ab.** 23:23

It's something I experienced, but it's also a stereotype because like when you're on expat Facebook pages, people will be like, "give me a doctor that is less Dutch with their medical practices". And so like I went in, and I had tonsillitis, like I had visual bacterial on my tonsils, and like in the US, you would get like an antibiotic, or you at least prescribe something and here they're like, "just go home." Yeah, I'm like, yeah, like the third time it's happened.

**Interviewer** 23:52

It is always like "go home and if it's not gone in two weeks, then you could come back".

**Ab.** 23:56

Yeah. That is a bit weird.

**Interviewer** 24:01

Yeah, about those kinds of those kinds of situations. In intercultural competence a big part of that is reflection. The fact that you have an encounter, like your doctor appointment, and you go home, and you reflect on it, like, what just happened? Why did this happen? How can I do this in the future? Do you reflect in any way?

**Ab.** 24:25

Um, so I do actually, I have had that twice where I had tonsils problems. The first time, I didn't even go because I had read up on the culture in the Netherlands on giving antibiotics. And I know it's not really a thing. The second time, I was only there because I had an appointment to get into counseling. And so I was like, "Well, I'm here. Might as well ask", but also Dutch doctors are like a one stop shop, you make an appointment for one thing. And so if you bring up anything else, they're like, "Oh, this isn't what you scheduled your appointment for we're gonna make another three weeks." Yeah. So I think so like I do reflect on that. And I do act accordingly. And I'm very good I think now at not... because like when I lived in Ukraine, I think one of my best best, like positive outlooks is like, I never took a negative interaction as it's their fault. Or like, it's my fault. It was always like, what was the misunderstanding? I think that would have allowed me now to do that here. And so, I do think that helps.

**Interviewer** 25:32

Okay, I find this really interesting to hear that you actively reflect because, as I said, that is something that's really broadly described in academia, when it comes to intercultural competence. And it's interesting to see that you follow those, those steps of immersion, then some reflection and maybe that makes you start to understand it better which makes you able to become intercultural competence. So, we walked the whole path. I asked you everything that I wanted to ask you, I always want to give the participants in the end the

possibility to ask questions, in reality they do not really have questions usually, but you have the possibility.

**Ab.** 26:26

I guess. I think I should ask you some basic ones just because I've never met you in the program before. You can stop the recording if you want and I'll ask you off record.

**Interviewer** 26:38

I just wanted to add; thank you for this interview, I will stop the recording.

## Transcript 7

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dutch, netherlands, people, norway, bit, culture, restrictions, utrecht, thesis, day, bike, experience, encounter, little bit, german, italy, field, immerse, finland, recognize

### SPEAKERS

Interviewer, A.

**Interviewer** 00:00

Okay, so the recording has started, you already signed your consent form, I need to ask it again on record, you are aware that you're being recorded right now, right? -Yes, I am.- Okay. Great. And you also are aware that your data will be used anonymously in my thesis?

**A.** 00:21

Yes, that's fine for me. Okay.

**Interviewer** 00:22

Great. Thank you. So, okay, my name is Jaap. I study at University of Utrecht right now. The past six months I have been studying as an exchange student in Finland. And there I grew to be really interested in exchange students and whole concept of studying internationally. For my thesis, I wanted to connect that to my home country. And that's why I'm interviewing people like you. I want to thank you again, for responding to my, to my request, I can say that you are the only one who who has responded to me through the International Facebook groups. So thank you again. And could you please tell me a little bit about yourself? Like, where do you come from? Why are you in the Netherlands?

**A.** 01:24

So my name is (redacted). I am originally from Italy. But I haven't been living there for a long time now. I studied my bachelor in Norway and I did biomedicine. And then I wanted to further experience some, like other schools or universities, and also Utrecht University was one of the few schools offering the master in regenerative medicine and technology. And I basically applied to that one and another one in Stockholm, and Utrecht answered earlier. And I just Googled it. And it felt like an amazing place to be and yeah, that's, that's why I'm here now. So I started my master in September.

**Interviewer** 02:18

Okay, so you started here in the midst of COVID restrictions?

**A.** 02:26

Yeah, exactly. I think I was a little bit lucky, because I moved here a little bit earlier in August. So when the restriction were not that strict, at least here in the Netherlands, it was really, it was really weird to come from Norway or Italy, because I've had my summer vacation there. And everybody were wearing masks, masks. And here it felt almost like COVID did not really exist. But then of course here the restriction hit a little bit later during the semester. And that was a little bit weird. Yeah.

**Interviewer** 02:57

Yeah. Yeah. So you arrived in a relatively open society? And, like around December, coincidentally when I returned from Finland, everything closed again. -Yeah.- So could you evaluate your stay so far? Like how do you feel about the native people, the university, your housing situation? social life?

**A.** 03:24

Yes. So the housing situation, of course, was.... I did not expect it to be this difficult in the Netherlands because I and my other international friends, we thought, "Oh, the Netherlands, they are so advanced in so many fields" and "housing will not be a problem". And I thought, well, in Norway they were not that prepared into having exchange student but maybe in the Netherlands, they know that they have more but that was not the case. Not like that. Yeah, but I have to say that was the only kind of negative experience that I got so far. Also, because people say that Dutch people tend not to be super friendly towards internationals, or it's really difficult in the class, since Dutch people used to stick with Dutch and just talk Dutch to each other and never, or like very sudden switch to English. But that was not my experience. I got kind of lucky, because my sister program really tried to mix us up in the first weeks. So we had different projects, and they were really trying to let us interact with as many people as possible and that really helped us to bond and I have to say now that I'm doing my internship with other classmates or like colleagues from the Master, I basically have lunch with Dutch, with Dutch people all the time. So that's.... the fact I'm not a Dutch speaker, that did not prevent me from bonding with them. Absolutely.

**Interviewer** 03:25

Yeah. Okay. So... because I had an interview yesterday as well. And he told me that he was surprised by the fact that when he tried to speak Dutch, he could not speak Dutch fluently but a few words, but then that the Dutch person would automatically like figure out okay, he is having issues and then automatically switch back to English, but your experience is different, as you say, like they will talk Dutch to each other, even though you're standing next to them?

**A.** 05:59

Okay, so it's a little bit different, because I already speak Norwegian and German and Italian and English. So I had like a different background. So also, I'm very interested into learning also Dutch. So it's, for me, it's not that.... it's not negative if the person around me are speaking, in fact, Dutch and also I.... there's a friend of mine and she starts to learn Italian, and I start to learn Dutch on Duolingo, like the app. And so every time we are just like, "Oh, can you just talk a little bit more?" Or "how do you pronounce this?" And "how do you do that". And, of course, things are not proceeding at the same speed as they would in your native language, it's also natural for you to switch to a language which is combined for both of you. So I don't think it's... unpoliteness is just a matter of communication. And also, me as a girl of science, we know how, like, we want to have the facts we want to have our

conversation keeping on and so yeah, it's that yeah, I come from a very international background so I really experienced these and I don't think the Dutch population is.... actually, you're doing great.

**Interviewer** 07:19

Okay, great. Great to hear that. And I can figure that because, as you said, you have some kind of German influence in you and I can imagine that you may be able to maybe recognize some Dutch words, and then translate them to German for yourself, how fluent are you in German? And how does that help?

**A.** 07:43

B2 in German? Yeah, and like, I've been also living in Germany for one year before my studies. So like, I consider myself fluent. Yeah, it's actually it's difficult for me to learn Dutch now, because I give a German accent to everything or like, I can understand emails, I can read. While when I tried to talk, I would always give like, the German accent or I tried to Germanize something or like, of course, the words are so similar. Like, they could understand if I just talk Dutch. Actually I was in a bike shop the other day, I was about to ask if they could fix it or something. And then I was looking at the guy. I was like, yeah, do you speak English? He was like, nah. Okay. Do you speak Italian or German or Norwegian? And then he looks at me and then I was just talking in German ish Norwegian, and he would reply in Dutch ish. Something but like, the communication went along.

**Interviewer** 09:00

Okay. And as a person with, as you said, a lot of international experience. I think it's interesting to hear about what are some things that in your experience are typically Dutch that you have encountered, like riding a bike?

**A.** 09:29

The bike stereotype is surely there, which I love. But I have to say... I think I kind of Dutchified a little bit because I'm also super aggressive on my bel when I'm riding the bike. It is so socially accepted that like if you want to just go as fast as you want, you are allowed to so that's fine.

**Interviewer** 10:04

And in Utrecht that's also necessary otherwise you're you're gonna die or have a fight within like an hour show. You need to use the bel to alert people.

**A.** 10:17

Exactly. And I also became a little bit more aggressive when I see like, or I guess those are like internationals who are not really used to ride a bike, and they are like riding next to each other. And you're like why are they blocking the road.

**Interviewer** 10:37

Okay, I can recognize everything that you say. I really liked what you said, you use the word Dutchified which really correlates to one of the biggest concepts in my thesis and that's cultural adaptation. And that is like, taking parts of the host culture and put them in your own frame of reference or way to behave and way to handle day to day situations. And you already mentioned being more aggressive on the bike with the bell. Are there more examples?

**A.** 11:21

I think I was a little bit shocked by this food. Like, I did not realize.... I'm Italian so food wise, it's really... that's the way I use for immerse emerging myself into the culture. Yeah. But I didn't really find that much. I mean, sure I'm loving bitterballen. And like, there's so much when you're going out now of course I think I got addicted to Stroopwafels. Like, one big package a week. But then, yeah, it's not really that you are having a dinner and you're like, "Yeah, let's cook some Dutch meal". That is not happening. Yeah, but I think I also Yeah, I think I also switched more to the sandwiches for lunch.

**Interviewer** 12:23

Sandwiches, yeah, you make them yourself and you take them with you. Yeah.

**A.** 12:27

Exactly. So yeah, that's also a little bit more part of my routine now. Instead of pasta or whatever I was doing back home in Italy.

**Interviewer** 12:38

Maybe in the Netherlands it is more simple. It's just two slices of bread. Put something in between and go.

**A.** 12:49

Yeah, exactly. I think also timewise I, I feel like, while in Norway, they would also eat dinner really early, like, around 6 o'clock. And but my Italian DNA tells me to eat like, late. I really like the early style as well here in the Netherlands. Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer** 13:15

You feel like you adapted to that you're not having dinner at night anymore?

**A.** 13:25

Yeah, but that's difficult when you have to plan with someone from different countries. And you are in the Netherlands and you're like talking with people and you're like, Yeah, okay, so shall we meet after dinner? And then if you also have Spanish people involved then you wont see them before 11.

**Interviewer** 13:45

Yeah, I recognize that a lot of my own exchange, because we also had, like a really intercultural group. And then we're exactly as you said, when we had plans to meet in town after dinner, I was ready like at 6:30 and then they wouldve not even be in the supermarket. I completely recognize that. So when we talked about adapting to Dutch culture and taking parts of Dutch culture and making them your own you talked about your food behavior as I like to call it and the scheduling of your day. Are there any other things that come into your mind maybe when it has to do with person to person contact? There is a stereotypical Dutch thing that is the Dutch directness and have you encountered that yourself? The Dutch directness that they what they think.

**A.** 15:03

I think I haven't experienced that too much. Now from what I was used from Norway, people would be the exact opposite. And here normally, maybe, maybe I didn't really notice that because it's something that I appreciate or that I like.



**Interviewer** 15:25

It's not a shock if you already experience it, exactly.

**A.** 15:29

Exactly. Yeah, I mean, I was going out with some people, and we were just talking about stuff. But it didn't really Yeah, I didn't really shock me, or it's not something that I that I just noticed it so much. And I was, I didn't realize that they were not doing that. Also, because in the lab, as I was mentioned before, like, in the scientific field, it's kind of a good thing, if they are telling you directly like, Okay, I have an acid in my hand, what should I do, like, Do this, do that don't do the other thing. So maybe maybe in my field, it's also a little bit, it's a good thing, of course, like giving, it's not about giving critiques, but giving, like straightforward instruction that you don't need to read between the lines

**Interviewer** 16:19

being clear to one another. And I agree that that really depends on which field you are in. Because, as you said, during like lab experiments, there is no room for indirectness or people to guess what you mean.

**A.** 16:41

no, no.

**Interviewer** 16:43

And this is, so we talked about adaptation, we talked about parts of Dutch culture that you make your own. And the main thing that leads to adaptation, according to the current theoretical field, is cultural immersion. And the name already explains a little bit, this is that you really can dive into your host culture, you can really immerse yourself, in your case in Dutch culture. And I can imagine that for you, that was easier in the beginning, when there were no COVID restrictions left. But then maybe it grew to be harder when COVID restrictions came in. Could you tell me a little bit about how you experienced that, your immersion in Dutch culture from the beginning?

**A.** 17:41

So yes, yeah, when I came here, then also being part of the university, of course, it's a huge help, because, yeah, you, you get to know these people around you every day, or you have to work with them. And then, at the beginning it was very easy. And like, we could meet on campus, we can do some activity face to face. And being able to ask, "Okay, what's your name," again, not only reading it by zoom call, or by the teams, you know, and then it got a little bit more online or people started getting sick. So we were also a bit more, maybe also afraid some of some of our colleagues were more fragile than others. So sometimes we will have like a hybrid version. So sometimes some people were in school and some were not there. But of course, it's a little bit difficult also to bound or to, yeah, to, to interact in the same way, of course, because it's not the same as "Okay guys, we are done for the day, can we like do you want to go out for a beer or be spontaneous"? Or really try to have some more extra time with these people than only what you usually have on the computer? I mean, not all of them, of course, are playing computer games or like little bit nerds like me, but it's just like, yeah, it's it's different. And it's so much better now the restrictions are open again, also because my class was lucky because we also got to have some borrels like after we were done with with our first semester. And the professor just organized some small borrel so we get together and drink. Yeah, and get together. Yeah. But yeah, I think my experience would definitely have been different and also a little bit more boring. I have to say if I had the COVID restriction on all the time because I also remember, when the lockdown was

announced a little bit before Christmas time, I just thought, "thank God, I am going back home for Christmas holiday" and I get to spend some time there where there is not a lockdown. Because, you know, like you are exchange students and probably living with people that you don't know, maybe you don't like some of them. And yeah, there's not that much you can do. You're not allowed to invite people, you're not allowed to go to your friends, you're not allowed to eat something outside. And of course, it was not like the previous week's with a good weather, it was really shitty weather, sorry for the word, at that time. So it's not that you could go out and try to do something in the new culture, you would seek back to your old habits and just Netflix and you're eating ice cream.

**Interviewer** 20:55

So the way that you... before the COVID restrictions you could really immerse yourself in Dutch culture how you wanted to like: socializing at uni, going to social events etcetera. And to summarize what you said, the social aspect has been your greatest way of immersing yourself in Dutch culture, right? And then COVID came and you were basically locked up in your own room and you could not really experience Dutch society or Dutch culture. -Yeah.- And besides, like, uni and going out, are there other ways for you to immerse yourself in in a culture like, maybe you like Dutch art or Dutch museums?

**A.** 22:03

Yeah,(unintelligible). But of course some of those were also closed. And I don't really like the digital version that some museums try to offer. I'm not following any films from Dutch history .That does not interest me. I think something that I did, because I was bored was just downloading some meeting apps and just, yeah, just chatting with people from from Utrecht from here.

**Interviewer** 22:44

So that so basically, you also, were able to dive into Dutch culture. on a social level, even though the there was a lockdown. That's a really interesting thing. And you downloaded the app, for the purposes of social contact.

**A.** 23:11

I mean, it's not something that everybody does. But like, I also, I find it funny to learn a language in the funniest way, which is also including, like, day to day talk, or like something that it can be used in everyday. And like reading the profile description of Dutch people, that's that's a part of it, right? And then you can always learn something new and maybe also meeting interesting people, even though there's no possibility to actually meet.

**Interviewer** 23:47

Yeah, you mentioned a really interesting concept again and that's being able to handle day to day situations for day to day contexts in your host culture. In my field of research, we call it intercultural competence. And that's basically the main theory of my of my thesis. And intercultural competence basically entails that you can move around your host society, in your case Dutch society, without experiencing like, cultural problems, cultural dissonance basically. Do you feel you're like you're interculturally competent when it comes to Dutch culture?

**A.** 24:44

Yeah, I could say yeah, like you say, so. But, but again, I was exposed to German and Norwegian and I think the region, like the higher you go, the harder it becomes.

**Interviewer 24:59**

So for you, previous intercultural experience was really a big factor for you adapting to the Netherlands quite easily?

**A. 25:09**

Yeah, I also have to say like weather wise. Yeah. I'm used. I'm used to the snow, like, from September until the end of May. Yeah. And having those very, very dark periods where you're not even seeing the sun. My friends here were super sad. And they said, "Oh, my God, I'm getting so depressed by all this rain, and by the sun going away at four," and I was just like they could have expected that.

**Interviewer 25:52**

Yeah, so I understand. Yeah, I recognize that immediately from my time in Finland, and I think around from the beginning of November, maybe the end of October, you had like four hours of sun every day. And the temperature would not become above zero Celsius. And I think that's for you in the northern part of Norway. similar experience. Yeah.

**A. 26:33**

Yeah.

**Interviewer 26:34**

How did you handle that?

**A. 26:36**

Ah, well, I mean, I have to say, there were less distractions for like when you had to study then you knew "okay I do not want to go". I mean, sure, you can go skiing, and there's beautiful things to do up there as well. But yeah, I think lighting up a lot of candles, just just trying to meet, try, really, like, you really get the opportunity to discover yourself and to understand what you like, what you don't like, what it's essential for you.

**Interviewer 27:11**

And what, what also is something interesting that I would like to talk to you about shortly, is what has been described in a theoretical landscape about intercultural competence. And what I experienced myself is that a reflection or self evaluation is a big part of getting to know your host culture. Do you agree with that? Like, like you have you had an intercultural encounter? And maybe some problems arise during that encounter, or you don't really understand each other, and then for example, you go home and you actively think it over like, "Okay, what just happened?" "How could I do this differently in the future?" Do you reflect or self evaluate when it comes to these intercultural encounters?

**A. 28:15**

Yes, but I haven't experienced that many as I have when I was abroad other times, but probably also because I'm more in international environments, due to the fact that my masters also taught in English

**Interviewer 28:35**

Yeah. It also does not have to be like a negative encounter, it could also be your positive encounter, and the main point is the reflection part that you could also reflect like, "Okay, this

went really well". And then you adjust your future behavior on the basis of how that situation went.

**A. 28:58**

Actually, now that I'm thinking about it, I, I saw like, last month or two, I remember, somebody fell off their bikes. And so many people just stopped to help which I did not expect because in Italy or in Norway, I would, I don't know, I think I just would have experienced a different a different society or like the level of awareness of people and like, towards the difficulties of somebody else's. Yeah, it was, it was really great. I, I love that and maybe something about the energy of this country, that people seems really to know what they want and act to. You have to work in a way where it's not as chaotic as I experienced in Italy, where people have a lot of disgust and discontent about their lifestyle. Here it really feels like people believe in a purpose. And this is I also I think I also saw it from a business class that I'm following where investors were saying yeah, because the Netherlands are investing in anything that which is green, which is healthy and which is smart. I was like, wow, I really would like to live in such a country where these are the main thoughts. Also, you believe it when you see that people are going to work on their bikes, and that they know that they have to move. And as soon as the sun is out, everybody's running or doing physical activities in parks. I really love that. I mean, I'm considering about staying for a longer period here in this country, which I like. Yeah, I just chose Utrecht because it looked nice in the beginning. And now I'm really considering because of many, many things.

**Interviewer 31:15**

What you basically described to me is like a sort of process of you seeing stuff and then reflecting on it. In the Netherlands, it might be a bit more on the on the foreground. And that thought process is really interesting to me. I must say, like, I've asked everything that I wanted to say. And for me, you have chosen the best city in the Netherlands. Okay, I am going to transcribe this interview. And I will send you the transcript and how I coded it and then you have all the freedom to tell me "I did not mean it like that". Or "you should put more emphasis on this". And I also want to remind you that you are in complete freedom of just pulling the plug whenever you want. You can tell me "hey, I don't want to be used in your thesis anymore." So thank you very much for this interview. I if I can call you a resource, you are a very valuable resource.

## 8.2 Coding

Open Codes	<p>active attitude with immersion attitude very important for competence confidence is important with intercultural competence eager to learn <i>dutch</i> empathy very important for competence learning Dutch is not necessary mindset is important when becoming interculturally competent positive expectations of stay beforehand preparation for stay abroad is important</p>	<p>immersion through arts and history immersion through celebrating <i>dutch</i> traditions immersion through food no immersion because of different covid administration</p>	<p>adaptation because of social immersion adaptation for social convenience buddy system of university helped with immersion communication with Dutch people is fine because of multilingual background COVID blocked social immersion COVID blocked social immersion and adaptation <i>dutch</i> are <i>aggressive</i> bike riders <i>dutch</i> are cooperative <i>dutch</i> are eager to help <i>dutch</i> are funny <i>dutch</i> are happy and bubbly people Dutch are organized <i>dutch</i> are very caring and non <i>aggressive</i> <i>dutch</i> are welcoming <i>dutch</i> culture is not rushed getting familiar with Dutch culture through social events immersion mainly through social life immersion stopped through online teaching immersion through Dutch project partner immersion through roommates (social) immersion through social activities immersion through work intercultural competence through social immersion language greatest barrier for immersion no adaptation because of lack of immersion no adaptation without immersion no immersion because of different covid administration no immersion because of lack of interaction with c no immersion because of lack of social life online education can be positive but not for immersion online teaching blocks social immersion online teaching blocked immersion online teaching improved immersion through showing how we deal with problems creating social life through social media cultural immersion through dating culture shock of Dutch work ethic <i>dutch</i> were more careful of social interaction during covid</p>	<p>adaptation for social convenience adaptation of card payments adaptation of cycling adaptation of dinner time adaptation of public transport structure adaptation to blend in cultural adaptation of riding a bike fraternities are big in the Netherlands ice skating is typically <i>dutch</i> immersion through celebrating Dutch traditions</p>	<p>adaptation of Dutch efficiency adaptation of card payments adaptation through learning the language adaptation to blend in adaptation to Dutch planning adapted to code of conduct with bikes appreciation of <i>dutch</i> directness communication with Dutch people is fine because of multilingual background cultural adaptation of being flexible cultural immersion through dating culture shock of Dutch directness culture shock of Dutch work ethic <i>dutch</i> are <i>aggressive</i> bike riders <i>dutch</i> are cooperative <i>dutch</i> are eager to help <i>dutch</i> are funny <i>dutch</i> are happy and bubbly people Dutch are organized <i>dutch</i> are very caring and non <i>aggressive</i> <i>dutch</i> are welcoming <i>dutch</i> culture is tolerant <i>dutch</i> were more careful of social interaction during covid eager to learn <i>dutch</i> immersion through learning language language barrier blocking integration no adaptation because of personality no adaptation without immersion no intercultural competence because of language <i>barriere</i> stereotype of Dutch directness stereotype of Dutch <i>tidyness</i></p>	<p>actively reflect to gain competence competence through observation immersion through observing intercultural competence through rich moment not a lot of reflection reflect to gain competence reflection big role in adaptation of <i>dutch</i> directness reflection helps to learn reflection is very important for competence</p>	<p>buddy system of university helped with immersion immersion through Dutch project partner intercultural competence improved through online teaching because of showing how we deal with problems no problems with online education on educational level online education should be always accessible online teaching improved immersion through showing how we deal with problems university plays positive role in immersion</p>	<p><i>dutch</i> were more careful of social interaction during covid expected online education to be structured better experienced multiple types of education experienced online education immersion stopped through online teaching language barrier blocking integration language greatest barrier for immersion no immersion because of intercultural study no immersion because of lack of interaction with online teaching no intercultural competence because of language barrier online education blocked immersion online education can be positive but not for immersion online education enforced language barrier online teaching blocked immersion online teaching blocks social immersion real education is way better for immersion than online education</p>
Categories	Attitude	<u>Immersion through arts &amp; history</u>	<u>Social Immersion</u>	<u>Cultural adaptation of customs</u>	Cultural adaptation of behavior and communication	Reflection as a tool	Online teaching as enforce of developing ICC	Online teaching as blockade of developing ICC
Themes	Development of intercultural competence of exchange students during a COVID schoolyear						Role of online education	

### 8.3 Consent forms



**Universiteit  
Utrecht**

#### **DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:**

A master thesis study regarding the development of intercultural competence for exchange students/internationals during COVID schoolyears

I hereby confirm:

- that I have been satisfactorily informed about the study;
- that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and that any questions I asked have been satisfactorily answered;
- that I have had the opportunity to carefully consider participation in this study;
- that I voluntarily consent to participating.

I consent to the following:

- the data collected will be obtained for scientific purposes and retained as stated in the information letter;
- the collected, coded research data may be shared with other scientists and/or re-used to answer other research questions;
- audio recordings will be made for scientific purposes (see also the box below on the sharing and reuse of this data).

I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: Siena Fam

Signature: *Siena Fam*

Date, town/city: 10/04/2022 Utrecht, NL

#### **Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

Signature: *Siena Fam*

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Name: Jaap Visser

Signature: *Jaap Visser*

Date: 10/4/2022

**DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:**  
A master thesis study regarding the development of intercultural competence  
for exchange students/internationals during COVID schoolyears

I hereby confirm:

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I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: Diana Teodora Ionica

Signature:  Date, town/city: 29 / 03 /2022, Delft

**Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

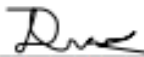
Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

Signature: 

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Name: Jaap Visser

Signature: 

Date: 29/3/2022



**DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:**

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Name of participant: Artemis Kottas

Signature: A.K. Date, town/city: 31 / 03 / 2022 Utrecht

**Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

Signature: A.K.

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Name: Jaap Visser

Signature: 

Date: 31/3/2022





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I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: Javier Sanchez Jimenez

Signature: 

Date, town/city: 29/03 / 2022, Delft

**Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

- Yes, I agree.  No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

- Yes, I agree.  No, I do not agree.

Signature: 

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Name: Jaap Visser

Signature: 

Date: 29/03/2022



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I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: Alice Pravato

Signature: *A. Pravato*

Date, town/city: 29/ 03 /2022 Utrecht

**Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

Yes, I agree.  No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

Yes, I agree.  No, I do not agree.

Signature: *A. Pravato*

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

Name: Jaap Visser

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Signature: *J. Visser*

Date: 29/03/2022



**DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:**

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- that I voluntarily consent to participating.

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- audio recordings will be made for scientific purposes (see also the box below on the sharing and reuse of this data).

I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: Spyros Krinis

Signature: *Selex* Date, town/city: 01/04/2022, Delft, NL

**Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

Yes, I agree.  No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

Yes, I agree.  No, I do not agree.

Signature: *Selex*

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

Name: Jaap Visser

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Signature: *JV*

Date: 01/04/2022



**Universiteit  
Utrecht**

**DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in:**

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I hereby confirm:

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- that I voluntarily consent to participating.

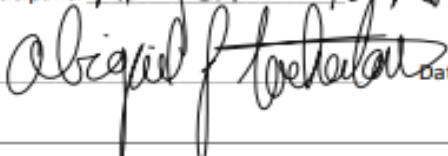
I consent to the following:

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- the collected, coded research data may be shared with other scientists and/or re-used to answer other research questions;
- audio recordings will be made for scientific purposes (see also the box below on the sharing and reuse of this data).

I understand that:

- I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of data, as stated in the information letter.

Name of participant: Abigail F. Tochalausk

Signature:  Date, town/city: 12/04/22 Utrecht

**Declaration on data reuse:**

(1) Do you agree to the sharing of the collected audio recordings, which are anonymous as they will not include any names, with other researchers for research purposes?

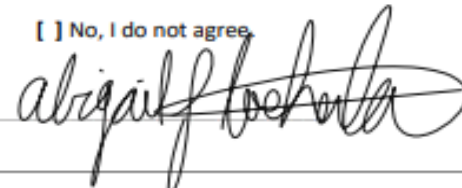
Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

(2) Occasionally, audio recordings may be shown in scientific lectures or lessons. Do you agree to the collected anonymous audio recordings being used for these purposes?

Yes, I agree.

No, I do not agree.

Signature: 

To be completed by the researcher carrying out the study:

I declare that I have explained to the above-mentioned participant what participation in the study entails.

Name: Jaap Visser

Signature: 

Date: 12/04/2022