

THE ANALYSIS OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS' INFLUENCE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

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Doctoral Thesis

**The analysis of tourist destinations' influence
in international student mobility**

Karla Romina Quintero Morán

2023



Doctoral Thesis

**The analysis of tourist destinations' influence in
international student mobility**

Compendium of publications

Karla Romina Quintero Morán

2023

Doctoral Programme in Tourism

Supervised by: PhD. Konstantina Zerva

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Doctoral thesis presented to obtain the degree of PhD at the
University of Girona



Dr Konstantina Zerva, of the University of Girona,

I DECLARE:

That the thesis titles *The analysis of tourist destinations' influence in international student mobility*, presented by Karla Romina Quintero Morán to obtain a doctoral degree, has been completed under my supervision.

For all intents and purposes, I hereby sign this document.

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Girona, 21/06/2023

List of publications derived from the doctoral thesis.

The doctoral thesis titled “The analysis of tourist destinations’ influence in international student mobility” is a compendium of publications comprising three articles following the same line of research. These publications have been previously accepted or sent to the respective journals and their quality indexes are indicated below.

Article 1: Accepted and published

Title: From place disruption to attachment: another perspective for international student mobility.

Authors: Quintero, Karla; Zerva, Konstantina

Journal: Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2022.2144334>

JCR (2021): Impact factor: 1.967. Quartile: Q4, Hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism. Ranking: 50/58.

SCOPUS (2021): Impact factor: 1.101. Quartile: Q1, Cultural Studies. Ranking: 31/1203.

Reference: Karla Quintero & Konstantina Zerva (2022): From place disruption to attachment: another perspective for international student mobility, Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, DOI: 10.1080/14766825.2022.2144334

Article 2: Sent

Title: Educational travel: the role of gender shaping students’ transformative experience

Authors: Quintero, Karla; Zerva, Konstantina

Journal: Social and Cultural Geography

JCR (2022): Impact factor: 2.5. Quartile: Q2, Geography. Ranking: 40/86.

SCOPUS (2022): Impact factor: 6.3. Quartile: Q1, Cultural Studies; Geography, Planning and Development. Ranking: 14/141.

Article 3: Under Review

Title: Mobility-Immobility transitions and the search for home: From educational travel to migration

Authors: Quintero, Karla; Zerva, Konstantina

Journal: Mobilities

JCR (2021): Impact factor: 2.574. Quartile: Q2, Geography. Ranking: 42/86.

SCOPUS (2021): Impact factor: 1.866. Quartile: Q1, Demography. Ranking: 17/135.

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Abstract

The ability for places to become meaningful, to generate bonds, sometimes without awareness, tends to create attachments that are developed and reproduced over time. Attachment to the environment is often considered to be both inherent and invariant in the human species, creating responsibility, respect, and commitment for that place. Place attachment is also increasingly linked to common mobility practices. Mobility may generate attachments to multiple places (for example, one's original home and a new home), and those who repeatedly move may develop the ability to quickly forge attachments to new places.

In 2019, 6.063.665 million international students were seeking experiences that would enable them to develop values, beliefs, behaviours, skills, insights, and, particularly, a disposition for critical and self-reflection. For international students, cities offer a complex array of services with embedded individual meaning. The direct experience of being *in-situ* offers multi-sensory exposure to environments, and the opportunities for exploration create a greater sense of adventure and discovery. It is through the students' lived experiences of places in the new culture that they are able to establish new bonds with places in the host culture. Students' deeper interaction with a host destination can lead to the development of a sense of belonging, that is intimately tied to the process of homemaking within mobility. In addition, an increasing number of women are undertaking educational travel for personal and professional development, while exploring new cultures and adjusting to different environments.

Considering latest literature on international student mobility, there are still gaps regarding the formation of place attachment, the creation of transformative experiences employing a gender perspective, and the drivers behind international students future mobility, this thesis attempts to explore the relationship between place, people and mobilities within the international student mobility context, with the general objective to examine the role of the host destination in international student mobility by exploring concepts of sense of place, place attachment, acculturation, transformative experiences, migration and home.

The thesis went for a qualitative approach, where thirty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with international students from different nationalities who have finished a Master's degree in Tourism at the University of Girona, Spain. As a result, the present thesis is a compendium of three articles that following its general objective,

examine the production of place attachment in international students in the host destination, the transmission and dynamics of gender-role values and their implication in international students transformative experience through Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall, & Dasen's (2002) forms of cultural transmission and acculturation, and the drivers behind international student migration by exploring the role played by mobility perception, sense of continuity and the definition of home.

Resumen

La capacidad de los lugares de volverse significativos, de generar vínculos, a veces sin conciencia, tiende a crear vínculos que se desarrollan y reproducen en el tiempo. El apego al medio ambiente a menudo se considera inherente e invariable en la especie humana, creando responsabilidad, respeto y compromiso por ese lugar. El apego al lugar también está cada vez más vinculado a las prácticas comunes de movilidad. La movilidad puede generar apegos a múltiples lugares (por ejemplo, el hogar original de uno y un nuevo hogar), y aquellos que se mudan repetidamente pueden desarrollar la habilidad de forjar rápidamente apegos a nuevos lugares.

En el año 2019, 6.063.665 millones de estudiantes internacionales buscaban experiencias que les permitieran desarrollar valores, creencias, comportamientos, habilidades, percepciones y, en particular, una disposición crítica y autorreflexiva. Para los estudiantes internacionales, las ciudades ofrecen una gama compleja de servicios con un significado individual integrado. La experiencia directa de estar in situ ofrece una exposición multisensorial a los entornos, y las oportunidades de exploración crean una mayor sensación de aventura y descubrimiento. Es a través de las experiencias vividas por los estudiantes que pueden establecer nuevos vínculos con lugares en la cultura anfitriona. La interacción más profunda de los estudiantes con un destino de acogida puede conducir al desarrollo de un sentido de pertenencia, que está íntimamente ligado al proceso de crear un hogar dentro de la movilidad. Además, un número cada vez mayor de mujeres emprenden viajes educativos para el desarrollo personal y profesional, mientras exploran nuevas culturas y se adaptan a diferentes entornos.

Teniendo en cuenta la literatura más reciente sobre la movilidad estudiantil internacional, todavía existen brechas con respecto a la formación del apego al lugar, la creación de experiencias transformadoras que emplean una perspectiva de género y las motivaciones detrás de la movilidad futura de los estudiantes internacionales, esta tesis intenta explorar la relación entre el lugar, las personas y movilidades dentro del contexto de la movilidad estudiantil internacional, con el objetivo general de examinar el papel del destino anfitrión en la movilidad estudiantil internacional mediante la exploración de conceptos de sentido de lugar, apego al lugar, aculturación, experiencias transformadoras, migración y hogar.

La tesis optó por un enfoque cualitativo, donde se realizaron treinta y tres entrevistas semiestructuradas en profundidad a estudiantes internacionales de diferentes nacionalidades que han finalizado una Maestría en Turismo en la Universidad de Girona,

España. Como resultado, la presente tesis es un compendio de tres artículos que siguiendo su objetivo general, examinan la producción del apego al lugar en los estudiantes internacionales en el destino de acogida, la transmisión y dinámica de los valores de rol de género y su implicación en la experiencia transformadora de los estudiantes internacionales. a través de las formas de transmisión cultural y aculturación de Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall y Dasen (2002), y las motivaciones de la migración de estudiantes internacionales al explorar el papel que desempeña la percepción de la movilidad, el sentido de continuidad y la definición de hogar.

Resum

La capacitat dels llocs de tornar-se significatius, de generar enllaços, de vegades sense consciència, tendeix a crear enllaços que es desenvolupen i reproduïxen en el temps. L'aferrament al medi ambient sovint es considera inherent i invariable a l'espècie humana, creant responsabilitat, respecte i compromís per aquest lloc. L'aferrament al lloc també està cada cop més vinculat a les pràctiques comunes de mobilitat. La mobilitat pot generar aferraments a múltiples llocs (per exemple, la llar original d'una i una nova llar), i aquells que es muden repetidament poden desenvolupar l'habilitat de forjar ràpidament aferraments a nous llocs.

L'any 2019, 6.063.665 milions d'estudiants internacionals cercaven experiències que els permetessin desenvolupar valors, creences, comportaments, habilitats, percepcions i, en particular, una disposició crítica i autoreflexiva. Pels estudiants internacionals, les ciutats ofereixen una gamma complexa de serveis amb un significat individual integrat. L'experiència directa d'estar in situ ofereix una exposició multisensorial als entorns, i les oportunitats d'exploració creen més sensació d'aventura i descobriment. És a través de les experiències viscudes pels estudiants que poden establir nous vincles amb llocs a la cultura amfitriona. La interacció més profunda dels estudiants amb una destinació d'acollida pot conduir al desenvolupament d'un sentit de pertinença, lligat íntimament al procés de fer una llar dins de la mobilitat. A més, un nombre cada vegada més gran de dones emprenen viatges educatius per al desenvolupament personal i professional, mentre exploren noves cultures i s'adapten a diferents entorns.

Tenint en compte la literatura més recent sobre la mobilitat estudiantil internacional, encara hi ha bretxes pel que fa a la formació de l'aferrament al lloc, la creació d'experiències transformadores que empren una perspectiva de gènere i les motivacions darrere de la mobilitat futura dels estudiants internacionals, aquesta tesi intenta explorar la relació entre el lloc, les persones i les mobilitats dins del context de la mobilitat estudiantil internacional, amb l'objectiu general d'examinar el paper de la destinació amfitrió en la mobilitat estudiantil internacional mitjançant l'exploració de conceptes de sentit de lloc, afeció al lloc, aculturació, experiències transformadores, migració i llar.

La tesi va optar per un enfocament qualitatiu, on es van fer trenta-tres entrevistes semiestructurades en profunditat a estudiants internacionals de diferents nacionalitats que han finalitzat un Mestratge en Turisme a la Universitat de Girona, Espanya. Com a resultat, aquesta tesi és un compendi de tres articles que seguint el seu objectiu general,

examinen la producció de l'aferrament al lloc en els estudiants internacionals en la destinació d'acollida, la transmissió i la dinàmica dels valors de rol de gènere i la seva implicació en l'experiència transformadora dels estudiants internacionals. a través de les formes de transmissió cultural i aculturació de Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall i Dasen (2002), i les motivacions de la migració d'estudiants internacionals en explorar el paper que exerceix la percepció de la mobilitat, el sentit de continuïtat i la definició de llar.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God first, my everything. I am yours, forever and ever. My heart belongs to you. Thank you for continuing teaching me what true love is about in this life. And I promise you, I will do everything in my power, to fulfill my purpose here on earth until you take me back home, with you.

Thanks to my family. Ratoncito blanco, Churos, Capi Jr. and Chapi, for making my life a wonderful journey full of love and support, full of laugh and light. To my Conejita Blanca (grandma), for teaching me the importance of faith, love, and compassion, before having my personal meeting with God. Thanks to my entire crew Quintero-Morán. I love you.

Thanks to my family here in Girona. My sisters from El Sagrat Cor: Dulce Madre, Morada, Agonía, Lirio, Atrada, and Luján. My life has completely changed since I met you. Now, I am truly happy. Now I know what is to love and to be loved in return. To my friends who I also called my family. I wouldn't get to this point without your company. Thank you! It is an indescribable blessing to have a family.

Thank you, Konstantina. My PhD. Supervisor, my teacher, my family, my friend, my psychologist, and all the roles that you have taken since the first day that we met for my master's degree, 7 years ago. God knew from the beginning it had to be you, a special and beautiful soul. And here we are. I admire you, I am proud of you, and I am forever grateful for everything that you have done for me since the beginning of this journey. Thank you for sharing your love, your wisdom, your knowledge, your compassion, your patience, and your time with me.

Thanks to the University of Girona and my research group Laboratori Multidisciplinar de Recerca en Turisme for believing in my research abilities and awarding me with the scholarship IFUDG2019.

God bless you all!

Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en ti confío,
Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en ti confío,
Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en ti confío,
Inmaculado Corazón de María, sed la salvación del alma mía.

Introduction

“To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place” (Relph, 1976). The concept of place has been widely defined under different approaches, affirming that places are indeed ‘spatial-temporal fields’ (Malpas, 2018; Seamon, 2021). Place constitutes and interconnects things, people, experiences, meanings, and events, that must be understood as a structure (Canter, 1977; Malpas, 2018; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 2021). Places and landscapes are individually experienced, and individuals perceived them through the lens of their attitudes, experiences, intentions, and their unique circumstances (Lowenthal, 1961). This phenomenon of people/place entanglement is complex and dynamic and incorporates generative processes through which a place and its experiences and meanings, including place attachment, shift or stay the same (Seamon, 2021).

The ability for places to become meaningful, to generate bonds, sometimes without awareness, tends to create attachments that are developed and reproduced over time (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Paulsen, 2019). Milligan (1998) already proposed how tourists and visitors tend to develop place attachment, when their social interactions and involvement within the destination are meaningful, influencing in its level of intensity, ranging from immediate sensory to long lasting, deeply rooted affection (Altman & Low, Place attachment, 1992). Conceived as a multidimensional construct (place identity, dependence, affect, social bonding, memory and expectation), the relationship between people and place has several variables affecting the attachment formed by tourists to particular settings, including visitors’ relationships with leisure activities and settings, past experiences, substitution for alternatives, frequency of use and proximity of destination, tourist motivation, social factors (Dwyer, Chen, & Lee, 2019; Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012; Prayag & Lee, 2019; Woosman, et al., 2018).

Attachment to the environment is often considered to be both inherent and invariant in the human species (Altman & Low, 1992), creating responsibility, respect, and commitment for that place (Relph, 1976). Place attachment is also increasingly linked to common mobility practices (Di Masso, et al., 2019; Gustafson, 2001; Scannell, Williams, Gifford, & Sarich, 2021). Placing mobility as a crucial aspect of human life (Cangia & Zittoun, 2020), researchers like Massey (2008), Cresswell (2009) and Seamon (2018) consider places to be processes, outcomes of everyday habitual mobilities, time-space routines, where individual and social constants help shape a place's meaning (Cresswell,

2009; Seamon, 2021). Places to Massey (2008) are actively constituted by mobility, and not only by the movement of people but also commodities and ideas (Cresswell, 2009). The kinds and degree of mobility vary widely across the world and facilitates place attachment based on cultural expectations, social interactions and their production of meanings and beliefs that are afforded in particular sites (Di Masso, et al., 2019; Gustafson, 2001; Zerva & el Quardi Ahbouch, 2019). Mobility may generate attachments to multiple places (for example, one's original home and a new home), and those who repeatedly move may develop the ability to quickly forge attachments to new places (Gaynor, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005; Paulsen, 2019).

Nevertheless, Relph (1976) and Tuan (1974) were among others arguing how too much mobility could mitigate against sense of place, raising the issue of the relations between place and mobilities (Cresswell, 2006). For many researchers, it has been assumed that people value stable relations with their places of residence, and that disruption of this relation is a cause of psychological disturbances, equally severe as disruption of the relationship with a loved one (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1963; Fullilove, 2005; Lewicka, 2021). Disruptions of place attachment for Brown & Perkins (1992) are 'noticeable transformations in place attachment due to noticeable changes in the people, processes, or places', and geographic relocation/residential mobility represents a disruption of place (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 290).

For Lewicka (2021) forced or voluntary mobility plays an important role when developing attachment since depending on the case, people may respond negatively to move, or may be able to adapt to a new environment with relative ease. Mobility does not preclude place attachment, neither the capacity to make home (Gustafson, 2008; Lewicka, 2021; Massa, 2020). Being at home includes people's adaptive strategies to (re)establish or maintain a sense of self continuity across space and time (Lewicka, 2021; Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). For Lewicka (2021), place-related continuity is crucial to the development of emotional bonds with a place. The perceived continuity of oneself in a particular place contributes to place identification and place attachment, and a sense of belonging somewhere and feeling at home, followed by the decision to stay in that place, increasing instances of immobility within mobility (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015; Fried, 1966; Lewicka, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale et al., 2018).

Within mobility literature, the term immobility often has negative connotations such as stasis, inertia, sedentarism, or a fixed non-mobility, while not even considered to be a type

of mobility (Bissell & Fuller, 2011; Gruber, 2021; Malkki, 1992; Salazar, 2021). However, more positive, albeit scarce, interpretations of immobility have developed over the past few decades, including people-place attachment perspectives among highly mobile societies (Feldman, 1990; Van Houtum & Van Der Velde, 2004; Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Salazar, 2021). In migration studies, mobility and immobility are seen as interconnected phenomenon since international migratory processes can take diverse forms and ‘transitory, incomplete, liquid, circular, seasonal and temporary manifestations’ (Choe & Lugosi, 2022, p. 2).

The shift in focus towards mobility has led scholars to demonstrate links between mobility and immobility and different patterns of movement (from global flows of ideals and capital, to day-to-day activities) and different kinds of mobile people (e.g., tourists, asylum seekers, migrants or international students) (Adey, 2006; Massa, 2020; Schapendonk, Van Liempt, & Spierings, 2015). Literature addressing the interplay between fixity and mobility, in various realms of mobility, expose the relationship between tourism and migration and how tourism may lead to a transition of former tourists, to permanent residents (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014; Huang & Chen, 2021; Salazar, 2022; Provenzano, 2020; Wu & Wilkes, 2017), considering the sense of self-continuity in a place as an important aspect for this transition to happen, since it helps to create attachments that bring a sense of belonging and feeling at home (Di Masso, et al., 2019). As the individual's sense of continuity is based on home, losing it is accompanied by grief and severe disruptions (caused by culture shock and homesickness) to one's relationship with the place (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1966; Furnham, 2019; Presbitero, 2016).

Research within the new mobilities paradigm explores the embodied nature and experience of different modes of travel, seeing them in part as forms of material and sociable dwelling in motion, places of and for various activities, altering travel, tourism and migration patterns (Bissell & Gorman-Murray, 2020; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006; Massa, 2020). Gender has recently been considered as an indispensable aspect to analyze in tourism research, since the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of women and men are indispensable to understand men and women's personality types, beliefs, values, behavior, and attitudes (Bianchi, 2016; Chiao Ling Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia, 2017; Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020). It is clear that female and male tourists may have different reasons for traveling and engaging with a destination (Rasoolimanesh,

Khoo-Lattimore, Md Noor, Jaafar, & Konar, 2020). Evidence exposes gender engagement and destination loyalty related to 'socio-cultural norms and values associated with the places they live which reflects upon the activities they do during consumption or tourism services' (Rasoolimanesh, et al., 2020, p. 3). Nonetheless, research on the role of gender associating mobilities is scarce.

This thesis attempts to explore the relationship between place, people and mobilities within the international student mobility context, looking to comprehend how this type of mobility experience forms place attachment, creates transformative experiences, becomes a platform to other mobilities and is a path for the search of a home. In 2019, 6.063.665 million international students (UNESCO, 2022) were seeking experiences that would enable them to develop 'values, beliefs, behaviours, skills, insights, and, particularly, a disposition for critical and self-reflection' (Hanson 2010, p.81). For international students, cities offer a complex array of services with embedded individual meaning. The direct experience of being *in-situ* offers multi-sensory exposure to environments (Tuan 1977), and the opportunities for exploration create a greater sense of adventure and discovery. In addition, their process of acculturation not only brings conflict and negotiation (Berry, 2005) in their everyday practices (Selby, 2021), but it is able to offer cross-cultural understanding and intercultural competence (Bae & Song, 2017; Brown, 2009; Selby, 2021), creating openness towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Rizvi, 2005) and leading to feelings of satisfaction and well-being while learning to live in the new way of life (Fitzpatrick, 2017).

It is through the students' lived experiences of places in the new culture that they are able to establish new bonds with places in the host culture (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, 2014). For the student, the acquisition of a greater sense of place can, firstly, help understand the characteristics and functioning of the place in question; secondly, help gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of geographical issues within the local context; and, thirdly, reconcile academic knowledge and understanding with reality and practice (Brown 2009; Holton 2015; Simm & Marvell 2015; Prazeres 2016; Filipe, et al. 2017; Bae & Song 2017; Nada, et al. 2018; Lelawati & Lackland 2018).

The present thesis is a compendium of three articles examining the role of the host destination in international student mobility by exploring concepts of sense of place, place attachment, acculturation, transformative experiences, migration and home.

Research on international student mobility and place has primarily focused on geographical mobility (Wells, 2014), connections between places and people (Cheng, 2014; Kolbel, 2018), sense of belonging and home-making process in the host destination (Bae & Song, 2017; Lelawati & Lackland, 2018; Nada, et al., 2018; Prazeres, 2017) and migration (Tran, 2013, 2015; Wu & Rima, 2017). Nevertheless, analyzing the formation of place attachment, especially after students experienced a rupture of attachments in their country of origin, remains absent within international student mobility literature.

Therefore, “From place disruption to attachment: another perspective for international student mobility”, examines the concept of disruptions to attachment caused by a voluntary relocation (as defined by Brown and Perkins, 1992) in order to examine the production of place attachment in international students in the host country. According to this study, previous mobility and sociocultural context are significant contributors to disruptions of attachment in students' home countries; in addition, the process of acculturation plays an important role in producing place attachment to the host destination, leading international students to create and recreate a new home in the host country.

The degree of attachment formed by international students to the host destination during the mobility, led to continuing research about the motives behind such attachments, finding how the overall experience of this mobility creates a deep and meaningful bond with the destination, and how it was associated with a transformative travel. Furthermore, it was found that the outcomes of these transformative experiences differed according to gender.

There are several types of tourism that are associated with transformational travel, including educational travel/tourism (Sheldon, 2020). Studying abroad helps students to renegotiate their identities, creating self-understanding and a sense of belonging (Filipe et al. 2017; Wee 2019). It offers an opportunity for greater personal freedom, self-discovery, and increased assertiveness, independence, confidence, and cultural awareness (Brown, 2009; Brown & Graham, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). In addition, an increasing number of women are undertaking educational travel for personal and professional development, while exploring new cultures and adjusting to different environments (Alqahtani & Pfeffer, 2017; Bamber, 2014; Cordua & Netz, 2021; Tompkins, Cook, Miller, & LePeau, 2017). Research suggests that socialization, acculturation, and re-enchantment form the heart of personal transformation in tourism

experiences (Decrop et al., 2018), but few studies associate gender, acculturation, and international student mobility as a transformative experience (Austin Lee, Sun Park, & Kim, 2009; Bar, 2017; Lim, 2019; Tang & Dion, 1999).

Since research on the role of gender in educational travel is scarce, the second paper entitled “Educational travel: the role of gender shaping students’ transformative experience”, addresses the gap on transformative experiences in educational tourism employing a gender perspective. The investigation uses Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall, & Dasen's (2002) forms of cultural transmission and acculturation to analyze the dynamics and transmission of gender-role values and their implication in the international student mobility experience. This second paper argues that the transmission of gender-role values differ according to the socio-cultural context in the students' home country, which is gradually replicated and/or adapted later, during the acculturation process, which affects the transformative experiences associated with students' personal development. Interestingly, this study found that educational travelers experienced three distinct types of change in relation to their socio-cultural contexts and gender-role values: transformative learning, existential transformation, and behavioral change.

Another aspect of the research that stood out was the decision students made regarding their future mobility after completing their studies abroad. Students showed a higher tendency for migrating to the host destination, after feeling and living a sense of self continuity in the place, highly associated with the feeling of finding a home. In addition, this circumstance illustrated possible transitions from tourists to migrants and the relationship between mobility and immobility.

Mobility and immobility are seen as interconnected phenomenon, lying on a continuum, often termed (im)mobility for its different forms and types of “(im)mobile (non)movements”, exploring individuals shift from one status to the other during their lifetime (Bélanger & Silvey, 2020; Carling, 2002; Gruber, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale, Theunissen, & Haartsen, 2018). International students move between tourism and migration categories (Cerdeira, Martinez-Roget, Pereira, & Rodriguez, 2021; Choe & Lugosi, 2022; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017; Glover, 2011). Students’ deeper interaction with a host destination can lead to develop a sense of belonging, that is intimately tied to the process of home-making within mobility (Perez Murcia, 2020; Prazeres, 2017).

Research on international students’ future mobility decisions is often limited to their returning home or becoming migrants by staying in the host destination (Geddie, 2013;

Tan & Hugo, 2016), with a focus on push/pull factors as drivers behind these mobilities (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Bijwaard & Wang, 2016; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Kim, 2015; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). Wu & Wilkes (2017) acknowledge students' significant personal growth, which complicates their migration plans (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2015; Collins et al., 2016; Geddie, 2013; Sage et al., 2013). Ambitions and life goals change in response to personal development, therefore mobility decisions are socially and biographically embedded (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2015; Coulter et al., 2016; Marcu, 2015) and can even consider the concept of home (Wu & Wilkes, 2017).

Consequently, the third and last paper named "Mobility-Immobility transitions and the search for home: From educational travel to migration" provides deeper insights into the drivers behind international student migration by exploring the role played by mobility perception, sense of continuity and the definition of home. Based on Lewicka's (2021) argument for a sense of continuity in a place, and Tucker's (1994) claim that home-searching is a basic human trait, this final paper goes further by uncovering the processes of transition between educational tourism and migration, mapping the journey of international students' mobility, and exploring how the sense of continuity and the search for home influence students' future (im)mobilities.

Objectives

The thesis was structured according to the following research question:

What is the role of the host destination in international student mobility?

After reviewing the available literature on sense of place, place attachment, acculturation, mobilities, gender, migration and the search for home, and its association with international student mobility, the following research gaps were discovered:

- An analysis of the creation of place attachment after experiencing place disruption with students' country of origin.
- An exploration of transformative experiences from a gender perspective and within international student mobility.
- An explanation of the structure of international students' future mobility after completing their educational mobility.

And later, according to each research gap, final objectives were outlined for the compendium of publications:

- To identify the factors contributing to the production of place attachment in international students in the host destination through the conceptual lens of disruptions to attachment caused by voluntary relocations.
- To discover the dynamics and transmission of gender-role values and their implication in the international student mobility experience.
- To uncover the processes of transition between educational tourism and migration by exploring how the sense of continuity and the search for home influence students' future (im)mobilities.

Methodology

As an international student herself, the researcher developed her initial motivation for studying this topic. Previous personal experience allowed her to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' mobility experiences. As the researcher was aware of potential bias, she attempted to avoid it through extensive use of clarification questions during the interviews, even when answers similar to her own experience were reported, so as to assure that the context of each participant was well reflected. This allowed the PhD student to engage in a dialogical method with the participants, exploring differences rather than commonalities when discussing narratives, meanings, and determinants related to mobility experiences. (Mei Pung, Yung, Khoo-Lattimore, & Del Chiappa, 2020).

The study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 33 international students who had completed either the master's degree in Tourism Management and Planning, Cultural Tourism, or the European Master in Tourism Management at the University of Girona, Spain, and had lived in Girona for at least five months. This last criterion is based on the requirement of the Master's degree to be physically present in order to complete this study. Students from the European Master in Tourism were required to be physically present for the duration of a semester, with the option of staying longer to complete their master's thesis in Girona.

The 33 participants included 22 women and 11 men, ages 24-41, from Central and South America (19) and Europe/Asia (14). It is important to highlight that the University of Girona each year receives more international students from Central and South America not only because the masters courses are offered in Spanish (most of them), but also because the Faculty of Tourism at the University of Girona offers a variety of scholarships between academic institutions from the above regions. Also, the number of female international students was greater than the number of male international students due to the significantly higher demand from female students in tourism studies, particularly from overseas.

This research considers neither the process of data collection nor the data itself was affected since all students knew how to manage Google Meet, Zoom, and Skype

platforms. Moreover, the questionnaire was designed to investigate the students' cultural and social background, their acculturation process, their experience at the university and at the host destination, and the outcome of their mobility experience. As a result, even though the interviews took place between January and May, with the pandemic between them, the collected data not only reflected the experiences of international students long before the pandemic, but also provided answers at the beginning of the pandemic without adequate time for reflection on the impact of the pandemic on their future plans. In addition, some of the interviewed students were in their home countries at the time of the interview, where the lockdown had not yet begun (for example, Brazil).

The interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes and were recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed through a thematic analysis using Nvivo software for encoding data.

Article 1: From place disruption to attachment: another perspective for international student mobility

Reproduction of the original article published in Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change

Reference: Karla Quintero & Konstantina Zerva (2022): From place disruption to attachment: another perspective for international student mobility, Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, DOI: 10.1080/14766825.2022.2144334

FROM PLACE DISRUPTION TO ATTACHMENT: ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

Places can hold the most significant experiences of peoples' lives, and place attachment rests in these people-place meaningful connections. Traveling abroad for international students is a mobility where changes and mixed emotions entangle to one another. It represents distancing and loosening ties from a familiar place (home) and creating and connecting new ones with another place (host destination). This voluntary relocation is considered a disruption in place attachment and impacts the overall experience of the international student mobility. Nevertheless, the creation of attachment to a place derived from a place disruption remains scarce within international student mobility literature. This case study explores the production of place attachment in international students in the host destination through the conceptual lens of disruptions to attachment via changes in places. Thirty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with international students from different nationalities who have finished a Master's degree in Tourism at the University of Girona, Spain. This investigation demonstrates the motives and process of place disruption in international student mobility and the power of a host destination to create new emotional bonds and connections, becoming another home for international students.

Keywords: Place experiences; student mobility; travel; place attachment; place disruption; home

Introduction

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2018, there were over 5.5 million international students enrolled outside their home countries (UNESCO, 2020), promoting cultural understanding, economic and social growth, and providing opportunities for interactions in the host destination. The desire for self-exploration and self-development, to gain a better understanding of the host culture and its people, the accessibility, convenience, and affordability of international travel (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Kelly & Brown, 2004; Townsend & Lee, 2004) motivates students to travel as much as possible in the host country (Babin & Kim, 2001; Teichler, 2004). This can lead to a positive communication

of their experience when returning home (Weaver, 2003; Bae & Song, 2017) and accentuate students' dual definition as international students and educational tourists (Kelly & Brown, 2004, Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008; Filipe, et al. 2017; Wee, 2019).

Even though literature traditionally regarded studying abroad as a one-of-a-kind experience due to its multifaceted nature (Stone & Petrick, 2013), the mobility involves change and mixed emotions, especially if geographical relocation is involved (Chow & Healey, 2008). Mobilities are considered as 'something we feel in an emotional and affective sense' (Adey, 2009, 162). Students traveling abroad, leaving home and distancing from their 'fields of care' (Relph, 1976, 38), can be subject to nostalgia or homesickness in the host destination as a result of a loss of attachment to their familiar place (home) or place disruption (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Casey, 2009; Tognoli, 2003). Relocation and mobility impact place attachment (Scopelliti & Tiberio, 2010). Voluntary relocation has been associated with disruption in place attachment (Brown & Perkins, 1992), and even though the loss of a bond with a place may result in negative side effects (Fried, 1963; Gustafson, 2001, Relph, 1976), there are findings affirming positive ties with different places (for example, one's original home and a new home) can be experienced after relocation (Bissell, 2020; Paulsen, 2019).

For international students, relocation can substantially affect the mobility experience, nevertheless, an optimal adjustment, in which they are willing to both value other cultures and retain their own cultural identity (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Berry, 2005; Brown, 2009; Selby, 2021), is crucial to establish new bonds and connect with the host destination. Place attachment involves positively experienced bonds between individuals and their socio-physical environment (Malpas, 2018; Seamon, 2021; Qiuju & Weijia, 2016). Yet, it is not static; it shifts in accordance with changes in people, activities or processes, and places involved in the attachment (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Paulsen, 2019). Hence, the importance to learn how to connect with one's place (Casey, 2009), since it provides an intimate sense of belonging and comfort as well as of being at ease and secure within the new place (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Gustafson, 2014; Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, 2014).

Latest research on international student mobility and place has primarily focused on geographical mobility (Wells, 2014), connections between places and people (Cheng, 2014; Kolbel, 2018), sense of belonging and home-making process in the host destination

(Bae & Song, 2017; Lelawati & Lackland, 2018; Nada, et al., 2018; Prazeres, 2017) and migration (Tran, 2013, 2015; Wu & Rima, 2017). Nevertheless, the creation of attachment to a place derived from a place disruption remain absent within international student mobility literature. Therefore, this article explores the production of place attachment in international students in the host destination through the conceptual lens of disruptions to attachment via changes in places from a voluntary relocation given by Brown and Perkins (1992). This investigation exposes the role of previous mobilities and socio-cultural context as forces driving to disruption of attachment in students' home countries, and the role of students' process of acculturation as the force that produces place attachment to the host destination, leading international students to create and recreate another home.

Literature Review

The relationship between place and people

Along the years, the concept of place has been widely defined under different approaches, affirming that places are indeed 'spatial-temporal fields' (Malpas, 2018; Seamon, 2021) that constitute and interconnect things, people, experiences, meanings, and events, that must be understood as a structure (Canter, 1977; Malpas, 2018; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 2021). Place is 'the indivisible, normally unnoticed phenomenon of person or people experiencing place' (Casey, 2009; Janz, 2017; Malpas, 2018; Seamon, 2018). This phenomenon of people/place entanglement is complex and dynamic and incorporates generative processes through which a place and its experiences and meanings, including place attachment, shift or stay the same (Seamon, 2021).

Individuals develop affective bonds with places that provide, in part, satisfaction, since places permit control and foster creativity, while offering opportunities for stability, privacy, security and serenity (Altman & Low 1992; Shamsuddin & Ujang 2008; Åkerlund & Sandberg 2015; Han, et al. 2019). Nonetheless, bonding also entails evaluation, and other identity-related aspects, as well as objective criteria, such as length of stay, and involvement in the local area and social networks (Moore 2000; Shamsuddin & Ujang 2008; Tran 2015; Correia & Moraes 2018; Han, et al. 2019).

Lewicka (2021) added that people feel connected with a place based on the perceived continuity of oneself-in-that-place, seeking ongoing connections as they engage in the routines of daily life, infusing places with meaning and memories (Lewicka, 2021; Paulsen, 2019). The ability for places to become meaningful, to generate bonds,

sometimes without awareness, tends to create attachments that are developed and reproduced over time (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Paulsen, 2019).

The importance of identifying physical environments that facilitates place attachment is seen in Smith's (2018) work, defining categories of places with which humans experience supportive emotional involvement (Seamon, 2021; Smith, 2018). Contemporary conceptualizations often associate place attachment as a three-way construct made up of place dependence, place commitment, and place identity (Hanks, Zhang, & Line, 2020). Seamon (2021) proposes a deeper understanding on the process of emotional bonds with place by exposing six place processes (interaction, identity, release, realization, intensification and creation), emphasizing its presence and involvement, as well as its different dynamics within places. Nonetheless, positive interplay between these dimensions, can significantly predict both word-of-mouth recommendation and destination loyalty (Altman & Low, 1992; Qiuju & Weijia, 2016, Seamon, 2021).

Attachment to the environment is often considered to be both inherent and invariant in the human species (Altman & Low, 1992). Recent research has considered the formation of place attachment in adulthood through individual memories and milestones (Scannell & Gifford, 2017), with indirect experiences like stories, media and music (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2021; Hosany, Buzova & Sanz-Blas, 2019), inducing positive emotional associations with a place or places (Scannell, Williams, Gifford, & Sarich, 2021). Like interpersonal attachments, place attachment can develop toward multiple places, and it is increasingly linked to common mobility practices (Di Masso, et al., 2019; Gustafson, 2001; Scannell, Williams, Gifford, & Sarich, 2021).

Being on the move is a way of life for an increasing number of people (Zerva & el Quardi Ahbouch, 2019). The kinds and degree of mobility vary widely across the world and facilitates place attachment based on cultural expectations, social interactions and their production of meanings and beliefs that are afforded in particular sites (Di Masso, et al., 2019; Gustafson, 2001; Zerva & el Quardi Ahbouch, 2019). Mobility may facilitate attachments to multiple places (for example, one's original home and a new home), and those who repeatedly move may develop the ability to quickly forge attachments to new places (Gaynor, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005; Paulsen, 2019).

Despite concerns over the presumed negative results of increasing mobilities and place attachment (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Manzo, 2014; Relph, 1976), this investigation

examines place attachment in international student mobility, and how a host destination is able to create and re-create new forms of attachments after place disruption.

International student mobility: From disruptions to attachments

‘Today’s society is a society on the move’ (Gustafson, 2014). Massey (2005) highlights how places can be better understood as ‘events’ involving physical movement, relationships, networks and connections which transcend particular locality (Bissell, 2020). But for many researchers, it has been assumed that people value stable relations with their places of residence, and that disruption of this relation is a cause of psychological disturbances, equally severe as disruption of the relationship with a loved one (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1963; Fullilove, 2005; Lewicka, 2021).

Disruptions of place attachment for Brown & Perkins (1992) are ‘noticeable transformations in place attachment due to noticeable changes in the people, processes, or places’, and geographic relocation/residential mobility represents a disruption of place (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Voluntary relocations, since are often planned, allow disruption to be experienced into different phases (pre-disruption, disruption, and post-disruption) and permits in most cases, new or re-attachments to a new place (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Gumpert & Drucker, 2012). Moreover, relocation involves an individual’s ability to adjust to the new environment (Chow & Healy, 2008). Whilst sojourner adjustment literature delivers considerable research on the challenges of adapting and interacting within unfamiliar cultures (Berry, 2005; Brown L. , 2009; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Divya, & Topping, 2008), the mobilities paradigm response to the need of a more holistic, relational and contextual understanding of individuals’ intercultural interactions, considering context, power relations, discourse and the formation of hybrid identities (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2017; Selby, 2021). Nevertheless, recent research acknowledges the interplay of these processes for continuing exploring individuals’ negotiation and performance of everyday practices in the host destination (Selby, 2021).

In the case of international students, even though their mobility or relocation is voluntary since according to Lewicka (2021), it is often planned, it is temporary, and accompanied by a sense of thrill and exploration (Lewicka, 2021), going away from home can lead to erode or develop negative connections to place (failed attachments) which may be experienced as alienation, homesickness, culture shock, and acculturative stress (Bae &

Song, 2017; Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fitzpatrick, 2017; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

But as place disruption occurs in international student mobility, place attachment in host destination is present as well. For international students, cities offer a complex array of services with embedded individual meaning. Social and economic interactions among residents (whether permanent or temporary) shape their expectations and satisfaction with the services they receive (Freestone and Geldend 2008; Insch & Sun 2013; Filipe, et al. 2017; Bae & Song 2017; Prazeres 2017). The direct experience of being *in-situ* offers multi-sensory exposure to environments (Tuan 1977), and the opportunities for exploration create a greater sense of adventure and discovery. In addition, their process of acculturation not only brings conflict and negotiation (Berry, 2005) in their everyday practices (Selby, 2021), but it is able to offer cross-cultural understanding and intercultural competence (Bae & Song, 2017; Brown, 2009; Selby, 2021), creating openness towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Rizvi, 2005) and leading to feelings of satisfaction and well-being while learning to live in the new way of life (Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Students' lived experiences of places in the new culture provide the context in which they can build new bonds to places in the host destination (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, 2014). For the student, the acquisition of a greater sense of place can, firstly, help understand the characteristics and functioning of the place in question; secondly, help gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of geographical issues within the local context; and, thirdly, reconcile academic knowledge and understanding with reality and practice (Brown 2009; Holton 2015; Simm & Marvell 2015; Prazeres 2016; Filipe, et al. 2017; Bae & Song 2017; Nada, et al. 2018; Lelawati & Lackland 2018).

Students' deeper interaction with a host destination can lead to develop a sense of belonging, that is intimately tied to the process of home-making within mobility (Perez Murcia, 2020; Prazeres, 2017). Therefore, an important facet of this research is to understand the process of place disruption to place attachment in international student mobility.

Methodology

To examine the role of the host destination in the international mobility student experience, this exploratory study adopted a qualitative approach to collect the

individual's construction of their experience, the meanings given and the memory of the host destination. This approach permits a wider variety of response as well as offering the chance to examine the impacts (Wearing & Wearing 1996).

In addition, this research takes the form of a case study, since it is appropriate when answering the "how" or "why" questions; it matches contemporary research styles; and aids in discovering deep, hidden meanings when studying places or sites (Yin 2014; Çakar & Aykol 2020).

Participants in this research (see **Table 1**) were international students that had finished their Master's degree in Tourism at the University of Girona, in Spain, between 2015 and 2020. There were 33 participants, 22 women and 11 men, among 24 and 41 years old at the moment of the interview, and they had to have resided in the city for over five months. Nineteen participants were from Central or South America, and 14 from Europe/Asia. This diversity of nationalities was necessary for analyzing multicultural effects. Data were collected between February and May 2020, via in-depth interviews that used a five-part semi-structured questionnaire. Due to COVID-19, 8 interviews were completed face to face since they were performed before the lock down, the rest of the 25 interviews were performed online during lock down. This research considers neither the process of data collection or the data itself affected since all students knew how to manage the platforms Google Meet, Zoom and Skype, and on the other hand, students have already finished the mobility. Therefore, since the data gathered were referring to past experiences, before the pandemic, the channel for conducting interviews did not affect the quality of data.

The questionnaire of the interview was divided into 5 subjects. The first part covered the student profiles; the second highlighted the acculturation process; the third section explored their experience at the university; the fourth analyzed the students' experience of the host destination and the final part examined the aftermath of their international mobility experience.

The interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes, and were recorded, transcribed, and later analysed using *Nvivo* software for encoding data. Thematic analysis was used, since it provides a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data, allows the interpretation of various aspects of the research, and collects the analysis of data meanings within their particular context (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Terese 2013). Investigators first familiarize with the data in order to generate the initial codes. The codes were related to previous travel experience, motivations for studying abroad, adaptation in the host

destination, students' experience with the university, students' perspective of the host destination, and the outcomes of the mobility. Afterward themes were defined for each code. Among the themes that appeared during the review were exposure to cultural diversity and socio-cultural influences in students home country, the formation of routines and students' daily activities in the host destination, friendship, personal experiences related to discoveries and changes, experience with the university and the master program, students' experience with the host destination from a tourist perspective, and expectations after finishing their masters' degree.

Table 1. International Students Profile

| Name | Nationality | Age | Length of Stay |
|-------------|--------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Natalia | Ecuador | 33 | 3 years |
| Mishel | Ecuador | 28 | 4 years |
| Camilo | Colombia | 31 | 5 years |
| Mariana | México | 27 | 1 year |
| Dulce | Ecuador | 38 | 18 months |
| Belén | Argentina | 29 | 1 years |
| Tomás | Argentina | 31 | 1 year |
| Jessica | Argentina | 27 | 1 year |
| Ekaterina | Russia | 25 | 3 years |
| Tiago | Portugal | 25 | 2 years |
| Lorena | México | 35 | 3 years |
| Silvia | México | 29 | 11 months |
| Desiré | Peru | 28 | 2 years |
| Guilherme | Brazil | 35 | 11 months |
| Carla | Brazil | 41 | 13 months |
| Eliana | Colombia | 37 | 14 months |
| Javier | Bolivia | 25 | 10 months |
| Julio | Peru | 29 | 2 years |
| Pablo | Chile | 32 | 11 months |
| Liedma | Bolivia | 29 | 10 months |
| Shuai | China | 24 | 2 years |
| Angelica | Greece | 30 | 18 months |
| Mohamad | Iran | 33 | 4 years |
| Joey | Lebanon | 29 | 1 year |
| Shima | Iran | 33 | 6 years |
| Omara | Bolivia | 35 | 8 months |
| Nabila | Malaysia | 27 | 6 months |
| Jeffrey | China | 31 | 5 months |
| Hiroaki | Japan | 28 | 13 months |
| Marie | Germany | 24 | 5 months |
| Suchi | India | 30 | 6 years |
| Ha | Vietnam | 32 | 1 year |
| Airin | Indonesia | 26 | 1 year |

Results

International student mobility: travellers looking for changes

This case study is of the city of Girona. The city was founded over 2,000 years ago, around two fortified enclosures, the *Força Vella* (The Old Fort), and the Medieval Quarter. The city has numerous other highlights, including the impressive old Jewish Quarter or *Call*, with its beautiful streets and porticoed squares; the exuberant Baroque corners; and the *Noucentisme*-style buildings of architect Rafael Masó (Ajuntament de Girona, 2021). The faculty of tourism of the University of Girona is located in the city's Old Quarter at the heart of the medieval town, surrounded by the main tourist attractions.

To begin with, mobility patterns related to having previously moved 'away from home', whether short or long-term, were analyzed. '*I started travelling when I was five years old with my family, we had relatives around my country and in Italy... I remember really enjoying travelling... At one point I thought of becoming a flight attendant...*' (Jessica). Travelling within their home country (and in some cases abroad) with their families for leisure or to visit close relatives while they were children was very frequent. When older, many of them continued 'being mobile' by studying abroad for short periods during high-school or university, while others took several internships abroad through exchange programs like ERASMUS. Travelling for professional purposes was also mentioned, as was the relocation of the student or the entire family.

A majority of participants expressed the undeniable wish to fulfill an intense need linked to a change in lifestyle. Many of them had recently graduated and were taking their first professional steps, others already had well-established careers and were in long-term relationships, their social life revolving around friends and family. Nonetheless, many of them felt that such a life was highly monotonous. One wish was repeated time and again, '*I wanted to see the world... and to experience different cultures...*' (Ha).

The students' socio-cultural surroundings, physical setting (college and workplace), and social context (media exposure) in their home country were strong determining influences. '*I was preparing to study abroad, because we were educated that way. We learnt a third language, we prepared to study abroad either in the USA or Europe. It was like an academic plan, as part of our life project...*' (Camilo). Our data also showed that the students' education directly exposed them to the idea of 'acquiring new experiences' and 'learning new cultures'. This was later accentuated through their work experience, many of the participants were working in the tourism industry, in hotels, on cruises, and

in DMO. Another clear influence was the impact of mass and social media highlighting travel experiences in other countries.

The social and cultural constraints in the students' home countries were also contributing factors when seeking a change. Students not only wanted to discover the world, but also themselves. *'I got married very young, I was 20 years old, and I think that stopped me from developing myself... I had never traveled by myself!... When I got divorced, I decided to travel to countries where I had friends... and the dream to travel and study in Spain came back...'* (Omara). Statements demonstrating socio-cultural constraints were mostly made by students from highly conservative countries such as Iran, China, and Ecuador. In such contexts, 'the rules' are set by the opinions of the family and social standards. These students felt the need to comply with the family's expectations, turning into a person their family or society wanted, but this was antithesis to the students. *'I could finally explore my sexuality, something I couldn't do in my hometown... I started to feel more comfortable in my own skin...'* (Tiago). For many participants, student mobility represented an opportunity to finally define themselves and live according to their true selves.

Acculturation in the host destination: Generating new attachments

This research shows that the changes the students were seeking began in their daily interactions with the host destination and its physical, social and cultural settings.

'We felt like tourists... walking and recognizing the city and its beauty' (Javier). Being in a new environment allowed students to be tourists; exploring the city, eating local food, attending concerts and festivals, and visiting museums were among their activities. Travelling further afield, around the province, visiting places like the Costa Brava, was the result of university field trips or personal initiative, and was very frequently referred to.

Besides getting to know the city, creating new daily routines was essential, not only as a form of organization but as a way to adapt to their new environment as well. *'I always try to create a routine... Since I knew that my classes were at the afternoon, I organized my time in the mornings for cooking, later my catalan classes, besides housework... because of course now you don't have someone that does it for you'* (Natalia).

Student life was a fundamental part of the experience as well. *'I wanted to specialize my education in tourism so it could serve as a tool to develop my professional career and*

improve my job opportunities' (Jessica). Some participants had high educational expectations as they were aiming to acquire greater knowledge and improve their professional curriculums. Others expressed concerns about becoming a student again and were uncertain of their ability to adapt to a new educational system.

Once the students were relatively settled, the establishment of affective ties took place. '*Here (in Girona), my friends are my family*' (Desiree). Friendship is recognized as a key element in the mobility experience. Students rely on their social network as an invaluable support, in many cases it is the cornerstone of a successful experience. Friendship took several roles. Friends were considered family, a strong emotional support in difficult times, as mediators in the adaptation to the host destination, and a source for understanding the overseas experience. '*You have so much contact together (master's friends) ... It's like 24/7, you eat together, you have your social activities together... You learn to love and accept people that are very different from you*' (Suchi).

A number of factors were mentioned as leading to social distancing; one of these was language, with some residents refusing to speak any other language than their mother tongue, Catalan. It should be noted here that the period this research covers saw an increase in the resistance to low-cost tourism and a resulting rise in antagonistic attitudes towards foreigners. However, in many cases, this only served to increase the efforts made by students to adjust to the culture of Girona. The period also saw the issue of Catalan independence from Spain take center-stage, some students perceived a certain degree of ethnocentricity, making explicit reference to the issue and the widespread custom of hanging Catalan flags from balconies, alongside signs expressing opposition to tourism, and others supporting political ideals. Nevertheless, many students emphasized their respect towards the city's cultural differences, considering them to be unique, well-preserved and manageable; indeed, these differences affected their adaptation less than they felt they would upon arrival. '*If I need to learn a new language to be happier (in the host destination), I do it... and If I need to avoid an action to prevent a reaction, I avoid it...*' (Mohammed).

Creating and recreating home

The meaningful experiences and connections made in the type of mobility discussed above can produce a strong emotional attachment with the host destination. '*Girona is a special place, a historical moment that changed my life... More than just a city that I like,*

it represents a chapter of my life ...' (Mohammed). The students talked of gratitude, a love for the city, and lasting memories of their stay; they also mentioned their desire to lengthen their stay, many would love to revisit the city, and would thoroughly recommend the destination.

A note-worthy aspect of our findings is the inclination of some students to call Girona home. For participants coming from conservative societies like South America, Asia, and the Middle East, home is defined as family and friends. *'Home is here with my family, but if I'm away, home is the place where I settle, where I meet people that later become my friends and family... where you form a life... taking your culture with you'* (Natalia).

For European students, and those who had lived for longer periods of time abroad before, the definition of home is connected not only to where family and friends are physically located (emotional resemblance is not a necessary condition), but also to creating their own sense of home in the host destination. Assuming that they have successfully built a social network, accomplished their personal and professional expectations, got a job, and connected with the community, home becomes the place where they are at that given moment. *'My home country is Malaysia, but I don't feel like it's home. I think home is wherever I'll end up, wherever I'll establish myself and can establish a connection with the community I'll be living with...'* (Nabila).

There is a connection between the idea of home and the perceived quality of life. In Girona, some students experienced a lifestyle that was different to that of their home countries. They saw Girona as a city where residents enjoy life, are calmer, more relaxed, and live a healthier life. *'I'm healthier here (Girona) because of the weather... I see here healthy people, they do sports, they enjoy life... And I also wanted to enjoy life'* (Ekaterina).

Home also meant the opportunity of self-discovery and self-development, the feeling of being able to become who they really are, with the freedom and independence from the constraints of their home country. *'Home is where I can develop myself freely... I can develop my ideas and I'm able to discover that I'm capable of doing many things... Girona was my home'* (Mariana).

Daily activities, experiences created during the time spent in Girona, and the feeling of living like a local allowed students to consciously make a transition in their status from students to residents. *'I remember I started walking like someone who lives in Girona... Tourists asking me to take their pictures... I thought ok, I think I'm finally from here '*

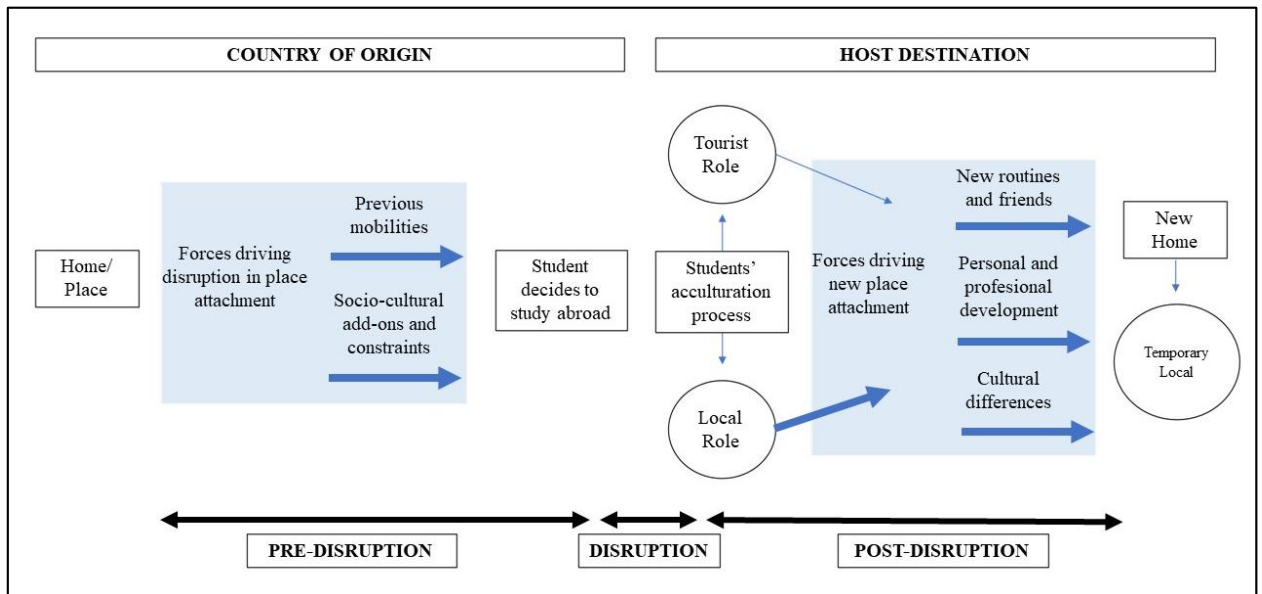
(Omara). Such a status brings together behavior like protecting Girona’s cultural heritage and its environment, appreciating and responsibly using its key resources and attractors, as well as recognizing the uniqueness of the city through the existence of an international student community. *‘We are thinking more about how our behavior influences the environment or influences in the protection of the city’s heritage...’* (Shuai).

While Girona was home to some students for at least six months, and others stayed for the entire length of the program (one year), a number of students stayed indefinitely. Some decided to pursue another Master’s or a PhD, others found work, a few fell in love, and a couple decided to extend their stay while deciding what to do next. *‘It just felt like home. I love it here, I feel connected, cared for... I have a job that I love... I learn more every day, and I live a different life...’* (Shima).

Despite this sense of belonging felt by many, a number of students acknowledged that this was temporary, and wanted to carry on travelling, seeing and discovering more places. *‘Since I got back, I’ve been looking for a PhD... The experience made me realize... I’m able to live anywhere... I don’t want to have a ‘forever’ here... I feel like I don’t belong to just one place...’* (Carla).

A model for the production of place attachment

Figure 1. Model of production of place attachment in international student mobility



This investigation offers a model (**Figure 1**) of how place attachment is produced from a place disruption, and how this can lead to the perception of the host destination as ‘home’. The model describes how previous mobilities and socio-cultural add-ons and constrains

become the forces driving a disruption in place attachment in students' home country. This phase represents a pre-disruption of attachments. It is a phase that leads students to decide to study abroad. When students arrive to the host destination, a disruption phase takes place.

The acculturation process of students, which begins from the first day of their arrival, motivates the creation of roles to adjust to the different changes that students go through. The main role is the one of the student, followed by the tourist and local roles. The interaction between these three roles where new routines are created, friends become family, personal and professional evolution are experienced, and cultural differences are being integrated and appreciated, converts the host destination into another home for international students. It is important to highlight students' feeling of belongingness due to the sense of becoming residents of the host destination despite of their temporary status. This period becomes the post-disruption phase in international student mobility.

Discussion and conclusion

The model (**Figure 1**) represents a deeper understanding on the international student mobility experience, exploring the process of place disruption on students' home country, followed by the process of place attachment in the host destination and its beneficial outcomes not only for the destination but for the international student as well. Certainly, analyzing such processes from an international student mobility perspective, contribute to renew concepts and rethink its applicability in other research areas in need of further insights in the context of this type of mobility.

The paper's findings begin by suggesting that participants involved in student mobility had had experience travelling at a young age. They were thus somewhat used to geographical mobility, to being exposed to social and cultural diversity, and to being surrounded by changing environments; these experiences can lead students to perceive mobility as a lifestyle. This complements other findings (Urry 2000; Sheller & Urry 2006; Duncan, Cohen & Thulemark 2016; Beech 2018; Zhu 2018) about mobility being a gradual process that is influenced by and through international ties. It can also be argued that Rizvi's (2005) perspective on the effects of the exposure to global media culture over international students, increasing their desire to not only continue travelling but demonstrating a high degree of adaptability to changes due to their travelling cultures.

The present research also highlights two key points, originating in the students' home country, influencing their decision, both being connected to the construction of a desired place identity. Socio-cultural add-ons, like education (preparing students for studying abroad), work experience (working in the tourism and travel industry), and media (exposure to digital content related to travel experiences), increased their curiosity and desire to look beyond the known, while socio-cultural constraints imposed by family and society incite them to find a place where to experience their personal changes, where according to Proshansky et al., 1983, is necessary to acquire a sense of belonging and purpose which gives meaning to their life. This investigation also agrees with authors like Brooks & Waters (2011) on travels becoming more than an attempt to acquire educational and professional development, but a part of a broader culture of self-exploration and self-development (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Adding Desforges (2000) argument, that travels can be used by individuals to re-imagine themselves in times where their self-identity is open to question and in need of feeling to move towards a rewarding self in the future. Moreover, these previous mobilities and socio-cultural influences in students' country of origin turn into specific motivations for place disruption in international student mobility. These motivations can be categorized in the pre-disruption phase (**Figure 1**), since they create anticipation for students' mobility and allow a transition of loosening ties with their homes and prepare them for developing new ties (Brown & Perkins, 1992).

Relocation to the host destination represents the phase of disruption. Since students were looking for changes and preparing themselves at the same time for this type of mobility, disruption was more manageable and perceived as a desired new life. The host destination is also the place where students' expectations are usually met due to the daily interactions between other students and their new surroundings and prompt to new attachments. They expect to receive quality education and are conscious of the challenge of excelling in the Master's course. The student role directly leads to affective ties with other international students that assist in coping with the stressful elements of acculturation, creating a more pleasant environment through leisure activities, and a deeper understanding of the mobility experience itself. Friends that in many cases, help to increase the sense of home and familiarity in the host destination, most likely because of the mutual understanding given by the fact of them being all international students, the emotional support that they represent, and for the time students share together. This highlights the need for Girona to position itself as a university city with a diverse and established community of

international students. This complements Beech's (2018) findings on the importance of social networks in student mobility, emphasizing the impact of this type of social support that according to Fitzpatrick (2017) also represents emotional support, social companionship, tangible assistance, and informational support. On the other hand, Russo, Van den Berg & Lavanga's (2007) highlights how beneficial is for university cities to have student population since it increases the attractiveness of the city.

This study finds that students develop other roles during their acculturation process and in which Girona is continuously lived: as tourists and as locals. Living as tourists, where everything is unknown, becoming familiar with their new surroundings, sightseeing and travelling (including nearby towns) allows students to appreciate the uniqueness of a destination. From this standpoint, Girona, in return, can showcase its tourist features to the newcomers on their first days in the city, create memorable tourism experiences for the students and their new social network, and start a process of engagement and attachment to the place as students carry out meaningful daily activities in their new surroundings. This makes it more important for the destination to approach student mobility as a tourist experience, as has also been found in previous research (Kim & Chen 2018; Correia & Moraes 2018; Cho, Heetae, Kah Min Tan, & Weisheng Chiu 2019) that examines the lasting impression these experiences can create and the emotional bonds that can develop with the host city.

Living like locals, students become familiarized with, and adapt to, their surroundings, creating routines around their new daily activities and household and leisure activities, and spending money in the same ways as local people do. Girona provides its international students with access to other international students and its residents (the owners and employees of places that students frequent). It also provides contexts for social interaction, such as bars and cafes, local markets, and public parks. These contexts aid in creating routines and expenditure, increasing both the level of interaction between student and place and their sense of belonging. In addition, this research highlights students' perception of routines. While, in their home country, routines are associated with feelings of stagnation, they become a novelty and challenge in the host destination. Being recognized and treated as regular customers in local shops enhances the relationship between students and residents. Fitzpatrick (2017) mentioned previous research regarding the creation of roles in the adjustment process and their interaction between different environments, focusing on international relocation. This investigation suggests that this

process also occurs in international student mobility, and identifies the moments and the characteristics of each role, helping to improve the adjustment between students' home and host practice arrangements explained by Selby (2021). The importance of local social relationships, familiar environments, and the positive evaluation of the physical or social environment to create a sense of home is also analyzed (Mesch & Manor, 1998; Prazeres, 2017).

In addition, throughout the mobility experience, the understanding, tolerance and acceptance of the host destination's culture successfully overcame cultural barriers.

This indicates an intercultural sensitivity among students, possibly provided by the exposure to cultural diversity through their previous travel patterns and socio-cultural contexts, increasing their interest to accept cultural differences, and to be willing to adjust their perception and behaviors as explained by Bae & Song (2017).

In the acculturation process, the tourist and local roles permit the gradual develop of new ties, identifying themselves with the new place and creating a sense of belongingness. It is interesting that despite of student mobility research arguing the strong presence of acculturative stress and its difficulties to overcome it (Berry, 2005; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Divya, & Topping, 2008), this investigation reveals that it is a process that is easily and rather quickly overcome due to students' openness to adjust to the host destination. This part of the acculturation process is where the post-disruption phase arises and help to ease the transition and generate new attachments as seen in **Figure 1**.

This research also demonstrates that, when the host destination is capable of developing a sense of place in the student, this leads to meaningful experiences that enable the student to call Girona home, implying that, according to their definition of home, students unconsciously create and recreate home in different places and supporting Weil's (1955) suggestion on the need human beings have for roots, whether single or multiple. The meaning of home is constructed in everyday life, in the routine practices and the repetition of habitual interactions (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Nowicka 2007, Prazeres 2017), thus the importance of familiarization through social and cultural settings, activities and daily routines in evoking the sense of being at home.

The concept of 'home' varies depending on cultural contexts. Students from conservative societies tend to establish affective ties that resemble those from their home country. This supports Holton (2015) regarding the replication when moving into a new area of connections they had in previous locations. On the other hand, students from more liberal

societies, and those who had lived abroad before for longer times, tend to create their sense of home by meeting their personal and professional expectations in the new environment. These findings are in consonance with those of previous authors (Soini, Vaarala & Pouta 2012; Prazeres 2017; Dwyer et al., 2019) in stating that people perceive specific settings as more convenient for achieving their private and professional goals and creating a sense of familiarity that feels like home in a context of unfamiliarity and strangeness.

In addition, students associate home with the place where their process of self-discoveries and self-development occurs, complementing the findings of Gustafson (2001) when linking place and mobility with personal development and freedom. It also highlights an important outcome of this type of mobility: an identity transformation created by students lived experiences and the constant interactions with the place (Rizvi, 2009). Home also implies a sense of caring and commitment for the place, reflected in students' behavior of protection, appreciation and recognition towards Girona as described by Vycinas (1961, 33), when stating that people take care of the places they are most attached to. The mobility experience caused students a gradual development of commitment to the city, and a feeling of ease; this sense of feeling at home is manifested in the decision of some to remain in Girona after finishing their Master's degree, or to return and continue their PhD studies. Such decisions are evidence of the role that satisfaction plays in the development of affective bonds with places (Altman & Low 1992; Chow et al. 2008; Counted 2016; Correia et al. 2018) and in Fried's work on future orientation associated with place attachment (Fried, 2000).

It is important to highlight that despite of international students having faced a displacement from their home country, they are still able to create a home under different circumstances, accentuating Rizvi (2005) suggestion that displacement can take a particularly benign form in the international student's context. Although this research adds that there is no need to maintain strong ties with their home country since students develop new ties in the host destination to create a home.

Even though students feel a connection with the host destination and call it home, many of them wanted to continue travelling, thus leaving home again, and unconsciously but voluntarily creating a new home in a new place. This would suggest that mobile people feel an attachment to new places because the landscapes are similar to ones they are already familiar with; because they are open to new experiences (Relph 1976); or because

the dynamism of the place permits the creation of multiple senses of place for those in transition (Mesch & Manor 1998; Butcher 2010; Holton 2014, 2015; Dwyer et al., 2019). Along students' mobility experience, it is seen how they live the three disruption phases when there is a voluntary relocation, argued by Brown and Perkins (1992). Previous mobilities and the socio-cultural add-ons and constraints of their home country become the pre-disruption phase, where anticipation allows a gradual transition into the next phase, disruption, that takes place when students arrive to the host destination. Along the acculturation process, the post-disruption stage can be seen through students' need to become identified with the host destination, creating new attachments through the roles that students take on while experiencing the host destination, those of tourist, local that give host destinations the opportunity to offer experiences that can be seen and lived from different perspectives. These attachments conduct students to voluntarily create a home in the host destination, and this implies that university cities provide not only a campus, but a second home.

To be at home means the making of self-discoveries, familiarization with local social and cultural settings, and protection, appreciation, and commitment towards the host destination, emphasizing that students can become a new type of temporary local during the mobility experience. They arrive at the host destination as tourists and leave this same host destination as locals.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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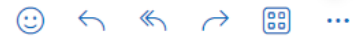
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**Article 2: Educational travel: the role of gender shaping students'
transformative experience**

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EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL: THE ROLE OF GENDER SHAPING STUDENTS' TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

It is well known that travelling acts as a tool for inner transformation, and transformational travel includes educational travel. Educational travelers such as international students, even though are recognized as an important niche market, continue to be understudied especially through a gender perspective. Considering that gendered differences exist in tourism research and are associated with culture and family traditions, this study analyzes the transmission and dynamics of gender-role values and their implication in international students transformative experience through Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall, & Dasen's (2002) forms of cultural transmission and acculturation. Thirty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with international students from different nationalities who have finished a Master's degree in Tourism at the University of Girona, Spain. This paper exposes how gender-role values differs from students' socio-cultural contexts, influence their mobility experience and transformative outcomes and allow destinations to create meaningful and tailored experiences for the educational tourism segment.

Keywords: Student mobility; educational travel; acculturation; gender; transformative experience

1. Introduction

In 2021, the educational tourism market size was around \$399.8 billion dollars (Future Market Insights, 2021), mostly coming from international student's expenses on accommodation, food, tuition fees, entertainment, and leisure activities. In countries like Australia, educational travellers are considered a significant part of tourism spending, proving to be important contributors towards destination's social and economic sustainability (Weiyii, Wang, & Kwek, 2023).

In 2019, 6.063.665 million international students (UNESCO, 2022) were seeking experiences that would enable them to develop 'values, beliefs, behaviours, skills, insights, and, particularly, a disposition for critical and self-reflection' (Hanson 2010, p.81). According to Brown (2009), the experience of being an international student has transformative potential. It helps them renegotiate their identities, creating self-understanding and a sense of belonging (Filipe et al. 2017; Wee 2019). It offers an

opportunity for greater personal freedom, self-discovery, and increased assertiveness, independence, confidence, and cultural awareness (Brown, 2009; Brown & Graham, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Despite a large body of literature on international student mobility experiences, there is little research taking a gender approach to the evaluation of travel and mobility experiences. The understanding of motivations, meanings, and experiences through mobility has gendered differences subject to social stereotypes, roles, and the social construction of gender associated with culture and family traditions (Beniashvili & Böhm, 2020; Cresswell & Priya Uteng, 2016; Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020). Further, there is still a knowledge gap on transformative experiences in educational tourism employing a gender perspective.

Thus, this investigation uses Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall, & Dasen's (2002) forms of cultural transmission and acculturation to analyze the dynamics and transmission of gender-role values and their implication in the international student mobility experience. This paper argues that the transmission of gender-role values differ according to the socio-cultural context in the students' home country, which is gradually replicated and/or adapted later, during the acculturation process, which affects the transformative experiences associated with students' personal development. It is worthwhile noting that this study found educational travelers experiencing three different types of process of change in relation to their socio-cultural context and gender-role values: transformative learning, existential transformation, and behavioral change.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International student mobility as a transformational experience

Travel remains heavily promoted as an agent of change as it has the power to transform individuals, spaces, places, and ecosystems (Lean, 2012; Soulard, McGehee, & Stern, 2019). In the tourism context, tourists undergo transformative travel, expecting changes in body, emotions, attitudes, and skills (Mei Pung, Yung, Khoo-Lattimore, & Del Chiappa, 2020), attributed to the trip itself or to the activities and experiences it includes (Decrop, Del Chiappa, Mallargé, & Zidda, 2018).

Over the years, academics have constructed different conceptualizations of tourist transformation. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) involves integrating the perspectives of others, acquiring a broader sense of the world and developing new skills

and abilities. These include existential transformation (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017), involving a major existential re-evaluation of one's existence and value-system and behavioral transformation (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; McClinchey, 2015), an indirect, empirical consequence of the transformation process stemming from transformative tourism experiences (Mei Pung et al., 2020). These processes occurring during the travel experience could have different degrees of impact on the individual behaviour triggering changes that last over time (Mei Pung et al., 2020).

Educational travel/tourism is among the types of tourism related to transformational travel (Sheldon, 2020). Studying abroad is often described as a "life-transforming experience" that increases cross-cultural understanding by immersing students in different cultures (Crabtree, 2008). Students seek to travel to the host country, participate in local festivities, and interact with its socio-cultural context to better understand its culture and people (Castillo, Rodriguez, Pérez, & López-Guzmán, 2017; Glover, 2011; Wee, 2019; Weiyii, Wang, & Kwek, 2023). This results in students developing an emotional bond with the destination, becoming ambassadors of the country they have visited, prone to returning in the future and demonstrating loyalty towards the host country (Castillo, Rodriguez, Pérez, & López-Guzmán, 2017; Chen, Dwyer, & Firth, 2015; Quintero & Zerva, 2022).

Mobility to a new place abroad can provoke a powerful journey of the self that is both reflexive and transformative (Grabowski, Wearing, Lyons, Tarrant, & Landon, 2017; Mei Pung et al., 2020; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Prazeres, 2016; Quintero & Zerva, 2022). Research suggests that socialization, acculturation, and re-enchantment form the heart of personal transformation in tourism experiences (Decrop et al., 2018). Nevertheless, a central issue for many international students is adapting to a new host environment (Pekerti, van de Vijver, Moeller, & Okimoto, 2020). Students are not only introduced to unfamiliar cultures, but sometimes immersed in them for long periods (Brown, 2009, Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016). This acculturation process happens when individuals come into contact with a culture that is new to them, and where cultural maintenance amalgamates with heritage culture, gradually generating participation in the host culture (Berry, 1997, 1998; De Juan-Vigaray, Sarabia-Sanchez, & Garau-Vadell, 2013; Martin, 2005; Tang & Dion, 1999).

Despite substantial research on the transformational influence of student mobility highlighting the importance of the acculturation process (Brown, 2009; Brown &

Graham, 2009; Filipe et al., 2017; Gabowski, Wearing, Lyons, Tarrant, & Landon, 2017; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Wee, 2019), few studies associate gender, acculturation, and international student mobility as a transformative experience (Austin Lee, Sun Park, & Kim, 2009; Bar, 2017; Lim, 2019; Tang & Dion, 1999). Hence, this paper sheds light on the transformative outcome of the acculturation process affecting the international student mobility experience from a gendered perspective.

2.2. Educational travel and gendered perspective

Gender has been a neglected area in tourism investigation in recent years, lately becoming the subject of research. Around the 1990s, critical contributions attempted to identify, understand, and disseminate notable differences between men and women in tourism. Swain (1995) defined gender in tourism as a 'system of culturally constructed identities, expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity'. Risman (1998) described the consequences of this social construction of gender on several levels: individual (considering the personal conception of the self as belonging to one gender or another); interactional (expectations of how men and women must behave in relation to others depending on their gender); and institutional (how social, cultural, and organizational structures reproduce gender differences) (Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020).

Based on these investigations, gender roles and gender stereotypes emerge in literature as social roles that mark the personal, family, and professional trajectory throughout the lives of women and men (Machin-Rincon, Cifre, Dominguez-Castillo, & Segovia-Perez, 2020; Mani & Jose, 2020; Risman, 1998, Seow & Brown, 2018). For tourism researchers, the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of women and men surrounding online purchasing behavior (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Kim, Lee, & Bonn, 2017), perceived risk and tourism experience (Chiao Ling Yang et al., 2017), destination attributes (Meng & Muzaffer, 2008; Vespestad & Mehmetoglu, 2015), and transformative travels (Bianchi, 2021; Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020; Mani & Jose, 2020; Mei Pung et al., 2020), are indispensable to understand men and women's personality types, beliefs, values, behavior, and attitudes (Bianchi, 2016; Chiao Ling Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017; Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020).

Female and male tourists may have different reasons for engaging with a destination, expressing differences in their preferences for certain activities offered by a destination (Rasoolimanesh, Khoo-Lattimore, Md Noor, Jaafar, & Konar, 2020). Evidence expose

gender engagement and destination loyalty related to ‘socio-cultural norms and values associated with the places they live which reflects upon the activities they do during consumption or tourism services’ (Rasoolimanesh, Khoo-Lattimore, Md Noor, Jaafar, & Konar, 2020).

Destination brand personality and image, including specific gender dimensions, can attract tourists with the promise of satisfying their emotional and identity needs (Huang & van der Veen, 2019; Pan, Lu, & Zhang, 2021). In addition, gender played a moderating role in the relationship between affective image of a destination and tourist expectations: the effect of affective image on tourist expectations was found to be significantly stronger for female tourists than for male tourists (Huang & van der Veen, 2019). Recent research highlight destination gender as a ‘set of human masculine and feminine traits through which consumers envisage a destination as a man or a woman’ (Pan, Lu, & Zhang, 2021), and the importance to consider how culturally diverse tourists perceive destination masculinity/femininity (Avery, 2012; Pan, Lu, & Zhang, 2021).

Nowadays, an increasing number of women are undertaking educational travel for personal and professional development, while exploring new cultures and adjusting to different environments (Alqahtani & Pfeffer, 2017; Bamber, 2014; Cordua & Netz, 2021; Tompkins, Cook, Miller, & LePeau, 2017). Nevertheless, research on the role of gender in educational travel is scarce. Previous studies on migration have used Berry et al.'s (2002) forms of cultural transmission (vertical, horizontal, and oblique transmission) to suggest that gender-role values are shaped by intergenerational and intercultural relations, which influence their acculturation process (Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Idema & Phalet, 2007; Williams & Best, 1990). It is often reported that women have more problems adjusting to acculturation than their male counterparts. This is either because societies use gender when raising expectations and determining distinct gender roles (Austin Lee, Sun Park, & Kim, 2009; Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020; Tang & Dion, 1999), or because women find new gender roles in western cultures such as North America or Canada, becoming more self-confident, self-expressive, and self-assertive (Austin Lee, Sun Park, & Kim, 2009; Berry et al., 2002; Idema & Phalet, 2007; Mani & Jose, 2020; Tang & Dion, 1999).

This research analyzes the role of gender in international student mobility by using Berry et al.'s (2002) forms of cultural transmission for a broad understanding of the emergence

of gender-role values transmission in students' lives and how this impacts their international student experience.

3. Methodology

This exploratory study adopted a qualitative approach for its creativity, flexibility and spontaneity in locating meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives, and to interpret data and develop hypotheses or research strategies that will be used to make strategic marketing decisions. (Bellenger, Bernhardt, & Goldstucker, 2011; Milliken, 2001; Picken, 2018). Research participants (see Table 1) were international students that had finished a master's degree in tourism at the University of Girona, Spain, between 2015 and 2020. The 33 participants included 22 women and 11 men, 24-41 years old who had resided in the city of Girona for over five months. Nineteen participants were from Central and South America and 14 from Europe/Asia. This diversity of nationalities was essential to analyze multicultural effects.

Since in-depth interview supports studies that address complex concepts like experience, transformation, memory, identity, and the relations between self and other (Picken, 2018), for this investigation, data were collected via in-depth interviews using a five-part semi-structured questionnaire. Due to COVID-19, only eight interviews were conducted face-to-face before the lockdown and the other 25 were conducted online during the lockdown. This research considers neither the process of data collection nor the data itself was affected since all students knew how to manage Google Meet, Zoom, and Skype platforms. Additionally, participating students had already finished the mobility when interviewed.

The interview questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first part covered student profiles; the second highlighted the acculturation process; the third section explored the students' experience of the university; the fourth analyzed the students' experience of the host destination; the final part examined the outcome of their international mobility experience.

The interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes and were recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed using Nvivo software for encoding data. Thematic analysis was used, and the codes were related to students' life in their home country, previous travel experiences, motivations for studying abroad, routines in the host destination, students' experience

with the university and the host destination, and the outcomes of the mobility from a gender perspective.

Table 1. International Students Profile

| Name | Nationality | Gender | Age |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Natalia | Ecuador | F | 33 |
| Mishel | Ecuador | F | 28 |
| Camilo | Colombia | M | 31 |
| Mariana | México | F | 27 |
| Dulce | Ecuador | F | 38 |
| Belén | Argentina | F | 29 |
| Tomás | Argentina | M | 31 |
| Jessica | Argentina | F | 27 |
| Ekaterina | Russia | F | 25 |
| Tiago | Portugal | M | 25 |
| Lorena | México | F | 35 |
| Silvia | México | F | 29 |
| Desiré | Peru | F | 28 |
| Guilherme | Brazil | M | 35 |
| Carla | Brazil | F | 41 |
| Eliana | Colombia | F | 37 |
| Javier | Bolivia | M | 25 |
| Julio | Peru | M | 29 |
| Pablo | Chile | M | 32 |
| Liedma | Bolivia | F | 29 |
| Shuai | China | M | 24 |
| Angelica | Greece | F | 30 |
| Mohamad | Iran | M | 33 |
| Joey | Lebanon | F | 29 |
| Shima | Iran | F | 33 |
| Omara | Bolivia | F | 35 |
| Nabila | Malaysia | F | 27 |
| Jeffrey | China | M | 31 |
| Hiroaki | Japan | M | 28 |
| Marie | Germany | F | 24 |
| Suchi | India | F | 30 |
| Ha | Vietnam | F | 32 |
| Airin | Indonesia | F | 26 |

4. Results

4.1. Traditional socio-cultural contexts

This study aims to understand students' lives back in their home country and considers family values, traditions, and other socio-cultural aspects that may have influenced their mobility experience and its possible transformative outcomes. This investigation found two groups of students: one male and one female, who had grown up in either a traditional or a liberal socio-cultural environment.

4.1.1. Students' Backgrounds

Under the traditional socio-cultural context, female students are close to their families, holding values associated with nurturing others, whereas male students maintain a fairly respectful and distant relationship with their family, expressing values of independence and achievement throughout their life abroad. Female students grew up with values like the importance of being surrounded by family, staying together, serving, respecting, and caring for others. These values brought closeness and a strong sense of protection and emotional support from parents towards their daughters. *"I could say I was a bit spoiled by them (parents)... I was not used to cooking, to buying stuff... discovering I had to do everything by myself, and study on top of that ... it was hard"* (Shima).

Since their mothers usually performed home duties, the daily patterns of female students went around their studies, work, and social life. This group had also traveled with their parents since childhood, and for short periods when older accompanied by either family or friends. In some cases, business travel was also included.

The students stated a growing interest in studying abroad to expand their educational and cultural experience. This was reinforced by both their travels and through work experience where they had colleagues with different nationalities, friends living abroad, and a university education projected toward mobility and cultural diversity. *"A process of adaptation is natural... I'm a tour guide... The fact of being surrounded by different people, you get to know them and to adapt to these differences..."* (Dulce).

For this group, the majority had established professional careers, and saw the master's degree as an opportunity to expand their careers into other areas of tourism, have better job opportunities, and acquire additional knowledge for developing new tasks related to their jobs back in their home country. *"I wanted an education that would allow me to*

expand... not only customer service, but also planning, and working with the local community” (Jessica).

The study also presents from the data analysis a group of male students who grew up with values of care and respect for the family and personal and professional achievement. These students were encouraged by their families to gain experience through education and travel. This group has a substantial degree of independence concerning their relationship with their family, including their parents. *“My parents encouraged me to do this... they think as a young person you need to travel a lot and have more experience and to learn different things” (Shuai).*

This group had well-established routines and social networks, and most focused more on getting an education than work experience as this represented achievement and status in their view. They only took up short-term mobilities related to learning a new language or short-term internships. Students particularly acknowledge the influence of friends, universities, and social media stimulating the need to travel abroad. In some cases, this was a priority before going on to establish a professional career. *“I didn’t want to start a job yet... I wanted to experience more things... another world outside my country” (Hiro).* Worth noting is this group's common emotional state: feeling tired and overwhelmed with their life; being under pressure to acquire the proper education and employment to succeed; having a sense of always running around, doing the same routines, and having many goals to accomplish. *“For me, everything was the same... living in a small town with my family, attending the institute, hanging out with the same people... I felt like I was moving in these three circles all the time...” (Thiago).*

4.1.2. Students’ adjustment to the host destination

Once in the host destination, female students built their daily routines around replicating values and routines seen, lived, or performed in their country of origin, while also adjusting to new ones in the host destination. These students prioritize having a structure and a sense of responsibility towards organizing housework among their roommates and then dividing their daily lives between home, classes, and leisure activities. *“I had to manage my time because now I had to cook and do several things that I didn’t do before because my mom oversaw it... Now I had to distribute my time between housework and my classes”.* (Natalia). Students adapted their new homes to feel more familiar by decorating their rooms with representations of their home culture, cooking traditional

dishes, and maintaining contact with their family and friends through videocalls and text messages.

When interacting with their surroundings, the students' actions were manifestations of their home values and culture. The group developed close friendships with roommates and classmates resembling family ties. They engaged in activities together such as cooking traditional recipes, sharing stories, celebrating festivities from their specific home country, sightseeing around the city, attending local festivals, traveling abroad and studying. The students also recognized the opportunity and potential to learn from each other, helping each other overcome fears and open up to change. *"I would help the girls out, like a mother, you know...If they would get sick or something, I would tell them 'You let me know if you need anything, I'm here for you...'"* (Omara).

There were substantial differences in the interactions between locals, cultures, educational systems, and fellow students. The students had to learn to overcome challenges such as interacting with individuals with different behavior, living in a city with a foreign language, and negotiating the grading system and teaching methods on the master's degree, as well as their classmates' cultural differences.

On the other hand, the adjustment process for the group of male students was significantly different to their female counterparts. The most robust value displayed was independence, seen in their autonomy regarding doing housework, attending classes, and enjoying leisure time without being inhibited by schedules, priorities, or the routines of their home country, thus creating new routines enabling them to feel comfortable.

This independence brought them the freedom to interact with other people and their new surroundings. They developed good relationships with their roommates and classmates without forming deep attachments, even though they most likely engaged in the same activities as the female students. Learning from each other on a personal level was also present. Their efforts to adjust to new customs associated with food, language and lifestyle showed an evident willingness to adapt quickly. However, despite establishing a significant level of independence from their home culture, some students from Asian cultures maintained certain attitudes and activities identified with their home culture. *"Sometimes I practice my Chinese handwriting... in our culture, it is very important... Beautiful handwriting means you have a good education"* (Shuai).

For this group it must be highlighted that the master's degree led to discovering new passions and exploring other educational areas. Many students chose to study tourism

because they associated it with their love for traveling and exploring new cultures, including meeting different people. Although a few students chose mobility to further their careers, an element of personal development also featured.

4.1.3. Students' transformative outcomes

Overall, for female students, these experiences lead to transcendental changes in students' beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about the world. *"I am another person, I know what I want, I know who I am... Since I came back from Girona, everything in my life has gone well..."* (Omara). The many experiences students went through during their first time abroad gave them the opportunity to learn more about themselves. They discovered they were capable of living on their own, run a house by themselves, and know their likes, dislikes, and limits.

Studying abroad represented independence, bringing the freedom to be open to changes. There is an acknowledgment of living without fear of trying new things, facing uncertainties with an optimistic perspective, and leaving behind inner complexes. It gave female students empowerment, courage, and confidence. *"In the past, I used to be afraid of trying new things, I didn't have a vision for myself... but after all that I went through, I can see myself, I can be happy..."* (Ekaterina).

Interaction with the new environment also afforded students specific abilities like flexibility towards adapting to different roles (student life, tourist, temporary resident), tolerance towards others (fellow students and locals) and the host culture, and empathy to deeply understand and accept cultural diversity. *"I became empathic, so I could understand why they (locals) were like that... I would think this is how they live. It is as if somebody wanted to interfere in your life..."* (Natalia). Furthermore, the mobility impact in this group transformed students into agents of social change back in their home countries.

Furthermore, for the male students, mobility represented a continuing self-evolution. Exploring a new lifestyle gave them a new vision of the life they wanted to have. They learned more about themselves, found the lifestyle they sought and felt more confident and comfortable. *"I had a calmer lifestyle, I became more reflexive and valued that calmness and quietness, that was the quality of life I was looking for..."* (Tomás). Understanding themselves on a deeper level brought maturity, higher self-esteem, and confidence. They became more tolerant to their coexistence with roommates, classmates and the cultural diversity.

This group also developed new interests related to their new student lifestyle, such as cooking and new educational interests. It is essential to highlight that for this group, along with their female counterparts, the mobility experience also transforms them into agents of social change. *“Understanding cultural diversity is key to personal improvement... mutual understanding between different cultures is quite important for the improvement of the world in general...”* (Hiro).

4.2. Liberal socio-cultural context

4.2.1. Students’ backgrounds

The second context of this research centers on female and male students who grew up with more liberal family values such as independence and achievement. These values encouraged them to seek travel and education as life experiences as young adults. For the group of female students, these values created a good, albeit distant, relationship between them and their parents, developing student autonomy and decision-making abilities. *“My parents were very supportive. Of course, they would have preferred it if I had stayed at home, but they knew I would go because I had discussed doing this before... so it wasn’t a shock...”* (Airin).

These students prioritize travel, education, and their professional careers. Hence, they develop these three components as part of their lifestyle. Many of them had already studied abroad for their bachelor’s degree and were able to continue traveling by enrolling on a master’s degree. Others traveled for only a few months to learn another language. *“I left home when I was 16 in a student exchange program, I went to Japan. I stayed about a month with a foster family. When I was 19, I traveled to Canada for my bachelor’s degree...”* (Nabila). Furthermore, students who traveled at a young age had a deeper understanding of cultural differences, acknowledged learning experiences and absorbed new cultural additions to their identities.

Within this group of female students emerged a smaller group originating from migrant families, or a family whose parents were occasionally relocated to a foreign country for work reasons. Family values and travel behavior were the two main differences found in their surroundings during their upbringing. This group indicates that distance is part of their life; an added component to an upbringing based on family values like caring for the family and sharing and maintaining affective ties. They were also taught how to minimize distance with traveling. This context didn't affect their decision to study abroad or make

it difficult to leave their home country. *"The most important thing is the ties (family) that remain throughout time in despite of the distance"* (Jessica). Regarding travel behavior, most of their trips were to visit family and friends. Although they continued being mobile and participating in exchange programs like working and traveling in other countries, they always made time to visit their relatives.

In the case of the male students, one group grew up with liberal values, predominantly independence and achievement, where getting an education, traveling, gaining work experience, and living a comfortable life were greatly valued. Their relationship with their families was mainly based on receiving support. In many cases this was financial aid, which enabled them to make independent decisions. For them, work experience is prioritized over higher education and most of the group had already worked in companies, universities, and travel agencies. *"I was working in Hong Kong. It was more of a 9 to 5 job... but I wanted to gain more cultural exposure... It was beneficial... since international mobilities are the future if I want to diversify my professional career options..."* (Jeffrey).

This group claimed that their life was hectic. Still, the difference between this group and the traditional is that they focused on developing their professional careers, working many hours, making their own money from a young age, and feeling they had assumed many responsibilities to the point it was too demanding. Despite feeling they had everything, this lifestyle drove them to the point of 'burn out'. *"I was motivated, but then I got tired. I saw my boss as the next step in my career, and I didn't see myself there... I didn't want to be like him, so I decided to quit and start traveling"* (Pablo).

This group took several trips by themselves as young adults. Some were involved in other exchange programs in high school, or during their bachelor's degree, and others had worked outside of their home country for some time.

4.2.2. Students' adjustment in the host destination

Once in the host destination, the group of female students continued to display the exact same patterns of independence as their male counterparts from the traditional socio-cultural context. The same autonomy to develop their routines surrounded their student lifestyle, with the difference that these routines were not new since the majority had studied abroad before. An important aspect is a willingness to immerse themselves in the host destination. Students' first routines focused on exploring the city and its

surroundings. *"You get connected with the locals and feel like one of them. You go to the same market every week, you pass the same bridge, you go to university, you start building that place as your home"* (Airin).

These students are also free to develop friendships with their roommates and classmates as part of the connections needed for the process of adjustment to a new environment. They had an active social life and spent almost the same amount of time together as the traditional female group. Nevertheless, they understood that eventually each of the students was going to continue their own path. *"... I definitely also wanted to make new friends because I knew I was going to live in Europe, so it was important for me to make connections..."* (Marie). Students also acknowledged the temporary component, pointing out the importance of adapting quickly and enjoying the experience more due to time constraints.

Since this is a career-oriented group, they had high expectations of the master's program and were very critical, prioritizing studying and attending classes over everything else. They were looking to have a more significant learning experience compared to other programs and an opportunity to develop their careers, either in a field related to the hospitality industry such as hotels, travel agencies, or family businesses, or continuing an academic career by pursuing a PhD.

This study highlights that the group of female students from migrant families adjusted to the host destination in a similar way to the rest of the groups, emphasizing their tolerance to cultural diversity since it is an aspect that many students experience in their family homes. *"My family is Vietnamese, but we live in the United States. In my home, my parents and my brother are very Vietnamese, my sister and her husband are more American... I'm more European style..."* (Ha).

Under this liberal socio-cultural context, there is also a group of male students adjusting to their daily lives in the host destination, similar to the traditional male group. The only difference found is a greater detachment from their home culture. They replicate some of the daily activities from their home country associated with lifestyle; for example, cooking, visiting museums or doing sport.

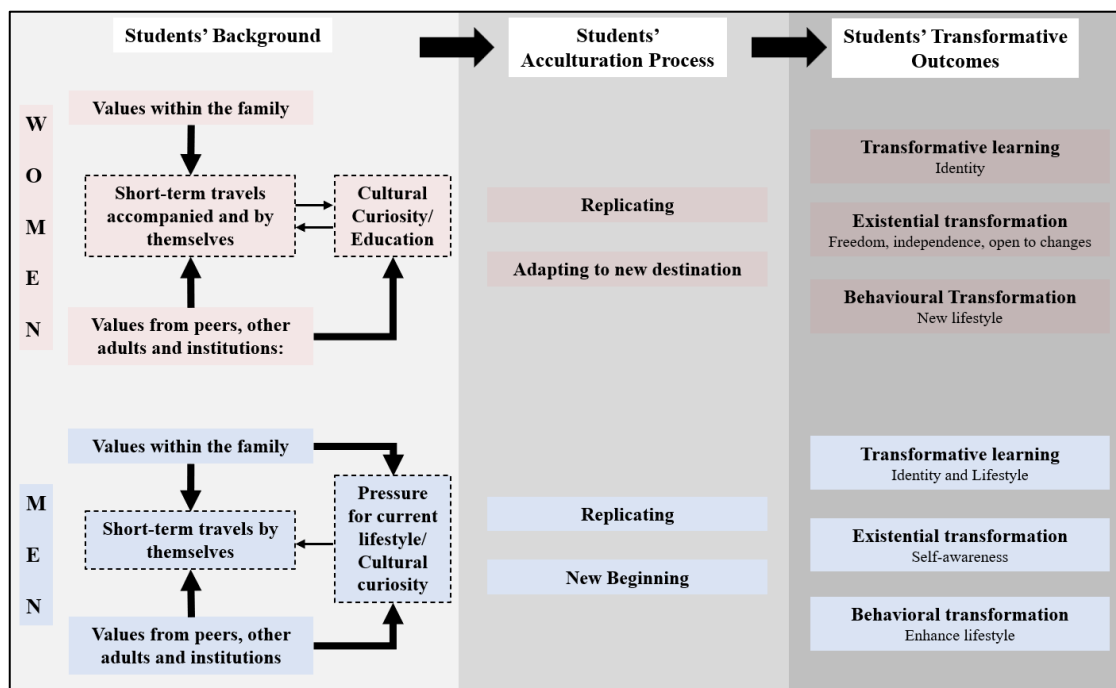
4.2.3. Students' transformative outcomes

For the female students, the outcomes of their mobility experience included a continuing evolution of the self and discovering their desired lifestyle, which is the same as their

male counterparts from the traditional and liberal socio-cultural context, as well as deepening their understanding of diversity, increasing their confidence, and gaining more personal and professional experience. *"There would be people I felt I would not be friends with under any circumstances, but you learned from love and accepted the difference between people"* (Suchi).

5. Conclusion

Figure 1. Transmission of Gender-role values in students from traditional socio-cultural context



This paper uses Berry et al.'s (2002) forms of cultural transmission to gain insights into how gender-role values are formed and transmitted to international students, and how this affects the transformative experience of their mobility. Findings suggest that the students lived in one of two of socio-cultural contexts: traditional or liberal. **Figure 1** shows how cultural transmission occurs in students from traditional socio-cultural contexts. Starting with vertical transmission (from parents to children), female students grow up with values associated with nurturing others and demonstrating a closeness to their families. In contrast, male students were embedded with values of independence and achievement, thus showing a degree of detachment from their families. This type of transmission can

be considered the initial point where gender-role values begin affecting a person on an individual level (Figuroa-Domecq, C & Segovia-Perez, M, 2020; Risman, 1998).

The students' background includes horizontal and oblique cultural transmissions (friends, education, and work), enabling female students to incorporate values of achievement in continuing education, professional careers, and travel. For male students, however, these agents reinforced values also taught by parents. These forms of transmission of gender-role values continue to affect and influence students, even at this point, at both interactional and institutional levels (Figuroa-Domecq, C & Segovia-Perez, M, 2020; Machin-Rincon et al., 2020; Risman, 1998).

In addition to students' transmission of gender-role values, this study highlights prior travel experiences that are not only gendered but serve as a strong influence for engaging in international student mobility. For female students, previous travels were opportunities for exposure to cultural diversity, increasing their curiosity to explore other cultures and travel the world. For male students, even though previous travels appeared to be for educational purposes, they also served as an opportunity for a lifestyle change, and a shift from a life of constant pressure due to their surroundings to a calmer and more relaxed lifestyle. These aspects of mobility complement students' backgrounds and facilitate moving to a new environment, where a positive outcome is expected (Berry, 2002).

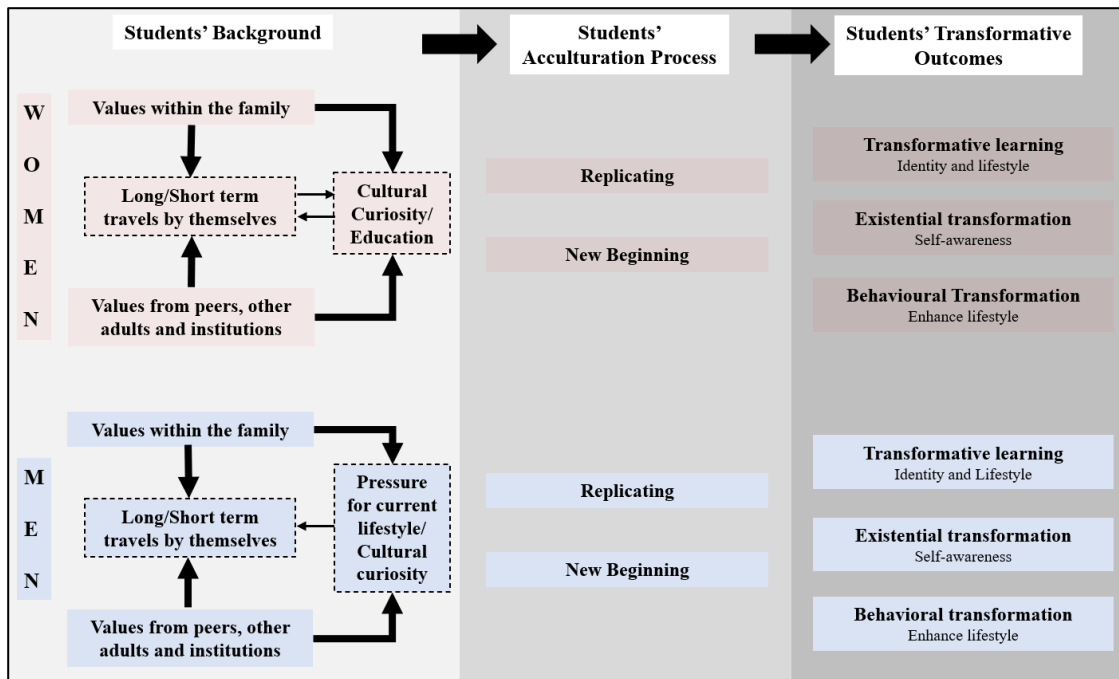
Furthermore, a degree of replication and adaptation of these gender-role values can be seen in students' acculturation in the host destination. Family values are highly replicated in female students' adjustment to their new environment, where they establish a home structure, a familiar environment, and relationships with their new friends resembling family ties. In contrast, male students sometimes tend to replicate customs and attitudes related to their home culture identity, accentuating a degree of distance not only from the family, but from the familiar. Under the same scenario, female students adapt their values and attitudes acquired from family, friends, and institutions to overcome the challenges brought by the acculturation process associated with different lifestyles, cultures, and educational systems. In contrast, male students create a new beginning stemming from the values of independence and autonomy they grew up with and their search for a different lifestyle. This is reflected in their routines, interactions with their friends, willingness to adapt to foreign customs, and the discovery of new passions. This research highlights the importance of female students living their mobility experience with

company, reliving their previous ties, while males focus on living the experience with or without this type of attachment, and hence are not looking for it.

Nonetheless, even though this group of students grew up in a traditional socio-cultural context, female students' transmission of gender-role values continued strongly in their acculturation process. This supports the authors statement that traditional or non-western values firmly remain throughout the acculturation process of migrants. Yet, male students in this group grew up with more lenient traditional values and favor host culture values in their acculturation process (Berry, 2002; Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Idema & Phalet, 2007). This process was also influenced by interaction with peers from a different gender role environment (Figueroa-Domecq, C & Segovia-Perez, M, 2020; Idema & Phalet, 2007).

The outcome of these gender-role value transmissions can be seen in the different transformative experiences associated with student mobilities. For female students, their transformative learning started with all the experiences and challenges in the host destination that led to knowing more about themselves. This affected their identities, whereas in the case of the men, it affected their lifestyle. This led to an existential transformation, where female students experience the feeling of freedom, independence, and openness to changes. Males, on the other hand, experience self-awareness as they are finally reflecting on what they want and need. Finally, there is a behavioral transformation, where female students experience several attitudinal changes, such as gaining tolerance, empathy, and feeling empowered and confident. Male students develop more assertive attitudes than before, like becoming more mature, confident, and easygoing. These findings complement Pung et al.'s (2020) research on transformative travel experience and gender.

Figure 2. Transmission of gender-role values in students from a liberal socio-cultural context



From the vertical, horizontal, and oblique forms of cultural transmission shown in **Figure 2**, the dissemination of gender-role values related to independence and personal and professional achievement (including travel and education) are very similar between female and male students from liberal socio-cultural contexts. These similarities in gender-role values also affect students at a personal, interactional, and institutional level (Figuroa-Domecq, C & Segovia-Perez, M, 2020; Machin-Rincon et al., 2020; Risman, 1998).

These values prompted female and male students to undertake previous long and short-term mobilities alone. Females associated this type of travel with education and cultural curiosity, and males with education and work. Interestingly, unlike the liberal socio-cultural context, within the traditional context, female students took short-term leisure trips accompanied by their families, or traveled alone for business. In contrast, male students took solo, short-term educational trips. Hence, the international student mobility experience differs according to students' socio-cultural context and past experiences (Bianchi, 2021).

Furthermore, for some female and male students, there is a degree of replication of lifestyle activities in their home country such as cooking, visiting museums, and doing sports. However, the lives of most of the students in the host destination took on new

routines and customs associated with a student lifestyle. It must be highlighted that the term 'new' refers to the environment, as these students had engaged in this type of mobility and student lifestyle before. Important differences to highlight from the groups of traditional context: In general, female students showed a higher tendency towards replication than male students and the actual newness of living a student lifestyle since these traditional context groups had never engaged in long-term mobility. These findings relate to the authors stating that liberal or western values tend to change depending on the foreign culture the individuals are immersed in (Berry, 2002; Idema & Phalet, 2007).

The outcome of these gender-role value transmissions is seen in the transformative experiences associated with mobilities. Once again, transformative learning affected the lifestyles and identities of both female and male students, particularly helping them to grow and gain self-confidence. This leads to an existential transformation and self-awareness of what they want and need. Finally, the students underwent behavioral transformation, deciding to change their lifestyle and develop certain attitudes such as becoming more mature, confident, and tolerant, in line with studies by Pung et al. (2020). Due to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that surround us in the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world, Kotler (2019) argues that people need transformative experiences. Travel experiences that transcend into an inner journey of self-growth and real and lasting transformation are in high demand, explaining why people seek out transformative travel experiences (Wee, 2019).

This research offers new practical perspectives on consumer behavior for educational tourism segment, considering how gender is part of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, emotions, experiences, and behavior; this study emphasizes the need for destinations to consider certain characteristics important to each gender as part of their branding strategy when developing destinations' personality and image for the educational tourism segment, as well as for the educational institutions and tourism providers when tailored experiences for international students (Huang & van der Veen, 2019; Meng & Uysal, 2008; Pan, Lu, & Zhang, 2021; Weiyii, Wang, & Kwek, 2023). This research suggests destinations in order to appeal female students, will have to emphasize that these provide experiences related to freedom, independence, knowledge and openness, within an environment where familiarity and connections takes place. Meanwhile, appealing to male students, destinations will stress that these offer experiences associated with

relaxing, discovering, and knowledge, within an unfamiliar and independent environment and highlighting destination' attributes related to its lifestyle.

Moreover, this study acknowledges the need for further research on gender roles in international student mobility. Further work might explore the increase in the numbers of male and female students studying abroad and a more diverse sample of nationalities and ages, which would enable comparisons between families and other socio-cultural environments. Another line of enquiry could be to analyze value continuity or change after mobility experiences and measure how gender roles influence decisions regarding future migration.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Article 3: Mobility-Immobility Transitions and the Search for Home: From Educational Travel to Migration

Reproduction of the original article Under Review in Mobilities.

| | SUBMISSION | TITLE | JOURNAL | STATUS | CHARGES |
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| 1 | SUBMISSION ∨ | | | | |
| 2 | PEER REVIEW ∧ | | | | |
| | 27 June 2023 | Decision Pending | | | |
| | 03 July 2023 | With Editor | | | |
| | 09 August 2023 | Out for Review | | | CONTACT |
| | | ... | | | |
| | | Final Decision | | | |

MOBILITY-IMMOBILITY TRANSITIONS AND THE SEARCH FOR HOME: FROM EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL TO MIGRATION

Tourism may prompt former tourists to transition to permanent residents. Educational tourism has garnered attention because of its economic influence and potential as a unique experience for students going abroad. Apart from the education obtained (satisfying their career aspirations), several other social processes can influence a student's future mobility decisions after finishing their studies abroad. These include their daily activities in the host destination, experiences in non-formal educational contexts, their attachment to a new place and their search for home. This study provides deeper insights into the drivers behind international student migration by exploring the role played by mobility perception, sense of continuity and the definition of home. Thirty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with international students from different nationalities who have finished a Master's degree in Tourism at the University of Girona, Spain. Based on Lewicka's (2021) argument for a sense of continuity in a place, and Tucker's (1994) claim that home-searching is a basic human trait, this research goes further by uncovering the processes of transition between educational tourism and migration, mapping the journey of international students' mobility, and exploring how the sense of continuity and the search for home influence students' future (im)mobilities.

Keywords: Mobility, Immobility, Educational Tourism, Migration, Home, Sense of Continuity

Introduction

Mobility has become central to people's way of life. It makes places vibrant and energizing and contributes to a global sense of place (Bissell, 2021). The two main kinds of human mobility, tourism and migration, are intertwined and often fuel each other as people engage with destinations in various ways, moving between the many different categories of mobility (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Huang & Chen, 2021; Illés & Michalkó, 2008; Salzar, 2022; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Tourism may prompt former tourists to transition to permanent residents (Provenzano, 2020) leading to decreased mobility (Lewicka, 2021), and researchers have attempted to link the two using concepts such as retirement migration, amenity-seeking and seasonal migration, leisure migration, second

home ownership, and lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014; Nelson, Black, & Bamberry, 2021; Zhang & Su, 2020).

Educational tourism has recently garnered attention because of its economic influence and potential as a unique experience for students going abroad as it bridges cultural gaps between two or more distinct groups of people (Cho, Min Tan, & Chiu, Will I be back? Evoking nostalgia through college students' memorable exchange programme experiences, 2019). Apart from the education obtained (satisfying their career aspirations), several other social processes can influence a student's future mobility decisions after finishing their studies abroad. These include their daily activities in the host destination, experiences in non-formal educational contexts, their attachment to a new place and their search for home (Malet, 2018; Quintero & Zerva, 2022).

Research on graduate international student mobility is usually limited to returning home or becoming migrants by staying in the host destination (Geddie, 2013; Tan & Hugo, 2016). Wu & Wilkes (2017) went further, exposing how the role of life experience and aspirations, particularly the concept of home, strongly influences international students' post migration plans.

This study builds on current knowledge and provides deeper insights into the drivers behind international student migration by exploring the role played by mobility perception, sense of continuity and the definition of home. Based on Lewicka's (2021) argument for a sense of continuity in a place, and Tucker's (1994) claim that home-searching is a basic human trait, this research goes further by uncovering the processes of transition between educational tourism and migration, mapping the journey of international students' mobility, and exploring how the sense of continuity and the search for home influence students' future (im)mobilities.

Literature Review

Exploring (im)mobility and sense of place

Mobility is a crucial aspect of human development, and the possibilities for physical movement are infused with the act of imagining origins and destinations and the aspiration for other lives and future selves (Cangia & Zittoun, 2020). Mobility not only concerns movement; it is also about how human beings experience transitional and transformational passages through space and time, creating zones of liminality between places and identities and moments of life that affect the perception of how an individual's

society stands in relation to others, and imagining an alternative life miles away from one's immediate surroundings (Cangia & Zittoun, 2020; Ginnerskov-Dahlberg, 2021; Salazar, 2011).

Research within the New Mobilities Paradigm explores the embodied nature and experience of different modes of travel, seeing them as forms of material and sociable dwelling in motion, and places of and for various activities that influence travel, tourism and migration patterns (Bissell & Gorman-Murray, 2020; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Massa, 2020).

People develop feelings of connection or attachment to meaningful places through lived experiences based on their affect (emotions) for those places (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015). Lewicka (2021) argues that voluntary or forced mobility plays an important role in the development of attachment. People who are primarily attached to place-dependent daily routines and habits may respond negatively to the move, while others who experience attachment as an active coping strategy may be able to adapt to a new environment with relative ease.

Low and Altman (1992) point out that place attachment comprises several interrelated dimensions based on both cognition (thought, knowledge and belief) and practice (behavior and action). Thus, the bonds connecting people to places are not always related to feelings of belonging or imply affective feelings towards the place, but can arise when a chosen place of residence is perceived as valuable due to its congruence with lifestyle and life story requirements, and its connection to other important places (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005; Torkington, 2012).

Mobility does not preclude attachment to a place, nor the ability to make a home (Gustafson, 2008; Lewicka, 2021; Massa, 2020), which entails a type of immobility for people who were once mobile, but made their home in their place of residence (Lewicka, 2021; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). The shift in focus towards mobility has led scholars to demonstrate links between mobility and immobility and different patterns of movement (from global flows of ideals and capital, to day-to-day activities) and different kinds of mobile people (e.g., tourists, asylum seekers, migrants or international students) (Adey, 2006; Massa, 2020; Schapendonk, Van Liempt, & Spierings, 2015).

Within mobility literature, the term immobility often has negative connotations such as stasis, inertia, sedentarism, or a fixed non-mobility, which is not even considered to be a type of mobility (Bissell & Fuller, 2011; Gruber, 2021; Malkki, 1992; Salazar, 2021).

However, more positive, albeit scarce, interpretations of immobility have developed over the past few decades. Research includes people-place attachment perspectives among highly mobile societies, the link between immobility and the preservation of residential experiences (Feldman, 1990), and the importance of belonging somewhere or feeling at home in a specific place (Van Houtum & Van Der Velde, 2004). Other studies have focused on social well-being, comfort, relaxation and emotional self-regulation stemming from having a stable place to live (Scannell & Gifford, 2017), and the need to coexist with mobility as it is formed with and through the potential for, and practice of, stability (Salazar, 2021).

Although the literature addresses the interplay between fixity and mobility, there is still little knowledge about international student mobility and the power to generate new forms of (im)mobilities within various realms of mobility, including residential mobility, tourism, work, amenity-seeking or lifestyle migration (Bailey, Devine-Wright, & Batel, 2016; Buckle, 2017; Williams & McIntyre, 2012) or how other factors such as the search for a home, contribute to these new movements.

Between (im)mobilities: A sense of continuity and the search for home

In migration studies, mobility and immobility are seen as interconnected phenomenon, lying on a continuum, often termed (im)mobility for its different forms and types of “(im)mobile (non-)movements”, exploring individuals shift from one status to the other during their lifetime (Bélanger & Silvey, 2020; Carling, 2002; Gruber, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale, Theunissen, & Haartsen, 2018). Scholars have increasingly recognized that international migratory processes can take diverse forms and ‘transitory, incomplete, liquid, circular, seasonal and temporary manifestations’ (Choe & Lugosi, 2022, p. 2), and that tourism may lead to former tourists transitioning to permanent residents (Provenzano, 2020). Long-term migrants returning to their home countries to visit friends and family, dual citizens, second home owners, retiree and lifestyle migrants, exchange students, contract workers and digital nomads all demonstrate how migration and tourism are interconnected types of human mobility. These mobilities constantly intersect and fuel each other as people engage with destinations in various ways and move between different categories (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014; Huang & Chen, 2021; Salzar, 2022; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). International students also move between these

tourism and migration categories (Cerdeira, Martinez-Roget, Pereira, & Rodriguez, 2021; Choe & Lugosi, 2022; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017; Glover, 2011).

Fried (1966) pointed out that when residing in a place, routines, relationships, and expectations are critical to a sense of continuity and serve as a framework for functioning in a universe which has temporal, social, and spatial dimensions (Fried, 1966). The perceived continuity of oneself in a particular place contributes to place identification and place attachment, and a sense of belonging somewhere and feeling at home, followed by the decision to stay in that place, increasing instances of immobility within mobility (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015; Fried, 1966; Lewicka, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale et al., 2018). For Lewicka (2021), place-related continuity is crucial to the development of emotional bonds with a place, and when disrupted (people leaving the place) may reinforce people's ties with their places of residence temporarily (Case, 1996; Lewicka, 2021). However, when the move is permanent or long-term, this continuity is broken and new ties have to be made for it to be re-established (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Lewicka, 2021).

Places may serve as sources of personal continuity (Lewicka, 2021) by creating an attachment that brings a sense of belonging and feeling at home (Di Masso, et al., *Between fixities and flows: Navigating place attachments in an increasingly mobile world*, 2019). This sense of home involves people's adaptive strategies to (re) establish or maintain a sense of self continuity across space and time (Lewicka, 2021; Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). Migrants' homemaking practices are often based on repeating habitual routines (Rappoport and Dawson 1998), using social media to keep in touch with family and friends, bringing particular objects with them, and keeping photographs of loved ones close by (Massa, 2020; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Tandogan & Onaran, 2008). Home is constructed through dynamic relationships, social and personal meanings associated with dwelling, and fragmented processes where mobility and immobility play a prominent role (Massa, 2020). Home is made, unmade, sought, idealised or reconstituted through different (im)mobilities (Massa, 2020; Miranda Nieto, 2020).

Home is important to the extent that it is critical to the individual's sense of continuity, and when lost, this loss is represented by grief and severe disruption (caused by culture shock and homesickness) to one's relationship with the place (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1966; Furnham, 2019; Presbitero, 2016

Research on international students' future mobility decisions is often limited to their returning home or becoming migrants by staying in the host destination (Geddie, 2013; Tan & Hugo, 2016), with a focus on push/pull factors as drivers behind these mobilities (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Bijwaard & Wang, 2016; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Kim, 2015; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). Wu & Wilkes (2017) acknowledge students' significant personal growth, which complicates their migration plans (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2015; Collins et al., 2016; Geddie, 2013; Sage et al., 2013). Ambitions and life goals change in response to personal development, therefore mobility decisions are socially and biographically embedded (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2015; Coulter et al., 2016; Marcu, 2015) and can even consider the concept of home (Wu & Wilkes, 2017).

Migration can be a home-seeking process (Tucker, 1994) and international students migratory plans are tied to different concepts of home (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Therefore, this investigation explores the experiences of international students in the host destination and how students' definition of home evolve and influences their future mobilities including migration.

Methodology

This exploratory study adopted a qualitative approach due to its creativity, flexibility and spontaneity in identifying the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives, and to interpret data and develop hypotheses or research strategies used to make strategic marketing decisions. (Bellenger, Bernhardt, & Goldstucker, 2011; Milliken, 2001; Picken, 2018). Research participants (see Table 1) were international students who had finished a master's degree in tourism at the University of Girona, Spain, between 2015 and 2020. The 33 participants included 22 women and 11 men aged between 24 and 41, and who had resided in the city of Girona for over five months. Nineteen participants were from Central and South America and 14 from Europe/Asia. This diversity of nationalities was essential in order to analyze the multicultural effects. From the total number of participants, 9 students decided to stay in Girona and 24 returned to their home country, with 10 of these later returning to Girona.

Data were collected via in-depth interviews using a five-part semi-structured questionnaire, as this method supports studies addressing complex concepts such as experience, transformation, memory, identity, and the relations between self and other (Picken, 2018). Due to COVID-19, only eight interviews were conducted face-to-face

before the lockdown; the other 25 were conducted online during the lockdown. Neither the data collection process nor the data itself was affected by this as all students could easily manage Google Meet, Zoom, and Skype platforms. Furthermore, the participants had completed their student mobility program when interviewed.

The interview questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first part covered student profile; the second highlighted the acculturation process; the third section explored the students' experience of the host university; the fourth analyzed the students' experience of the host destination; and the final part examined the outcome of their international mobility experience and their future decisions on completing their mobility.

The interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes and were recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed using Nvivo software for encoding data. Thematic analysis was applied, and the codes were related to students' life in their home country, previous travel experiences, motivations for studying abroad, routines in the host destination, students' experience of the university and the host destination, and their intentions after finishing their mobility.

Table 1. International Student Profiles

| Name | Nationality | Gender | Age | Length of Stay |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Natalia | Ecuador | F | 33 | 3 years |
| Mishel | Ecuador | F | 28 | 4 years |
| Camilo | Colombia | M | 31 | 5 years |
| Mariana | México | F | 27 | 1 year |
| Dulce | Ecuador | F | 38 | 18 months |
| Belén | Argentina | F | 29 | 1 year |
| Tomás | Argentina | M | 31 | 1 year |
| Jessica | Argentina | F | 27 | 1 year |
| Ekaterina | Russia | F | 25 | 3 years |
| Tiago | Portugal | M | 25 | 2 years |
| Lorena | México | F | 35 | 3 years |
| Silvia | México | F | 29 | 11 months |
| Desiré | Peru | F | 28 | 2 years |
| Guilherme | Brazil | M | 35 | 11 months |
| Carla | Brazil | F | 41 | 13 months |
| Eliana | Colombia | F | 37 | 14 months |
| Javier | Bolivia | M | 25 | 10 months |
| Julio | Peru | M | 29 | 2 years |
| Pablo | Chile | M | 32 | 11 months |
| Liedma | Bolivia | F | 29 | 10 months |
| Shuai | China | M | 24 | 2 years |
| Angelica | Greece | F | 30 | 18 months |
| Mohamad | Iran | M | 33 | 4 years |
| Joey | Lebanon | F | 29 | 1 year |
| Shima | Iran | F | 33 | 6 years |
| Omara | Bolivia | F | 35 | 8 months |
| Nabila | Malaysia | F | 27 | 6 months |
| Jeffrey | China | M | 31 | 5 months |
| Hiroaki | Japan | M | 28 | 13 months |
| Marie | Germany | F | 24 | 5 months |
| Suchi | India | F | 30 | 6 years |
| Ha | Vietnam | F | 32 | 1 year |
| Airin | Indonesia | F | 26 | 1 year |

Results

From imagining to materializing home

In considering the drivers of educational mobility, Ginnerskov-Dahlberg (2021) emphasizes looking at individuals' perceptions and the meaning attached to a place, as this plays a decisive role in people's desire to travel. To understand the students' motives for making the transition from international student to migrant, this research presents two dimensions that merge to influence their decision to stay in the host destination. These are the students' perception of the mobility and the destination, and their definition of home.

Regarding the first dimension, for most students, studying abroad meant expanding their professional careers (a higher education degree was needed for work purposes, or to change careers), and were seeking a new lifestyle (students complained of a monotonous life filled with stress and long working hours). However, the host destination was perceived as a place where new encounters and cultural learning could take place (note that the majority of the group did no prior research on the host destination, and had no clear expectation of the attributes of the place). Nonetheless, students do not separate these perceptions, so their expectations of mobility and the host destination blend together, benefiting both from the same perceptions. *"I wanted to change my career and live in a place that is close to the sea and have a good weather ..."* (Ekaterina). This research suggests that students constructed these perceptions through their previous travel experiences, having family and friends living or studying abroad, or from information on travel obtained from social media.

The second factor influencing this mobility transition is students' definition of home. This can be categorized into home country, family and social ties, and the physical place where self-development takes place. For some students, home is their country of origin, where they find their physical home, their home culture and gastronomy, and the emotional environment of affection and security provided by the physical presence of their family. *"I'm aware of my strong Japanese roots, my culture, my environment... my home country is my home... I'm quite Japanese and I felt that when I join the Master..."* (Hiro). These first-time international students had a strong relationship with their family, considering their home culture as their identity.

For others, home is more than simply the place and dynamics they have left behind; it is what they are able to create when the opportunity presents itself. Home represents the

place where they can personally and professionally develop their lives, including forming a family or social ties, having a job, fulfilling a desire to pursue a particular lifestyle, and perceiving a sense of personal growth. *“Home is wherever I’ll end up at and wherever I establish myself and can form a connection with the community that I am living with...”* (Nabila). The students in this second group acknowledge that home has a variable definition, depending on the evolution of the elements that define home for them according to their ambitions and life goals (Wu & Wilkes, 2017), and whether these are found in the place where they are residing. These students had a more independent relationship with their families, considered themselves influenced by several cultures they had previously been exposed to, and had previous experience as international students. In the host destination, students’ perception of mobility and definition of home merge, and over time, materialize through home-making practices in their daily lives in the destination. Students had routines such as preparing meals for themselves, doing housework, attending classes, meeting up with friends and going to local festivities or cafés, or seeing around the city at weekends. Other activities that accentuate the sense of belonging and of being at home included learning Catalan, integrating the student’s home culture with the host culture (cooking their traditional food, decorating their room, writing in their mother tongue), receiving family and friends (providing the opportunity for students to show them the city and their favorite places). When showing the city to visitors (such as visiting friends and relatives), students also realized the potential of the place they live, and the happiness and satisfaction they feel when they present Girona as their home. *“My family and some friends came to visit me... I liked having them... I’m always happy to be a host in Girona, to show them what it looks like, my home...”* (Shuai). The students learned valuable lessons from their daily lives (many of them related to old social stereotypes and taboos) that helped them grow personally and professionally. Their interaction with a new environment enabled self-exploration and helped them confront old ideals or beliefs, undergoing radical changes, hence increasing the attached to the destination where these changes take place, and making the new home feel freer. *“I used to love going to the beach with my father, but as I grew up people made me feel ashamed of my body and I stopped going... Here (Girona) I found a friend that helped me realize that I am free and I can do whatever I want, and nobody cares...”* (Desiré). The research underlines the fact that students feel comfortable in the city. Their surroundings; the medieval landscape, local culture, connectivity and closeness to other

cities, brought them a feeling of security and inner calm. For the students living in Girona, the old quarter was particularly associated with a rich cultural history, giving them the feeling they were living in a magical fairy tale. The city's medieval architecture immediately caught their attention and was enjoyed greatly during their stay. The combination of several aspects of their life such as home making and self-knowledge, and the satisfaction with the attributes of the destination, in addition to materializing the students' prior perceptions of mobility and home, which enabled them to develop an emotional connection with both the people and the place, thus making the destination feel like home.

Should I stay or should I go? Exploring the sense of continuity and the grief for a lost home

Lewicka (2021) argued that although mobility is present in our daily lives, immobility is more prevalent, evidencing people's ability worldwide to feel attached to their places of residence. In this section, this investigation explores the reasons behind some students decision to stay in Girona after completing their masters' degree, while others choose to return to their country of origin, and in the latter case, analyse the experiences of returning to their home culture.

For some students, the international student mobility program helped materialize their definition of home. They discovered a place where they could create a family with their friends or romantic partners, opportunities to continue their process of self-discovery, job opportunities or new educational aspirations (e.g., obtaining a PhD) to expand their professional careers, a calmer and more relaxed lifestyle compared to their previous unsatisfactory one, a safer and more stable environment that provides satisfaction with the host destination. *"I started my studies, and I fell in love with the city. I knew a few people... opportunities for work came up , I started learning a little bit of Spanish, I started to do activities... my boyfriend was from here... these sort of things started appearing, so it became more decisive to stay here... I'm building a home..."* (Shima).

After settling, many of the students continued traveling back to their home countries to visit family and friends. Although they felt alienated at first, a sense of familiarity eventually returned and they were able to feel at home again. Students also affirmed that the more often they traveled to their home country, the easier it was to change environment. *"Before I felt as if I was in another world, but later I could understand the*

differences between the places, I felt normal... I go back to Peru and I'm back home, and then I'm here (Girona) again at my home... It's like everything is unified..." (Julio).

These findings demonstrate that mobility does not preclude feeling at home or making a home in different places, and highlights students' ability to adapt to new cultures and have different homes. This also highlights that, at some point, mobility between places is no longer considered a disruption of place, but as a bridge to previous attachments.

According to Lewicka (2021), individuals feel an emotional attachment to a place based on their perception of continuing in that place. This research presents the case of one group of students who felt a sense of continuity and decided to stay in Girona, and another group who decided to go back to their home country on completing their masters' program. These students were certain from the beginning that they would go back to their home country after finishing the mobility experience. *"I was always clear that I was not going to stay... I was going to go back to Chile because I wanted to start my own business..."* (Pablo). These students were eager to return and looking forward to picking up where they left off to develop their professional careers, and to spend time with their family and friends.

These students went back to their old routines after readapting to new schedules, new jobs, and living with their parents again, and claimed that the return to their home country was natural. *"I understood that the experience was over, and it was part of the process to accept that... so when I went back, it was easy for me to adapt to my traditional life... I had also a job that it was waiting for me..."* (Javier). For these students, there was no perceived place continuity stemming from the feeling of having a home they had made. This supports Wu & Wilkes (2017), who claim that international students engage less with the host destination if they perceive their mobility as temporary and part of the educational ladder.

Nevertheless, there were students who experienced considerable culture shock on returning to on their destination of origin despite preparing themselves emotionally and physically for their return, and expressed feelings of frustration and a sense of being different from their surrounding environment. *"I found that I'm different now from my culture and I got frustrated at the beginning, asking myself, how do I fit in now?... It took time and I talked to a lot of people... I reached out to people who could understand me..."* (Nabila). These students also recognized that this was a temporary phase of their re-

adaptation process and demonstrated a renewed awareness of the positive consequences of voluntary relocation.

Within the group of returnees, some students were reluctant to leave the host destination, and felt forced to go back home. Although they felt at home in their host destination, they were unable to continue there due to the lack of job opportunities. It was very important for students to be financially independent and to develop their professional career. *“I wanted to stay, to find a job because I really loved living in a small city that has it all, to feel secure, to be able to travel... But I couldn't find a job and a better opportunity came up in Ecuador, so I came back...”* (Natalia).

This group was expected to experience greater culture shock when re-adapting to their home country, and some students expressed feelings of depression, anxiety, and lack of connection with their home culture. *“It was very difficult on a personal level because I didn't want to leave Girona... I broke down, I was sad and distressed... It took me a long time to adapt again...”* (Jessica). Back in their country of origin, many of these students continued to follow the customs and habits acquired in the host destination such as cooking the local food, speaking the language or reading the news. These students tried to create a sense of continuity back home by somehow keeping certain experiences and feelings (e.g., freedom) from the host destination alive. This can also be considered a coping mechanism for dealing with the grief of losing a home (Fried, 1966). *“I missed having freedom, doing whatever I pleased, not being attached to anyone or to anything...”* (Silvia).

Yet another group of students had a positive attitude towards moving back to their home country despite being forced to relocate. This is what Fried (1966) referred to as positive feelings for relocation, which helped the students cope with the changes within themselves, and returning to routines which included securing employment and keeping in touch with friends from the host destination.

Nevertheless, while trying to move on, the feeling of discomfort was present in their everyday lives. *“I missed Girona, my friends and the independence that I had, but when I started to work when I went back home, I gained independence in other ways, like having my own money, I moved out of my parents' house... there were mixed feelings...”* (Angélica). Forced mobility causes place disruption (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1966), the outcomes of which may vary according to the attitude students take towards moving back to their home country.

Migrating: Returning to the place where I felt at home

A further group investigated was made up of students who decided to migrate to the host destination after going back home and resuming their life there, re-adapting and setting new personal and professional goals. *“I was not happy, I said to myself this is not what I want, and I declined to the job I was offered and came back to do a PhD and for the opportunities that I knew I was going to have here...”* (Dulce). Before returning to Girona, the students had the time to experience life in their home country and, as Brown & Perkins (1992) point out in relation to motives for place disruption, the personal changes experienced during the students’ mobility became significant enough to make them feel that they no longer belonged in their home country and needed to move, leading them to return to the place where they felt they belonged or had experienced a sense of continuity (Lewicka, In search of roots: Restoring continuity in a mobile world, 2021). Furthermore, students were dissatisfied with their work and the place they were living, prompting them to re-analyze the possibility of moving back to Girona.

Along with the decision to migrate, students faced two major constraints: family and legal residency. In some cases, students’ families disagreed with their decision to migrate. Family and parents thought that migrating and leaving behind security and economic stability was a risky venture. *“My family didn’t take my decision very well. For them I was capricious and reckless... continuing with an adventure that was risky... especially financially speaking...”* (Belén). Students were also aware that processing the paperwork related to their legal residency was going to require patience and time.

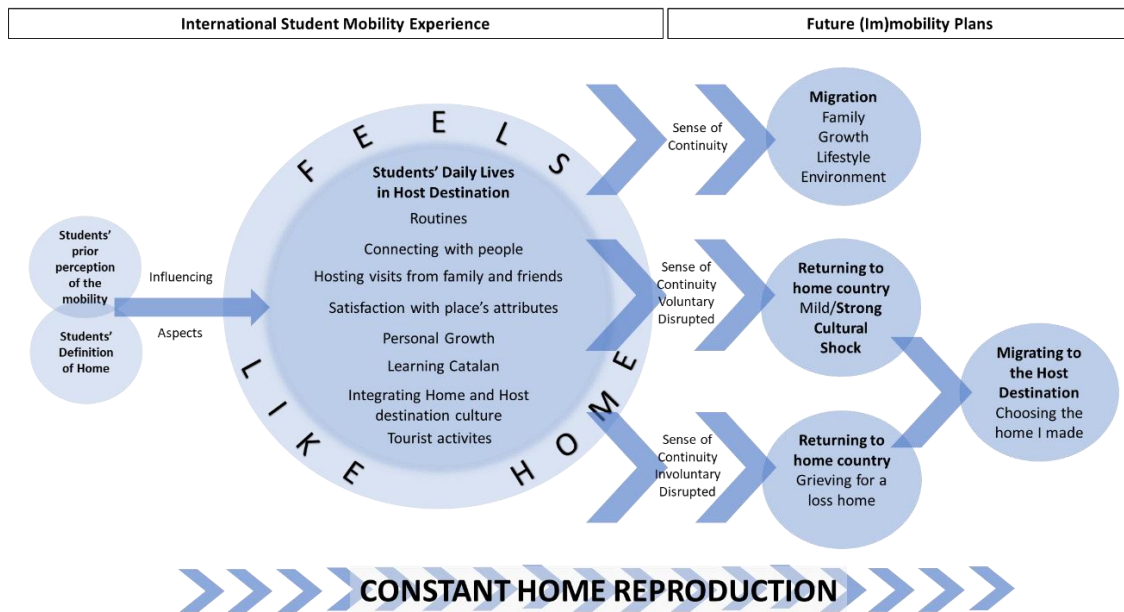
Findings also highlight that the decision to migrate was directed towards opportunities to enhance their professional careers, mostly through the decision to continue their education by pursuing a PhD, or when a job opportunity arose, or a research grant awarded in the host destination. Students who opted to follow a PhD program expressed an interest in continuing academic research after completing their master’s degree, and even received guidance and encouragement from their former master thesis director, hence leaving the door open to a possible new career path. *“I wasn’t sure If I wanted to apply, but a professor encouraged me to, and then I got the funding ... and a friend asked me “do you really want to come back?” and I was torn ... I didn’t know... but I decided to try it... I’m happy with this place (Girona)”* (Suchi).

Students migrating because of a job opportunity or being awarded a research grant felt encouraged to migrate, as the host destination was still considered home and they could still see themselves developing their personal and professional life there. *“For me it was like going back home, you can see yourself building a life in the long-term... it is economically stable, the people are more open, and you can travel more often...”* (Tomás). Hence, this research demonstrates that student mobility involves more than simply migrating to a place for better opportunities; it is more about going back ‘home’ to the host destination and continuing to grow professionally.

On their return, the students reported that they again faced a process of readjustment. Although they were returning to a place they were emotionally and physically attached to, they were aware that this time it was different as the status of educational tourist differs from that of migrant. The sense of loneliness is greater, as friends with whom they shared the master’s degree are no longer there, and now they are now facing a new challenge alone. They also acknowledged that cultural differences that were once considered normal, such as language, are now seen as barriers that can even make them feel uncomfortable at times. However, this process of returning to a familiar place was expected by the students, and they accepted it as part of their new mobility. *“I think it was a bit difficult and lonely at the beginning... During the master’s degree you were surrounded by people and used to the feeling that everything was being taken care of [...]. Now you are by yourself, and you see that the language difference is even more marked, for example [...] The first few months were a bit of readjustment...”* (Suchi).

Conclusion

Figure 1. (Im)mobility transitions in International Student Mobility



This work argues that students' prior perceptions of their mobility in general and their definition of home, once materialized in the host destination, influences students' sense of place and feeling at home. This research presents a model (**Figure. 1**) that explores perceptions, sense of continuity and home in the context of international student mobility and how these concepts influence students' future (im)mobility plans. First, in order to support the premise that students use mobilities to search for a home, this paper argues that once students are settled in the host destination, their prior perceptions of overall mobility and definition of home influence their sense of place and feeling at home. Routines and experiences in the host destination are closely related to what students were looking to accomplish regarding the mobility and home-making practices that reflected their definition of home, demonstrating the importance of places being perceived as valuable for their congruence with students' lifestyle and life story requirements in creating bonds with places (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2005; Torkington, 2012).

The students' daily lives helped establish an emotional bond with the place as well as heightening their sense of home, particularly by engaging in activities such as learning the local language, hosting family and friends, integrating their home with the culture of the host destination, and learning life lessons that enhanced their personal growth. During this stage of the mobility, the dynamics of the students in the host destination influenced their prior definition of home and helped them create a new one, emphasizing the

evolving, timeless process of home-making within mobilities (Di Masso, et al., 2019; Lewicka, 2021; Massa, 2020; Miranda Nieto, 2020).

After completing their educational mobility, the host destination provided a sense of continuity for the group of students, based on family (friends and romantic partners), personal and professional growth, a desirable lifestyle, and a safe and stable environment. In these circumstances, students became both migrant and settled. They felt at home, and demonstrated how mobility and immobility are interconnected and ongoing, and how it is possible to find a home in the midst of mobilities (Feldman, 1990; Salazar, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale et al., 2018). Furthermore, this transition highlights how students make and remake home through their daily activities, first as educational travelers, and then as migrants (Massa, 2020; Miranda Nieto, 2020; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

Another group of students voluntarily decided to interrupt the continuity found through their mobility experience and return to their home country. As they had relocated voluntarily, these students went back to their usual routines, but aware there would be a period of readjustment. Some students found this relatively easy, but for others it was more challenging as they experienced greater culture shock. Nevertheless, the students demonstrated a willingness and positive attitude towards re-adapting to their home country. These findings support Lewicka's (2021) assertions on voluntary mobility and positive outcomes (easily adapting to new environments) when relocating to the country of origin.

Other students moved back to their home country involuntarily as they did not want to leave the host destination; however, the sense of continuity was interrupted due to the lack of job opportunities. A decisive factor forced students to return, and they therefore experienced greater culture shock, to the point of experiencing symptoms of grief for a the loss of a home, a sentiment underpinned by theories of disruption of place/sense of continuity (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1966). However, these students reproduced particular customs from the host destination that helped them create a sense of continuity in their home country and cope with the grief stemming from disrupting the attachment with the host destination. This demonstrates the importance for individuals to re-establish continuity and attachment in a new place, not only to cope with changes, but to regain a sense of home (Bissell & Gorman-Murray, 2020; Brown & Perkins, 1992; Lewicka, 2021; Rishbeth & Powell, 2013).

Among the group of returnee students, some later decided to migrate to the host destination as they were motivated by the feeling of home, the sense of continuity of the routines and their experiences during their international student mobility, and now re-lived with a degree of adjustment (dealing with loneliness, cultural differences, different educational aspirations, new job opportunities). Nonetheless, the students were willing to finally make themselves a home again. These findings provide further insights into people's adaptative strategies for re-establishing a sense of self-continuity and migrating in search of a home, and how the concept of home evolves through different (im)mobilities (Massa, 2020; Miranda Nieto, 2020; Tucker, 1994; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). This study contributes to the literature on international student mobility in a number of ways. It demonstrates 1) the close relationship between mobility and immobility (educational travelers can migrate after graduation); 2) how immobility can arise from other forms of mobilities (former students deciding to later migrate); 3) how self-perceived continuity in a place is a decisive factor when analyzing future mobilities considering making a place home; and 4) how the search for home, or the feeling of being at home is embedded in students daily lives and made and remade throughout their various mobilities.

These findings are a call for higher education institutions and DMOs to recognize that individuals not only pursue education for personal and professional growth, but also to look for home. Hence, the importance of understanding this population segment on a deeper level in order to provide experiences linked to the perception of feeling at home.

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Discussion

This thesis attempted to explore the role of the host destination in international student mobility, implementing theories related to place attachment, acculturation, transformative experiences, sense of continuity and the search for home, in order to comprehend and update the literature regarding the educational tourism market. To begin with, the first article aimed at identifying the production of place attachment in international students in the host destination through the conceptual lens of disruptions to attachment via changes in places from a voluntary relocation. As a result, the investigation presents a model that illustrates the process of place disruption on students' home country, followed by the process of place attachment in the host destination and its beneficial outcomes not only for the destination but for the international student as well.

In this first article, findings suggest that previous mobilities and socio-cultural influences in students' country of origin turn into specific motivations for place disruption in international student mobility. These motivations can be categorized in the pre-disruption phase, since they create anticipation for students' mobility and allow a transition of loosening ties with their homes and prepare them for developing new ties (Brown & Perkins, 1992).

Relocation to the host destination represents the phase of disruption. In light of the fact that students were looking for changes and preparing themselves for this kind of mobility at the same time, disruptions were considered more manageable and viewed as a desired new experience. The host destination is also the place where students' expectations are usually met due to the daily interactions between other students and their new surroundings and prompt to new attachments.

This study finds that students develop roles during their acculturation process and in which Girona is continuously lived: as students, tourists and as locals. These roles helped students in their adjustment process and their interaction between different environments permit the gradual development of new ties, identifying themselves with the new place and creating a sense of belongingness. This stage represents the post-disruption phase. This research also demonstrates that, when the host destination is capable of developing a sense of place in the student, this leads to meaningful experiences that enable the student to call the host destination home.

The second article examines the dynamics and transmission of gender-role values and their implications for international student mobility. Adapting Berry, Poortinga, Segall,

Marshall, & Dasen's (2002) forms of cultural transmission and acculturation, this paper presents two types of transmission of gender-role values in students according to their socio-cultural context. The transmission of gender-role values in students from traditional socio-cultural context shows how women are raised with values associated with nurturing others and demonstrating a closeness to their families, and in contrast, male students were embedded with values of independence and achievement, thus showing a degree of detachment from their families. The students' background includes horizontal and oblique cultural transmissions (friends, education, and work), enabling female students to incorporate values of achievement in continuing education, professional careers, and travel. For male students, however, these agents reinforced values also taught by parents. Furthermore, a degree of replication and adaptation of these gender-role values can be seen in students' acculturation in the host destination. Family values are highly replicated in female students' adjustment to their new environment, where they establish a home structure, a familiar environment, and relationships with their new friends resembling family ties. In contrast, male students sometimes tend to replicate customs and attitudes related to their home culture identity, accentuating a degree of distance not only from the family, but from the familiar. The outcome of these gender-role value transmissions can be seen in the different transformative experiences associated with student mobilities.

In addition, this research presents the second type of transmission of gender-role values in students from liberal socio-cultural context, where the dissemination of gender-role values related to independence and personal and professional achievement (including travel and education) are very similar between female and male students. Furthermore, for some female and male students, there is a degree of replication of lifestyle activities in their home country such as cooking, visiting museums, and doing sports. However, the lives of most of the students in the host destination took on new routines and customs associated with a student lifestyle. The outcome of these gender-role value transmissions is seen in the transformative experiences associated with students' liberal socio-cultural context.

In the third article, the focus was on uncovering the processes of transition between educational tourism and migration, and exploring how the sense of continuity and the search for home impact the future mobility of students. The research presents a model that explores perceptions, sense of continuity and home in the context of international student mobility and how these concepts influence students' future (im)mobility plans.

First, to support the premise that students use mobilities to search for a home, this paper argues that once students are settled in the host destination, their prior perceptions of overall mobility and definition of home influence their sense of place and feeling at home. The students' daily lives helped establish an emotional bond with the place as well as heightening their sense of home. After completing their educational mobility, the host destination provided a sense of continuity for a group of students, who settled and became migrants. Another group of students decided voluntarily to interrupt the continuity established through their mobility experience and return home. Some students moved back to their home country involuntarily as they did not wish to leave the host destination; however, the sense of continuity was interrupted due to the lack of job opportunities. Among the group of returnee students, some later decided to migrate to the host destination as they were motivated by the feeling of home, the sense of continuity of the routines and their experiences during their international student mobility.

These findings demonstrated how mobility and immobility are interconnected and ongoing, within the context of international student mobility (Feldman, 1990; Salazar, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale et al., 2018). It is clear that tourism can lead to other forms of mobility, including migration. Place attachment can vary according to students' degree of involvement with the host destination. In addition, when deciding to migrate, there is an interplay between the emotional connection to the place, the sense of continuity associated with personal and professional growth and afterwards the feeling of home. In addition, the paper highlights that it is not always possible to reestablish bonds with the home country once they have been formed. A student's ability to develop their personal and professional goals depends on the destination's opportunities.

General Conclusions

The concepts of sense of place, place attachment, im(mobilities), and the search for home, have been widely studied under different contexts, methods, market segments, and perspectives. In spite of this, there are still gaps in the literature in the field of educational travel. This thesis examines these concepts, using Girona as its field of research, and embarks on a journey that explores the host destination's role in international student mobility from a variety of perspectives, including gender.

For a more comprehensive understanding of students' construction of their experiences, the meaning given and the memories associated with the host destination, a qualitative approach was required. It was also considered appropriate that participants be of a variety of nationalities in order to evaluate the effects of multiculturalism. In addition, this thesis presents findings that contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of international student mobility after carefully reviewing literature and collecting and processing data from the in-depth interviews.

When referring to the thesis's theoretical contribution, the first article theoretically underlines that international students experience place disruption in their country of origin due to forces like previous mobilities and socio-cultural add-ons and constraints, and the disruption phases (Brown & Perkins, 1992) are lived in different stages of their mobility. Nevertheless, the students' readiness to perform a mobility and their positive expectations, diminish the degree of disruption, and start a process of place attachment in the host destination. Following place attachment theories towards multiple places in the midst of a mobility (Di Masso et al., 2019; Gustafson, 2001; Scannell et al., 2021), as a result of the thesis' findings, host destinations have been shown to be capable of creating and recreating attachments that are embedded in students' daily lives (new routines and friends, professional and personal development, cultural differences), as well as through the different roles students adopt during their mobility experience. Students develop a feeling of belonging and feel at home through these attachments.

The second article, based on Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Marshall, & Dasen's (2002) forms of cultural transmission and acculturation, acknowledges the existence of gender-role values being passed down from international students' family, friends, education and work, and that these values vary according to the socio-cultural context in students' home country. In addition, students' prior travel experiences are not only gender-specific, but serve as a strong influence on engaging in international student mobility. During students'

acculturation process in the host destination, these gender-role values can be gradually replicated and/or adapted, affecting the three types of transformative experiences associated with students' personal development. These contributions support the main theories of gender-roles in tourism (Figueroa-Domecq, C & Segovia-Perez, M, 2020; Machin-Rincon et al., 2020; Risman, 1998) as well as on transformative experiences (Bianchi, 2021; Pung et al., 2020).

The third article, drawing on Lewicka's (2021) argument for a sense of continuity in a place, and Tucker's (1994), theoretically expose the transition between educational tourism and migration claim that home-searching is a basic human trait. Through their everyday lives in the host destination, students develop the feeling that they are at home after materializing their prior perceptions of mobility and their definition of home. Future mobility plans are considered based on the sense of continuity the host destination generates in students. When the sense of continuity is clear, students decide to migrate, turning their mobility into immobility. Furthermore, this sense of continuity can be voluntarily disrupted when students decide to return home after finishing their program, or can be involuntarily disrupted, when students are forced to return home. In many cases, after students move back to their home country, they later decide to migrate to the host destination influence by the feeling of home and the sense of continuity felt during the mobility experience. These findings demonstrated how mobility and immobility are interconnected and ongoing, and how it is possible to find a home in the midst of mobilities contributing to the (im)mobility literature (Feldman, 1990; Salazar, 2021; Schewel, 2019; Stockdale et al., 2018).

Furthermore, this thesis provides practical contributions that can be used by higher education institutions and DMOs in order to increase the market for educational tourism. Considering that the educational tourism market size represents \$399.8 billion dollars (Future Market Insights, 2021) primarily derived from international students' expenses related to accommodation, food, tuition fees, entertainment, and leisure activities, it is important to take into account the fact that a positive international student mobility experience can create a sense of attachment and loyalty towards the destination, which can increase the willingness of students to return. As a result, this type of mobility can develop other types of tourism, such as visiting friends and relative (VFR) tourism, since most students during their course of study have received at least one visit from family and friends during their course of study. In addition, these attachments can lead students to

become more responsible with their environment, increasing their sense of compromise, taking care of their community, and turning themselves into responsible tourists as well. This type of mobility is also considered a transformative experience since it offers valuable lessons that can be used for personal and professional growth. The development of destinations' personality and image for the educational tourism segment requires destinations to provide tailored experiences for female and male students since each has different characteristics important to that gender as part of their branding strategy.

Finally, this thesis highlights the importance of understanding this population segment on a deeper level to provide experiences related to the perception of feeling at home, since individuals not only pursue education for personal and professional growth, but also to search for a home, thereby opening doors to future mobility.

Limitations and Future Research

In this thesis, broad concepts have been incorporated into the international student mobility concept; as such, there are still many areas for research in the future. Nevertheless, the present thesis has limitations, starting from the methodology. The sample of participants is not represented by a very balanced number of male and female students, and while that limitation did not seem to mislead the data interpretation, a more balanced sample could provide a more solid base. There is also a limitation on the number of students performing the different types of mobilities mentioned in the third article, but it was not possible to find more students matching this last criteria. In addition, even though all the participants studied a tourism master degree, the researcher considered this an interesting aspect, since they were practicing partly (through their daily lives as international students/tourists) what they were learning during the course, accentuating the different types of learnings in this type of mobility.

The research has been developed with respect to the characteristics of one particular destination, in this case Girona, which suggests the need to examine other destinations to have a broader comparison of this type of mobility. It is important to mention that even though Girona is one of the many cities that carries a continuous socio-political issue for the independence of Catalunya, and it is part of its culture as it is displayed throughout the city (flags, yellow bows, comments in the news and social media), students who lived in the city, considered this aspect as part of the destination's culture overall, demonstrating understanding and respect for the destination's debate for independence.

Meanwhile, future research can also take into account other categories of international students, such as PhD students, since these students also have a high proportion of international students worldwide. Each of them has a different background and motivations, travels multiple times, and stays at the host destination for longer periods of time, allowing them to assess their perception of sense of place as well as to generate other types of mobility during and following their program.

Another aspect to consider is the impact that COVID-19 left in this type of mobility. There is not enough research associated with the perception of students about studying abroad after a pandemic, if there is a before and after era on their motivations for taking this type of mobility, if their university and destination choices or their experiences while living in a pandemic and its outcome have changed.

In addition, the gender perspective is also another notable gap that this research found and encourage for future investigation. There are very few studies under international student mobility that accentuates gender differences. It is clear that women and men can have totally different experiences through the different concepts presented in this thesis and under this type of mobility. For instance, there are still questions to be answered regarding differences between women and men on the formation of sense of place, the generation of place attachment, the motivations behind the type of mobility chosen by each gender, the impact of the mobility on their personal and professional careers, among other subjects.

One last interesting aspect is the tendency for individuals to see education as a door for self-discovery. In this research, the majority of the participants were looking for a change and decided to perform a student mobility. It could be interesting to analyze the future of education in mobility and the role of destinations and higher education institutions when attempting to attract this type of segment market, if they perceive that the concept of education for students is evolving and tends to be related as a more personal journey, as an inner call of self-discovery rather than just an opportunity to live in another country and experience a different culture.

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