CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE

Faculty of Humanities

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The Impact of Social Capital on Academic and Social Integration of

International Students After Mobility to Study in the Czech Republic

Master's Thesis

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Supervisor: prof. doc. PhDr. Jiří Šubrt, CSc.

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Statement

I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis solely by myself and I agree with its eventual publication in print or electronic form. All sources and literature have been properly cited. This work has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, June 2024   Leri Jijavadze

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Abstract

This master thesis examines the impact of social capital on the academic and social integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic. Social and academic integration is one of the main challenges that international students face after moving abroad to study. The research addresses the question what is the role of friends, family, and the university in the social and academic integration of international students. The thesis is based on qualitative research, I collected data through in-depth interviews. My results showed that social capital can help students access resources and information that can be useful for their integration process. A support system created by family, friends and the university plays a crucial role in international students' social and academic integration in the Czech Republic.

Keywords

Social integration, academic integration, social capital, international students, family, friends, university, the Czech Republic.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the era of modern globalization, where it has become easier to travel, change residence, and have access to higher education, the number of international students mobilizing to study abroad is increasing day by day. According to the data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021) in 2021, the number of inbound international students from all parts of the world was 6 387 488, of which 51,203 were international students registered in the Czech Republic (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2021).

One of the key elements for international students to successfully transition from one country to the other is social and academic integration. Social integration helps students to adapt to the new social environment and society, while academic integration is essential to embrace a new academic environment. The integration process might go differently depending on the student and their circumstances, in some cases, an international student can quite easily integrate into a new environment and academic space while others may find it challenging. Social and academic integration of international students can depend on many factors, such as support and help from family, friends, and the university.

The theory of social capital, which has emerged in the social sciences in the last two decades, is one of the most influential and popular theories. Through social capital, an individual can access resources that are presented within their social networks, furthermore, social capital can offer a support system and help when neede. An international student, who seeks to successfully integrate socially and academically in a new country can therefore through their social capital obtain resources, support, and help that would benefit them in their social and academic integration within a new country. As sociologist Nan Lin explains, social capital is thus an investment in social relationships with expected

benefits (Lin, 1999). Students can build social capital and their investment in social relationships can help them to achieve integration.

According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is an asset that can help individuals to achieve a shared goal by taking advantage of their social network (Bourdieu, 1986). International students should then be able to, through their social capital, advance themselves and obtain resources and help that would be beneficial in regards to their integration into the new country they are studying abroad in.

This thesis will thus explore to what is the impact of social capital on the academic and social integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic. The focus will especially be held on students' social capital in regards to family, friends, and their university.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1.1 The Overview of the Theory of Social Capital

One of the oldest credited use of social capital is by an education and school administrator Lyda Hanifan. In 1916 she published the article titled "The Rural School Community Center". Hanifan addressed the value of social connections and community networks for the growth of strong, resilient rural communities. She cites the example of a solitary person, whom she calls socially helpless because she believes, every individual has a feeling to be part of a larger group and they can't achieve this by being alone. When an individual interacts with a neighbor and then with other neighbors, social capital is accumulated and once social capital is presented in their lives, it can benefit the whole community and improve their living conditions, while an individual will find the sympathy and fellowship of his neighbors. "If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social

needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community" (Hanifan, 1916, p 130).

However, the interest in the research of social capital started growing and commonly used in the late 1990s, which is connected to James Coleman's name. Nowadays, the theory of social capital is quite popular in the social sciences and has been widely used in various fields such as sociology, political science, history, economics, etc. And yet what is social capital? It should be emphasized that different authors describe social capital differently and we do not have a common definition that is agreed upon by everyone. However, almost all definitions of social capital are related to such keywords as social relationships, social networks, social interaction, social connections, physical or virtual resources, beneficial resources, individuals, groups, norms, and values.

In the literature review, we will try to introduce and evaluate the concept of social capital. To achieve this goal, in part I we will focus on the meaning of social theory developed by different authors. We will start discussing the theory of social capital developed by pioneer authors of the concept; Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam, and then we will move to Nan Lin and Alejandro Portes. In part II, we will briefly discuss sources of social capital: family, university, and friends.

2.1.2 The Theory of Social Capital: Pierre Bourdieu's Perspective

Although the idea of the social capital concept was not used by Pierre Bourdieu for the first time, he is considered as one of the key scholars who contributed to the development of the social capital concept. He suggested a systematic contemporary analysis of the theory. According to him "social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in

other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). In other words, Bourdieu considers social capital as a source of resources that can be accessed by being a part of a group that is based on strong relationships, and once a member of a group accesses these resources it can help and support various ways and he notes that this capital is collectively owned.

Bourdieu believes that a network of relationships can be useful in the short or long term and building and maintaining these relationships needs effort from members of these relationships, and sometimes we do this even without realizing it. Furthermore, these relationships can become important for participants and then they have a sense of duty to respect each other. "The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights) (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249).

Bourdieu was concerned with how social capital could be utilized to perpetuate and reinforce existing power systems and inequalities. Bourdieu notes that it is possible to construct relationships and networks in which some social groups cannot participate and are excluded, he discusses the example of the Basque region where exists different ranks of neighbors "first neighbor", "second neighbor" and so on and that they have different assigned tasks based on their rank. (Bourdieu, 1986). Lin notes, "Bourdieu, from his class perspective, sees social capital as the investment of the members in the dominant class (as a group or network) engaging in mutual recognition and acknowledgment so as to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and preserve the group's dominant position" (Lin, 1999. p34).

Portes believes that Bourdieu's work on "social fields" and the role of social networks in the allocation of resources and power within society, aided in the creation of the social capital notion. Bourdieu argues how individuals or groups can use their social connections to gain advantages and access valuable opportunities. Portes, on the other hand, criticizes Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, arguing that Bourdieu's emphasis on the exclusive nature of social networks and the reproduction of social stratification with cultural capital neglects the potential for social capital to be a force for social transformation and mobility (Portes, 1998).

Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) also define three other types of capital:

- Economic capital – refers to financial resources, any form of wealth that helps us to occupy a privileged position in the social field. Bourdieu and Wacquant consider economic capital as foundational for acquiring other capitals.

- Cultural capital – Cultural capital is related to an individual's educational qualifications, knowledge, taste, cultural level, skills, and titles, and it is related to an individual's social status. Further, family background and personal experiences are some of the most important influences on the accumulation of cultural capital. They call cultural capital "informational capital" (Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L.J.D, 1992, p 119).

- Symbolic capital - It stands close to cultural capital, which is related to the possession of certain authority and reputation and also it represents recognition and prestige of individuals or groups (Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L.J.D, 1992)

2.1.3 The Theory of Social Capital: James Coleman's Perspective

American sociologist, James Coleman published his seminal work "Foundations of Social Theory," in 1990, where he developed his theory of social capital. To suggest his view on social capital, he starts by discussing other authors' ideas about social capital such as Loury (1977; 1987) Bourdieu (1980), Flap and De Graaf (1986), and so on. Coleman considers social capital as productive like other forms of capital and recognizes the importance of social capital in achieving the goal which would be impossible without social capital – "like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence" (Coleman, 1990, p 302).

Coleman regards social-structural resources as social capital. He does not think that social capital is a single entity rather it's defined by its function. "It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure" (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). Social capital can have different sizes, it can be small or big which depends on relationships and networks, however, according to Coleman, social capital must have certain aspects of social structure (networks, institutions) and it has to support actions and behaviors of individuals who are part of this structure. In other words, a particular social structure that represents social capital depends on whether its function serves the individual participating in a structure.

Coleman views trust as a crucial part of social capital. To show the importance of trust in social relations, he uses the example of a decline in trust between physicians and patients in the United States. This is evidenced by increased cases of patients suing physicians which led to an increase in the cost of medical care and reduced availability of medical care. Coleman notes that trust between patients and physicians is essential for positive relations and for building social capital in the

healthcare system, it facilitates cooperation and collaboration and the consequence of declining trust is that social capital in the healthcare system is diminishing and makes the system unavailable. Trust is an essential component of the social network it facilitates cooperation and fosters the functioning of social capital (Coleman, 1990)

According to Coleman, when a person does something for the other and trusts the other person to reciprocate in the future, it creates an expectation in a person and an obligation on the part of the other person to maintain the trust. He calls this obligation a "credit slip" which is held by a person and must be redeemed by the other person on a certain performance (Coleman, 1990).

Coleman considered physical and human capital as a private good, however social capital as a public good, the actions made by individuals ultimately profit society. He believes that everyone in the structure benefits, not only the ones who made an effort in certain actions. Social structures that facilitate social norms and sanctions benefit the entire community, not just the individuals who create them. Coleman uses the example of a dense set of associations in schools that are run by some parents, usually mothers who don't have full-time jobs. If one of the mothers decides to get a full-time job, which might be reasonable from a personal point of view, withdrawal from these activities, will be a loss for the whole community (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman argues that social capital has an important influence on educational outcomes. Coleman proposed in his study, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," that social capital can affect educational achievements. Coleman defined what is the social capital of the family, "the social capital of the family is the relations between children and parents (and, when families include other members, relationships with them as well)" (Coleman, 1988, s110). Coleman notes that children whose families have high levels of social capital (they are part of the kid's education life) are more likely to be

successful in school because they have been socialized into norms and values that promote academic success.

Coleman was influenced by rational choice theory which can explain some of his ideas. The rational choice theory tries to explain human behavior through rationality. "Rational choice theory is an approach to the study of human behavior that emphasizes the role of rationality in individual decision-making. This approach assumes that individuals have consistent preferences and make choices that maximize their expected utility based on those preferences" (Green & Shapiro, 1994, p. 1). Coleman notes that people engage in social networks, interactions, or relationships as long as the benefits remain in place and the decision to engage in them is based on a rational calculation of these benefits. (Coleman, 1988).

2.1.4 The Theory of Social Capital: Putnam's Perspective

Putnam's contribution to the conceptualization and development of social capital is highly significant. He is an American political scientist and widely regarded as a notable researcher in the field of social capital. Putnam was influenced by Coleman's ideas and he developed his concept of social capital following Coleman's research about social capital and social networks. In 1993, he published the book *"Making Democracy Work: civic traditions in modern Italy"* based on empirical data, Putnam attempted to determine and then explain disparities in regional and local governments in northern and southern Italy. Furthermore, Putnam investigates the concept of social capital and its influence on the functioning of democratic institutions in Italy. He believes that institutions in northern Italy were relatively more successful than in southern Italy and the success of institutions depended on the relationship between civil society and the government. Putnam explores how differences in social

capital levels among regions might result in differences in economic growth, public participation, and government responsiveness (Putnam, 1993).

According to Putnam, trust, norms, and networks are key components of social capital. "Social capital here refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993, p167). A society's efficiency and production can be increased by having a high degree of social capital. He argues that "trust is an essential component of social capital" (Putnam, 1993, p170). Through trust, people more easily engage in mutually beneficial relationships, the more trust there is, the more people trust each other and the less they need to manage each other's behavior. Trust can be an aggregate indicator of social capital. Through norms, people develop shared expectations, and through networks, people can share resources and knowledge available to them (Putnam, 1993).

Putnam notes that with the help of social capital participants of the social network can achieve a shared goal and he uses Coleman's idea that individuals can accomplish a certain end which would be impossible without social capital (Putnam, 1993).

Later in his book, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community" regards the social network and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness as critical components of social capital. "Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them: (Putnam, 2000, p 19). He believes that social ties make our lives more productive, "core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value" (Putnam, 2000. p18-19). Putnam distinguishes social capital from human capital by the phrase "whom we know not what we know – that is our social capital" (Putnam, 2000, p 20). social capital is social networks, people that we are connected to, for example, family, friends while human capital is knowledge and skills.

Putnam in his book, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community" focused on the United States and he claimed that the social capital in the United States was in decline. He pointed out that fewer and fewer people were involved in social engagement and he was trying to prove his idea with empirical data, such as the number of club meetings, the number of church-related group members, the number of daily newspaper readers, the frequency of friends' meetings, and so on. He believes social engagement is beneficial for society (Putnam, 2000).

For Putnam, social capital has a public and private face. By forming social networks an individual can benefit as well as the community, and he is discussing the example of service clubs which are created to raise scholarships and fight with diseases while the members of these clubs benefit from friendships and connections (Putnam, 2000).

According to Putnam, the positive consequences of social capital are – mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness (Putnam, 2000).

Like Coleman, who also discussed that in social networks when someone does something for the other person, it's expected that the other person needs to return (Coleman, 1990), Putman also talked about mutual obligation, he believes that if a person does something for you, the favor needs to be returned by you or perhaps by someone else. To explain this reciprocity, he mentions Yogi Borra's idea that if you don't go to someone's funeral, they won't come to yours either (Putnam, 2000).

Putnam distinguishes two forms of social capital: *Bridging* (inclusive) and *Bonding* (exclusive). Bonding social capital is the connections and relationships that exist between people with similar identities, interests, etc. He cites ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups, and fashionable country clubs as examples of bonding social capital, bonding social capital can provide social and physiological support. Bridging social capital represents the connection and relationships that can be established between individuals with different backgrounds, to share

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resources and experiences, the examples are young service groups, and the civil rights movement. Putnam argues that "bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity" (Putnam, 2000. p 22), while "bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion" (Putnam, 2000. p 22).

2.1.5 The Theory of Social Capital: Lin's Perspective

Nan Lin in a way summarizes the definitions of social capital by various authors and defines social capital as "investment in social relations with expected returns" (Lin, 1999. p 30). Lin believes that people engage in interactions and networks in order to gain benefits and he mentions four reasons why the embedded resources in social networks will increase outcomes of actions. As the first reason, he states that he "it facilitates the flow of information" (Lin, 1999, p 31). Social ties which are located in different locations can facilitate the dissemination of information and an individual can take this information and use it for his own benefit which would not be available without social ties. The second reason Lin gives is that, "these social ties may exert influence on the agents" (Lin, 1999, p31), which means that existing social ties may influence the decisions of agents, for example, a recruiter when he is going to hire a new workforce. Hence, as Lin points out, "putting in a word" can affect decision-making. Third, through social tie resources, the agent can be convinced of the individual's social credentials and that their inclusion in the organization will be beneficial for the organization as a whole. Finally, Lin argues that "social relations are expected to reinforce identity and recognition" (Lin, 1999. p31) and these reinforcements are critical to preserving mental health and keeping access

to resources. Of these four elements - information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement – Lin explains why "social capital works in instrumental and expressive actions not accounted for by forms of personal capital such as economic capital or human capital" (Lin, 1999. P31.)

Lin considers social capital as both a public good and an individual good, as individuals can benefit from social capital as well as the collective, "institutionalized social relations with embedded resources are expected to be beneficial to both the collective and the individuals in the collective" (Lin, 1999. p33). Later in the article, when Lin completes his review of existing social capital theory, he proposes a new definition of social capital, "resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (Lin, 1999. p35). Based on this definition, Lin suggests three aspects of social capital: the structural (embeddedness), opportunity (accessibility), and action-oriented (use) aspects (Lin, 1999). He notes that these elements have been mentioned by many other scholars.

Lin suggests the other definition of social capital, "investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions" (Lin, 1999. p39). He distinguishes two possible outcomes of social capital: returns to instrumental action, which is taken to get resources that the actor does not have, and returns to expressive action, which is taken to keep and protect the resources that the actor already has. Lin argues that for instrumental action, there are three possible returns: economic, political, and social returns (wealth, power, reputation). In the case of expressive returns, physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction (Lin, 1999). Instrumental actions are conducted to achieve specific goals, while expressive actions are undertaken for their own sake, they are both means and ends and are interwoven and interconnected (Lin, 2001). The success of actions is related to social capital, the higher the social capital the more likely the action will be successful, "the success of action is positively associated with social capital" (Lin, 2001. p 60).

In 2001, Lin published the book, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action.* Subsequently, Lin focused on further investigating the concept of social capital in greater depth, discussing the concept of social capital and its consequences for social structure and individual behavior. First, he proposes the question what is capital and defines it as an "investment of resources with expected returns in the marketplace" (Lin, 2001. P3). Therefore, Lin believes that capital should serve a certain purpose, when an individual invests in the production process, he must receive some profit, since an individual used time and effort in this investment. Lin distinguishes two forms of capital: human or personal capital and social capital. Human capital includes individual resources, the individual owns and disposes of these resources freely and without much concern.

As Coleman distinguishes between bridging and bonding social capital, Lin distinguishes between 'strong ties' and 'weak ties'. For Lin, strong ties refer to close, intimate relationships among people similar to themselves. Typical for family and close friends. It's oriented to create strong networks and special bonds between individuals. Strong ties are useful for expressive actions, "the stronger the tie, the more likely that the social capital accessed will positively affect the success of expressive action" (Lin, 2001. P-65). Weak ties unite people from different cultures and backgrounds, characterized by a lower degree of emotional arousal. Compared to strong ties, weak ties usually include less intimacy and contact. While strong ties are connected to expressive action, Lin notes that weak ties are related to instrumental actions, "the weaker the tie, the more likely ego will have access to better social capital for instrumental action" (Lin, 2001. p67).

2.1.6 The Theory of Social Capital: Ronald Burt's Perspective

Ronald Barth, an American sociologist, has made significant contributions to the development of the concept of social capital. He investigates the concept social capital, social networks and structural holes in social networks. He is focusing on what are structural holes, how they impact individuals' access to resources, information, and opportunities, and how structural holes can be related to social capital. He also discusses different types of capital.

Burt tried to distinguish social capital from financial and human capital. He considers social capital as the property of all actors involved in the relationship, noting that no one has exclusive rights to social capital, and if one of the two actors breaks the bond, it means that social capital is dissolved. He considers financial and human capital as individual property, partially or fully owned by an individual or cooperation, which is defined by law. Further, he perceives social capital as a final arbiter of competitive success and notes that competition plays a big role in the process of the production equation, the higher the competition, the more mobile the social capital (Burt, 2005).

Burt thinks that through social capital, we can explain, why certain people and organizations perform better than others. He believes that social capital is a metaphor for advantage, and individuals or organizations have advantages because of their location in social structure. He compares society to a market where people exchange their ideas or goods to pursue their interests. Certain people benefit more than others, have better incomes, and are better able to realize their resources. Burt tries to explain this with social capital and says that "the social capital metaphor is that the people who do better are somehow better connected" (Burt, 2000. p 347)

Burt was interested in social structure and structural holes. Structural holes are gaps, and lack of connections in the social network, among individuals or groups (Burt, 2005). Structural holes facilitate

access to diverse resources, information, and perspectives for those who bridge these gaps. Burt argues "Structural holes are thus an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people and control the projects that bring together people from opposite sides of the hole (Burt, 2000. p353). The question is what role does social capital play in structural holes? Burt believes that social capital fulfills the function of a brokerage, "social capital is a function of brokerage across structural holes" (Burt, 2000. p357). Brokers can fill structural holes with the support of social capital. When a person has a high level of social capital, they are more likely to be able to bridge structural holes. Individuals can operate as brokers, facilitating the flow of information, resources, and opportunities between different areas of the network by connecting previously unconnected groups or clusters. In turn, brokers can acquire competitive advantages by taking use of the benefits of occupying a strategic position in the network since they have influence over information, and resources (Burt, 2000).

2.2 Family and Social Capital

The first agent of socialization that affects us is family. In the family, we start to learn codes of behaviors, how to speak, how to act, how to ask, how to respond, how to eat, etc. Family can influence our values and beliefs. It draws the image of society and gives us general directions on how to become a full-fledged member of society. Family is one of the most important sources of social capital and it can play a vital role in the accumulation of social capital.

Coleman was the first sociologist who widely researched family as social capital and its connection with human capital. According to him, family social capital which is a relationship between children, parents, and other relatives who live in the same place, plays a crucial role in accessing human capital in younger members of the family. He considered family as a primary source for the development and accumulation of social capital (Coleman, 1988). Coleman underlines the importance of family

relationships in children's educational lives. "Even if adults are physically present, there is a lack of social capital in the family if there are not strong relations between children and parents" (Coleman, 1988, s 111). He notes that without the family social capital, human capital becomes irrelevant because it means that the family is not present in a kid's life and therefore, the access to human capital is limited. Also, he discusses the effects of a lack of social capital within the family, and he mentions dropping out of school as one of the effects. Family relationships and bonds, create a foundation of trust and reciprocity which for Coleman, are key elements of social capital. Furthermore, it goes beyond family unions and donates to bigger social networks. (Coleman,1988).

2.3 Friends and Social Capital

Aristotle said: "For without friends, no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods" (Aristotle, 1999/384–322 B.C., p. 127). Friends are a big part of people's lives. Friendships donate to social capital, social network that they provide can give an access to an individual to various resources and

Friendships are based on trust and reciprocity. They constitute a fundamental aspect of social capital. When friends are deeply bonded to each other, then they trust each other which leads to reciprocal sharing of resources, information, and support. Putman, in his work, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community", argues that friendships are essential in building social capital and flowing and exchanging resources. (Putnam, 2000). As a result, social capital within the friendship network is growing and developing. He also uses the words of the sociologist of friendships

Claude Fischer – "social networks are important in all our lives, often finding a job, more often finding a helping hand, companionship or a shoulder to cry on". (Putnam, 2000, p20).

According to Putnam, friendships are important for both, bonding and bridging social capital. Close friendships are linked with bonding social capital, they create strong ties between close circles while casual friendships and acquaintanceships contribute to bridging social capital by associating individuals with different social groups (Putnam, 2000).

Coleman argues about friendships' role as sources of social capital within social networks. Close friends which are very important in building bonding social capital, contribute to the cohesion and resilience of social networks while weak ties, such as acquaintances, provide diverse information, and resources that exist beyond the social circle (Coleman, 1990).

2.4 University and Social Capital

Bourdieu believes that university as a social institution brings different individuals together and fostering interactions which helps in the accumulation of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). University can donate to build a big social network, it's a place where people with diverse backgrounds interact with each other, interactions among students and university staff, can create a social network that promotes relationships, connections, and mutual support (Coleman, 1990). Therefore, it's an important source of building social capital. Connections made in universities can last for long term and they can play a huge role in our life experience.

It is worth noting the fact that social interactions in the university, which are further formed into friendships, are greatly influenced by race and other different backgrounds. Marmaros and Sacerdote used data from email conversations between Dartmouth College students to measure the level of social

interactions and they discovered that race and residential proximity are major predictors of social interaction. The level of social interaction between the same races is higher and also, between students who live in the same dorms. They also concluded that social interactions have the benefits: "a.) a flow of information and ideas and b.) the utility from sharing a common experience and conversation with another human being" (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006, p6).

Characteristics of social networks such as education level, resources, socioeconomic status, or power of network members influence the formation of weak ties and the form of social capital obtained. Certain people, based on their socioeconomic class, ethnic diversity, or gender, are better positioned to create weak ties and get access to fresh and diverse information, resulting in disparities in the distribution of resources in networks that advantage some groups over others.(Bourdieu, 1986) (Lin, 2001).

Chapter 3 Methodology

In our research, we will identify and measure social capital by focusing on the key elements:

- Social networks and relationships – Social capital includes social networks and connections, relationships accumulated by an individual. Our research identifies social capital by examining international students' social networks, which include relationships with family members, friends, and academic personal from the university, also we will ask them to mention other groups with whom they connect outside of this circle.

- Trust and reciprocity – Social capital includes trust and reciprocity within social networks. In our research, you will try to identify social capital by examining the levels of trust and

reciprocity in the connections formed by international students. We will look for mutual support, shared experiences, and collaborations that reflect the presence of social capital.

- Resources - Social networks facilitate the sharing of resources, information. We will examine how participants' social networks provide them with access to resources and information that helps to achieve a certain goal, social and academic integration.

3.1 Research question and sub-questions

The research question of this Master's thesis is: What is the impact of social capital on the academic and social integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic?

And sub-questions are:

- What is the role played by a family in the social and academic integration of international students?
- What is the role played by a university in the social and academic integration of international students?
- What is the role played by friends in the social and academic integration of international students?

3.2 Qualitative Research

In this Master's thesis, we will use qualitative research. Qualitative research is interdisciplinary and widely used in almost all social sciences: sociology, ethnography, historical sociology, anthropology, psychology, and others. Qualitative methods allow us to study social life in depth. As a result of the

use of qualitative methods, researchers are given the opportunity to deeply observe, describe, and explain various nuances of people's behavior. With the help of qualitative research, we can get deep knowledge about the research respondents' lives or opinions. Moreover, through qualitative research, people can explain their position, why they think one way or another, and what factors have influenced their position. Qualitative research is very useful as we can answer the questions, why and how? (Zurabishvili, 2006).

Sarah J. Tracy identifies five advantages of qualitative research: researchers can escape into the field; it gives you the opportunity to study the phenomena you are interested in but have never before had a "valid" reason for entering; qualitative data provides insight into cultural activities that might be missed by quantitative research; it can uncover silent issues and allows in future to use more structured methods to study the issues; instead of simply inquiring about what people say do, it allows to see what actually people do; and the last and the main reason she notes is "good qualitative research helps people to understand the world, their society, and its institutions. Qualitative methodology can provide knowledge that targets societal issues, questions, or problems and therefore serves humankind" (Tracey, 2012, p 5). Therefore, the qualitative research method will help us to understand in deep and explain what is the role of social capital in the academic and social integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic.

It is also important to talk about the limit of qualitative methods, it is difficult to scientifically prove that we have fully studied this or that phenomenon and that the results we obtained are objective and reliable, qualitative results are never representative, which means that the results of research conducted by qualitative methods cannot be generalized on the general assembly. It is focused not on disseminating data to the general public, but on revealing trends within specific groups (Tsuladze, 2020).

3.3 The Issue of the Research Ethics

Any scientific research, including sociological research, must be conducted in compliance with ethical norms, especially when the research directly affects people. Ethical regulations first originated in medical research and occurred after World War II, when society saw the need for ethical regulations due to the experiments conducted on humans by Nazi doctors. In 1947, The Nuremberg Code was founded, which established ethical principles of human experimentation. In the social sciences, over time, in the background of conducting various unethical experiments, the need to develop ethical principles also arose. The British Sociological Association established a code of ethics in 1968 while the American Sociological Association ethics code was formed in 1970 (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). In my master's thesis, we tried as much as possible to protect the norms of research ethics, through the following steps: we informed the research participants about the purpose of the research and also what their participation in it means; we have also confirmed that their data will be used confidentially and anonymously; we told the study participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out if they did not want to participate; we have tried to protect the independence of the research; we tried to ensure the integrity and quality of the research. We anonymized the research results to make sure that the research participants could not be identified. To achieve this goal, in the analysis, we did not use the names of the students, but we used words such as student, international student, and respondent. Also, we did not specify which study programs the students studied at.

3.4 In-depth Interview

Based on the nature of the thesis and research question and sub-questions, we will use in-depth interviews in this Master's thesis.

In-depth interview, which is one of the most popular methods of qualitative research, is intermediate between structured and unstructured interviews, so-called semi-structured interviews. It aims to obtain detailed, deep, and consistent information from the respondents about their life experiences. Based on information collected through in-depth interviews, it can be possible to explain certain social patterns, to understand the specific phenomenon (Zurabishvili, 2006). A semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to add questions during the interview when they want to verify or clarify certain information, or even remove the question when the answer no longer needs clarification (Tsuladze, 2020).

In total, we conducted 15 in-depth interviews with international students from Charles University, specifically from the Faculty of Humanities. Spanning bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, from which there were 8 girls and 7 boys from various countries. The age of the research participants ranged from 19 to 37 years. Several interviews were conducted face-to-face and several online, and averaged approximately half an hour in length.

Before conducting an in-depth interview, we prepared a written outline of possible questions and their preferred sequence, based on a preliminary study of topics and issues to be discussed during the interview process, the so-called interview guide. The interview guide helped us to control the interview process so as not to miss important issues and to get maximum information from the respondents related to the thesis topic.

An in-depth interview, allows both us, the researchers, and respondents to directly raise or develop new topics during the interview that are relevant to the research, but for various reasons were not considered in advance at the research planning stage (Zurabishvili, 2006). This happened during our in-depth interviews, in many cases we discussed topics that were not included in the interview guide.

The in-depth interview is conducted mainly based on "open" questions, we used open questions in our interview guide too. When answering such questions, the respondents are given complete freedom to express their own opinions, the researcher does not "push" them to answer the questions in a certain way. Such questions are very useful for exploring relatively understudied, unexplored topics and allow us to explore these topics and issues in greater depth. Since the topic of our master's thesis is less studied, we considered it appropriate to use open questions. Finally, through in-depth interviews, we obtained the rich and interesting data necessary to answer our research question and sub-questions.

Before the interview, we conducted a pre-interview, where we introduced the respondents to the topic and objectives of the study, why we chose them as respondents, and asked permission to record the interview on audio, we confirmed and reassured that we would use the audio only for the preparation of the transcript to process the data and confirmed that confidentiality would be maintained.

During the in-depth interview, we repeatedly used one of the well-known "probing" techniques, specifically silence, to elicit more honesty from the respondents and to get more information from them than they were initially willing to reveal to us (Zurabisvili, 2006). When the respondent did not give us a complete answer to the question, instead of asking the next question, we were in silence for seconds and then the respondent continued talking and gave us more information.

After we finished preparing the transcripts, we started analyzing the data and the first step was to code the data. Coding is the separation of important thematic blocks or elements in the respondent's narrative. This is the initial stage of the analysis. (Zurabishvili, 2006).To analyze the results, we will use the comparative analysis. "Qualitative comparative analysis compares cases to identify necessary and sufficient conditions of outcome" (Mello, P. A. 2021, p2). Based on comparative analysis, we will be able to compare different interview transcripts to identify similarities and differences, and these comparisons are analyzed to answer the research questions and sub-questions.

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

The analysis of my thesis consists of the comparative analysis of in-depth interviews which have been conducted with international students. We will try to combine and connect the results of interviews with the literature review. This chapter will be divided into three parts: 1. Family and its Role in social and academic integration of international students after Mobility to Study in the Czech Republic; 2. Friends and their role in the social and academic integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic; 3. University and its role in social and academic integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic

4.1 Family and its Role in Social and Academic Integration of International Students After Mobility to Study in the Czech Republic

Families are an integral part of international students' lives. Family offers international students a variety of support that transcends geographical boundaries. The support system, whether financial, emotional, or in the form of life advice and academic guidance, enables students to build new lives in a foreign land. In this chapter, we discuss the role of the support and help system offered by families to students, we will try to show the significance of family ties in fostering both social and academic integration for international students in the Czech Republic.

Based on analysis of in-depth interviews, the results show that despite the distance, all of the respondents try to keep in touch with family to a certain degree after moving to the Czech Republic. Mainly they are contacted via the Internet and phone. Group chats are quite popular among students'

family members, where they talk, share photos, inform each other about important life events, and so on. One of the students said:

> *"Yes, I maintain relations with my family, my family is a part of my life and we have a family group chat where we share pictures and experiences, we discuss how to face challenges. We also make group calls and I think it's a very good tool to be in touch with family. In a way, it helps to keep relations from getting cold and we are present and updated about our matters, I'm the only one in our family who does not live in home country so it's kind of special for me to have this group chat".*

The family group chat is a form of social capital, according to Bourdieu, the network of relationships, in this case, family, provides support and resources (Bourdieu, 1986). With the existence of the group chat, social capital is maintained and flowing in the family, the student can receive support from the family. Frequent contact with the family, exchange of photos, and group calls ensure the student that he still belongs to this family and is an integral part, especially because he is the only one who lives abroad. The group chat can be considered a tool to bridge the gap between the student's new life in the Czech Republic and their family back home. Additionally, the family can assist and advise how to deal with challenges that follow studying in a foreign country, emotional support is significant for international students. This reciprocal communication can be beneficial for the family too because the family still can feel connected with the student. It contributes to a mutual bond.

The student whose family lives in the US, underlines the problem of the time difference between the US and the Czech Republic and that they have to plan the calling time in advance.

> *"O - And there is a big time difference between the US and the Czech Republic, and we always plan when to talk, because it's very important for me to contact them and tell*

them what's happening in my life, like my family is very involved in my life, I'm one of these people who are very close to family.

I – How does it make you feel that you always need to plan a call and you can't just call them anytime?

O – You know, sometimes it makes me feel sad when I feel the need to catch up with my family and I know that it's 4 AM in the US and I can't call them, but, like, once it's doable time for both of us to speak, I will call them immediately."

The time difference acts as a barrier between family members to contact each other wherever they want to and to overcome this issue, planning the call is essential. As the student notes, she is very close to her family and she needs to keep them updated about her life. The student feels sad when she can't call to family, which once again makes us think about the student that support and help from her family is critical for her.

However, the results of interviews showed that the level of involvement of family in some students' lives has decreased since they moved to the Czech Republic. The main factors include geographical distance, the maturation process as students grow older, and achieving financial independence. One of the students remarked:

"Now, naturally, I see them less, but we talk on the phone either every day or every other day. They of course can't be involved in the same way as before because of distance and also they are involved less now because I am older and work a full-time job and I am financially independent. But they are still in the loop about what is going on in my life"

Another student emphasized the impact of geographical distance:

"I think I've always had a good relationship with my parents. Before moving, I was close with my whole family. Obviously, moving to Prague had its effect on my relationship with my family, before coming to Prague I was with them every day because we lived together and now I see them once every three-four month because of location change. But I feel like I still kept a close relationship with them as much as I can, I talk to my parents or my sisters almost every day, so we can still communicate to each other"

Although, one of the students shared a different experience - *"I would say my relationship with them got even better after moving away. Somehow, the distance actually brought us closer"*. We investigated in what was the reason for this phenomenon and asked the applicant if they could specify the reason and the student was able to discuss the reason:

"I think that the reason is that now I'm far away from home, my family is more concerned about my well-being and how am I managing all of the challenges that I'm facing. They call me every day to check on me and I share most of my daily life with them, it was not like that when I was still living with my family, I was not sharing my daily life with them neither they were asking too much about it".

This is very interesting as it shows the bond between the family and the student became stronger after the student's mobility in the Czech Republic. The family feels that the student needs more support from them as now they are far away from each other, this regular contact from family can contribute to emotional resilience for the international student facing challenges, and for students to feel supported despite the physical distance is important in achieving social and academic integration.

An international student who is from the US says that she is sharing her location with family which provides a feeling of safety for both parties, the student and her family:

"Yes I keep in contact with my family all the time and I share my location on WhatsApp cause my parents are in US. I'm far away from home, in this way, they feel safe like me, so they know where I am in case anything bad happens, because I'm on a different continent."

This is also a part of the support system that a family can offer an international student. When you are a student in a foreign country, especially on another continent, it can give you a feeling of unsafety. The feeling of unsafety can hinder the integration process and during this time, support from family can be important. Sharing location with family shows the high level of trust between family and the student, a student illustrates trust in her family and the family reciprocates by assurance and support in case of emergency. As Coleman and Putnam discussed, trust is crucial part of the social capital (Coleman, 1990) (Putnam,1993).

The frequency of students visiting family in the home country depends on family location. Students from European countries go home about 3-4 times, however, the student who is from a neighboring country of the Czech Republic, namely Slovakia, says that he goes home once every two months. As for students whose family is located far away from the Czech Republic, such as in the USA and Asian countries, once a year, due to high travel costs.

A student from Slovakia says that he has never had a feeling of separation from his family and has never felt homesick:

"To be honest, since I visit my family once in every two months, I don't feel like that I have left my house completely and I don't feel homesick because I know that I can visit them at any time."

Some of the students mentioned the role of family support in preparing them before moving to the Czech Republic. To start a new life in a foreign country has its challenges and international students

are somehow aware of it. During the interview, the respondent shared his experience that he had considered not coming to Prague due to nervousness and uncertainty.

> *"And yeah, my family supported me the most before I moved to Prague. Before my arrival, I was a bit nervous because I didn't really know what to expect, I knew the city because I had been in Prague before but it was different. That time I visited as a tourist and now I was going to live there, so I had no idea what to expect or how it was going to be and sometimes I was thinking that what if I don't go to Prague to study and my family was motivating me to go, especially my mom who has the degree from abroad, telling me how exciting it would be to receive education in a foreign country which is a privilege and not everyone has this chance. They supported me throughout the whole process, my mom was sharing me her experience and how to be ready for this moment of my life, and that it's super exciting to meet other students all around the world, I used her experience and advice and yeah, they pursued me to come here. I'm very grateful that my family was with me in this dilemma and they pushed me to move here, it was the best decision in my life to study in Prague and thanks to my family"*

The respondent's words, *"Before my arrival, I was a bit nervous because I didn't really know what to expect"* highlights the common emotional response of anxiety and uncertainty for international students. Moving to a foreign country for education involves significant life changes and can be overwhelming and stressful, it requires dealing with bureaucratic processes, navigating everyday life, integrating into the local society, and so on. This initial anxiety can affect a student's decision to continue studying in a foreign country, and at the same time, the student's emotional state before departure and how prepared they are for this new challenge.

While the student was experiencing anxiety and uncertainty, family support was crucial to provide motivation and perspective to the student, to guide the student. Especially, the mother's experience of studying abroad functions as a beneficial source of reassurance and inspiration. The mom, emphasizes how exciting it is to meet diverse students from different countries, it prepares the student to build a network that will ultimately help the student's integration, cultural exchange, and shaping the student's experience. This aligns with Putnam's idea and shows how the student can access to human capital (mom's educational experience) through social capital (relationship, connection between the mom and the student) that could be useful for the student (Putnam, 2000).

Student expressions of gratitude and recognition of a positive outcome speak directly to the long-term benefits of social capital based on strong family support. Like Bourdieu notes, a network of relationships can be useful in the short or long term (Bourdieu, 1986). The student is satisfied that he has finally decided to come to Prague and is enjoying this educational experience *"It was the best decision of my life to study in Prague"* which highlights the need for such family support systems during the transition of international students when they go to abroad to study.

Another international student also highlighted the role of the family in supporting her before arrival, especially in the in bureaucratic matters.

> *"The help of my family was incredibly invaluable and important in the bureaucratic process. As an international student coming from a third country, you need a visa and the visa process is quite complicated, with the bureaucracy of finding a home, preparing various documents for your studies, etc. At some point, I felt that I was overwhelmed by all of this, and it was the family that played the biggest role in these bureaucratic issues, they helped me with everything, and finally I managed to leave successfully"*

Support from families before arrival is as important as during studies. Overwhelming feelings can affect the students' successful transition into a new country. Bureaucracy process can be an issue for international students which causes difficulties. As the student said, the help from the family was critical in solving bureaucratic problems. The student used resources within the family social network, to deal with obstacles that challenged the process of mobility to study in the Czech Republic. This example once again points to the importance of social capital for international students to successfully navigate in the study process in the Czech Republic.

Another participant also highlighted the role of family support before arrival:

> *"It was a very, very difficult time emotionally when I had to say goodbye to my home country. I even had depression and it was hard for me to say no to the life I had in my home country. I often cried.. And at that time, my family supported me, they encouraged me, motivated me, and together we overcame this emotional stress and influence on me to come to the Czech Republic to study"*

This shows once more that family support in a student's pre-arrival emotional stress can be vital and a family can positively influence on student's well-being.

Coleman in his theory of social capital highlights the significance of family involvement in a child's academic success and notes that the families who have a high level of social capital, it's more likely that their child will succeed in school because a child is socialized into norms and values that promote academic achievement. (Coleman, 1988).

During the interview, the student described how his family, especially his mom, was involved in his studies, how she monitored him, and that his academic success is connected with his family:

"K - Yes, they have provided me with some help when I needed it. I came to the Czech Republic for my Bachelor's degree and during my Bachelor's studies, my family supported me with money and also, they were my main mental supporters. They were actively involved in my studies, like I could speak with them about my studies, exams and when I felt stressed, they cheered me up and made to be more motivated and to be honest, my family kinda, how to say, monitored me about my grades and homework.

I – In what way did they monitor you?

K - My mom was very involved in my studies, she also studied the same field that I'm studying so I could call her to help me in solving some problems regarding my studies, also she was asking me to send her my final grades.

I- How did it make you feel that you had to send her your final grades?

K – It made me feel motivated to do a good job at university, I did not want her to be disappointed in me, so I tried hard to get the best grades. I believe my success in academia is connected with my family. She was also a part of my studies at my school but after completing the Bachelor's, it changed, she did not monitor me anymore on my Master's.

I – What do you think why did she stop monitoring you?

K – Because she trusted me, I finished my Bachelor's degree with honors, and she knew that I would continue studying very well, but of course, we were still talking about my studies, just the level of monitoring was decreased"

The fact that the mom of the student was monitoring him by asking him to provide grades, shows the family's interest in the student's academic achievement, which socializes the student in prioritizing

academic success, and it is connected with Coleman's idea that students whose families have high social capital are socialized into values and norms that promote academic achievement (Coleman, 1988).

Emotional support is a very important part of social networks which helps international students to be motivated, navigate challenges, and achieve educational goals. The student in the interview said that he could speak with his family when he felt stressed and the family was motivating them and boosting their mood. Additionally, monitoring from the mom of the student had a positive outcome, the student feels motivated.

The student mentioned that his mom studied the same field and she was able to help him in his studies. It shows the exchange of resources and knowledge within the family which provides an advantage for the student and it reinforces Coleman's idea that social capital includes access to valuable resources and support networks, and his definition of social capital - "resources that are embedded in social networks and which can be accessed and mobilized by individuals and groups" (Coleman, 1988, p. S98)

Another international student spoke about the family's role in her academic integration:

> *"T - My family played a big role in my integration process in the Czech Republic, especially in the academic aspect. Obviously, it's the closest people to you that prepare you for such big changes and support you while going through them. And in my case it happened to be my family. Although, there have been plenty of times when I couldn't reach out to any of my friends in Prague but my parents were there for me. I know I can always count on them.*
> *I- In what way did they assist you academically?*

T – My father is helping me to prepare for exams, when I have some difficulties in understanding the topic, I always contact him to help me and he is always trying his best"

The student considers family as the "closest people" who are assisting and preparing international students for moving abroad and then supporting them which shows the strong ties within families and the importance such kind of ties in the social and academic integration of students. Lin notes that "the stronger the tie, the more likely that the social capital accessed will positively affect the success of expressive action" (Lin, 2001, p65). The existing strong tie between our respondent and her family can positively affect the student's academic and social integration. The international student knows that she can rely on family in case she needs help in difficult situations, when she cannot reach out to her friends, family support is accessible and this support can be essential for overcoming the stress and anxiety that follows moving abroad. Moreover, the father helps the student with studies, such as studying for exams and gaining insight into topics, which once again aligns with Coleman's idea that family involvement in education is very important for academic success. (Coleman, 1988).

A family's social capital can provide the opportunity for an international student to build a social network that helps them to integrate into a new country. One of the respondents shared their experience of how the family friend's child who was studying in the Czech Republic assisted her in navigating the visa process, house finding, and making new friends. Coleman considered family as a primary source for the development and accumulation of social capital (Coleman, 1988). This example aligns with it, family helped a student to build a social network in the Czech Republic even before moving.

The student said:

"My family has a family friend whose son is studying also at Charles University. I did know him in person but I have heard about him from my family. When I got admission to Charles University, our families connected us, he helped me so much. I asked him about the visa process, as it's quite complicated, and he assisted me in finding a house. We were actively in contact before I arrived in Prague and when I arrived, we met each other and now became close friends. He also introduced me to his other friends and they supported me in my very first months of living in Prague"

An international student, who had been living outside of her home country without family for years, says that she prefers to not ask for help from family:

"Not likely that I would ask for the help to dad. It would have to be severe and something I couldn't solve myself. I am just so used to doing things by myself as I have lived by myself in other countries for years and I am used to my dad not calling that much. Even though, if I had big problems I would call. But I really prefer not to."

Living in different countries for years gave the student the ability to be more independent and do things by herself, therefore, she can use this experience in the Czech Republic to solve problems and not ask for help from family. Also, the student did not receive financial support from their family to fund her studies. She notes that this is one of the main reasons why she feels independent from her family:

"My dad didn't help me financially but it's because I come from a country where everybody gets a scholarship each month for studying as soon as they turn 18, and this affected my independence as a student."

Another student, who did not live with his family for several years before moving to the Czech Republic, notes that he feels very independent from his family and does not ask for their help:

"So, before I moved to the Czech Republic, I was living without family for 4 years. Over the years, I have developed a sense of independence from my family and their help is no longer necessary for me. I deal with problems on my own with the collected experience of being away from home for four years. Of course learning you can learn how to survive without the help of your family. To be honest, family help when you are an international student is mainly focused on financial side and I came here with my savings, so."

This illustrates that living without family for years, equipped the student with the skills and confidence to handle challenges on their own. It suggests that the student has learned how to survive independently without help from the family. Past experiences and skills can be useful for the student to navigate challenges and integrate into the Czech Republic.

Another student who is 37 years old and not getting financial support from family due to having a job, feels independent however, she emphasizes the value of emotional support from family, which she describes as "invaluable" and notes that their support is essential for academic success. She said that:

"Family provides me with a sense of comfort and security." It indicates strong emotional support, and this support can reduce stress and anxiety and it can make easier for international students to adapt to the new academic and social environment. According to Bourdieu, networks and relationships provide access to resources and support (Bourdieu, 1986). The student's sense of comfort and security derives from the social capital invested in these relationships. Furthermore, the sense of comfort and security that the student described is built on trust and reciprocity, trust is a core element of social capital and as Coleman notes, it ensures the proper functioning of social capital (Coleman, 1990).

Usually, family relationships have a high level of trust. One of the students mentioned that she took a loan from her parents to pay for her studies, she mentioned that her parents gave her the money without

any legal documents and she plans to pay his parents back when she gets a well-paying job. This shows that there is a high degree of trust between the student and the parents.

One of the international students who lives with his family in the Czech Republic said that since he moved to the Czech Republic with his family when he has problems his family has always been by his side. He notes that adapting to the new social and academic environment was easier because he knew that he could always get help and support from his family. This emphasizes the significant role of family support in adapting to the new environment, having a family nearby, provides strong emotional as well as practical support. The student can rely on the family and the physical presence of the family can make academic and social integration easier, furthermore, it can create a sense of security in the student. He said:

> *"Well, my mom is a teacher and we moved to the Czech Republic together, along with my father. Having family support available all the time was very beneficial for me while I was getting used to living in the Czech Republic and adapting to society and the university, I knew that they had my back in case of problems, so I felt more, how to say, comfortable and confident. To be fair, my family is very supportive."*

We asked students which type of help and support they feel is the most important during their studies in the Czech Republic: help from family, help from friends, or help from the university. In general, for international students, family support is crucial which is strengthened by the results of our interviews that we discussed. However, fewer respondents directly state that without family support, they would not have been able to move to the Czech Republic to study, and therefore, help from family is the most important for them. One of them said during the interview:

> *"I definitely could not have traveled to study on my own if I did not feel that my family would not support me"*

Another student said:

> *"For me, family help is paramount. I know that they will always be there for me*
> *whenever I need help, and without their unwavering support, I don't think I could have*
> *succeeded in studying at Charles University. Their presence in my life is invaluable,*
> *not only emotionally but also financially. They generously pay my tuition fees, which*
> *is the cornerstone of my education."*

This reflects the role of family social capital in providing the support and help necessary for the social and academic integration of international students. Coleman believes that social capital assists people to achieve goals that would be impossible without the help of social capital (Coleman, 1990). As the student said, they would not be able to come to the Czech Republic to study if the family did not help him which aligns with the above-mentioned idea of Coleman. The student successfully used the social capital available to him in the form of family support to start studying abroad. Financial support from family is very important for international students if they do not have scholarships or student loans. Several students indicated that they would not have been able to start their studies in the Czech Republic without the financial support of their families, so social capital is critical at this time.

4.2 Friends and Their Role in the Social and Academic Integration of International Students After Mobility to Study in the Czech Republic

Putman believes that friendships are crucial in building social capital and exchanging resources, friends can offer a helping hand when needed. (Putnam, 2000). Social networks formed within friends can contribute to the growth of social capital, access to resources and information, and receive help and support that are critical during the integration process of international students. Having friends is

of immeasurable importance to international students, friends can reduce the emotional pressures that accompany social and academic integration. In this chapter, we analyze the role that friends play in the social and academic integration of international students based on the results of in-depth interviews and literature reviews.

First of all, we asked the respondents to define what friendship and having a friend mean to them. As the in-depth interviews showed, having friends is very important for international students, they attach great value to friendships.

One of the international students considers friends as very close to her, she prioritizes them and even more, she sees friends as family in a lot of ways:

> *"My friends are very important in my life, I feel like I have realized this more and more since I have gotten older. I see them as a family in a lot of ways. I see them as very close to me and I value them a lot, therefore it's also important for me to prioritize them in my life"*

Friends offer camaraderie, understanding, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for well-being. As we age, this relationship is especially important and can provide a whole support system at various stages of life. With a student maturing, and moving to the Czech Republic to study, friendships often become a source of interaction and support. Since the family is physically separated from students, friends can become a family. Another student also considers friends as a "chosen family", which means that individuals who are not family members, in this case, friends for international students, provide the same love, and support as traditional family members.

The other student who has lived in different places, highlights that friends became family to her, she thinks that it's crucial to make such kind of connections while starting a new life in a new place because you are left there without family and you need someone to help you.

She said:

> *"Friendships are important for me, I came in the Czech Republic alone, and friends became family. Well, cause I was living at different places and I was travelling alone, everywhere I went I made very close friends who at some point, became a part of my family. Imagine, you are somewhere completely alone, without family, of course friends are so so important during this time, they are like family, who stand with you while facing challenges and who can help you, you know. And what I admire is that these family type friendships did not disappear after I changed my living destination, rather they stayed as a family, this also confirms that they actually became family"*

One of the students calls friends a second family:

> *"Having friends is extremely important to me. I am an extrovert who loves socializing with others and making new connections. My friends are like my second family to me and I admire the relationships we have built. They bring so much joy, laughter, and support into my life. And you know, I truly value these relationships, and I cannot imagine my life without them"*

The student considering friends as the second family points out the significance of friendships for her. Friends can offer a similar support system which is associated with family. Furthermore, the student admires relationships formed with friends which emphasizes the role of friendships in the student's life. However, the student places friends after family, which indicates the special bond between family and the student.

On the other hand, one of the international students mentioned that for her, friends are valued more than family and romantic partners:

"Having friends is very important to me. They hold a core place in my life. They offer support, a listening and understanding ear, advice, love, care, empathy, the harsh truth when we need it. Platonic friendships hold more value for me than romantic relationships and family, because we chose them ourselves and they chose us back, and they are often more permanent in our life than romantic partners, and they also help us navigate both family and romantic relationships. They also offer community, which plays a core role in a persons' life, one that is often neglected in the individualistic, capitalist modern society"

The passage underlines the multifaceted support system that friends provide, love, care, advice, listening, and honesty (the harsh truth), which are necessary to deal with challenges. The harsh truth shows the high level of trust, which is essential for the efficiency of social capital (Coleman, 1990), (Putnam, 1993). The fact that the student values platonic friendships more than romantic and family relationships shows strong bonds in friendships. Also, she underlines the permanency of friendships, friendships can be stable, long-term relationships that can provide support and help throughout different life stages, and this support can be essential for international students to integrate into the Czech Republic. It's important to note that the student highlighted the role of friends in offering community, and being a part of a community can influence on sense of belonging, which could be very useful for students to integrate in a new country.

One of the international students mentioned the reciprocity nature of her friendship relationships:

"They are very important to me and I prioritize them in my life. What do my friends not give me?! I think friends are the people in my life who consistently have given me

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happiness, understanding, love, and support. I believe we are responsible for each

other if we are involved in each other's lives and I am therefore not afraid to ask my

friends for help as I feel like there should be space for that"

According to Putnam, social capital includes reciprocity, the social network in which individuals engage has to have reciprocity to flow resources, information, support, and help within the social network (Putnam, 2000). The student acknowledges reciprocity, when a friendship is formed, there is a kind of responsibility on both sides to take care of each other. Student notes that she can ask her friends for support when she needs it, and there should be room for that.

Another respondent wants to deconstruct the hierarchy that tells us friends are secondary people in our lives, which she considers as an act of revolution. This demonstrates rebellion from the student to go against societal norms about friends, for her, friends are the primary people:

"Giving my friends so much space in my life is also an act of revolution for me, I am

constantly seeking to deconstruct traditional structures and norms that tell me friends

are secondary people in my life. I feel like that's how our societies see them, but I for

sure see them as primary people in my life"

The data suggests the high value of friends in the student's life, friendships are prioritized in her life, which makes us think that the student has strong ties with her friends. Strong ties refer to intimate, close relationships among some people, which can be also seen in close friends (Lin, 2001). Strong ties can create strong social networks, so a student can develop strong bonds with friends which will drive into creating a strong social network with a high level of trust that can help a student to access a support system from friends necessary for the international students' integration process.

Another student considers friends as a vital part of her life and underlines that it would be almost impossible to live without friends:

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"Friends are very important to me; they are a vital part of my life, and I feel like, without friends, it would be incredibly hard, almost impossible, to live. Friends give me support, care, and help, and they are there for me when I need them. They make the good times better and the tough times bearable"

This student also points out that friends are providing support, help, and care, this evidence shows the significance of friendships and what friends can offer to each other. Friends can provide support during difficult times and share joy during good times.

Friends can support each other during hard times, like when losing a family member, which can be very stressful and emotional support is essential at this time. One of the international students said:

"Friends offer different perspectives and advice that help me see things more clearly. With my friends I am honest and don't need to act. With them I can be emotional, social, and get personal growth benefits. For example, when my father passed away i had really bad times, had depression and the friends were the best help to somehow accept my loss and continue my life journey"

This example demonstrates how invaluable is support and help from friends. When the student lost her father, she was depressed. Friends helped her to accept the loss and continue living. Even more, the student directly revealed that the help from friends was the most useful, while no other social connections were that helpful for the student. Additionally, the student mentioned that friends' advice is helping her to see things more clearly which illustrates how friends can support each other in intellectual growth which can lead to better decision-making. Being honest with friends shows a high level of trust within social networks, which contributes to making the connection deeper.

One of the students, while talking about the importance of friends, mentioned that he does not have many friends and emphasized the need to have many friends. He also recalled the period when he first moved to the Czech Republic and he had no friends and noted that he felt isolated:

"Having friends is very important for me, with friends, I can talk and share things that I can't with my family, and as a person who does not have many friends in Prague, I feel like more need to have friends to fulfill my life, it feels like something is missing from my life.

L - What is missing?

K- Hm, I think, friends make you as a complete person, and when you don't have many friends some parts are missing from you and sometimes, you feel sad. Like, when you want to talk with someone to support you emotionally and all of your friends are busy and they can't meet you. Also, I remember the time when I moved in Prague for first time and I did not have any close friend, I felt isolated and I knew that I had to find friends as soon as possible.

L – In what way did you feel isolated?

K – I felt isolated from life in Prague, I did not feel that I did belong here. But. It changed once I met my close friends, they made my life better (laughs).

L- How did they make your life better?

K – We started hanging out together, going to study, and spending free time together, they also introduced me other friends, like I, my life got way better, finally, I was integrated into Prague and I was not alone anymore"

The passage shows that, for the student, the support system that friends offer is important for him to fulfill his life. He mentions that when he can't make contact with his friends and has to talk about this or that topic, it makes him feel sad. This once again emphasizes the crucial role of emotional support for international students to successfully integrate socially and academically.

Moreover, when he moved to the Czech Republic and had no friends, he felt isolated, and making friends later helped him to overcome this feeling of isolation. This aligns with the idea of Hanifan that an individual is socially helpless if left alone (Hanifan, 1916).

Lin defined social capital as "investment in social relations with expected returns" (Lin, 1999. p30). The student said "*I knew that I had to find friends as soon as possible*" which suggests that the student realized he had to make social connections to get the benefit, in this case, the benefit is to stop feeling isolated and it aligns with the definition of social capital developed by Lin.

Similarly, another student mentioned that when they first moved to the Czech Republic and didn't have friends for a while, they felt depressed, and when they made friends, that all changed:

> *"Having friends and keeping those friendships is super important to me. I can't imagine life without them. When I first moved to Prague, I didn't have any friends for a while, and I felt really depressed. It was a really tough time for me. I struggled to adjust to the new environment, and without anyone to share my experiences with, everything felt overwhelming. Making friends eventually helped me feel more at home and brought so much joy and support into my life. Honestly, I don't know how I would have gotten through that period without eventually finding those connections".*

The student cannot imagine life without friends, this suggests the importance of the support system that this social network can offer her. This is substantiated by an argument that after the student made friends in the Czech Republic, and received support from them, her life changed for the better.

Moreover, she directly mentions that without having those connections, it is difficult for her to imagine overcoming the period when she needed to adapt to a new environment. Social capital here played a crucial role in the integration process of the student and proving the support.

The size of the circle of friends of students in the Czech Republic varies from student to student, some of them have many friends, some have few, but all of them have at least two friends that they can name. Indeed, most of them did not have friends immediately when they moved to the Czech Republic, but over time they established relationships and made friends.

The circle of friends of international students in the Czech Republic is quite diverse and includes representatives of different cultures which is seen as a positive thing in international students. One of the students who is from Slovenia said that she did not have a chance to meet people from different cultural backgrounds in home country and she has this opportunity in Prague. Making friends with people from different backgrounds can help a student feel more connected and integrated into an international community. She said:

> *"I think my friend circle is quite diverse. I got to meet people from so many different*
>
> *cultural backgrounds here in Prague, which I didn't have so much opportunity to do*
>
> *in Slovenia. I like how international it is and I like that I get to broaden my perspectives*
>
> *through encounters with different people from different backgrounds"*

One of the students indicated that cultural differences affect friendships, but positively, she considers diversity in friendships as enriching and interesting, the student is open and willing to learn new perspectives from these diverse relationships:

> *"I think cultural differences affect friendships, but I wouldn't say they affect them in a*
>
> *negative way. I see that effect as positive, as so enriching, and interesting, they make*
>
> *the friendships even more complex, richer and they teach you so much if you are willing*

and open to learn. It can make you think in ways you never thought about before or of

things you have never heard of before, so it is truly beautiful. But of course sometimes

it can be a challenge and a source of conflict when you perceive certain situations

differently due to your cultural background. But in those cases it is important to listen

and set up a constructive dialogue, which these friendships for sure help you to do and

nurture".

The student is aware of challenges in the friendships that might be coming from cultural differences, however, the student emphasizes the role of listening and a constructive dialogue to solve the problems.

Another student also emphasized that cultural differences affect her relationships in a good way:

"All my friends are internationals in Prague, and from very different countries and

cultural backgrounds. Cultural differences can shape my relationships, but I would

say in a good way. Since I am older, and my friends are older and we are all abroad,

all of us are curious and open to learning about each other's cultures and listening

and apologizing when needed. The international friends I have made in Prague have

really enriched my perspectives on a lot of different countries and cultures, in a way I

wouldn't have imagined before. You learn more intimately about a country or culture

when it's communicated to you by somebody you love".

The student also highlights that all of her friends are interested in each other's culture, which can be considered as the same goal, and this goal is achieved with the help of social capital. Lin believes social capital is useful for members of the social network to achieve the same goal (Lin, 1999). Also,

the willingness to apologize when required shows mutual respect and understanding which is necessary to solve the problem. The student has a deep emotional connection with her friends that can provide a support system.

Several students mentioned that their closest friends are from the same countries they come from or from countries close to their culture, since they share some cultural characteristics. One of them said:

> *"All of my friends are from different countries, I have some friends from Poland, I'm also Polish and the connection with them is more different, closer, because we share the same culture and background. Other friends are from Kosovo, the UK, France, and Denmark, mostly from Europe. My friend group is very diverse and that is one of my favorite things about being an international student. I think it's beautiful that a lot of people, from so many different cultural backgrounds and upbringings gather and form such meaningful relationships. I'd say I am naturally closer to people who come from similar cultures"*

Cultural similarities can be a basis for a strong understanding and connection between friends, which can provide a strong support system, trust, and reciprocity. Students can build bonding social capital with friends based on the fact that they come from the same country and this bond can provide social and physiological support (Putnam, 2000). The student acknowledges the advantages of diversity in her friend circle and she calls it one of her *"favorite things"*, it emphasizes the dual nature of social integration, where both diverse and culturally similar relationships can play an important role in student's social network.

One of the students, who is from Slovakia, mentions that most of his friends are from Slovakia since they are from the same country, they understand each other better and offer more comfort, on the other

hand, he mentions that it is interesting to have friendships with representatives of other countries, which allows him to learn more about these countries, things that he had not heard before.

A few students mentioned that they have Czech friends, although not in large numbers, and the reason they don't have many Czech friends is that since they are international students, they don't have much contact with Czech students at the university. The students discussed that having Czech friends is important for them because they are part of the society and culture where they moved to live, and to better understand the peculiarities of the culture, it is necessary to have contact with the representatives of this culture. We can analyze this under Lin's definition of social capital, the investment in relationships with an expected outcome (Lin, 1999). One of the expected results in this case can be that international students, with the support of their Czech friends, get to know the Czech culture and society better.

The main way international students make friends is at the university, the university provides the opportunity for students to establish and expand social networks. Students also named other sources from which they make friends: dormitories, parties, workplaces, and also from friends - friends introducing other friends.

One of the student said:

> *"In the Czech Republic I have mainly made social connections through my uni. I was lucky to find my friends there, and then friends of friends or at parties. It's hard to say how I choose my friends, cause in the moment I don't really think about it. But usually they are funny, extroverted, kind and have the same political values as me. I don't feel like I can get truly close to a person that doesn't share the same values as me, but usually when picking a friend I just feel a certain trust and chemistry"*

The student primarily made friends through the university, the same for other students, which means that the university is like a central hub where students build their social capital. Parties and introducing friends to friends also can contribute to expanding the social network. The student underscores the importance of shared values in friendships, and based on shared values, students can make very deep connections, necessary for providing support and help. Significantly, the student mentions that when she chooses a friend, she feels a certain trust. Trust, as discussed by Putnam and Coleman, is the core element of social capital (Putnam, 1993) (Coleman, 1990).

Similarly, another student also mentioned that the university and parties are the main ways they make friends since she meets there people with the same values:

> *"The main way I make friends is at university and at parties. That is usually where I met like-minded people with similar worldviews and values as myself"*

Several students mentioned the dormitory as a source where they build friendships. One of the participants said:

> *"D - Some of them I met in dormitories the closest ones, some I knew from my home country, and some are my classmates.*
>
> *I – Can you please tell us why your closest friends are from the dormitories?*
>
> *D – Because to live in the same place and seeing each other constantly, makes friendship stronger. You can easily reach them, there is no distance. Let's make it clearer, imagine you are living in the building and as a kid, in most cases, your closest friends are also living in the same building. It's the same about the dorms when you have a feeling that the dorms is your home, then everyone who lives there automatically is related to each other, and you have a special connection and trust. For example,*

once, I was at the club and randomly I met a student who lived at the same dorm and we became friends once we heard about this info, we spent the whole night together and we are still friends. It's so easy to make friends through the dormitories".

The student mentions the role of physical proximity in strengthening the bond of friendship, since students live in the same building, they often meet each other, and frequent contact is important for students to build strong bonds based on trust and shared experiences. As Marmaros and Sacerdote's research showed, the interaction between students who live in the same dorms is higher (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006). Dorms allow students to establish a kind of community, which is supported by the argument that the student compares living in a dormitory to a child living in the same building where his close friends live in this same building, and living together in the same building is associated with the fact that close friends will be made in this building. A sense of community is important for a sense of belonging, which helps students successfully integrate into the Czech Republic. Furthermore, the example of how the student met the other student who is from the same dormitories at the club, illustrates the quick bond and connection that they made due to the shared experience. According to Putnam, strong social capital can contribute to access to the support system and resources that will benefit the members of the connections (Putnam, 1993). Friendships formed in the dormitory can provide a support system.

Analogously, another student also talked about the role of the dorms in forming friendships, how living in the dorms helped him to develop deeper connections with his classmates, and how he became close friends with his roommate:

"K -One close friend is my dorm roommate and the others are my classmates. These classmates also live at the dorm, so the dorm gave us the opportunity to connect more and to become closer friends. Living together has created special and close relationship within our friend group and now we are supportive community. I'm a shy person and for me to form friendships

requires some time, and regular meetings, and you know, I think this is the main reason why all of my friends are my classmates who live at the dorms. After seeing them quite often, we became friends and I felt secure with them. My dorm roommate is not my classmate but since, we were living in the same room, we saw each other on a daily basis and we made strong friendship quite easily

I – So, the dorm connected you with these friends.

K – Yes, the dorm connected us and I think the dorm is the best for students to find friends.

I – Would you consider moving from the dorms if finance is not an issue?

K- Actually, now that I'm working and I have quite a good salary, I can easily move from the dorms, my ex-roommate moved to the apartment and he is always telling me to move from the dorms but I don't want to, I want to stay at the dorms and be connected with others. Without the dorms, I would not have close friendships with my close friends. Dorms is amazing for making friends"

As the student said, the dormitory facilitates the chance for regular interactions which is necessary to build the connection. This can be beneficial for shy students, for students who need more time to develop friendships. The student described how the friends in the dormitory became a supportive community, which can be essential for academic and social integration. Regular meetings with friends can build trust and mutual support between friends, they can become more open with each other. As the student discussed, once he had a strong bond with his friends, he felt secure. The sense of security that the student mentioned is a result of regular communication and close friendship. The example illustrates the importance of a strong bond for a shy person to overcome social barriers.

Another student talked about the experience within the community, particularly, queer community:

"I am a part of the queer community. Being queer myself, I feel like they can understand my life experiences more, they understand the life of a person to an extent marginalized from the mainstream. I like to hang out with people who live outside the norms, and we can encourage each other to be confident and proud of our differences. I think the queer community plays a big role in forming connections because you know which venues, places and events to go to where queer people hang out, and that is how you meet them and mingle. And then each week you keep seeing similar people around because the community is not big and you start forming more and more connections, particularly because everyone knows everyone, the community is small"

This passage expresses the strong bond of a student with others in a queer community due to the mutual understanding and support. Queer venues, places, and events are giving a chance to members of the community to connect and expand their social networks based shared experiences and identity. Student notes that the community is small and the members of the community see each other weekly which helps them to form more and more connections. Membership in a queer community, and the social network that membership creates, can provide students with access to the support and help necessary for social and academic integration. A social network based on shared values can have a high level of trust and bond between friends can become stronger.

Several students who work alongside their studies have mentioned that they have made friends at work. These relationships are just as important to them as friends from the university or other places. The students said that since they spend a certain amount of time each week at work, they had the opportunity to better connect with other colleagues and eventually developed a strong tie with some colleagues. Working and studying together is not an easy task, which can cause stress in students, and this stress can hinder the integration process. Having friends at the workplace can be essential for help and support when a student is overwhelmed. With the help of friends, it can be possible to balance

study and work without being completely exhausted and stressed. At the same time, the friends that students make at work are not only friends in the workplace but also outside of it. Therefore, friends made at work can be part of the support system that is paramount in the social and academic integration of international students.

One of the students, who has a hobby of performing stand-up comedy, has made friends through this hobby. She notes that she likes having this diverse circle of friends who aren't connected to the university. The reason is that it allows the student to socialize with people outside the university, which enables her to see different approaches to topics. It's important to have a hobby as a student because it balances the social and academic life, which can positively influence on student's well-being. Moreover, having a hobby can help students expand their social network and a social network can be fundamental for providing support and help that assists students' social and academic integration.

Another student mentioned that he moved to the Czech Republic with his best friend, which made his decision to study abroad easier. Having a trusted person with you at the beginning of this journey offers a sense of security that can overcome the fear of adapting to the new environment.

During the in-depth interviews, the students mentioned that they engage in various activities with their friends, whether it is studying together, going to the movies or going for a walk, and so on. The frequency of viewing depends on how close they are to this or that friend, the intensity of meeting with friends of our respondent students also varies from student to student, but all of them still manage to see their friends every week. It is worth noting that when students have a busy schedule, for example, during exams, they do not meet each other with the same intensity as before. One of the students noted:

"I see some of my friends every day or almost every day. Then I see some of them weekly and some of them monthly, depends on the friend and the closeness of the friendship and also depends how busy schedule do I have, like if I have exams, I seem them less. My close friends are involved in my daily life, we are chatting. Activities which we do is go out for drinks, go study, go for walks, the cinema, go to party, attend events, gossip, analyze, give advice, work together, cook, watch movies, dance, go to the store, run errands together sometimes. I spend time with them because they fill my days with joy, support and love"

According to Putnam, mutual support is one of the positive outcomes of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Mutual support from friends in international students is crucial to integrating and adapting to the new environment in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, Putnam considers reciprocity as an integral part of social capital. (Putnam, 2000). All of our respondents indicated that they and their friends are providing mutual support to each other, and given that most of their friends are also international students, mutual support plays a critical role in their common goal, social and academic integration. One of the respondents said:

"Yes, my friends support me and I do my best to support them back. I think it is a very reciprocal relationship, based on mutual respect, love and understanding. If friendships are not mutual, then they need to be repaired to become mutual or they need to be abandoned, because it is not fair to the people involved, where one is giving more than the other. It is a relationship of equals and both persons deserve support and care equally. Of course, there will be times where one needs more support than the other, but in a different period of life that will most likely change, and the other needs more support. It balances out"

This illustrates that the student and her friends have understood that social connection requires reciprocity, for friendship to function successfully, both parties who participate in this network must understand the meaning of reciprocity. The student's words that sometimes one party may need more support than the other, but over time the parties will change, can be related to Coleman's idea of a "credit slip", which is an obligation that when one party does something for another, the person who received the help from the other party has a kind of obligation in future to redeem on a certain performance (Coleman, 1990).

All of the students said that with their student friends, they often study together, which helps them to better understand difficult topics, solve hard tasks, and stay focused and motivated.

One of them said:

> *"Studying together with my friends is a regular occurrence for us, and it's something that I find immensely beneficial. I feel like it helps me stay focused and motivated, and I believe the same goes for them. We embark on this academic adventure together, sharing our knowledge and supporting each other through the challenges"*

Supporting each other in the study process among students is important not only for academic integration but for social integration too because they can develop and make deeper connections with each other. As Lin discusses, through social capital, individuals can access resources within their social network (Lin, 1999). Studying together creates an environment that promotes academic effort and studying harder which might be difficult while studying alone. Mutual support, and sharing of resources, information, and knowledge are essential to make the academic journey easier. According to Bourdieu, by advantaging social capital people can achieve the same goal (Bourdieu, 1986). When the student said *"We embark on this academic adventure together"* demonstrates that the students

have the same goal and to achieve the same goal, in this case, to successfully complete academic and social integration as well as qualification.

Burt believes that with the help of social capital, structural holes can be filled and individuals can act as brokers to facilitate the flow of resources, information, and opportunities. He considers structural holes as gaps and lack of connections in the social network, it could be among individuals or with groups (Burt,2005). One of the students shared his experience about how he got the information he needed with the help of his friend. He told us that he was going to continue his studies for PhD, but he was traveling abroad and did not have information that two days were left to submit his PhD application. However, his friend called him and provided this information. This example shows how an individual, a broker, in this case a student's friend, filled the structural hole between the student's network and the university's information network, the friend facilitated the flow of information and bridged the gap, without this the student could have missed the deadline.

A few students said they would turn to friends for financial help, conversely others said they would only contact family for financial help. The first case shows the students' strong bond with their friends and emphasizes that the level of trust and reciprocity is very high, they feel comfortable asking their friends for financial help, indicating that support from this social network is not limited to emotional support and also includes financial resources. On the other hand, students who would ask family for financial help may indicate that these students view financial problems primarily as a matter of family support. Family relationships is based on ridging social capital which can provide foundational support for international students.

One of the students talked about xenophobia that she has experienced in the Czech Republic. International students can face cultural barriers while starting living in a new country. The student highlighted the role of friends in overcoming these challenges which underlines the importance of

social networks in providing support. Furthermore, she said that the international community helped her to navigate, and thought this community, she felt comfortable. The community creates a sense of belonging.

She said:

> *"It was hard living in the Czech Republic for me, cause I felt the culture and the people were not that welcoming. Sometimes, my friends and I experienced xenophobia, but my friends made it worthwhile. If it wasn't for my friends, I wouldn't have felt so comfortable in my academic life or social life. The situation would have been totally different. I am not sure I would have stayed to be honest. But the international community we formed created an environment that made me feel comfortable and one in which I could lean on when times were tough. This is super necessary when integrating into a new country"*

The student's words *"I am not sure I would have stayed to be honest"* show the crucial role of social capital in the integration process of the students. Te support system provided by social connections can play a critical role. This passage aligns with Coleman's idea that social capital which includes networks, norms, and trust, can improve individual outcomes (Coleman, 1990). Sudent's social capital helped her to access the support needed to overcome the challenges of living in a foreign country. Also, Bourdieu's concept of social capital is relevant here, according to him, social capital is resources that can be accessed by members of social networks (Bourdieu, 1986). Student's friends are part of the social capital that can offer emotional support which is the resource that is necessary to integrate in the Czech Republic.

Coleman believes that everyone in the structure can benefit from the actions that are made by an individual or individuals (Coleman, 1988). One of the students, who has social anxiety and shyness when giving a speech in public or when asking something from people who are not close to him, shared his experience when he did not understand the nature of the exam in one of the subjects. During classes, it was difficult for him to ask questions to the professor in front of others because he was embarrassed. However, one of his friends asked the professor to schedule a consultation hour for the exam, which our respondent took advantage of and asked his friend if he could go with him and his friend agreed. During this consultation hour, he asked the professor questions and successfully passed the exam. This aligns with Coleman's idea and shows that the student benefited from his friend's action, even though he did not participate in the action.

The majority of students consider the help and support they received from friends as the most important during their studies in the Czech Republic, compared to family and the university. According to most of our respondents, help and support from friends is what helps them most to cope with the challenges of moving to a new country, to achieve academic and social integration in the Czech Republic.

One of the students said:

> *"Help from friends had the most important and big role. We helped each other to study, to make notes, write essays, share notes, offer insights and knowledge. I could not get through my studies without the emotional and psychological support of my friends as well. And also, in the social integration process it was so important to have people having your back in a foreign unfamiliar country, supporting you, helping you, uplifting you and also just having people who wanted to go with you to fun places and*

meet new people so you expanded your circle at the same time as well. Friends were

key to my integration here"

The student emphasizes the role of friends in academic integration, they help each other in studying, sharing notes, and so on, and their relationship is reciprocal. Friends support each other not only in the studying process but also in emotional and psychological aspects. As the student mentioned, friends played a big role in social integration too. The support offered by friends can be vital in navigating cultural differences and adapting to a new environment.

Another student who also said that help and support from friends were the most important, notes that friends were helping her to go through together when she experienced homophobia, sexism, and xenophobia. Homophobia, sexism, and xenophobia can challenge the integration process, as they can cause a sense of alienation from society. Support from friends during this time can be essential.

One of the international students said:

> *"The most important was help and support from friends, they supported me in the hard*
>
> *moments. Because when living abroad your friends ultimately become your family and*
>
> *your whole support system. This also happened to me, they became my family. actually*
>
> *for the first semester, before I had close friends, I was feeling isolated a lot and made*
>
> *me consider dropping out of university and returning home. I decided to try one more*
>
> *semester, here I made very good friends which helped me integrate academically and*
>
> *socially, which ultimately is what made me stay. Otherwise I would have been too*
>
> *miserable and I would leave the country"*

The student notes that when you live abroad, your friends become your family and your whole support system. It illustrates the special bond and trust that the student has with her friends, and how important friends are for her. When you don't have close friends in a new country, it can affect you and make

you feel isolated, which was the case with this student. When she found close friends, that all changed, and having close friends had a positive effect on her. Moreover, she wanted to stop studying, and with the support of her friends, she changed her mind and continued studying in the Czech Republic. This narrative once again points to the essential role of friends in the integration of international students in the Czech Republic. Coleman defined social capital as - "Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence" (Coleman, 1990, p 302). This passage aligns with Coleman's definition of social capital, the student would not be able to be integrated socially and academically without the help of social capital that she possesses.

One of the participants said:

> *"I feel a huge sense of belonging because of my friends, their presence is what makes*
> *me feel at home. And since I have lived here for so long I also now feel at home in the*
> *city to a certain degree"*

This highlights the important influence of social relationships on the sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is crucial in the integration process. Furthermore, living in a city for a long time can contribute to having a feeling of home.

On this matter, the other student mentioned:

> *"I do feel a sense of belonging to my friends here, they make it feel like home. But if*
> *they lived somewhere else, then that place would feel like home instead. It is the people,*
> *not the country"*

This statement also emphasizes the role of connections in creating a sense of belonging and a feeling of being at home. The sense of home for the student is connected with friends rather than the physical

location. It uncovers the importance of social connections for the student. Having a supportive social network can contribute to the well-being of international students which is necessary for academic and social integration.

On this subject, the Slovak international student said that he feels a sense of belonging in the Czech Republic which is influenced by the fact that he is coming from a similar culture.

> *"Yes, I feel a sense of belonging in the Czech Republic. As a Slovak person, I would say, it was easier for me to adapt to the Czech Republic than with students from overseas or from very different cultures. Slovakia and the Czech Republic have quite similar cultures, which helped me to understand the Czech culture and integrate into society, I feel like an integral part of the Czech Republic. Of course, I need to mention the role of language, as Czech and Slovak are very similar languages, when I arrived here, I could understand Czech people and I learned Czech super fast which opened a door of integration. I think speaking the local language is one of the important things to becoming a full member of society"*

This illustrates the importance of cultural similarity in the adaptation process. Slovakia and the Czech Republic have some shared cultural and social contexts which made it easier for the student to understand the Czech culture and integrate into it. Moreover, language plays one of the key roles in adapting to the new society. Knowing the local language of the host country is very important to adapt to the society as it reduces communication problems and allows more interactions with locals.

4.3 University and Its Role in Social and Academic Integration of International Students After Mobility to Study in the Czech Republic

The university is the main social institution for international students that helps to expand their social network. As discussed before, most of the friends of international students are also students from Charles University, and the university is the space where these connections are formed. The university plays a major role in the social and academic integration of international students, the social network created here by students facilitates the exchange of resources, information, and mutual support. We can say that a university has some type of mission to take care of the well-being of its students and help them as much as possible to make their study period smooth. In this paragraph, we will try to show what is university role in social and academic integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic.

Professors play an important role in the academic integration of students. Professors, who are part of the university space, help students to get comprehensive information about various topics and provide personal assistance when needed. Most of our respondents indicated that the majority of professors are willing to help them overcome academic obstacles. The social relationship that is formed between professor and student is a part of social capital, and with this connection, students can use the resources and support that are included in this relationship.

Some of the students mentioned that they had used the consultation hours to meet with professors face-to-face and discuss academic issues or exams.

One of the students indicated:

> *"Professors are very helpful, to be honest, they are willing to assist you with your queries, which could be related to the exam or the class. Personally, I have asked the professors many times if it would be possible for us to meet face-to-face, and in all*

these cases they agreed, and thanks to the individual meetings with them, I successfully understood the topics that needed more explanation for me, and this is very positive, us, students are different, some may need less explanation, some may need more, sometimes I may not understand the subject of matter, sometimes others. So, the opportunity to have such meetings with professors is necessary, in my opinion"

This narrative shows the importance of the interactions, and individual meetings, between professors and students. Professors' willingness to have personal consultations with students expresses the positive attitude of the university as well as professors. As the student shared her personal experience, individual meetings with professors helped her to understand challenging topics. Academic integration could be hard, especially for students who come from countries that have very different education systems compared to the Czech Republic, therefore, the chance to have individual meetings is crucial to make international students' academic journey easier.

Another student also emphasized the role of consultation hours in adapting to the new academic space:

"My first year in the Czech Republic was quite difficult. I studied at a university in my home country for a year, but the academic space here is different. But the consultation hours with professors helped to adopt a new academic space"

This passage once more emphasizes the useful side of consultation hours.

One of the students shared his experience when he and some of his classmates happened to meet a professor in a pub and had a beer together, which strengthened their bond.

"Ah, once me and classmates were in the pub and we saw our professor walk in. We went to him and proposed to join us at our table, which he agreed to. It was super nice, we talked about our social life and we kind of felt more connected in the way that we got to know each other outside of the university. Like, I think, it was very nice of the

professor that he joined us and we had one beer together, like students, professors have

their own lives and to know them in that way makes the connection between us better.

He gave me advice on my personal life, which I really appreciated."

This example shows the significance of informal interactions between a professor and students and how this informal interaction can contribute to making the connection between a professor and students stronger. Also, the professor's decision to accept the invitation reflects the breakdown of the traditional academic barriers. Casual meetings can help students feel more comfortable, and it can affect to students' openness with professors to ask them for help when required.

Several students mentioned the CU Newsletter for International Students which is published every month as the tool where they get information about events, tips, psychological assistance, support groups, and so on. The university, the newsletter, contributes to the flow of information and resources that are necessary for the academic and social integration of international students.

One of the students shared his recent experience while participating psychological resilience workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to help students strengthen their mental resilience. The student emphasized the role of the workshop in overcoming the stress that was caused due to the exam period. This highlights the positive contribution of Charles University in caring about students' well-being which is necessary for the academic and social integration of international students. He said:

"Charles University often holds various events that help us, the students, to better deal

with emotional problems. For example, a few weeks ago I participated in the

psychological resilience workshop where we discussed how to strengthen our mental

resilience. Since the exam period is approaching, we students are very stressed, at

least, I am, and this workshop helped me mentally prepare for the exams. Such

workshops are very necessary and useful".

Another student mentioned that for some time she participated in the support group for English-speaking students, which was organized by Charles University. Participants in this support group talked about their problems, and everyday life, and through this support group, she managed to overcome the challenges that come with moving to a foreign country to study. She also emphasized that she made many friends through this support group. This example indicates the university's willingness to help international students adapt to the new environment, not only to solve problems related to the new environment but also to their daily lives, the support group acted as a crucial resource for sharing experiences and finding solutions for the problems. Another bright side of this support group is that it allows students to interact with each other and make friends which will help them to have access to mutual support and help. The university offered a platform for open communication and integration of international students.

One of the students talked about an opportunity provided by Charles University, namely a workshop on improving academic writing. He mentioned that he had difficulty with academic writing and had had some problems with passing subjects due to that reason. With the help of this workshop, he was able to improve his skills and apply them successfully in an academic setting. This example shows how a university can help a student in their academic integration.

One of the participants mentioned that she received a scholarship from Charles University based on good academic results, which was new to her because she had never received such a scholarship. This scholarship has made the student more motivated and excited, which has had a positive impact on her studies, she says that she still has motivation from this scholarship and wants to maintain good grades in university. Therefore, the university not only recognizes her academic achievements but also serves as a source of motivation and excitement for her studies.

Some students addressed the university as a social place where they connect with other students and create social networks. One of them said:

> *"I met my best friends at university, so the space itself brought together like-minded people, making it easier to find people similar to yourself in one place and make friendships. It offered me a great level of education, so it played a role in this way. But it didn't play much of a role otherwise. It offered the space, but in which I integrated on my own, not receiving much help. It was a platform, which I used to my advantage by myself".*

The university space acts as a meeting ground for like-minded people, this is the space where usually people with the same interests and goals are gathered. The student also underscored the university's role in providing resources and knowledge and as a result, the student was able to receive *"a great level of education"*. However, the university for the student provided the limited support and did not play a big role in other aspects of the student's life.

One of the international students noted the academic challenge that she faced:

> *"It was more work and reading than what I was used to, so I struggled in the beginning with the big workload, it was challenging academically. But then I got the hang of it in the beginning of my second semester, and I am very happy with the deep and complex level of knowledge I got from my university"*

The student initially found the workload and reading requirements challenging at Charles University, however, after the first semester, she adapted to this new academic space, which shows the student's resilience and ability to cope with this challenge. She expresses her happiness *"with the deep and complex level of knowledge"* she received at Charles University despite the academic challenges she

faced at the beginning of her studies. This emphasizes the positive side of Charles University that offers students deep knowledge.

One of the students who is from the US mentioned the difference between the Czech and US education systems and how challenging it could be. She said:

> *"In some ways, some individuals can be very helpful but as a whole system, it can be challenging, because the actual website looks like it has not been updated for a long time and it's very old and there are no clear ways to figure things out, you have kinda, I don't know, find somehow information that you need. As I said, individuals are very great but the system is challenging if you are not ready to seek the information that you need. The American education system is the opposite, it feeds you information and kinda guides you through your expectations, and the Czech system does not do that, it expects you to figure it out by yourself, there is no central location to handle everything".*

The student emphasized the difficulty of navigating the SIS, as she suggests, it lacks modernization. Moreover, she notes that the Czech education system is not centralized and you need to figure out things by yourself while the American education system is very supportive in providing guidance. The fact that the student needs to find out information that she needs, may develop independence and skills for problem-solving. However, on the positive side, the student highlights the role of individuals in the university who are willing to support and guide students.

Additionally, another student highlighted the lack of information from the university as well and the difference between the education systems:

> *"It was fine adapting to the new academic space, it was like any other place. Except it has always been easier to get access to information at other universities I have been at*

than this one. The problems I had with my studies was just that I did not appreciate the structure of the study. Way to many courses per semester compared to other countries and constant stress about not having the right information. Which happened multiple times, because accessing information was so difficult".

The student's adoption process to the new academic space was generally smooth, however, she experienced challenges in accessing the information which was easier in her previous university. She expresses frustration with the structure of the study due to having many courses per semester.

Another student discussed the university support regarding administrative and practical challenges:

"I wish the university was helping us in the visa process. We had to go visa process by ourselves, the university didn't help us though they did provide some information about the process of acquiring a residence permit. The university does try to help international students by providing information about the city, about their studies, about living abroad in general and living in Prague specifically, the advice they give you about living here is quite helpful but I am not sure about other types of help they provide as I never really participated in any of the events or university organized gatherings".

The student expresses the wish to receive more direct guidance in the visa and residence permit process from the university. Bureaucratic challenges can be very stressful which can affect student's overall well-being. The assistance and help from the university may make this process easier. However, as the student mentioned, Charles University provided information about the studies and the city which contributes to the idea that the university is trying to help students in their transition to the Czech Republic. Additionally, the student did not use the opportunities offered by the university to participate in events and gatherings, this might suggest a gap, a "structural hole" (Burt, 2005), in

awareness or accessibility of these services for some students. Furthermore, the other student mentioned that she rarely received information on events, programs, etc. or they were exclusively held in Czech. This also suggests the existence of a structural hole between the student and the university because the university is organizing in every month different types of events or workshops for international students, however, based on a lack of information, the student is not aware.

One of the international students, who is in the last semester of her studies, laments that she did not have the opportunity to be connected to the Czech version of her program so she could meet peers, and notes that she only got to meet them in this current last semester. This narrative highlights the experience of an international student who, until the last semester, felt disconnected from her peers in the Czech version of her program. This example illustrates the importance of social connections with peers in the academic environment, indicating that early contact with the local student community could be beneficial in a better and faster integration of the international student to understand the local cultural characters. The student's sentiment reflects a missed opportunity to connect and build relationships with classmates that could have enriched her academic experience throughout her studies.

One student named support and help from the university as the most important during her studies. She says that the university helped her the most in dealing with the challenges of moving to a foreign country. The support group organized by the university, in which she actively participated, was the best way for her to talk about the problems that worried her and to get the necessary support to deal with these problems. Additionally, she mentions that through the university she managed to make friends who became a part of her life and notes that if she had not received help from the university, it would be very difficult, even impossible, for her to adapt to the new environment. This illustrates how important is the university's role international student integration process.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to explore what is the impact of social capital on the academic and social integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic. Most of our respondents mentioned that social and academic integration in the Czech Republic was not an easy task and they faced many challenges. Some of our interviewees experienced, anxiety, isolation, depression, stress, academic difficulties. Social capital emerged as an important factor influencing the academic and social integration of international students. The majority of international students said that in the beginning, the integration process was the hardest due to the fact that they did not have much information about living in the Czech Republic and the academic space at Charles University. However, it changed once they started to make new connections. Building social capital in the Czech Republic allowed students to access resources and support systems that were useful in their integration process. Putnam considers mutual support as one of the positive outcomes of social capital (Putnam, 2000). After international students formed relationships with classmates they successfully provided mutual support to each other. Mutual support was focused on the academic as well as social life of international students. One of the main problems in the integration of international students in a new country is connected with cultural unfamiliarity which can hinder the integration process. Social capital helped international students to overcome this problem in the way that they feel a sense of community and sense of belonging within their social networks. Also, students learn about local culture through social capital, the social connections they have made with local individuals provide information about the characteristics of the Czech culture which contributes to faster social and academic social integration. Furthermore, students' social networks established with their family, friends, and university provide the support system that helps them to navigate various challenges

connected to integrations. One of the aspects of the support system is emotional support. Students' well-being is crucial for a successful academic and social integration. Emotional support that students' social networks offers donate to their well-being. The results showed that in some cases, it would be impossible for students to achieve the integration without possessing social capital. This aligns with Coleman's idea that social capital is productive and enabling to achieve certain ends that would not be feasible without social capital (Coleman, 1990). Most of international students directly mentioned that help and support from family, friends and the university was vital in their integration process. International students who possess a high level of social capital can better integrate academically and socially which reflects to Burt's idea that individuals who do better are somehow better connected (Burt, 2000) Students with high levels of social capital can have access to support system, help, and information that will facilitate their social and academic integration, while students with low social capital may not have access to these resources.

Family relationships contribute to the formation of bonding social capital. Family members have special bonds, strong ties, and shared values which can offer a strong support system to international students. Family's role in the academic and social integration of international students after mobility to study in the Czech Republic is significant. Their emotional support to students during the pre-arrival period is fundamental since in most cases students do not know what to expect when moving to the Czech Republic. The feeling of anxiety and uncertainty appears in them, and at this time the family's support shapes the students' mood and motivation. The predispositions instilled by family can positively affect students' academic and social integration. The majority of students receive financial support from their families, and financial support is vital. Putnam and Coleman see trust as an essential part of social capital which promotes positive relationships and collaboration (Coleman, 1990) (Putnam, 1993). Family relationships are characterized by a high level of trust, which makes the family support system unique for international students during their studies. This makes it easier

for them to overcome emotional stress and everyday challenges. In the case of some students, family members support them in the academic space which can donate to students' academic success and integration. Our results showed that family members can participate in the academic integration of students in a variety of ways, such as providing emotional support, monitoring, and helping with academic challenges when they have the human capital, in this case, field-specific knowledge. Social capital allows international students to use the human capital of their family members to their advantage. Furthermore, there is a connection between our results and Coleman's idea that students whose families have high social capital are socialized into values and norms that promote academic achievement (Coleman, 1988). Our respondents whose families are actively involved in their studies have good academic achievements.

Mainly, at the outset of living in the Czech Republic international students did not have friends but after some period, they established connections and made friends. Friendships can develop bonding social capital as well as bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is formed between close friends which are characterized by reciprocity, trust, shared values, and interests while bridging social capital is established between acquaintances and friends beyond the immediate circle. It is evident from the findings that bridging social capital can help students access diverse information and resources within different friend groups that can be useful for students' academic and social integration. Bridging social capital allows students to obtain information outside of their immediate circle. Friendships are incredibly vital for international students in the integration process. Most of our respondents perceive help and support from friends as the most important during their studies, compared to help and support from family and the university. The help and support provided by friends are mainly focused on emotional and academic aspects. Since the majority of friends of the international students are other students and classmates from Charles University, they often study together and they support each other in the study process which can be very useful for academic integration. Besides the university,

students form friendships from dormitories, social events, workplaces and through friends. Students friend groups are quite diverse which gives them opportunity to get familiar with other cultures. as "primary people" is an act of revolution for students to deconstruct traditional structures and norms that tell them that friends are secondary people in their life. Friends offer a sense of community and belonging to international students in the Czech Republic which can contribute to the social integration of international students. Putnam considers reciprocity as one of the core elements of social capital that enables of exchange of resources within a social network (Putnam, 2000). As derived from our interviews, friendships formed by international students have the high level of reciprocity and this reciprocity can donate to the flow of resources, information, and support that are indispensable for the academic and social integration of international students. Friends can play the role of a broker in filling the structural hole between the student's network and the university's information network when students don't have information about some university-related issues, friends facilitate the flow of information and bridge the gap. Our research results show that sometimes international students intentionally form friendships to facilitate academic and social integration in the Czech Republic. This emphasizes Lin's core idea that social capital is investment in social relationships with expected returns (Lin, 1999). To conclude, students' friends provide social capital in the form of emotional support, companionship, a shared sense of community, resources, a sense of belonging which are crucial for the student's well-being and adaptation to a new country.

Bourdieu considered a university as a social institution that brings individuals together and contributes to building social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Based on our results, the main way of making friends for international students is the university, it provides the opportunity to connect people with the same values and goals. At the same, it offers students the possibility to meet people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Social capital can contribute to broad societal goals of diversity and inclusion. Social networks formed in the university among students with diverse cultural backgrounds foster cultural

exchange which can promote the development of a more interconnected society. Professors who are open to helping students on a one-to-one basis play a big role in academic integration of international students. Our analysis shows that students can cope better with academic challenges through individualized academic assistance from professors. The interaction between professors and students illustrates the accumulation of social capital in the university. The support provided by professors can strengthen students' social networks. One of the reason of academic challenges is connected with differences between academic spaces in home country and the host country. Students struggled to adjust to the new academic space however, social capital helped them to integrate into it, in the way of accessing support system that assist them. Charles University is contributing to the social and academic integration of international students by organizing various events for them, such as support groups, academic workshops, and psychological resilience workshops. Students receive information about coming events by CU Newsletter. Support groups and psychological resilience workshops are beneficial for students to overcome stress and connect with other students. The study reveals that students' academic journey was hard in some cases, however, the university offers them complex level of knowledge.

In order to comprehensively sum up my research, I also need to say that the research is not without limitations, such as the small size of the sample. I have conducted only 15 interviews with participants. However, the small size allowed me to analyze interviews in-depth. Also, the students participating in my research are only from the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University, which may limit the applicability of my findings to students from other faculties and the research may be biased. Perhaps, I can turn this limitation into the future research and expand the sample size of my research by including more participants from different faculties and compare the results between my thesis and future research. Also, the future research can explore the theory of social network in-depth. Additionally, reflecting on my subject of research, it could be expanded by focusing also on the roles

played by cultural and ethnic diversity, gender and age of students. Initially, I intended to research the influence of the above-mentioned factors, however, that would entail a wider scope of research. In the future, I would potentially want to explore this more in-depth so as to arrive to a more holistic picture of social and academic integration of international students.

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