

Making a temporary home in Berlin

A study of practices and perceptions of international students



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Abstract

Many students (about 3.3 million a year) spend a certain time of their studies abroad. The move abroad means leaving a social and physical familiar environment, and entering a new, unknown environment. This often involves a break with continuity and feelings of disorientation and displacement. This thesis examines how international students make themselves feel at home when temporary studying abroad, and how they perceive home in such a situation.

This study explores students' employed practices to feel at home in the new environment. Besides, it examines whether and how the temporary nature of the stay abroad influences the engagement in this home-making process. Also the influence of the temporary stay abroad on students' perception of home is examined.

The research was conducted in Berlin. Eleven international students, mainly from Spain and France, were asked to photograph things that made them feel at home in the city. These, along with questions about home, home-making, and living abroad, were discussed in semi-structured in-depth interviews. In support, participant observation was conducted.

Findings show that respondents employed numerous practices to feel at home in Berlin. It demonstrates the multifaceted character of home-making. Both social and territorial behaviour allowed to actively make a home in Berlin. Practices were employed to satisfy different needs: practices to maintain social, physical, and sensory continuity; practices to be in control; practices to establish and maintain social relationships; and practices to become part of the community and environment. Home-making was both focused at searching for familiarity in, and engaging with new features of, Berlin. Findings demonstrate the influence of a temporary stay on the willingness to make a home in Berlin, and commitment in home-making practices. The temporary amount of time to spend in Berlin often limited the home-making process. Finally, findings show the influence of living abroad on the perception of home. Students developed a multiple understanding of home, in which home obtained both a physical and symbolic meaning, or in which students found themselves floating between a home in Berlin and a home in the place of origin. More broadly, this indicates the impact of mobility on attachment to place. Also time is a factor that influences the development the attachment to Berlin.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The number of students experiencing a certain period abroad is growing (Institute of International Education, 2010). In 2009, 3.3 million post-secondary students worldwide were studying outside their own country, an increase of 1.3 million compared to the year 2001 (Institute of International Education, 2010). This increase is a result of, among others, changes and improvements in infrastructure, the bigger capacity of higher education systems, a higher GDP per capita, increasing competition between universities across the world and above all of funds by national governments and institutions like ERASMUS (World Education Services, 2007; Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Due to ERASMUS, especially student mobility within Europe has increased.

When international students leave their home country and enter a new country, this experience is often supposed to be “exciting and rich” (Hellstèn, 2002:3; Waters & Brooks, 2010). However, experiences may also be associated with feelings of disorientation and displacement, as a result of distancing from the familiar environment and social relationships, and entering an unfamiliar social and physical environment (Chow & Healy 2008; Hellstèn 2002; Wiborg 2003). Chow et al. (2008) argue that being in such unfamiliar circumstances evokes a desire to feel ‘in place’, or ‘at home’ in the new place of residence. Consequently, international students have to find a way to become connected to the new social and physical environment, and make themselves feel at home (Bih, 1992; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Chow et al., 2008; Ng, 1998).

Although it has been acknowledged that it becomes more common in this era of large-scale migration that “migrants establish homes in their newly adopted places” (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009:256), studies about home-making practices by migrants, especially temporary migrants like international students, are still scarce (with the notable exceptions of Bih (1992), exploring the meaning of objects in home-making; Mazumdar et al., 2009, exploring the role of religion in home-making; and Dayaratne & Kellett, 2008, exploring home-making in general). Therefore, it is useful to explore more about home-making by international temporary migrants. What practices are employed by international students in Berlin to feel at home, and does the temporary aspect of their stay have an impact on how home is being made (Wiborg, 2003)?

In addition, making a home in the new environment, and being away from the place of origin, may have significant implications for the meaning international students ascribe to home. Through home-making, students bind themselves to the new environment of Berlin, and by leaving their old environment, they distance themselves “geographical, social and partly cultural (...) [from] the home place” (Wiborg, 2003:149). This often provokes a changing sense of belonging and attachment to place (Chow et al., 2008). For example, the bond with the former home place or with Berlin, and the awareness of home might change or grow (Case, 1996). This research aims to explore how home matters to international students when temporally living abroad.

Putting this in a bigger framework, Gustafson (2001a) argues that as a result of more people experiencing mobility, the role of space and place changes. Social scientists like Baumann (1992), Giddens (1991), and Friedman (1997), for example, argue that travel and mobility “threaten to undermine the geographical boundedness and emotional groundedness that we tend to associate with home” (Molz, 2008:325).

However, on the other hand, Molz (2008) argues that a distinction between placelessness and place attachment is no longer relevant. Molz (2008) states that home and mobility become intersected, as a result of people being more and more on the move and occupying more places in less time. Within the context of place attachment and mobility, it becomes interesting to ask “*how* home matters” (Molz, 2008:326). To contribute to this issue, it is beneficial to explore how home matters when

temporary residing abroad. International students then experience mobility, but at the same time stay bounded to their country of origin, as they have the prospect to return to their country or place of origin – both often regarded as the ‘home’ place (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). In this ‘in-betweenness’ context, it is useful to investigate whether, and how, temporary residing abroad influences the meaning of home. By exploring how home is perceived in a context of temporary living abroad, and by examining the which home-making practices are employed in such a situation, this research contributes in getting more insight in today’s meaning of home and place attachment in relation to mobility (Chow et al., 2008; Molz, 2008).

1.2 Objective

International students change their familiar place of origin for a new, unfamiliar social and physical environment in the receiving country (Chow et al., 2008; Bih, 1992). I aim to explore the practices that students employ to make themselves a home in the new environment of Berlin. Besides, I intend to examine whether and how the temporary nature of the stay in Berlin influences the engagement in home-making. Finally, I will investigate whether the temporary stay in Berlin influences students’ meaning ascribed to home.

Hughes (2004) argues that research about international students is growing, but that there is still not known enough about designing and conducting studies in this area. Most studies about international students are about demographic and economic issues. This research aims to contribute to a broader and simultaneously deeper understanding of the experiences and feelings of the students.

1.3 Research questions

To explore the employed practices by international students to make a home in Berlin, and the influence of temporary living abroad on the ascribed meaning to home, the following main question will be answered in this research:

How do international students who are temporarily living in Berlin make themselves a home, and how does home matter when temporary living abroad?

In order to answer this question, first attention will be paid to the following sub questions:

- What home-making practices employed by participants can be identified?
- What is the influence of the temporary nature of the stay in Berlin on the degree of engagement with home-making practices?
- How is home perceived when temporary residing abroad?

A case study in Berlin was conducted to answer these questions. Interviews were the main method of data collection. In addition, a photo-elicitation method was used. Students were given an active role in the research by letting them make pictures of the things, places, practices, performances, people, and so forth, which helped them to feel at home.

1.4 Study area: Berlin

In order to explore the research questions, a case-study was conducted in Berlin, the capital of Germany. Berlin has 3.443 million inhabitants (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2011). The city has a complex history (from the 13th century, it was the capital of the Electorate of Brandenburg, kingdom of Prussia, the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany and the Soviet regime (Schulte-Peevers, 2011)), which is the basis of the eclectic atmosphere of Berlin today. Berlin has a young population, and is home to many immigrants (185 different nationalities live in the city).

Many people appreciate the city for its multicultural and diverse character (Schulte-Peevers, 2011). It has a lively culture, a highly developed art scene, and is called the party city of Europe. Berlin is innovative and seems to change continuously. As such, it is an attractive city to spend a study abroad. In the year 2010 Berlin hosted 16.000 international students, which is 12,2% of the total amount of students (i.e. 133.000) (Berlin.de, 2011).

1.5 Chapter contents

The theoretical framework, that underpins the analysis of this research, can be found in chapter 2. Chapter 3 then discusses the choices I have made concerning the research methodology. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings of the analysis. Finally, chapter 5 draws conclusions and gives a discussion.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This research explores home-making practices employed by international students living abroad, and the influence of temporary living abroad on the sense of home of international students in Berlin. To examine these topics, an exploration of the theoretical concepts implied in the questions is needed. This chapter presents the theoretical basis of the research, on which the chapter 4 relies.

Place attachment is fundamental to the concept of home. Therefore, this concept is outlined in 2.2. As the research focuses on home and home-making when studying abroad, 2.3 elaborates on the concept of home and 2.3.2 explores the concept of home-making.

2.2 Place attachment

“Place... is not only an arena for everyday life.. [it also] provides meaning to that life. To be attached to a place is seen as a fundamental human need and (...) as the foundation of ourselves and our identities” (Eyles, 1989:109).

Definitions of place attachment are various, but most scholars agree that it “characterizes the bonding between individuals and their important places” (Scannell & Gifford, 2010:1). Cresswell (2009:1) characterizes a place as “a combination of materiality, meaning, and practice”. What he means by this, shall become clear in the following sub paragraphs.

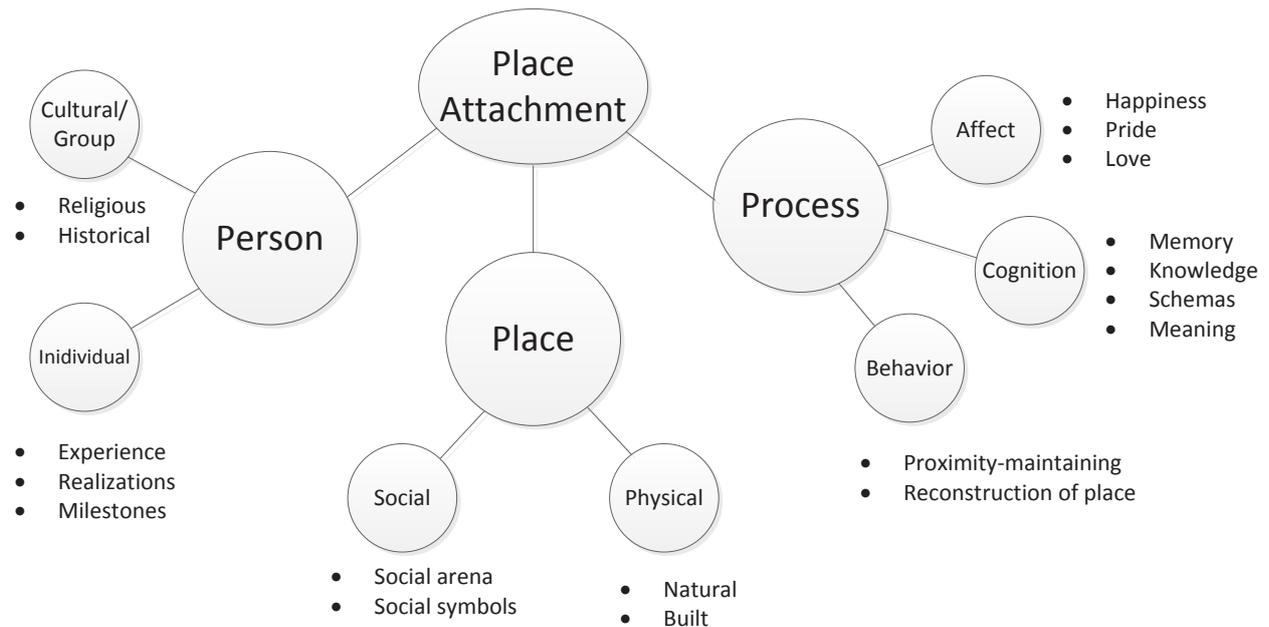
Chow et al. (2008) and Scannell et al. (2010) state that many different terms are used to give this connection to places a name; place attachment (Altman & Low, 1992), topophilia (Tuan, 1974), insideness (Rowles, 1983), place identity (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983), sense of place/ rootedness (Relph, 1976; Tuan 1980; Hay 1998). This research employs the concept of place attachment to describe the bond between people and places. This choice is based on the premise that place attachment encompasses a concern with the qualities and evaluation of places (Chow et al., 2008; Moore, 2000). This fits well in the focus of this research about the meaning of home and home-making in Berlin when temporary residing abroad.

Place attachment is a multifaceted concept and a dynamic process. Scannell et al. (2010) identify three dimensions that facilitate the bonding between people and place; person, place, and process (PPP-framework) (see figure 2.1, next page). The following will explore these dimensions, in a context of mobility.

2.2.1 The person dimension

Scannell et al. (2010) state that both individuals and groups develop attachment to place. Individually, people personally bind themselves to a place and as a result even identify with it. Important place experiences and interactions, “such as realizations, milestones, and experiences of personal growth” (Scannell et al., 2010:2) evoke memories of that place, and this in turn ascribes meaning to the place. As living and studying abroad might represent such experiences and interactions, it is likely that attachment to Berlin will be developed. At group level, particular groups of people may become attached to a place as it symbolizes their shared meanings or identities (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Shared place attachment may for example occur among Berliner residents, who identify with the Fernsehturm (TV tower), or among students, who identify with their university.

Figure 2.1 The place attachment model, adapted from Scannell et al. (2010:2)



2.2.2 The place dimension

People bind themselves to places of various geographic scales. Most research about place attachment has focused on the neighbourhood, but people may also bind themselves to a room, a home setting, a town or a village, a region, an urban metropolitan region, a nation, or even the earth (Altman et al., 1992; Gustafson, 2001b; Gustafson, 2009; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). Common places to feel attached to are settings of important emotional experiences and events in life (McAndrew, 1998). These can be places of growing up, the current place of residence, places of particularly moving experiences and places where one has lived for a long time (Relph, 1976). As a result, people often have strong bonds with “present or former “home” places” (Gustafson, 2001b:688).

The place dimension has both a social and physical aspect. Hidalgo et al. (2001) state that the former is more important than the latter, as people become bonded to places through “attachment to those who live there and to the social interactions that the place affords them” (Scannell et al., 2010:5). Social experiences bind people in place and make them feel attached to places that represent social interaction, like a coffee shop (Dayaratne et al., 2008; Scannell et al., 2010). This in turn strengthens a sense of community and a feeling of belonging (Dayaratne et al., 2008).

Further, recent studies show that people also may become attachment to other places than those of permanent residence (Scannell et al., 2010; Lewicka, 2011). Examples are places a person often travels to, or is aware of in a detailed way, like summer houses, second homes, outdoor recreation places, or university (Gustafson, 2001b; Lewicka, 2011). In addition, Lewicka (2011:223) mentions that people may be attached to various places, as “different places satisfy different (...) needs”. A place may serve recreational needs, social needs, or sporting needs. As a result, a multiple place attachment may arise (Scopelliti, 2010). Depending on the need and satisfaction, attachments to places may vary in importance, intensity, specificity and tangibility (Altman et al., 1992; Gustafson, 2009; Hidalgo et al., 2001; McAndrew, 1998).

2.2.3 The process dimension

The process dimension involves the way of becoming attached to a place and the emotions connected to that place. Scannell et al. (2010) divided this dimension in three psychological aspects, namely affect, cognition and behaviour. The process dimension is of special interest in this research, as it explores how home is made in a new environment, i.e. how one connects oneself to this new

environment. As will be seen, especially the aspect of behaviour is important. The following will address the three aspects.

Affect

People emotionally bind themselves to particular places. Feelings like happiness, pride and love are often named in relation to place attachment, which evoke, and are evoked by, comfort, stability, security, satisfaction, familiarity, and well-being (McAndrew, 1998; Moore, 2000, Scannell et al., 2010). As a result of this, people tend to stay close to the place of attachment (Hidalgo et al., 2001). However, although Scannell et al. (2010) do not address it in their framework, emotions related to place are not necessarily positive. For example, leaving the familiar environment often evokes emotions of detachment, grief, confusion and anxiety (Ng, 1998; Chow et al., 2008; Blunt et al., 2006). Also bad memories, fear, or alienation may be associated with places as a result of for example violence, oppression, or death (Blunt et al., 2006).

Cognition

“Place attachment as cognition involves the construction of, and bonding to, place meaning, as well as the cognitions that facilitate closeness to a place” (Scannell et al., 2010:3). Interaction and experiences in place evoke memories, beliefs, thoughts, meanings, values, preferences, and knowledge of that place (Scannell et al., 2010:3). These cognitive aspects, which are connected to physical and social features of the place, make the place unique to a person and evoke personal binding. Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff (1983) argue that this binding may lead to identification with a place; defining the self on the basis of “cognitions about the physical [and social] environment” (Scannell et al., 2010:3).

Attachment to a particular place is a cumulative process. The longer the length of residence, the more memorable experiences and events, social relations, satisfaction of goals and activities, and the stronger the connection and identification (Hidalgo et al., 2001; Scannell et al., 2010).

In addition, Scannell et al. (2010:3) cite Fullilove (1996), who identifies “familiarity as the cognitive component of place attachment”. Attachment means knowing the place and being able to organize it. In turn, this familiarity provides control, stability, comfort, satisfaction and predictability (McAndrew, 1998:409; Moore, 2000). This familiar feeling is again a reason to stay close to the place of attachment (Hidalgo et al., 2001), or, at moments of transition, to move to a similar environment. Familiarity may namely indicate attachment to a particular type of place (i.e. city, village, metropolis), or to particular physical features of places (i.e. buildings, parks, nature) (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell et al., 2010). Feldman (1990) calls this ‘settlement identity’. Lewicka (2011:216) states that as a result of increasing mobility, people shift to this new form of ‘settlement identity’, becoming, for example, a “‘mountain person’, ‘urbanite’, or ‘rural person’”. Kyle et al. (2004) argue that past experiences in and memories of such certain types of places can be supportive to become attached to new places.

Behaviour

Furthermore, place attachment is constituted and “expressed through action” (Scannell et al., 2010:4). Scannell et al. (2010:4) point at the importance of “proximity-maintaining behaviours” in this. The aspiration to remain close to the place of attachment is expressed by residing for a long time in the significant place. On the contrary, journeys away from the significant places may strengthen attachment. Case (1996) proved that alternating being at home and journeys away from home make people aware of the importance of home. Another behavioural expression is the reconstruction of place. When relocating, people then try to maintain a bond by looking for similar aspects in their new environment (Scannell et al., 2010). Paragraph 2.2.4 will elaborate on the conceptualization of mobility.

Behaviour that creates and expresses attachment is not only limited to moving and staying close to the place of attachment. Scannell et al. (2010) only describe proximity-maintaining behaviour, and barely elaborate on behaviour *in place* that develops and expresses place attachment. Chow et al. (2008) and Scopelliti (2010) have shown that when (international) students engage with activities (like engaging in sport clubs, leisure, getting to know people) in their new environment, their satisfaction about the new place increases and they quickly feel at home. Place-bonding is thus maintained, or quickly develops, when engaging activities to appropriate a place. Scott (2009) points also at particular repeated and routine use of place, which gives sense to everyday life. Behaviour in place that affects attachment will be further discussed in paragraph 2.3 about home-making.

2.2.4 Place attachment and mobility

The previous paragraphs already touched upon place attachment in relation to mobility. As the concept of mobility may take many different forms, it needs a further exploration. Adey (2010:1) stresses that mobility is “the new code word (...) for the new and extensive ways in which we live”; nowadays, everybody is concerned with mobility. Mobility appears in numerous forms. Urry (2000) identifies corporal, imaginative, virtual, and object mobility. This research speaks of corporal mobility: the physical mobility of persons. In turn, also this type of mobility captures many different forms, like commuting, travel, daily mobility, residential mobility, or (international) migration (Gustafson, 2009). Murpy-Lejeune (2002) identifies student mobility as a particular form of migration, as reasons and intentions of international students are not comparable to other groups of migrants, like immigrants, or asylum seekers. Students migrate temporary: they leave their country of origin, with the prospect of returning after a certain period, varying from a few months to a few years.

Scannell et al. (2010) and Chow et al. (2008) argue that providing continuity, across time and situation, is an important function of place attachment. Continuity “involves not the complete absence of change but some connection between the past, the present and the future within identity” (Speller, Lyons, & Twigger-Ross, 2002:43). Maintaining place-continuity is a base for a stable sense of self and provides predictability and familiarity. When experiencing mobility, especially long-term mobility, this continuity becomes disrupted (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). Speller et al. (2002:43) state that “absence of continuity is often experienced negatively” (Speller et al., 2002:43). Therefore, it is likely that mobility affects place attachment. This is something that Scannell et al. (2010) have barely touched upon in their model. They discuss mobility, but only in combination of journeys, and staying close to the place of attachment. They do not take more long-term forms of mobility into consideration. I would like to argue that long-term mobility, in the case of this research a few months to a year, is also a form of behaviour that affects place attachment.

A break of continuity means entering an unknown social and physical environment. The combination of leaving the familiar, and entering the unfamiliar, environment, may have implications on the sense of home and attachment to place (Chow et al., 2008; Dayaratne et al., 2008). Attachment to the former and current place of residence may strengthen, weaken, or change when experiencing mobility. Also multiple attachment to both places of origin and places where to one moves may occur (Scopelliti, 2010). The behaviour of mobility thus influences *and* expresses place attachment (the latter through for example proximity-maintaining behaviour, or looking for similarity) (Lewicka 2011). Case (1996) states that through mobility we get to learn the meaning of places.

Wiborg (2003) and Palmer, O’Kane & Owens (2009) argue that as a result of mobility, students may find themselves in ‘in-between-ness’ positions. This means that they are in an ambivalent situation of belonging: having the feeling they both belong and do not belong at the same time. On the one hand, students may experience individual freedom and self-development in the new place, allowing oneself to “make free, individual choices, independent of tradition, gender and social and geographical background which earlier directed and legitimated choices” (Wiborg, 2003:149). This

creates an opportunity to a search for the self, to think about what they want to do with their lives, “unmask, build or redefine identity”, or build a ‘desired identity’ (Brown et al., 1992; Chow et al., 2008; Palmer et al., 2009:47; Wiborg, 2003). However, at the same time students keep emotionally and socially bonded to their home place (Wiborg, 2003). Engagement with a new environment is then involved with anxiety and stress, and a study abroad can be traumatic as students break with old routines (Case, 1996; Chow et al., 2008; Wiborg, 2003). This makes them end up in a “betwixt space”: not knowing their place in the world yet (Palmer et al, 2009:38). Feeling ‘in-between’ may have implications on feeling at home in the new environment and the kind of home-making practices employed by students. Chapter 4 elaborates on that.

2.2.4 Place attachment and time

As already been noted, also time influences place attachment. Scannell et al. (2010) address this in their model, but not explicitly. Regarding the context of this research, time is a dimension of place attachment that should be given more attention, as international students only spend a certain time in Berlin, which might influence the way they engage in home-making practices and their sense of home in Berlin.

Smaldone (2006:47) argues that the bond between person and place “always encompasses a temporal element”. People always occupy a place for a certain amount of time, and a certain number of times. Also interaction with a place changes over time (Case, 1996). Hay (1998) and Altman et al. (1992) argue that place attachment strengthens over time: the longer the association, the more familiarity and memories, the stronger the bond. As students only live for a limited time in Berlin, also time to develop attachment is limited. Smaldone (2006) states that when engaging with a place for a limited amount of time, one feels mainly connected to the physical elements of a place. While time extends, this connection expands the environment, and social and emotional connections become more important. Through their limited time, participants in this research may thus build less strong social connections, and therefore develop only a moderate attachment to Berlin. Besides, “time also includes future” (Case, 1996:14), and since students already know they will leave Berlin again in the future, this may influence respondents’ engagement in practices and evoking a sense of home in advance (Bozkurt, 2009).

As it is assumed that time is a factor that may influence participants’ engagement in home-making practices and development of a sense of home in Berlin, it was added to the place attachment framework of Scannell et al. (2010), see figure 2.2.

2.3 Home

Home is one of the most common places to feel attached to and to identify with (Blunt et al., 2006; Chow et al., 2008). It therefore basically exists of the same dimensions of the PPP-framework of Scannell et al. (2010), described in paragraph 2.2. The concept of home is both concrete and abstract (Moore, 2000). Mostly, home indicates the centre of everyday life, “the location where one dwells”, which provides shelter, “contains one’s belongings”, and an important place to be with family and friends (Dayaratne et al., 2008:54; Blunt et al., 2006). This may indicate that home is connected to the house, but Hopkins (2010) argues that home may range further than, or is not even confined to, the house or the place where one lives. As already seen in paragraph 2.2.2, the scale of the place of attachment may vary, which also applies to home. When being away from home, it may still have significant meaning. Blunt et al. (2006), for example state that international migrants may feel at home in the place they have moved to, while keeping identifying with their native country or place. They then become attached to two places, and “home is shaped by memories (the imaginative, symbolic home) as well as everyday life in the present (the physical home)” (Blunt et al., 2006:202). Home is thus not necessarily connected to a geographical entity. It may also be a very strong affective

feeling, evoked by memories, and sometimes connected to certain objects, or senses (Blunt et al., 2006; Molz, 2008; Moore, 2000). Molz (2008) found that people who travel often have developed such kind of sense of home, so that they can evoke a homey feeling in mobility.

Because the cognitive elements (see paragraph 2.2.3) that constitute a home are personal, “different people understand home to mean different things at different times and in different contexts” (Chow et al., 2008:364). A broad range of associated meanings are positive, like privacy, fond memories, warmth, security, loved ones, intimacy, freedom, independence, safety, self-expression, continuity, work and leisure, comfort, and being in control (Blunt et al., 2006; Chow et al., 2008; Hopkins, 2010; Moore, 2000). However, just as other people-place bindings, meanings may also be negative (Blunt et al., 2006). It may be a place of bad experiences, or a place which is imposed by certain norms, related to for example age, gender, class, or ethnic divides (Holloway et al., 2001; Wiborg, 2003). This may make a person wanting to move away from the place he or she calls home. Home is therefore not static, but is made “in the process of living, and is in a constant process of consolidation and transformation” (Dayaratne, 2008:54). Attachment and meaning of home may thus change over time.

McAndrew (1998:411) states that especially students tend to have specific home and place bonding, as they “are often in a transitional period of life when relocations and the breaking of old attachments are especially salient issues”. During younger years, home may be regarded as oppressive, as the ability to be who you are and do what you want might be restricted due to control of parents. During the years of adolescence, many people leave this home place, and form a new home place on their own or with a partner. They gain more and more independence, mainly from their family. This might involve a changing bond to home (Hopkins, 2010).

4.4 Home-making

As home is a process, people are continuously engaged with “building, maintaining, and enhancing the feeling of home” (Dayaratne et al., 2008:66). A home is thus made (Blunt et al., 2006). The underlying focus of home-making is on expressing identity and social and territorial belonging, and serves to create a focus point of one’s “being in the world” (Chow et al., 2008; Dayaratne et al., 2008:54; Blunt et al., 2006; Mazumdar et al., 2009; Rivlin et al., 2001). Through home-making, one binds him or herself to a place, and becomes attached to it. Mostly, home-making is a process that happens without consciously being aware of it. However, at moments of transition, when the bond with home becomes threatened, motivations and practices to make a home become more highlighted (Chow et al., 2008:364; Dayaratne et al., 2008). People then move away from the place they call home, and enter an unknown environment. Disruption of continuity evokes a lack of familiarity, routines, (physical) comfort and security, control, and social relations or being part of a community. As a result of these lacks and disrupted feeling, the desire to feel ‘in place’ in the new environments evokes. This encourages the home-making process (Dayaratne et al., 2008; Kellett & Moore, 2003; Mazumdar et al., 2009). Home-making is “strongly related to feelings of well-being” (Rivlin et al., 2001:34). Being able to define, shape and control a bond with the new living environment which meets our needs is therefore stimulating a positive state of mind (Chow et al., 2008; Dayaratne et al., 2008).

Having said this, it can be argued that home-making is embedded in the concept of habitus. This concept was introduced by Bourdieu, and indicates “the mental structure that individuals develop by growing up in a certain social environment, and which determines how they perceive, value and act within this environment” (Flinterman, 2011). In turn, individuals themselves also structure this environment. The habitus is created within a certain social environment (a field), in which individuals with a similar social background tend to develop a similar habitus. This evokes mutual understanding and gives meaning to our place in the world (Flinterman, 2011). Friedman (2005:316) affirms that “societies are composed of a large number of [such] social fields”. He also argues that the practices

people engage with within a social field are ultimately aimed at feeling comfortable and 'at home'. The longer one lives in a place, the more he or she understands the practices of a particular field, and the more he knows how to behave and feels at home. When migrants move to their new country, they leave this known field and enter a new one, in which they have to learn to play with a new set of rules. They have to deal with for example new values, habits and languages, and this is what triggers them in making a home (Friedman, 2005).

2.4.1 Home-making practices

Paragraph 2.3 and 2.4 already showed that attachment to place is expressed by and developed through behaviour. This indicates that home is more than emotional, visual, or representational. Rather, people are also engaged with the *doing* of home (Adey, 2010). Cresswell (2004:82) agrees: "places are never finished but constantly produced through the reiteration of practices" (Cresswell, 2004:82).

Before further elaborating on home-making practices, it is worth explaining what is meant when using the word 'practice' in this research. It basically means what we *do*, and "how we encounter, apprehend, inhabit and move" (Merriman et al., 2008:192) (through) the world, to make our (everyday) lives meaningful. An important aspect of these practices is that they are often 'bodily': physical actions are used in the production of meaning (Adey, 2010). Through these embodied practices, meaning is also created in a combination of sensualities like touch, gesture, smells, sounds, and doing (Merriman et al., 2008). Practices are often mundane, and part of the everyday life; like vacuuming, drinking a cup of tea, doing groceries, going to university. These everyday activities often become routines. David Seamon has called the everyday practices in place a 'place-ballet' (Cresswell, 2005). With this term, he "suggests that places are performed on a daily basis through people living their everyday life" (Cresswell, 2005:34). Also home is thus performed through human practices.

Cresswell (2009) stresses that some practices define what is normal in a particular place. These practices are then part of the 'habitus'. By employing certain practices, it is possible to be 'in place', or 'out of place'. Especially when entering a new environment, people may feel 'out of place', as their employed practices are far from mundane and routinely. They then are more consciously engaged, revealing their underlying meaning and purpose. Practices are then employed to connect oneself to the environment (Dayaratne et al., 2008; Ng, 1998)). The next section will show this.

Home-making practices arise from the desire to express the self and create a desirable atmosphere, both in and outside the house. Through their everyday practices, people perform affective, social, and physical attachments, and feel at home (Blunt et al., 2006; Dayaratne et al., 2008; Molz, 2008; Rivlin et al., 2003).

One important home-making practice, especially when entering a new environment, is "filling the home spaces with things that represent values, affiliations, identities and aspirations of the owners" (Dayaratne et al., 2008:64). This also entails controlling of what and who is allowed in the home space, and what and who is not. This personalization of the house or room can be achieved by arranging and shaping it, and is often carried out by decorating (Shenk et al., 2004). (Personal) things are then used to demonstrate control over the home space, express the self, feel comfortable, or when relocating, maintain continuity (Mazumdar et al., 2009). Examples are reminders of close relatives and friends, achievements, events or ethnic values. People often bind themselves emotionally to such objects, as they "give them a sense of who they are, where they have come from, and where they are going" (Belk, 1992:37).

In addition, Belk (1992) stresses that also intangible elements are used to feel at home. They act to flourish up the living environment, or as reminders. Examples are particular thoughts, smells, music or other sounds, (landscape) views, or experiences. When relocating, intangible elements appear to

be important home-makers, as they are easy to take along. Bozkurt (2009:39) showed for example that Turkish migrants tried to create a homey atmosphere with “familiar smells, tastes and sounds, cultural practices and the exercise of rituals and traditions”.

Moreover, developing routines and rituals create a sense of home. Routines “give us a sense of what is ‘normal’, reduce the complexity of decision-making and make behaviour more predictable” (Marshall, 2006:70). Rituals indicate what to do in certain situations, and are therefore “indicative of social inclusion (or exclusion), and strengthen group solidarity and reduce anxiety (Marschall, 2006:75). Routines and rituals thus evoke familiarity with the environment, and “anchor people in their environment; giving individuals meaning about who they are, where they are, what they do, and why they do it” (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Shenk et al., 2004:159). Engaging with routines and rituals serves control and structure, and in turn predictability in that place (Dayaratne et al., 2008).

Frequently or routinely occupying certain places in the environment is part of this. A home is thus also made through territorial behaviour (Ng, 1998); “home-making practices extend to include the wider neighbourhood, suburb” or even city (Blunt et al., 2006:257). These include for example places where friends or family live, places to socialize, places to recreate, places to do groceries, places to educate (Dayaratne et al., 2008:65). As a result of the frequent use of these places, like certain buildings, streets, or shops, people bind themselves to a place, and this may evoke a familiar, homey feeling (Belk, 1992). Besides, Dayaratne et al. (2008:65) stress that at moments of transition, engaging (not necessarily routinely) with places in the environment allows the establishment of a ‘network of places’. This includes a familiar, predictable environment and gives a person a sense of orientation in, and understanding of, the new place of residence (Ng, 1998). It constitutes the “broader ‘home range’” (Dayaratne et al., 2008:65).

Another common routine and ritual practice that evokes and expresses a sense of home is cooking. Food is one of our most basic needs, and is normally consumed at defined times (Scott, 2009). Meals lend structure to the day, and so do practices to get the food (shopping). Besides, “timing and composition of each meal vary between cultures and groups, and are socially constructed according to local norms and values” (Scott, 2009:92). Eating habits, rituals, and routines in Berlin might thus be different than those in France, Spain, Italy or Switzerland. This shows that practices are also led by ethnicity, imposing certain directives of what is valued and appropriated in a home (Blunt et al., 2006). Besides, Mazumdar et al. (2009) have shown that homes often become appropriated through religious rituals, and Blunt et al. (2006) point at gendered imposed rules, such as women cooking, and men mowing the lawn.

Finally, Dayaratne et al. (2008) state that home is incomplete when it is socially isolated. Engaging with people, building up social relations, is therefore an important home-making practice, especially when entering an unfamiliar environment where no one is known. Moreover, being able to choose with whom we engage, social relationships allow us to define and express who we are. This again indicates that home-making is a process of being in control (Dayaratne et al., 2008).

Since home-making also has a major impact on the development of place attachment, I also add this concept to the framework of Scannell et al. (2010).

2.5 A revision of the PPP-framework

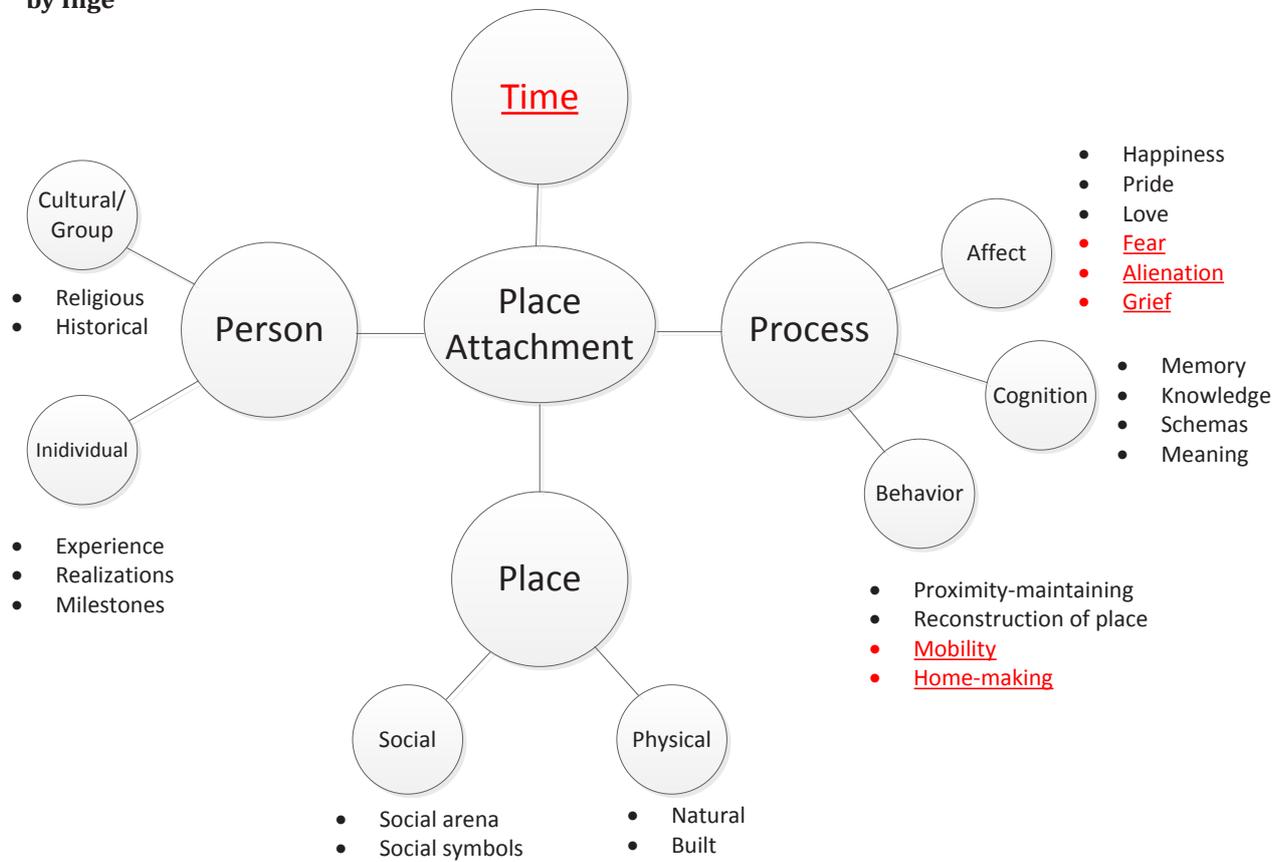
Throughout this chapter, it has become clear that people give places meaning, and bind themselves to places, through, among others, home-making practices. Therefore, I would like to add ‘home-making’ to the behaviour element of Scannell and Gifford’s (2010) framework. In the next chapter, I will further examine the importance of practices, by exploring what and why practices are employed to make a home in Berlin.

Besides, I add ‘mobility’ to this behaviour element of the PPP-framework. Place attachment may be affected by mobility. This will be further elaborated on in chapter 4, by exploring the way how home

matters when leaving the home place and residing temporary abroad.

Finally, a time dimension is added to the framework, as it may impact the engagement in the home-making process and development of attachment to, and a sense of home in, Berlin.

Figure 2.2 A revision of the model of place attachment, adapted from Scannell et al. (2010:2), revised by Inge



3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the research methodology. To start, 3.2 explains the qualitative nature of this research. Then, the different methods which were used to collect data are discussed in 3.3. 3.4 elaborates on the research population and 3.5 on the location of the research. Ethical considerations are described in §3.6, and the following chapters offer a discussion about positionality (§3.7) and reflexivity (§3.8). Finally, §3.9 examines the method of analysis.

3.2 Qualitative research

The research was conducted qualitatively, as the purpose of such research is to understand individuals, groups of people, or situations (Baarda, de Goede & Teunissen, 2005; O’Leary, 2010). It is a methodology that is appropriate to capture extensive personal experiences and opinions of individuals, which is exactly the purpose of this research: getting a deep understanding of home-making practices and the meaning of home. Understanding was obtained by fieldwork-based research (Mazumdar et al., 2009).

Within qualitative research subjectivities are accepted, as well as multiple perspectives and realities (O’Leary, 2010). It assumes that not one ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ exists; rather, the individual’s perception is what counts. **Observations and experiences of the individual on a phenomenon are then central**, and not the ‘objective’ phenomenon itself (Baarda et al., 2005; O’Leary, 2010; Van den Bersselaar, 2005). This means that “different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998:8). Research findings should however be trustworthy; being transferable to other settings or groups. Therefore “a clear and distinct description of culture and context, selection and characteristics of participants, data collection and process of analysis” is given here (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004:106).

Moreover, it is recognized that also the researcher is a subjective entity. Researchers may bias the answers of participants, or interpret them in different ways than the participants intended (Flowerdew et al., 2005). Therefore, a good reflection has to be made to the researchers’ role. This is discussed in §3.6.3.

3.3 Data collection techniques

Fieldwork was conducted to get a deep understanding of the practices employed to make a home in Berlin, and students’ perception of home when living temporary abroad. The data were gathered within a period of four months; from mid-February till mid-June 2011. Two main methods were used: in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation. Besides, also participant observation was done. Using several methods conducting a research allows the researcher “to collect ‘rich’ data and to gain intimate familiarity (Mazumdar et al., 2008:257). Interviews allowed capturing thoughts and feelings about home and home-making, photographs allowed capturing concrete aspects of home-making (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010), and participant observation allowed to become familiar with and understand experiences of international students.

3.3.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviewing is a common method in qualitative research. It intends to capture personal experiences and opinions by having extensive and deep conversations (Flowerdew et al., 2005; O’Leary, 2010). Conducting interviews “provides an opportunity for the participants to explore and clarify their experiences in a manner that a structured method such as a standardized questionnaire cannot” (Bih, 1992:136). Therefore, in-depth interviews were the main method used to capture the meaning and importance of home, mobility, and home-making when living abroad for study

reasons.

An interview guide was set up, consisting of open-ended questions which covered the main themes of the research (see appendix 1). The themes were determined by reading secondary literature, personal experiences and a pilot interview (Flowerdew et al., 2005).

The interviews had semi-structured nature. This allowed me to “follow the natural flow of the conversation” (O’Leary, 2010:195). As a result, all interview themes were discussed, but almost never in the order of the questions of the interview guide. The semi-structured nature also allowed for broader discussion, gaining new ideas about the topics of home, mobility, and home-making (Anderson, 2010).

A consequence of the conversation-like character of semi-structured interviews is that no interview can be exactly repeated. Answers of participants are dependent on their own circumstances (for example happy, sad, tired), and on the physical circumstances (where is the interview held, in a busy, noisy environment, or a quiet environment, in a familiar or unfamiliar environment, for example). The circumstances of a second interview with the same participant are always different from the first one, and the precise outcomes of a second interview will therefore never be the same as the first one. The validity of interviews may be called to question, as participants are inclined to give different answers in different circumstances (Flowerdew et al., 2005). However, as mentioned in §3.2, subjectivities are acknowledged in this research. Instead of being objective, this research aims to obtain a detailed understanding of experiences and meanings of home and home-making, and it is recognized that these are influenced by time, setting and myself (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

Interviews were recorded with a voice-recorder. This allowed me to concentrate fully on the interview, and to listen to the interview repeatedly. By doing this, things might be heard which were not noticed during the actual interview. The interviews lasted one to two hours and were conducted in English. Afterwards, all interviews were transcribed, so they were suitable for being analyzed in the text analysis program MAXQDA (Flowerdew et al., 2005).

3.3.2 Photo-elicitation

In addition to the interviews, photographs made by participants were used to capture home-making practices. The use of visual research methods in qualitative research becomes more and more popular, due to the assumption that “much of our knowledge about the world is build on the visual” (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010:96). Therefore, photos may reveal meanings that might not be come to consideration or might be overlooked in a face-to-face interview (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). For example, in this research, some respondents photographed their clothes because they provided control over the self and the stay in Berlin. In a normal interview, they would perhaps not have thought about it, as clothes are just obvious in everyday life. But the photo assignment got them thinking carefully about their home-making practices, which may have led to the recognition of clothes as important to feel comfortable and at home in Berlin. Photo-elicitation was thus used to gain a deeper understanding of home-making practices and experiences by international students. Kyle et al. (2007:215) argue that making photographs helps participants to express their “thoughts, reactions and feelings”. Photos thus acted as a medium of communication.

Moreover, Loeffler (2004) points at the power relationship between researcher and participant within the photo-elicitation method. In much qualitative research this power relationship is unequal, for example as a consequence of the researcher deciding what is being talked about during the interview. Within photo-elicitation, the participant gets empowered as the focus is on the photographs made by him or her. Instead of the researcher, the participant takes the lead in the interview, deciding what is important and what is talked about during the interview (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Loeffler, 2004). Besides, as participants were free to take as much time as they needed to take photos, I got a detailed view of respondents’ experiences of home-making, without “intruding on

their daily schedules or following them around” (Cele 2006:155).

Prosser (1998) also sees the benefits of using photographs in the research process, not only in a practical way, but also for the presentation of the research. It gives a research more power and clearness when being able to visually show the things that are being discussed.

In this research, photos were taken prior to the interview. Participants were asked to take five to ten photos of things which made them feel comfortable and at home in Berlin. These things could be everything: for example objects, places, people, events, (sensory) experiences, etcetera. 58 photos were made in total. The photos were discussed during the interview. The conversation was mainly focused on why the photos were meaningful to the respondent and in what way they contributed to feeling at home (Kyle et al., 2007).

3.3.3 Participant observation

During the four months I lived in Berlin to conduct this research, I kept personal notes about my own experiences as an international student, acting as a participant observer (Kyle et al., 2007). Participant observation is a technique whereby “researchers are, or become, part of the (...) group they are observing” (O’Leary, 2010:210). By being participating in the setting in respondents’ daily life, the research population is to some extent researched from the inside, instead of the outside (O’Leary, 2010, Swanborn, 1991). This is fair for the research, as Baarda et al. (2005) argue that when a phenomenon is studied within its own context, the eventual results will be most close to reality. As I already was an international student myself, I did not have to act or try to immerse myself into an international student’s world. This was very useful to get a detailed understanding and become familiar with the everyday life of international students and issues that concern them. However, my stay in Berlin had a different intention than that of the respondents; I was there to obtain information from them. This constituted an unequal relationship between us; I being able to use their information in my research (Asselin, 2003). Participant observation was only used to achieve understanding of participants’ everyday life, and was not employed to collect primary data, as the method may be tricky, relying too much on my own experiences as international student (Asselin, 2003) (see §3.7 for more information on the role of the researcher). As I wanted to get a detailed understanding of students’ experiences, I had to separate my own experiences from those of the respondents.

Notes were maintained in a small notebook. They were kept semi-structured: relating to home-making, belonging, home, mobility, temporality, living and studying in Berlin; and unstructured, as I observed and noted without any predetermined criteria. Any feeling or experience I had which seemed relevant was described (O’Leary, 2010). The notes were transcribed and analysed in MAXQDA.

3.4 Research participants

This section focuses on the participants of the research. First, 3.4.1 gives a definition of the term ‘international student’. Then 3.4.2 discusses upon the way of gathering the participants. 3.4.3 shows the characteristics of the participants.

3.4.1 Defining international students

Although the number of international students worldwide is increasing, a universal agreement defining an international student does not exist. In this research I employ the definition of The Institute of International Education (2011): “students who undertake all or part of their higher education experience in a country other than their home country or who travel across a national boundary to a country other than their home country to undertake all or part of their higher education experience”. The student may either stay for a few months, completing a semester, or for a longer period, doing a

complete degree (Andrade, 2006).

In Germany, the international student population is divided into two categories. The first one is called *Bildungsausländer*, which includes students from abroad who are in Germany for study reasons. The second one is *Bildungsinländer*; those who were born outside Germany but went to a German secondary school and have German residency status (World Education Services, 2007). This research thus only focuses on *Bildungsausländer*, as it studies a (changing) sense of belonging and home-making after having made the transition to Berlin.

Germany appears to be a popular destination for international students: in 2010 180.000 *Bildungsausländer* were registered in the country (DAAD, 2010), of which 16.000 (i.e. 12.2%) in Berlin (Berlin.de, 2011). That is 2.2% of Berlin's total population.

3.4.2 Recruiting the participants

According to Hughes (2004), research about international students can be challenging, as it is a broad research population. **International students have very diverse backgrounds; meaning that they possess a large heterogeneity in personal, linguistic, cultural and educational terms.** Previously, I did a small research about the same sort of topic; home-making by international students in Groningen, only focused on material culture. In this previous research, whereby the only premise to take part in the research was to be an international student in Groningen, I also experienced the large heterogeneity of the international student population. Students from different parts of the world appeared to have different thoughts about home and home-making, resulting in the fact it was difficult to find a focus in the research and establish commonalities.

Therefore, this research focuses on students from a more narrow geographical area. Examining Dutch students seems beneficial: we share backgrounds and language, which would result in a deep understanding (Flowerdew et al., 2005). However, it was decided not to do this. Asselin (2003:100) argues that having too many similarities with the research population prevents from gaining detachment, which is "necessary to analyze data objectively". Keeping distanced from the research population is thus more fruitful for a less biased research.

Hall (1995) argues that **people coming from the same community or nation are more likely to give meaning to the world in a similar way, as they belong to the same culture.** This indicates that students coming from a same geographical area may ascribe similar meanings to home and belonging, which makes the results of the interviews more comparable to one another. Therefore, this research only focuses on French and Spanish students, with the exception of one Italian and one Swiss.

French and Spanish students seemed easiest to find in Berlin. Yet, recruiting participants was not easy, a consequence of **the usual semester break starting from the beginning of March till the end of April.** A lot of students take the opportunity to visit the place of origin or travel to other cities or countries during this period. Besides, it is also the time in which first semester international students leave and second semester students arrive in Berlin. Accidentally, I arrived just at the beginning of this break, which made it difficult to find students. **The consequence was the participation of one Swiss and one Italian student.** See table 3.1 for an overview of the characteristics of the respondents.

Recruiting was focused on gathering a various group of respondents (within the geographical delineation), as the captured experiences of home, mobility and home-making in Berlin would then be more diverse, leading to broader understanding of the studied phenomenon (Graneheim et al., 2004). To achieve this, respondents living in different parts of Berlin (Kreuzberg, Tiergarten, Moabit, Friedrichshain, Pankow, Mitte, Wedding, Charlottenbug) were recruited, as well as respondents being part of different 'friend groups', were gathered. Flowerdew et al. (2005) namely point at the risk of only interviewing a narrow circle like-minded people. This was indeed experienced with two 'members' of the same group of friends, whom shared many experiences. **Also five women and six men were recruited, to get an idea of whether men and women ascribed different meanings to home,**

attachment and home-making. Yet, this appeared not to be the case.

The 11 participants of this research were recruited in different ways. Two students whom I knew personally were willing to participate. Further, I used several gatekeepers to gather respondents: my friends and employees of the Department of Geography of Humboldt University. Also putting up posters at the university resulted in two participants. Finally, snowballing was used to find participants: one participant was used to find new participants (Flowerdew et al., 2005). These different recruiting techniques resulted in finding different participants with different backgrounds. Through this, different meanings and experiences were gained.

After getting potential participants' e-mail addresses, they got an e-mail with more detailed information about the research (see appendix 2). This e-mail contained information about the outline of the research and shortly introduced the photograph part. After their confirmation to participate, a second e-mail was sent, with more detailed information about the photographing (see appendix 3). Participants then decided how much time they needed for taking the pictures, and on the basis of that we set a date for the interview. This gathering of participants and keeping into contact by e-mail turned out to be fruitful, although in some cases a reminder was needed.

Table 3.1 Overview of respondents

Participant	Gender	Age	Origin	Time spent in Berlin at time of interview	Total time to spend in Berlin
Agnes	Female	23	France	8 months	2 years
Pascale	Male	22	France	8 months	1 year
Elisa	Female	25	Spain	1 year	1 year
Mireille	Female	21	France	8 months	1 year
Alexander	Male	33	Switzerland	3 years	Does not know yet
Felipe	Male	23	Spain	3 months	6 months
Marie	Female	21	France	8 months	1 year
Étienne	Male	21	France	3 months	6 months
Domenico	Male	24	Italy	4 months	6 months
Eduardo	Male	22	Spain	9 months	1 year
Sylvie	Female	22	France	4 months	6 months

3.5 Location of the interviews

Interviews were conducted in participants' rooms. This was regarded as a suitable interview location, as it quickly becomes difficult to find a quiet environment in Berlin, suitable for recording the interviews. Besides, all respondents had stored their photographs on their laptop, which made an interview in the room more convenient as they did not have to take the laptop to some other place. Although the research showed that many home-making practices extended the house, still the room was often associated with home and home-making. It thus provided an appropriate location to talk about these topics. Moreover, when discussing (important things in) the room, I could immediately observe these things and their context, and thereby get a richer understanding. Also the living situation and the atmosphere in the house could be observed (Bih, 1992; Elwood & Martin, 2010).

Elwood et al. (2010) write about the power relations between researcher and participant, which becomes less unbalanced when interviewing in the participant's home. They argue that this enables the participant to have more authority, and to contribute valuable knowledge. More details about the power relations between researcher and participant will be discussed in §3.5.3.

All participants were living in a 'WG' (Wohngemeinschaft). This means that several independent people live together in an apartment. All tenants have separate rooms, but kitchen, bathroom and sometimes living room are shared. Not only students live in a WG, also single persons already working often share an apartment together (Studieren-im-Netz, 2011). Unlike a lot of other countries and

cities, where international students often live in a residence hall, the majority of international students in Berlin live in a WG. There are several residence halls in Berlin, but most of them are occupied by students from outside Europe (Freie Universität Berlin, 2011).

3.6 Research ethics

Researchers “have an explicit and fundamental responsibility towards the researched. The dignity and well-being of respondents, both mentally and physically, is absolutely crucial” (O’Leary, 2010:40). §3.6.1 and §3.6.2 reflect on considerations and decisions to serve this responsibility regarding this research.

Besides, as already mentioned, doing research is often not a matter of collaboration of equals. Researchers hold power over their interviewees, which might influence the research. It is important to be aware of this (Cloke et al., 2004). Therefore, also reflexivity and positionality are addressed in §3.6.3.

3.6.1 Informed consent

For ethical reasons, it is necessary that participants have an understanding of the purpose of the research, are fully aware of their involvement in it, of their commitments and rights, and of the outcomes and uses of the data (Hughes, 2004; O’Leary, 2010:40). Participants of this research got to know about the intentions of this research through the two e-mails they got (see appendix 2 and 3). Prior to the interview the research was explained again, and the topics of the interview were identified prior to the interview itself (see appendix 1). Questions could be asked at any time of this process prior to the interview, just as withdrawing from the research.

3.6.2 Confidentiality

A different part of ethical agreements is to ensure that the identity of participants is protected (Babbie, 2007; O’Leary, 2010). Therefore, participants were given a fictitious name. The tapes of the interviews were only used by me. After transcribing, the tapes were erased. Transcripts were kept for analyzing and stored on my computer to which only I have access. Participants were asked for permission for publication of the photographs they had taken. **This was necessary as the photographs might contain personal information.** All participants agreed with this.

3.7 Positionality

Conducting interviews means using the self as a research instrument. A researcher may possess numerous social characteristics which influence the study, either in positive or negative ways. It is needed to recognize my “social situatedness. (...) with respect to [my] subjects” (Nagar & Geiger, 2007:267), as different positionalities shape the research and interpretations of both the researcher and participants (Flowerdew 2005).

To start with, I was an international student myself conducting this research. This made me in part an ‘insider’: being a member of the international student population in Berlin, having the same age group (21-25), being in the same stage of life, being familiar with the environment and the ‘international student way of life’. However, on the other hand, I was an ‘outsider’: **not sharing origin, language, studies, year of studies, time spent in Berlin, and being an Erasmus student, and not knowing each other prior to the research (Ganga & Scott, 2006). More importantly, the intention of my stay in Berlin was doing research, which only coincidentally made me an international student. This resulted in an unequal relationship between me and the respondents, as I aimed at exploring their experiences, and had the power to use the information they gave me (Asselin, 2003).**

Similarities between researcher and participant may support the research: sharing a common background “can have a positive effect, facilitating the development of a rapport between interviewer

and interviewee and thus producing a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy and mutual respect and understanding” (Flowerdew et al., 2005:113). **For example, the common bond between me and the participants often supported to create a confidential relationship.** Several respondents indicated that they agreed to participate because we were both students: “and we help each other out” (Pascale) (Asselin, 2003). Despite our unequal power relationship, respondents regarded me as ‘one of them’. This created pleasant, comfortable research circumstances (Flowerdew et al., 2005). For example, during the interview with Felipe we drank two beers, and he was eating a pizza. This setting was very ‘two friends hang out’-like; it faded power hierarchies between us, and created an atmosphere in which it was more easy to talk about sensitive topics (Elwood et al., 2010). Also the fact that the interview took place in students’ room gave them the ability to create a research setting in which they felt most comfortable, having control about what was going to happen.

Moreover, being an international student myself made that I shared many similar experiences of living in Berlin; for example of making a home in Berlin. The danger of such awareness of issues concerning an international student is ‘pre-understanding: I may have found quotations so obvious and ‘taken-for-granted’, focussing on my own experiences on similar events, that I “identified a problem prematurely without delving deeper to examine all data or fail to recognize a problem that exists” (Asselin, 2003:100). This happened during one of the first interviews:

Interviewer: so what really contributes to feeling at home for you is people, and also routines, but also material stuff?

Domenico: yeah... sure... my own bed... it’s important... what was important for me as well was the fact that I bought a bike... I think that makes me understand that I was at home here in Berlin...

Interviewer: and is it also like you are more in control of what you are doing here?

Domenico: not that... but you are... inside the life of Berlin. So for example when I’m at home and I take my bike, it’s like ok I know the streets and I know what I want and discover other places. And for example when you are on holiday, you don’t have a bike. Well maybe in Holland yes but in Italy not, so... haha. [So here], you are like... a citizen of Berlin.

I experienced having a bike in Berlin as being in control of where you are going and what you are doing. I kind of imposed this experience on Domenico, but he had a totally different reason for cherishing his bike. Luckily he was not influenced by my statements. **After transcribing this interview I realized it was important to “separate [my] own experiences from those of participants” (Asselin, 2003:101).**

Having said this, it is clear that familiarity with the research setting may have affected my objectiveness, as “expectations, past experiences, beliefs, and emotions can prevent the researcher from achieving a detachment necessary for analyzing data objectively” (Asselin, 2003:100). To separate my own experiences and feelings from participants, I kept notes to ‘observe myself’. These notes contained feelings and thoughts about my experiences of being an international student, but also about experiences and thoughts of interviewing (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

3.8 Reflexivity

Eleven interviews were conducted over a period of 4 months. Graneheim et al. (2004) argue that when the data collection process extends over time, there is a risk of variation within the content of, in this case, interviews. Indeed, during the data collection process, I acquired new insights about home, mobility, and home-making, as a result of own experiences and those of participants. The consequence was that the content of the first and last interview was somewhat different.

In addition, the motivation of this research was my former research about home-making by international students in Groningen. Before coming to Berlin, I therefore already had preconceptions about how students may experience home and make themselves a home in Berlin. The research setting in Groningen was different from the one in Berlin, which may have lead to wrongly made

assumptions. However, the research in Groningen did not involve the elicitation of photographs made by participants, so not I, but mainly participants had much control on deciding the course and themes of the research.

Moreover, interviews were held in English; a language which was the native language for neither the interviewer nor interviewee. This might evoke linguistic misunderstandings between the researcher and interviewee (Hughes, 2004). Moreover, when having a conversation in another language, it is more difficult to express yourself (O'Leary, 2010). For example:

Sylvie: to live abroad.... To be open-minded. To be... I don't know how to say it in English... ehm....
Auf Deutsch: fleißig zu sein....

This is also an example of the problem many students pointed at: they mainly spoke German during their stay in Berlin, which constrained them to maintain their English vocabulary. The mixed usage of English, German and the native language may have caused less deep conversations between researcher and interviewee (O'Leary, 2010).

The origin of the participants of this research was limited to only a few South- and Mid European countries; mainly Spain and France. It would give a more complete picture when investigating experiences on home and home-making of students coming from other geographical areas, to get an idea of differences and therefore a broader view of the meaning of home and home-making to international students. It would for example be likely that students from Asia or Africa have different experiences of home and home-making than Europeans, due to their different cultural norms and values.

3.9 The analysis

After conducting the interviews, they were transcribed and uploaded in the text analysis program MAXQDA. Transcribing was done within a few days after the interview, as the circumstances of the conversations were still fresh in memory. Baarda et al. (2005) point at the risk of forgetting details, which increases the risk of subjectivity and bias, which is higher the longer one waits with transcribing an interview.

Data were analyzed with both predetermined codes, set by secondary literature and theory, and codes set purely from the data itself (Flowerdew et al., 2005). This allowed the discovering and uncovering of relevant themes (O'Leary, 2010). Analysis focused on how respondents talked about attachment to place, home, home-making and mobility. Also the meaning of every single home-making practice was coded into different categories, inspired by Bih (1992). Analysis thus centred on both feelings and concrete aspects of the topics being studied. Some pieces of text contained information for two codes. These pieces were then coded twice (Flowerdew et al., 2005). Also personal notes about my own experiences of living in Berlin and conducting research were coded.

3.9.1 Analysis of photographs

During the interviews, the photos made by participants were discussed. Also these conversations were transcribed and analyzed in MAXQDA (see previous paragraph).

Analysis of the photographs was focused on the meanings students wanted to communicate through the pictures. It was assumed that the things on the photos had no fixed meaning. Rather, meaning was constructed (Hall, 1997:3). This means that the pictured aspects were representations; they were used to express ideas, values feelings, concepts, people, places, identities, affiliations and aspirations concerning feeling comfortable and making a home (Dayaratne et al., 2008:64). The same element could be pictured by different students for different reasons. Meaning was ascribed by for example using the things in a particular way, tell particular stories about them, or having specific emotions

associated with them. The process of ascribing meaning is always selective. Students thus had the power to emphasize certain important home-making practices, and ignoring others (Holloway et al., 2001).

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

Interviews, along with photographs, showed the “richness and complexity” of the practice of home-making, and the meaning ascribed to the concept of home, when living abroad (Chow et al., 2008:366). International students making a home in Berlin encountered conditions in the new environment that were different from those that they were used to in the country of origin (Ng, 1998). They experienced the absence of familiar, and/or the presence of unfamiliar, places, people, situations and experiences (Kellett et al., 2003). As a result, they employed a various range of home-making practices to “build, maintain, and enhance the feeling of home” (Dayaratne et al., 2008:66). After operationalizing the word ‘home’ in 4.2, 4.3 discusses the practices employed by students to make a home.

Furthermore, living in Berlin and the employment of home-making practices, supported the development of attachment to Berlin. This, along with the move away from the place of origin (often considered as the home place), caused in many cases the development of different thoughts about the meaning of home. Also the temporary nature of the stay in Berlin affected the engagement in home-making practices and respondents’ perception of home. Paragraph 4.4 elaborates on the evolution of the perception of home through living in a new environment, in a context of a temporal stay.

4.2 Operationalization: the meaning of home

The concept of home is central within this research. However, as already seen in chapter 2, it may mean different things, especially regarding the scale. Therefore, this paragraph elaborates shortly on how respondents perceived the word ‘home’. When talking about home during the interviews, most respondents meant their place of origin. This was the place where they had lived most part of their lives, where knew many people, and had lots of experiences. Most often, home was a city, in few cases it was a village, and in one case it was a house. However, alongside the place of origin, respondents sometimes also spoke about their country designating their home. On the contrary, Eduardo did not associate home with his place of origin at all. To him, it was more a matter of feeling comfortable. Further, as will become clear in 4.4.2, some students designated a certain environment, or a specific feeling, as their home.

Through residing and home-making practices in Berlin, also home became related to Berlin. This makes the meaning of ‘home’ in this research even more complicated. In the following, it is thus dependent on the context what is meant by ‘home’. Paragraph 4.3 elaborates particularly on making a home in Berlin. ‘Home’ will then indicate (the feeling that is establishing in) Berlin. With ‘back home’ the place of origin is meant. Paragraph 4.4 will then elaborate more on the meaning of home.

3.3 The process of making a home

Participants showed that they made themselves a home in Berlin by actively employing various practices. Through social and territorial behaviour *in place*, practices provoked the bonding to the new environment of Berlin (Ng, 1998). Respondents’ home-making process can be distinguished into five sets of practices:

- Practices to maintain social continuity
- Practices to be in control
- Practices to establish and maintain social relationships
- Practices to become part of the new community and environment
- Practices to maintain physical and sensory continuity

The following paragraphs elaborates on each of these topics.

4.3.1 Practices to maintain social continuity

Through relocation, international students distance themselves from their existing social relationships (Chow et al., 2008:362). Respondents became aware of the fact that their move to Berlin had disrupted their experience of social continuity (Bih, 1992; Chow et al., 2008). They missed their family and friends and felt alone in Berlin. In an effort to make the disruption less severe, all students maintained links with important people in the country of origin, in several ways. Through these practices, students affirmed the need for social continuity when residing abroad (Bih, 1992; Chow et al., 2008). This paragraph discusses the role of the computer and decorations in meeting this need.

Computer

Three participants photographed their computer as it provided contact with their beloved ones back in the country of origin. This contact occurred via internet, i.e. e-mail, Skype, and social media like Facebook. Felipe stressed that it was important to stay into contact with friends and family: *“you keep up with the news [from beloved ones] and are not shot from what your friends are doing”*. Thus, although Felipe made the decision to reside in a new environment, he needed to stay informed with his previous environment. Especially the first few weeks he Skyped with his parents every day. He needed this connectedness with his previous environment, as he felt alone and had only a few social contacts in his new environment. Back in Spain, Felipe had contact with his parents only few times a month. The transition to Berlin had thus changed his need for contact with them: it made him much more aware of the importance of his family as emotional supportive, and something to fall back on (see also paragraph 4.4.2). These social contacts thus facilitated the transition to Felipe’s new living environment (Bih, 1992).

Through leaving the country of origin, the computer attained a different meaning. Before the move, Felipe also used the computer to employ social media, but he primarily had face-to-face contacts with friends and family. However, once living in Berlin, it became by far the easiest medium to have direct contact with family and friends. He emphasized that his life in Berlin would be different when not having a computer. Now, he was still well connected to his previous environment. As a result, he was less motivated to establish social relationships in Berlin; something that would be different when not having a computer.

However, after getting to know more people in Berlin, the intensity of social contacts with people back home started to reduce. Felipe cherished these new contacts as they enabled him to do things and discover in Berlin (see paragraph 4.3.4). As a result of new social contacts he was less dependent of people back home to feel comfortable in Berlin. He still maintained contact, but to a lesser extent. Molz (2008) and Tognoli (2003) also saw that maintaining contact with close family and friend during the first few weeks of a stay abroad manifests a less lonely feeling, but that new social contacts in the new environment eventually reduce the need of contacts with people back home.

Decorations: gifts

Another way to satisfy the need of connection with loved ones in the country of origin was carried out symbolically. Several students photographed gifts from friends that most of them took along from their country of origin to Berlin. As such, they engaged themselves in this practice even before their move to Berlin. This indicates that home-making is a process that already starts in the country of origin, by thinking about what to take to the new environment. In all cases, the cherished objects were displayed in the room in the form of decorations. They were important for what they represented; namely a close relationship with parents or friends. The objects were tangible evidences

of friendships and fond memories of loved ones, and therefore expressed emotional attachment and social identity (Belk, 1992; Shenk et al., 2004). For example, Elisa photographed a tinkering that her friends made her before leaving to Berlin (see figure 4.1). They had written down sympathetic messages on it. It mattered a lot to her: *“by this I remember my friends and feel more at home, because I know they think of me”*. At moments of loneliness, Elisa would look at the tinkering. She then felt connected to her friends through the piece of paper. It comforted her, and consequently, felt less alone. She thus managed to reproduce a feeling through the tinkering, without having the cause of the feeling physically close to her. Elisa transformed the tinkering into a ‘comforter’ (Bih, 1992): it mattered because her friends made it, not because it was a piece of paper with writings on it.



Figure 4.1 Gifts (Elisa). Comment: *“The day before I came here my friends threw me a surprise party. And they made a very long thing of paper, and they all wrote something down on it: ‘oh Elisa...’ So by this I remember my friends and feel more at home because I know they think of me.”*

4.3.2 Practices to be in control

Respondents developed a sense of home in Berlin by employing practices in order to exercise control. Rivlin et al. (2001) indeed argue that being in control is one of the qualities of home. Through various practices, participants became in control of their own space, and enabled themselves to be who they are (Dayaratne et al., 2008). They thus symbolized the power dynamics of the home (Blunt et al., 2006). Especially Eduardo cherished this being in control, as in Spain he felt subordinated to the power of his parents:

“I’ve never considered my house in Spain like home. There was something missing... I couldn’t be myself. Not only in... you know... in a sexual level so to speak, because my father for instance doesn’t know about me being gay. But also... not being able to invite who you want to, in your bed... And you know when you are living with your parents, they have dinner at this time, not in another time. And you may come later and eat alone, but then they fern up on you. And I’m like leave me alone, I’ve got my own timetable, I have no time for those things. And they cannot understand that. That’s the most unhomish thing I could think about. When you’re living with somebody who not respects your own sphere. So that’s very important, to have a complete personal liberty.”

As a result of the imposed norms and rules by his parents, Eduardo was happy to move away from Spain (Wiborg, 2003). The relocation in Berlin was Eduardo's first experience of living without his parents. He extremely valued this personal liberty that accompanies studying abroad. It was the first time in his life he was totally in control of who to invite, what and when to eat, what to do, and so forth. One expression of being in control and create an sense of home was appropriating the room. This was to many other students a significant practice to make a home, and is discussed in the following. Also the meaning of clothes in exercising control will be highlighted.

Appropriating the room

From the beginning of their stay in Berlin, all participants, except for Agnes, resided in a furnished room. This may seem like an advantage; furniture does not need to be bought, and the interior does not need to give a thought on. However, every single participant claimed to have changed the layout of the room in some way. Before, they could not identify with their room as it did not contain any personal elements. They felt a bit alienated: "...the room ... I immediately thought: I have to change this and that and that. I didn't like... I felt a bit like a stranger in this room, while I'd supposed to live in it for six months!" (Mireille). In order to change this feeling, and to be able to become attached to it, they had to endow the room with value; appropriate it (Blunt et al., 2006). Appropriating the room allowed participants to leave their mark on the room and shape and define a bond with it. They were in control of what was and was not allowed in the room, and were enabled to organize the room "*a bit more the way you like it*" (Agnes). Shenk et al. (2004:159) also point at the importance of "arranging, molding and even manipulating space" in order to personalize a space, and consequently be in control of it. Pascale describes the practice of reorganizing as an important way to appropriate his room:

"I think it's what this place makes it a home; to reorganize the room. For example... this thing [wardrobe] was already there but the rest was really not where it stands now. Everything was in different places. But yeah I needed to create my own space... so I moved everything, like to re-appropriate myself... I think it helps a lot. Obviously to organize things makes you feel at home. You know everything... And also cleaning... it's a bit like dogs peeing... haha. It's just to organize things as you want to and then to pee."

This quote also indicates that reorganizing the room was often not a matter of not liking the room. Rather, it was a matter of claiming the space, and being actively in control of it.

Besides rearranging, many students decorated their room to appropriate it and demonstrate control. 4.2.1 already showed the use of objects reminding of loved ones back in the country of origin. Other students put art, posters of events they went to (see paragraph 4.2.4), or things they made themselves, on their wall: "*I like to put things in my style, you wouldn't find it anywhere*". Others were happy to buy more furniture: "*I bought my own furniture. This definitely helped to make my home, because it was new stuff I could choose myself*" (Agnes). Pascale mentioned having plants in his room as appropriating practice (see figure 4.2). To him, plants were something to take care of. It gave him the feeling that he was in control of something in Berlin, as he was responsible for the 'well-being' of the plants. Having the plants sort of justified his stay in the city as he felt that the plants needed him. Besides, the plants acted as physical comfort: they made the room livelier and were one of the things that transformed the room into a home.



Figure 4.2 Plant (Pascale). Comment: *"I think it makes the room more lively."*

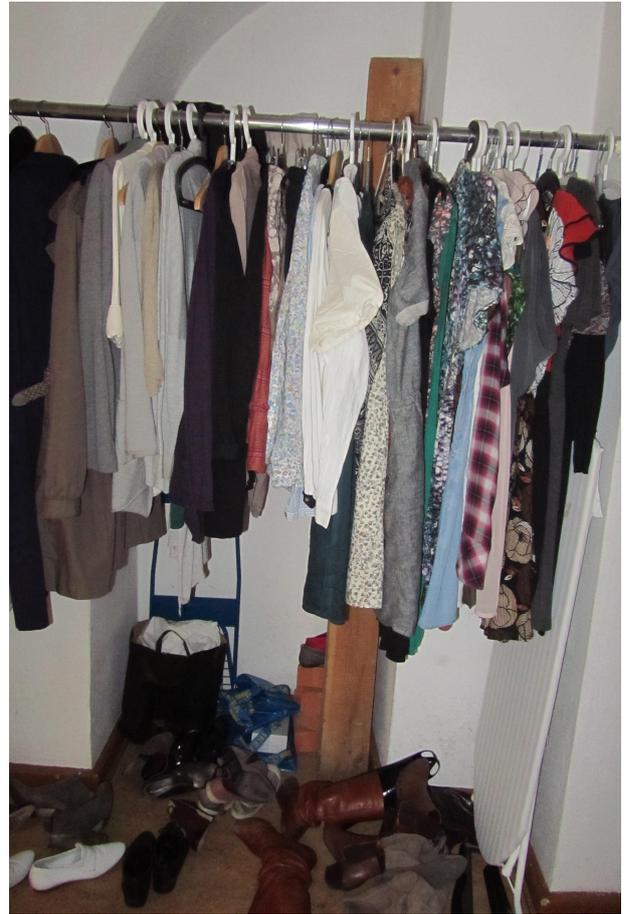


Figure 4.3 Clothes (Marie).

Clothes

Another practice that participants employed to exercise control was bringing *all* their clothes from the country of origin to Berlin (see figure 4.3). All participants brought some clothes, but to Marie and Pascale it had more significance to bring them all than to the others. Marie and Pascale cherished their clothes because they were an expression of personal freedom: *"I don't like to limit myself and miss anything"* (Pascale). The clothes gave them a feeling of control over their stay in Berlin. They regarded their clothes as part of the self; they were important elements that allowed them to express who they are. Having the most important tangible part of the self with them in Berlin evoked the feeling of being in control of herself, in where to be and to go.

Marie: "there is nothing left [clothes] in Paris. So if I had to go on a trip I had to leave from here [Berlin] rather than Paris, because I have all my clothes and things here. It gives me some kind of feeling of more permanency [of my stay in Berlin]."

Having all her clothes in Berlin transformed the city into her focus point: the place to leave from. The feeling of permanency that accompanied this allowed Marie to become tied to Berlin and make a home in the city.

4.3.3 Practices to establish and maintain social relationships

Just as other studies (for example Brown, 2009; Chow et al., 2008; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Scopelliti et al., 2010; Tognoli, 2003) stress, establishing social relationships in the new environment was

significant in order to feel at home. All respondents argued that knowing people was an important part of feeling at home; not only in Berlin, but everywhere:

Sylvie: “I have to know that there are people around me, I can count on. If I would only have a nice room with everything I want, but don’t have people around me I can count on, my home would be incomplete.”

Establishing social relationships was a drive to not experience loneliness (Humphrey-Lejeune, 2002; Brown, 2009). At the beginning of their stay most respondents did not know anybody, but strongly felt the need to get to know people and make friends.

Felipe: “it’s important to have contact with other people. I don’t want to be alone in Berlin of course. I want to go out and make things.”

As Felipe’s quote indicates, friends were needed to do activities and discover Berlin. Friends allowed respondents to “*appropriate the city*” (Sylvie). By this ‘shared’ appropriating of the city they developed a bond with, and tied themselves to, the city. Also Ng (1998) recognizes doing activities as a way to become connected to a place.

Friendships allowed respondents to “feel settled and at ease” in Berlin (Chow et al., 2008:369). Not only because they enabled the students to connect themselves to the city, but also because they provided emotional support and understanding. The students made a transition from an environment with many long-term, and therefore often deep, social relationships, to an environment with only short-term relationships. Most respondents did not know anybody before coming to Berlin. However, to some students this was not a reason for only superficial relationships. Marie, for example, emphasized the strong bond she had with her friends in Berlin, as a result of sharing many (new) experiences and emotions:

Marie: “we only know each other for a few months, but we spend so much time together, and we share so much. We have so much in common, not like intrinsically, but because we live in the same place, we have the same kind of experience. We share a lot of things. Probably more than with people that I know from university [in France]. The friendship is kind of stronger here. It’s really nice. And it’s probably these kind of relationships that make me feel at home.”

Being in the same situation, i.e. being abroad, away from friends and family, knowing hardly anyone in Berlin, was the ‘glue’ for the strong connection between the students. This created mutual understanding and emotional support, and in turn this was supportive for a secure feeling and students’ well-being. Also Brown (2009:185) noted that “friendship has long been noted as a major contributor to emotional well-being and sojourner adjustment”.

As the previous indicates, most respondents claimed to have friends from the same country of origin, or from anywhere else abroad. This corresponds with Brown’s (2009) study. Two respondents were mainly engaged with people from their own country of origin, as they valued sharing language and background in their relationships. This allowed deeper conversations and expressing the self (Brown, 2009). To the contrary, most other respondents highly rejected engagement with people from the home country: “*if you are staying with French people [in Berlin], stay in France!*” (Étienne). These respondents claimed to have come to Berlin to meet different people and cultures, and learn German. By staying only with people from the home country, they would never succeed in this. However, establishing friendships with German people was experienced as difficult. Also Waters et al. (2010:3) argue that “international students rarely mix with individuals from the host society”. Respondents argued that Germans already were settled in Berlin, not in need of new friends, and that they lacked in mutual understanding: “*they don’t realize how hard it is to actually be in Berlin,*

manage the language, and make new friends” (Marie). As a result, most respondents got engaged with other international students. These were friendships that were based on similarities between the students and the need to get to know people.

Respondents got quickly engaged with people through university, language courses and clubs; for example to play theatre or the international student clubs of their universities. Besides the friends themselves (see figure 4.4), respondents photographed a few other socializing elements that made them feel at home in Berlin. One of them is a brunch.



Figure 4.4 People (Marie).
Comment: *“I couldn’t live here without having people around who know me.”*



Figure 4.5 Brunch (Domenico).

Brunch

Domenico photographed a dinner plate with food (see figure 4.5). It represented the brunch he and his friends had organized. Domenico named eating together as an important practice to meet friends and getting to know them better. Together, they often made breakfast, brunch, dinner, or went out to eat. Eating and cooking was thus a socializing matter to Domenico. He emphasized that this was one

of the most important things that made him feel at home in Berlin:

“Not only to meet these friends, in the Sprachenzentrum [language centre], but also outside. (...) it was important to get into contact, to get to know each other. And I think that food is a very important way to know people, to meet people, to get in contact with people”.

Also Scott (2009:93) recognizes the socializing power of food. Eating in the company of friends gives pleasure and “expresses a group’s communality, and is used to form or consolidate social bonds”. By eating, Domenico established and maintained the connection between him and his friends. As this connection was based in Berlin, he also tied himself into the city.

4.3.4 Practices to become part of the new community and environment

Besides a break of social continuity, the move to Berlin involved a break of place continuity: the new environment of Berlin was physically and socially different from the place where they came from. This created an ‘out of place’ feeling in Berlin as respondents did not feel related to the new environment. Consequently, the need to play with the same rules and become familiar with the new social and physical environment arose (Ng, 1998). Practices that fit the new habitus were engaged to feel ‘in place’ (Cresswell, 2009).

In addition, before they left to Berlin, several participants identified themselves with the people and environment of the place where they lived. As a result of residing in that place for a few till many years, knowing a lot of people, having many experiences and memories, the place had become part of them (Hay, 1998). This provided a stable sense of self. As a result, the transition to the new environment of Berlin not only involved a break of place- and social-continuity, but also a break of self-continuity (Bih, 1992; Chow et al., 2008). The new social and physical environment of Berlin provided little to relate to the self. This is in line with Chow et al. (2008), who argue that relocation is often associated with a loss of self.

The students thus needed to establish a bond with Berlin in order to feel ‘in place’ in Berlin. Paragraph 4.2.3 already showed that new friendships were established. This paragraph will elaborate on other forms of social and territorial behaviour in order to become connected to the new community and environment (Ng, 1998). By trying to play with the same rules as Berliners, and creating reference points in the environment, respondents performed a sense of home. As will be seen, experience in place is extremely important in this. The following elaborates on the employment of practices of shopping, biking, and putting up posters on the wall of the room in order to feel ‘in place’ and at home. Most of these practices were engaged to appropriate the neighbourhood. Also Hidalgo et al. (2001) and Lewicka (2011) saw that home is often associated with the neighbourhood.

Finally, frequently employing these practices made them become part of students’ daily routines. This made life in the new environment more stable and predictable, and therefore more obvious. This supported the feeling of belonging to Berlin.



Figure 4.6 Shops (Pascale).

Shopping

Agnes, Pascale and Mireille used shopping to become part of the new environment. From the beginning of her stay, Agnes went to a particular small Turkish supermarket to do her groceries (she lived in a neighbourhood populated by many Turkish people). She quickly noticed that both employees of the supermarket, and she herself, had to get used to this new behaviour. Agnes clearly had to overstep a threshold: *“the first few times I came there [the Turkish supermarket], people were staring at me: ‘what is she doing here?’ And everybody spoke Turkish... I really felt like a stranger”*. Agnes felt like an outsider, and to feel like an insider, she had to learn to relate to her new social environment (Ng, 1998). She did this by making a routine of her visits to the supermarket, even though she did not feel comfortable. Through the routinely behaviour, Agnes and employees got comfortable with each other: *“I was always humble and always polite. And now it’s really okay, they say ‘hi’ to me and know me, it’s really cool.”*

Also Pascale and Mireille cherished shopping for its social function. Both of them regularly shopped at the same bakery (see figure 4.6). After a while, also they became recognized by the employees of the bakeries, which they extremely valued:

Pascale: then [when regularly visiting] you know the persons and they recognize you... Just to say hello, not because you are polite but because you recognize the person is something different. So that helps a lot. So I always go to the same place, just to settle... The habits, to know this thing.”

Mireille: okay I speak to them maybe 5 seconds, but they know me. I am the student who drinks a milchkaffee.

Through repetitious use of space, Agnes, Pascale and Mireille became recognized, and this gave them the feeling that they mattered in Berlin, and had become part of its population. Through repetitious social and territorial behaviour (Ng, 1998) students became tied into the social and physical environment, and this evoked a sense of home and belonging. Indeed, Belk (1992) argues that frequent use of specific places may evoke a sense of home. A routine is then developed, which makes behaviour mundane. The consistency of this routine provides predictability and stability of behaviour and of the everyday life.



Figure 4.7 Bike (Étienne).

Biking

Another way to become related to the physical environment and become part of the community was biking. Three respondents photographed their bike (see figure 4.7). The bike is a popular means of transport in Berlin; in 2008 more than 75 percent of all households of the city owned at least one bike, and the number was only growing the last few years (Autofrei, 2009; Berlin.de, 2011).

The bike was a means to actively interact with the environment. By biking, respondents got to learn their neighbourhood and the city. In Paris, Agnes always took the subway, and consequently could often not find her way above the ground. Therefore, she preferred biking in Berlin: *“you know the tube map by heart, but once you are on the street, you are totally lost. I wanted to avoid that here [in Berlin] so I bike like all the time”*. Also Domenico and Étienne valued their bike for getting to know the city. Through this territorial behaviour, they appropriated the city and established a “network of [familiar] places”, which offered them a “sense of orientation” in Berlin (Dayaratne et al., 2008:65).

Moreover, to Domenico and Étienne, having a bike in Berlin was a sign to be at home. They argued that at home people have a bike, and when they are travelling, or on holiday, they have not. Having a bike in Berlin gave Domenico and Étienne the feeling that they were socially integrated in Berlin:

Domenico: “the fact that I bought a bike... I think that makes me understand that I was at home here in Berlin. Because... you are inside the life of Berlin... you are like... a citizen of Berlin. You make the same things as the people in Berlin do.”

Domenico stresses here that feeling at home has to do with actively engaging in the activities of the inhabitants of the new place of residence. Through their bikes, Domenico and Étienne “learned to relate to their physical” and social environment (Ng, 1998:57). Also biking was incorporated to the daily routines (see previous section).

Decorating: posters

Marie decorated her room with several posters, which she used to demonstrate and confirm her status as inhabitant of Berlin (see figure 4.8). She cherished the posters for their physical appearance, but their symbolic value was more important. The posters represented particular events that she had visited during her stay in Berlin. To Marie, they were a tangible confirmation of her being part of the Berliner community and good knowledge of the city life of Berlin (Bih, 1992).

Marie: “these are all posters of things that I’ve done in Berlin. So events that I’ve been to. And... when you take part in some cultural events in the city, it makes me more feel like I’m from here, even though I’m not, but... It makes me feel I’m not a tourist anymore, because I’ve been to so many events... I’m building memories, basically from when I’m here, where I am. So this is why I like these posters and keep them.”

Interviewer: “it makes you feel a bit more in place, being here?”

Marie: yeah exactly, this is what makes me feel more... that I belong in here. So these are the indigenous elements of my room, haha.”

Through this active participation in the city life, Marie experienced experiences-in-place (Tognoli, 2003; Chow, 2008). As she confirms, and as also became clear of the theoretical framework, experiences-in-place build memories, and memories in place serve connection to the place (Scannell et al., 2010). Through participation, she fostered attachment to Berlin, and through this attachment, she identified herself with Berlin.



Figure 4.8 Posters (Marie)

4.3.5 Practices to maintain physical and sensory continuity

The previous paragraph outlined the engagement of new features of the environment of Berlin to feel at home. This paragraph will show that respondents also searched for familiar features to develop a bond with Berlin (Molz, 2008). Kyle et al. (2004) stress that past experiences and memories of certain types and certain features of places support adaptation and attachment to new places. This was also experienced by participants in this research. By looking for such familiar features and replicating practices in the new environment, relocating became less drastic, as respondents knew how to behave in, and how to organize, their new environment (Bih, 1992; Scannell et al., 2010). Through these familiar features, a certain continuity could be maintained. Most practices served to maintain physical continuity, but also practices to maintain a sensory continuity were employed. The following elaborates on the use of parks, the U-Bahn, and smells, tastes, and sounds to evoke a familiarity and feel at home.

Parks

Étienne, Domenico and Eduardo took pictures of Berliner parks (see figure 4.9). Especially when they felt a bit down or alone, they took a walk in one of the dozens of parks of Berlin. By going to the

parks, the respondents imitated a ritual from their previous environment, and incorporated it into the new environment of Berlin. This evoked a familiar feeling, and consequently parks helped to feel at home:

Domenico: “I think also the fact that Berlin has so many parks helped [to feel at home]... nature is the same anywhere in the world so when you feel alone you can go walk in the park (...) when I have some problems in Italy, I go there and I walk in the nature. And here I can do the same, so the feeling is the same.”

To Domenico, parks in Italy and Germany are the same. He felt connected to parks in Italy, and copied this bond to parks in Berlin. Through replicated practices, the parks maintained their function and purpose. This gave Domenico the ability to feel at ease in the predictable parks, without having to take the effort to understand, or adapt to, the environment. Also Ng (1998) stresses that feeling at home is a matter of understanding the physical environment.



Figure 4.9 Park
(Domenico)



Figure 4.10 U-Bahn
(Sylvie) “I like the metropolitan sphere of the U-Bahn.”

U-Bahn

As been outlined in chapter 2, people may attach themselves to certain physical features or types of places. Sylvie emphasized that she needed to live in a large city with urban characteristics, in order to feel at home. During her live, she had lived in the cities of Lyon and Paris, and felt comfortable in urban environments as she understood how they worked. Although she designated Paris as her home, she argued to feel attached to an urban environment. She thus had adapted herself a 'settlement-identity' (Fieldman, 1990) (see chapter 2): *"for me, home is a city, a very big city, and every time I go to a smaller city I'm feeling kind of uncomfortable because it's too small."* Consequently, Sylvie had little problems to adapt to the physical environment of Berlin.

To Sylvie, the subway was one of the features of the urban landscape that made her extremely comfortable. Therefore, she made a picture of the U-Bahn (*Untergrundbahn*, i.e. subway) (see figure 4.10). She routinely used the U-Bahn. Also Marie cherished the U-Bahn for its familiarity.

Marie: "the public transportation, the subway, is one thing that I find extremely similar in every city I've been to. And they are always the places where I feel most comfortable in.... well comfortable in the sense that I understand how it works. I take it like every day for a very long time... this is probably the place what it's the most familiar from Paris."

Again, this quote emphasizes the importance of understanding of the physical environment to feel comfortable and become bonded to it (Ng, 1998). By employing the familiar practice of taking the U-Bahn, respondents performed a sense of home.

Senses: smells, tastes, and sounds

Besides searching for familiar physical features, some respondents tried to replicate, or took along, certain sensory elements - sometimes rituals, that evoked familiarity and continuity. To start with, Marie recreated a homey atmosphere in her room by using particular frankincense and 'Armenian paper' (a piece of paper which evokes a nice smell after burning it). She used exactly the same elements to give her room in France a nice smell. As the smells were familiar, they gave her a really comfortable and homey feeling when being in her Berliner room, or coming home in her room. By recreating the same smell in Berlin, she softened the transition to the city. Also Bozkurt (2009) saw that immigrants often spread particular smells to feel at home in a new environment. Besides, perfumes were used by both Marie and Mireille to maintain personal continuity. Both of them had already used their perfumes for years, and therefore the smell had become part of their identity. By using the perfumes they maintained a part of the self and felt more complete in Berlin. See figure 4.11 for both the perfume and the Armenian paper.

Furthermore, tastes of food were cherished. Both Elisa and Felipe agreed to miss the rich tastes of Spanish food: *"German food is more expensive and taste not so good"* (Elisa). The loss of food was one thing that restricted Elisa and Felipe a bit to feel at home in Berlin. Also Blunt et al. (2006) argues that the quality of food in the host country may lead to alienation of migrants, as adapting to food habits of the receiving country can be harsh. Besides, Scott (2009:92) emphasizes that the (compositions of) meals are "socially constructed according to local norms and values". However, Felipe had expected this difficult 'food transition' and prepared himself for it by taking food from Spain to Berlin. This made the transition to Berlin more gradual: *"it was not like coming here and everything was different. I had some things which reminded me of Spain, so it was not really a very strong transition"* (Felipe). Felipe thus evoked a taste-continuity to feel at home in Berlin. After eating everything, he endeavoured to find as much Spanish food in Berlin as he could. He only found a little, but it was enough to satisfy his needs. Also Sylvie tried to maintain her French eating habits. She photographed her lunch (see figure 4.12), that she characterized as typically French: *"even if don't use French products, I continue cooking in a French way: three meals; a starter, the course, dessert, and*

I drink water while eating". Sylvie emphasized that "among our former national habits, eating is one of the most established". Therefore, she valued the French way of cooking, and kept this habit in order to feel comfortable and connected to France. In a way, Sylvie and Felipe thus maintained their cultural identity by food-continuity (Bih, 1992).

Finally, besides smells and tastes, also the continuity of familiar sounds was used to create a sense of home in Berlin. Felipe photographed the media player I-tunes at his computer, highlighting a special Spanish song. The song got nice place-dependent memories attached to it, and as a result it evoked feelings of happiness and warmth. Listening to this song made him think of all the great memories of experiences and people he has of Spain. As the computer produced the sound of the song, it allowed Felipe to maintain part of his (Spanish) identity, and it thus provided continuity of the self (Bih, 1992; Chow et al., 2008; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Besides, the music acted to create a comfortable living atmosphere and happy state of mind.



Figure 4.11 Smells (Marie). Comment: "this is the smell part. This is Armenian paper for the room. It gives a really nice smell to the room, very comfi. And my perfume, I brought it back from France. I had it already for 3 or 4 times. It's a familiar smell now... it's me".



Figure 4.12 Food (Sylvie).

4.3.6 Conclusion

The previous paragraphs showed that respondents employed many practices to feel at home in the new environment of Berlin. The Berliner home was thus actively made through practices (Molz, 2008). Leaving the previous environment involved a disruption of social-, environmental-, sensory- and self-continuity. In turn, the new environment offered an unfamiliar social and physical environment,

on which respondents had no control. Practices were employed to soften this disruption, and to appropriate the new environment. This indicates that practices also contributed to students' well-being (Rivlin et al., 2001).

Many practices were employed to look for familiarity, and in turn, maintain continuity. On the other hand, participants engaged practices in order to become related to the new aspects of the social and physical environment of Berlin. As such, through employing old and new practices, familiarity and strangeness were combined. Certain parts of the previous environment were thus "incorporated into the new environment, (...) and this made the change to [Berlin] less drastic" (Bih, 1992:142). Consequently, the employment of practices provided experience-in-place, which in turn evoked a sense of home in Berlin (Chow et al., 2008; Ng, 1998).

Lewicka (2011:223) argues that "different places satisfy different needs". This also applies in this case, seeing the broad range of places that were occupied and evoked a sense of home. Practices were employed in, for example, the room, physical environments like parks, and social environments like shops, the U-Bahn and streets (the latter by biking). As described, all these places indeed satisfied different needs of the students. Occupying different places also indicates that the scale of the Berliner home varies. Overall, most students designated their Berliner home as the close neighbourhood, i.e. a couple of streets around their house. However, in some cases it includes the overall environment (4.4.2.2 elaborates on that),

4.4 The meaning of home when temporary living abroad

The previous showed that all respondents actively got engaged to make a home in Berlin. However, the fact remained that they would only stay in Berlin for a temporary period of time. Respondents would reside for half a year, a year, or in one case, a few years in Berlin. This may have implications on their commitment in the home-making process, and on how they perceive their Berliner home. Besides, respondents had left a familiar place, and changed this for the unfamiliar environment of Berlin. Also this switch may impact the way students perceive home (Case, 1996). This chapter examines the influence of time on respondents' home-making processes (4.4.1), and explores how respondents perceived the concept of home, evolved through their relocation in Berlin (4.4.2).

4.4.1 A temporary stay: influences on home-making

Several respondents argued that the prospect of returning back to the country of origin made them feel restricted to fully engage in the home-making process, and establish a home in Berlin. This indicates that also time is an important dimension that impacts place attachment (see chapter 2).

To start with, temporality restricted students from living in, or creating, a desirable physical living environment. Some respondents argued that they would have moved within Berlin when their stay would be indefinitely, or that they would have furnished their room in a different way; get rid of that one chair, put in more decorations:

Eduardo: "even though this was not my ideal area in Berlin, I was like, ok this is for a year, as long as I can live comfortably, it's all right. If I'd stay here longer, I would have moved somewhere else. Prenzlauerberg or Friedrichshain. And perhaps a bigger place."

Domenico: "surely it's good to live here... this room is wonderful, but if I had to stay here for a long period, I need some other furniture."

Interviewer: so the fact that you are staying only temporary does influence a bit how you commit yourself here?

Domenico: sure.. you now have to make a balance between the money you have and what you need. So... ok, what I need is here... But if this was my own room, in my own house, I maybe had to organize it. This is temporary so I can manage it."

Because Eduardo and Domenico knew their stay in Berlin was limited, they were content with their

situation. They had developed a sense of home in Berlin, but the feeling was different from what they really referred to as a sense of home (see paragraph 4.4.2). They demanded less of a temporary home; as seen in the quotes especially in a physical way. Therefore they were satisfied with their Berliner home, but also less attached to it.

Further, Murphy-Lejeune (2002:139) argues that international students often “do not consider themselves as cut off from their native country”. Indeed, the combination of a strongly felt connection to France and a limited stay in Berlin kept some students from totally engaging in the social life of Berlin. For example, Marie emphasized that she would try harder to learn German, and meet Germans. She would make an effort to know more about the social and political life in Berlin, read more papers, and be more active in the life of the city, if she would stay in Berlin for an indefinitely time. However, as she knew she did not, she did not take these efforts. This proves the strength of being attached to a particular place: in Marie’s case, attachment to Paris, in combination with a temporal stay in Berlin, kept her from developing a firm attachment to Berlin.

Furthermore, also other participants were aware of the strength of place attachment. They deliberately kept themselves from totally engaging in home-making, because they were afraid to attach themselves too strongly to Berlin. These respondents felt really good in Berlin, due to the establishment of many social relationships, and taking part in the city life. However, with the perspective of leaving, these respondents tried not to get involved that much in the city and its people, in order to protect themselves.

Agnes: “even though you know you’re going to be here for one year, you still have the perspective that you will need to move on. So in your head it’s like well I do not need to take too deep roots because then it’s really difficult for me to go away. But I just want to protect myself. Because I know there is a risk that I do not find a job here, and then I have to leave again. But I still feel like it’s possible, so this feeling [of home] is growing but I tend to maintain it.”

On the contrary, other respondents did not feel limited by time or attachment to their old environment, and engaged more unbounded in the home-making process. For example, although paragraph 4.3.3 testifies of the establishment of close social relationships that helped to feel at home, some other students argued that their limited stay in Berlin kept them from taking effort to really get to know people and establish friendships. Also Murphy-Lejeune (2002) agrees that this is noticed a lot among international students. Felipe, however, deliberately tried not to behave like he was only going to see his friends only for a few months:

“I try not to treat people as if I only was going to meet them only for a few months. I think it’s better to be yourself. I would like to have contact with these people after coming back to Spain. I know it isn’t easy, because of the distance. But I would like to.”

Also Pascale felt not limited in home-making. He argued that he was worried about going back to France, because he bought too much stuff in Berlin, what would not fit in his suitcase. He emphasized that he was only able to enjoy himself in Berlin when he was not limited by the amount of things he bought.

Pascale: “I thought okay one year, it’s going to be long, so I can really settle here. It’s okay. Because I really didn’t want to limit myself, I really wanted to enjoy it. Also friends who were visiting me brought some big books... it won’t fit into my suitcase...”

4.4.2 Perceiving home when temporary living abroad

Many respondents indicated that the move to Berlin had changed their perception of home. Through relocation, respondents distanced themselves from their former environment, often regarded as

'home'. Case (1996) argues that every change in physical setting will change the meaning of home, and Wiborg (2003:418) stresses that "belonging can attain a different meaning when framed within a context of absence". In addition, living in Berlin, and the engagement in numerous home-making practices; adapting to the city life, engaging with the new environment, building up new routines, establishing social relations, doing activities, creating a new stability and comfort, all away from the familiar home environment, developed a sense of home towards the city. This paragraph examines the influence of distancing from the old environment, and engaging with a new environment abroad, on respondents' perception of home.

4.4.2.1 A multiple understanding of home

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) argues that unlike other migrants, international students tend to keep a remarkable amount of links with their country of origin. This was also seen in some of respondents' home-making practices, which were focused on maintaining links with their place of origin. These students established a home in Berlin in a context of maintaining attachment to the place of origin. Consequently, a multiple understanding of home occurred: respondents distanced themselves from their 'first' home, and linked themselves to a second home in Berlin (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). As will be seen, both homes mattered in different ways and satisfied different needs (Lewicka, 2011).

Through being away from the old environment, the Berliner home gained meaning: "*being in another place, makes you feel at home in another place than your first home*" (Étienne). As being the setting of everyday life, the Berliner home acted mainly as physical home. The city mattered because it was the setting in which experiences and social relations occurred. Respondents' room mattered because it was the place to leave from and return to, offering a comfortable place to reside (see 4.3.2). Seeing Smaldone (2006), this could be expected: he states that when engaging with a place for a limited period of time, first attachment to physical and functional features of a place is most important. Over time, emotional and social connections to the place will develop, and then these will be more important. For now, Berlin offered physical comfort and stability, but also excitement, as the city was new and still had to be discovered: "*there's things to do, there's things to say, there's little places to discover [in Berlin]... it takes a long long time to get tired of it. To know really I know all the secrets of the city...*" (Eduardo).

As a result of this newness of Berlin; residing for a short time (i.e. a few months), having little experiences, knowing few people, and therefore having few memories, attachment to Berlin developed only steadily (Hay, 1998). In consequence, Marie argued that it would take very long for Berlin to be a 'real' home, as she lacked in understanding of the Berliner people:

Marie: "here [Berlin], I still don't understand the people, I don't understand how they feel. How they act. For me it's still a totally different species, haha. They are still Germans and I don't understand them. It's not only the language, also the behaviour.

The temporary home of Berlin could not totally satisfy respondents' need of (mutual) understanding. However, Marie was content with her situation in Berlin, as she knew Paris did offer her understanding, predictability and familiarity. As she knew she would return to Paris, she did not take effort to change this situation (see also 4.4.1). It thus depended on Marie's own motivation how firmly she developed a home in Berlin (Bozkurt, 2009). For now, Marie's Berliner home could not exist without her Parisian home.

The place of origin thus continued to matter, albeit in a different way. It now gained meaning as symbolic entity:

Étienne: "being in another place, makes you feel at home in another place than your first home... And this first home...it's just imagination... the people I know there, friends and family... the things that we

share...so in a way I got this symbolic attachment to this.”

Alexander: “it [the place of origin] feels like home, but it’s just like... an idea. It’s just... reminding. It’s nice to have it in your head; like that’s my home. It’s just an idea, but it feels comfortable.”

Symbolically, the place of origin was of great value, created by many significant memories of that place, and the significant people in students’ lives who still lived there. This often indicates a well developed attachment to place (Hay, 1998). However, as participants mainly talked about the positive meaning of this symbolic home, this meaning may have been idealized. Moore (2000:213) namely states that “home disappoints, aggravates, neglects, confines and contradicts as much as it inspires and comforts us”. Being away from this home only highlighted its positive aspects (Case, 1996).

Respondents became aware of the fact that it was exactly this strong developed meaning to the former home place that enabled them to live in Berlin. Scannell et al. (2010:6) confirm this by arguing that “place attachment offers protection and security, which in turn allows exploration”. Felipe, for example, stressed that although his place of origin had lost its role of everyday home setting to Berlin, his attachment to this place allowed him to travel, and live in other places. Especially having social support was beneficial in this. Also Waters et al. (2010) saw that having a safe social environment to fall back on is beneficial when making the move to study abroad.

Felipe: “I think to be mobile, to study abroad... you can do that only maybe if you have a place... where you can say ok I have a problem, I return to that place. There are people who can help me, and... I have made what I’ve made also because of my parents, and my friends because they support me there, without them maybe it wouldn’t be possible.”

The place of origin gained meaning as symbolic entity, but at the same time lost meaning as important physical home entity. Respondents suddenly felt that the former place physically had little to offer, compared to Berlin with its diversity. Especially short trips back to the home place constructed the meaning of home (Molz, 2008). By being away from the former environment, and experiencing the contrasting conditions with Berlin, Domenico suddenly became aware of the monotonous character of the place of origin (Case, 1996):

Domenico: “I was like: why am I here [Italy]? I want to return back to Berlin! I mean, of course it was nice to see my friends, parents, and everything, but during the day I was there [Italy] and I said... okay... I’m here and now... what do I have to do? I realized it’s really boring over there.”

Although both Berlin and the place of origin gained (different) meaning through living in Berlin, most participants argued that the latter would always be more important than the temporary home in Berlin. Mobility, as well as time, thus evoked different levels of attachment (Lewicka, 2011:216): “there’s always going to be one real home, and that’s Paris. And all the other place [in which she would live] would be temporary homes, but they would still feel very good and very comfortable” (Marie). This is consistent with Wiborg (2004:418), who argues that “place as a specific and material geographical location, framing people’s lives, has less primary importance than place as a cultural construction which is shaped and maintained through social relations and within people’s minds”. To Marie, the physical aspect of home was easily to change and to rebuild, but the symbolic home could never. However, some of the students argued that the more time they would spend in Berlin, the more this Berliner ‘home’ would become important. They then would know more people, have more intense relationships with them, know the city better, and this would strengthen their attachment to Berlin and their Berliner sense of home (Hay, 1998; Moore, 2000). Also Chow et al. (2008:370) saw that the more the students in his research “got to know their new place of residence, the more it felt like home”. This again shows the influence of time on attachment to place.

4.4.2.2 A transportable sense of home

To Agnes, relocating in Berlin had hardly impact on their perception of home. She did not associate their place of origin with home. For Agnes, the move to Berlin was one of the many moves she had made in her life. She argued that living in many different places hindered a strong connection to one place. Consequently, this confused her about home relating to a particular place.

Agnes: “sometimes I have this weird feeling that actually I’m not at home anywhere. Because I move every year. And even though you know you’re going to be here for one year, you still have the perspective that you will need to move on”.

Mobility kept Agnes from developing a strong attachment to place. Several social theorists support this, by arguing that **when often experiencing mobility, the ability to establish a home bond and feel at home becomes complicated** (Bauman, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Gustafson, 2001a,b). However, although Agnes was not able to designate a particular home place, she had no difficulties in *feeling* at home in place. Due to her many experiences of mainly living in large cities, she had developed herself a ‘settlement identity’ (Feldman, 1990). She had become attached to the characteristics of an urban environment: *“home would be linked to some kind of a very urban environment... I mean not specific landmarks, but rather a style of environment”*. This meaning thus developed through the experience of mobility. The attachment to urban environments enabled Agnes to quickly feel at home in large cities, and thus also in Berlin. As seen in 4.3.4, also Sylvie was attached to urban environments. Also Eduardo experienced a transportable sense of home (Molz, 2008). As outlined in 4.3.2, he did not consider his house in Spain as home, as he felt subordinated by his parents. Just as Agnes, in a way, Eduardo derived a sense of home not from a particular place, but from smaller objects and feelings that he could take along or evoke easily. As he travelled a lot, he enabled himself to feel at home while experiencing mobility (Molz, 2008).

4.4.2.3 In-between-ness

Finally, Alexander and Marty found themselves in the difficult ‘in-between’ situation (Wiborg, 2003; Palmer et al., 2009). This shows that maintaining bonds with the country of origin is not always fruitful for a gradually transition and feeling at home in the new country. The establishment of a sense of home in Berlin, and the continuing link towards the place of origin, made Alexander and Pascale feel floating between these two places. Murphy-Lejeune (2002:139) already stressed that international students “swing backwards and forwards between old and new worlds”, especially socially. In Alexander and Pascale’s case, this situation made them wondering where they belonged.

Alexander showed that relocating has implications for the sense of belonging, when simultaneously maintaining bonds with an old place and establishing bonds with a new place:

Alexander: “Actually, here [Berlin] everybody is thinking that I’m French, or Swiss. And when I go back to Switzerland, everybody is thinking that I have some German accent. So I’m kind of a stranger in both places. So I not really have some part where I could say I’m really at home.”

From this it becomes clear that Alexander related being part of a community to feeling at home, and belonging. Now, through his relocation, there were two communities to which he only belonged partly, as both communities regarded him as an ‘outsider’; in Berlin he was Swiss, and in Switzerland he was German. Although he felt at home in Berlin, his move to the city made himself questioning about his identity and the place to call home.

Also Pascale found himself ‘trapped’ between his place of origin and Berlin, because of the relationship he got involved in with a person back in France, a few weeks before he went to Berlin.

The desire to be with this person made him feel 'in-between':

Pascale: "every day I had contact with France. I think it was really bad, because I didn't feel I had to be here [Berlin]. Berlin was not the right place for me to be. Quite awful, it was really bad. I really felt between two different places: I needed time to settle [in Berlin] and think that it was my home".

Pascale argued that he was trying to establish a sense of home in Berlin, but that the strong connection with France kept him from managing that. As soon as Pascale broke up, he felt all right. Weakening the connection with France allowed him to focus on the development of a sense of home in Berlin. To feel comfortable in Berlin, he thus first had to find closure with the previous social environment (Humphrey-Lejeune, 2002; Palmer et al., 2009). But, as the quote indicates, he also needed time. Pascale points that a short stay did not allow him to develop a bond with his new environment, that was strong enough to transcend, or at least equalise, attachment to France. This again shows the impact of time on the development of attachment to place.

4.4.3 Conclusion

Many respondents developed a different perception of home through living in Berlin. Most students showed that the meaning of home was made in the process of leaving the place of origin, and settling down in Berlin (Molz, 2008). A multiple understanding of home came to being, in which some students even became lost in an in-between-ness position. Also a sense of home through 'settlement-identity' (Feldman, 1990) was created through the move to Berlin, by many moves preceded. This indicates, as already was proposed in the theoretical framework, that mobility influences the meaning of home and attachment to place.

Further, time was an important determinant in the development of a sense of home in Berlin. The knowledge of a temporal stay hindered full engagement in home-making and therefore restricted the motivation to establish deep bonds with Berlin. Besides, most students had lived considerably longer time in their place of origin than in Berlin. Berlin could not compete with participants' strong attachment towards the place of origin. This made some students feel in-between, and others perceive Berlin as mainly a physical home; being the setting of everyday life. In addition, the place of origin mattered as a symbolic home, offering a base. According to Smaldone (2006) such a development is influenced by time, as place attachment starts with emotional connection to physical features, and social attachment develops while time extends.

5 Conclusion and discussion

This research aimed to answer the question *'how do international students who are temporarily living in Berlin make themselves a home, and how does home matter when temporary living abroad?'*

In order to answer this question, I explored what home-making practices students employ to make themselves a home. When living temporary abroad for study reasons, home-making practices are employed to satisfy various needs. Firstly, practices to maintain social continuity could be identified. Maintaining contact with beloved people in the country of origin facilitates the transition to the new environment. It allows students to keep their social identity and express emotional attachment, and therefore feel less alone. Both directive (internet) and in directive (through gifts) contacts are important. Secondly, practices were employed to be in control. Exercising control over space and the self allows students to express and be who they are and what they want. Especially appropriating the room is important in this. Thirdly, friendships were established in order to feel at home. Having friends in Berlin is really important; they allow respondents to discover the city and provide mutual understanding and social support. Fourthly, students actively tried to become part of the new community and environment. Through this, they come to understand the new environment and create a feeling of belonging. Biking, shopping, and taking part in cultural events contribute to feel 'in place'. Finally, searching for familiar features in the new environment contributed to maintain physical and sensory continuity. Past experiences of such features facilitate the establishment of bonds with the new environment, because students know how to behave, and organize. Looking for similar aspects like parks, the subway and generate senses like smells, tastes, and sounds, familiar behaviour and feelings are recreated and regenerated in the new environment.

Findings indicate the multifaceted nature of the process of home-making when entering a new environment abroad. They demonstrate that experience-in-place is crucial to evoke a sense of home in the new environment. This takes place through a variety of both social and territorial behaviour, and occurs through the occupancy of a variety of places. By employing old and new practices in the new environment, familiarity and strangeness are combined. On the one hand, this facilitates the development of a sense of home, as a part of the way one relates him- or herself to the social or physical environment can be maintained (for example, by going to a park when feeling sad). On the other hand, this allows the student to become related to the new social and physical environment. Finally, frequent use of space allow some practices to become part of students' daily routines. This makes life in the new environment more stable and predictable, and therefore more obvious. This supports feeling at home in the new place. The longer a student lives in a place, the more obvious the practices will be, and the more he or she will feel at home. This corresponds with theories about place attachment, that argue that place attachment grows over time (Hay, 1998).

Further, I explored whether and how the temporary nature of the stay abroad influences the engagement in the home-making process. Although a few students argued not to feel limited by time in making themselves a home in Berlin, many others did. Students felt hindered and less motivated to fully engage in developing a sense of home in the new place, as they knew they would only stay in this place for a limited amount of time. Hence, time may be an important factor influencing home-making. To my knowledge, this was not acknowledged yet in other studies about home-making, although Dayaratne et al. (2008) do acknowledge that home-making is a continuous process. Studies about place attachment to address the role of time in the development of place bonding, but tend to overlook it. As the perception of home when living abroad is also affected by time (see next section), it should be given more attention in future research.

Finally, I explored the influence of living abroad on students' perceptions of home. Findings show the major role of mobility in affecting place attachment, as the greater part of the respondents argued to perceive home differently after moving to Berlin. Again, also time may play a determining factor in this.

On the one hand, the limited stay in the new environment allowed little opportunity to develop a strong bond with the new environment. Therefore, Berlin was able to give students what they perceived as a sense of home. Consequently, a temporary study abroad evoked the development of two homes, both satisfying students' needs in different ways. On the one hand, Berlin acted as the physical home: offering the setting of everyday life, providing stability and comfort. On the other hand, due to time, Berlin did not offer enough emotional security yet that could meet the requirements of a home. Therefore, the previous place of origin remained to matter as a home. It mattered because of residing long in it, and having many memories associated with it (Hay, 1998). However, as students distanced themselves from this place, it got ascribed with a symbolic meaning, and became an imaginary home. This home satisfied students needs for a base in life. It offered security and predictability, and acted like a place to go back to. It therefore also enabled to live abroad.

On the other hand, establishing a home in Berlin, and remaining attached to the old environment, led to a situation of 'in-between-ness'. Students then feel floating between these two environments, uncertain about where they belong and where their home is. Again, time played a role, as the short stay did not allow students to develop a bond with the new environment that was strong enough to equalise attachment to the former home place.

However, not every student making a study abroad in Berlin experienced a changing sense of home. Some students did not relate a sense of home to a particular place, and were able to evoke a homey feeling when an environment met the requirements of a home. Attachment to certain physical features, or certain environments, for example, in this case, an urban one, may then evoke a sense of home. However, also this kind of feeling of home is often established through mobility. As a result of living in many places, students attach themselves to an environment, instead of a particular place.

This research showed that mobility influences attachment to place, and a sense of home. As today, much interest is on the meaning of place and place attachment in an era of increasing mobility, the concept of mobility should be added to the place attachment framework of Scannell et al. (2010).

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

My research is about home-making and belonging of international students in Berlin. I want to examine what you do to make yourself feel at home and comfortable in Berlin. In general I would also like to get to know what home means to you, and how you experience home while you live in Berlin.

Therefore, I will ask questions about the experiences of your move to Berlin, adjustments you had to make, your room or house, your sense of home and belonging and contributions to that. I am very interested in your personal story, experiences and opinions. I know from my own experiences that home-making and adjusting to Berlin can involve pretty weird things, so don't hesitate to tell me these. Also don't hesitate to tell me things which seem obvious to you. Please take your time to think about your answers.

And of course we also discuss the pictures you took preceding this interview.

The interview will take about an hour and a half. I would like to use a voice-recorder to tape the interview. This is because I can focus better on the interview. Only I will have access to the tapes.

I will use your interview for my master thesis. I will treat your interview confidentially.

Participating in this research is voluntary. You can always ask me to stop, even when we are already started with the interview. Also, if you want to pause the interview, please tell me.

Do you have any questions or do you want to know more about the research?

Is everything clear and do you agree with conducting this interview?

Then we can start. The interview consists of six parts. First I will ask you some general questions about yourself. Then we will elaborate on your decision to move to and study in Berlin, followed by your experiences of the transition and adjustment to Berlin. After that we will discuss what home means to you and what constitutes it, and whether your sense of home changed after coming to Berlin. Next we will talk about the pictures you made, and how you have made yourself a home and feel comfortable in Berlin. Finally we will talk shortly about your room here.

Introduction

[Make a note of gender]

How old are you?

Where are you from?

- *Where are you born?*
- *Where are your parents from?*

Can you name the places in which you have lived before?

- *Length of residence*
- *With whom?*
- *How was it to live there?*
- *What do these places mean to you? Feelings?*
- *How was it having to leave this place? (sad/happy?)*
- *Did you feel those places had all you needed?*

What do you study?

For how long have you been in Berlin now and how much time are you planning to spend here?

Before the move to Berlin

In the forthcoming part of the interview we are going to talk about the time before you moved to Berlin.

Why did you decide to study in Berlin?

- *What factors contributed? (Study, Personal development/Better circumstances for future, Family, Culture/customs: similar or different, Experiencing difference with current life, Germany/The city of Berlin (appearance?), Financial issues, Social issues, spatial distance from home country)*
- *Did you want Berlin to be different than the place you come from? Or more or less the same? Why?*
- *What did you want to achieve living and studying in Berlin? Did you succeed?*
- *What does having the opportunity to live and study abroad mean to you?*
 - *What feeling does it give you?*
 - *Future prospects*
 - *Is it easy to get the opportunity to do so?*

The transition and adjustment to Berlin

Now you told me something about your expectations before your move, we are going to talk about your experiences of the transition to Berlin

How did you experience the transition from your home country to Berlin?

- *Feeling, experiences*
- *How did you feel about leaving France/Spain?*
- *How did you feel about having to live in such a big city?*
- *How was it to adjust to Berlin? What factors contributed to this?*
- *Where there things you find hard to get used to?*
 - *What would you do to cope with these things?*
- *Did you already know people here? (What did that mean to you?)*
 - *Do you miss anything here? (a feeling, people, environment, events, rituals, activities)*
- *Did you ever have the feeling you wanted to go back?*

Are you satisfied about the place where you live? How come?

- *Was it your own decision to live here?*
- *With whom do you live?*

How do you experience living in Berlin now you have been here for a while?

- *What kind of feeling gives studying and living in Berlin you?*
- *What personal qualities/skills do you need to be able to study abroad?*
- *Do you feel you developed yourself while being here? In what way?*
- *Has this stay created new opportunities for you in live, or barriers?*
- *Do you feel independent from your parents or other people? Is this feeling stronger here than back home? How come? What does it mean to you?*

Sense of home and places

Next we are going to talk about the meaning of home to you and the way you made yourself a home here in Berlin.

Can you talk a bit about what home means to you?

- *With what kind of feelings do you associate home?*
- *Why is a home a home for you? What constitutes a home? (Physical environment (built or natural), Facilities (sport, clubs, shops, work, university), Senses (tastes/ food, sounds/music, smells), Social networks, Cultural customs, habits, everyday life, certain Places, etcetera.)*
- *Is it important to you to feel at home? Why (not)?*
- *Do you think you can feel at home anywhere? Several places? Or just one? How come?*
- *What do you perceive as your home?*
- *Is there a place where you can really be yourself? Your most personal space? (scale)*
- *Do you have the feeling there's a place where you belong? Why (not)?*
- *Is there a place where to you feel attached the most? How come?*

What feeling does studying and living in another country give you?

- *Do you think it will be easier to live in other countries and/or cities after this experience?*
- *How do you feel about being mobile and being attached to places?*
- *Do you think mobility influences the sense of home? How?*

What does the place where you come from mean to you? (scale)

- *What do you associate with it? (feelings/things/people?)*
- *Do you feel attached to it? In what way?*
- *Do you identify yourself with that place?*
- *Do you often think about it? How come?*
- *Is it important to you that you are French or Spanish? Do you want to show it here? Or would you rather hide it?*
- *Did you go back to the place you come from in the mean time? How was that?*

Do you feel attached to Berlin? In what way?

- *What do you associate with it? (feelings/things/people/...)*
- *Do you feel at home here? How come?*
- *Did it take long to feel at home here?*
- *Can you identify yourself with Berlin?*
- *Do you think you'll go back to Berlin often after this? Why? To do what?*

Did the move to Berlin change your thoughts about the meaning of home to you?

- *Can you explain these differences?*
- *Did it change your thoughts about the place where you come from? Did certain things from that place or country become more apparent? In what way?*
- *Will it be easier to live in other places/countries now? Do you have ambitions to do that?*

With whom you have been in contact since you are here?

- *People in Berlin*

- *People in France/Spain/Italy/Switzerland*
- *Do you have a lot of contact here with people from the country you're from? Is this important to you? Why?*
- *Are these social contacts important to you?*
- *Do you think relationships with people back home will be different after this study abroad? Friends, parents, grandparents, other family? How come?*

Home-making

PICTURES

You have made pictures of things which contributed to make you feel at home and comfortable here. Let's discuss the pictures.

- *What is on it?*
- *What does it mean to you?*
- *In what way did it help you to feel at home/in place?*

If a place is photographed:

- *What do you do there?*
- *Do you feel anything particular when you are there?*
- *Do you hear and smell anything particular when you are there?*
- *Do you go there often?*
- *When you go there, are you accompanied by other people?*

If an object is photographed:

- *What is it? Where does it refer to? (people, places, events..)*
- *(if it is an owned object) When (and from whom) did you acquire it?*
- *What would it mean to you to not have this thing?*

If a person is photographed:

- *Who is it?*
- *Why is he/she important to you?*

What else did you do to make yourself feel comfortable and at home in Berlin?

- *Did you get other habits or routines while you stayed here? Were you trying to find old habits or routines here? Can you name them?*
- *Are you involved in clubs? Why?*
- *You are staying here only temporary; does that influence your home-making process? How?*

Do you have the feeling you adjusted well to Berlin now? How come?

- *Do you feel equal to other people (the inhabitants of) in Berlin? Are you one of them? Is that important to you?*
- *Do you feel part of the community here? Is this important?*
- *Do you feel empowered here?*
 - *How come?*
- *Do you feel you can be yourself here?*
 - *How come?*

Your room

The final part of the interview is about your own personal spot in Berlin: your room.

Can you describe your room?

- *What do you like about it?*
- *What do you not like about it?*
- *Are you satisfied about your room?*
- *Is it a home to you? Why?*
- *Were there already things in the room? What did you bring yourself? Why? Did you buy things here? Why?*
- *Did you feel the need to personalize your room? / Put particular things in the room?*

- *Do you have the feeling this room is really yours now?*
- *Do you miss anything in your room?*
- *What does it mean to have your own space here?*

Are you often here?

- *What do you do in your room?*
- *Who comes here? Who not?*

Final sayings

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank the participant for the interview. End of the interview.

Appendix 2

First e-mail to gather participants

Hallo ...,

I got your e-mail address from ... He/she may have mentioned it to you. / I talked to you at.... I'm working on my master thesis which is about international students, especially from Switzerland/Spain/France/Italy. I'm still looking for more participants, so it would be very nice if you would consider being one!
I will tell a bit more about the research:

It is basically about how Swiss/Spanish/French/Italian students experience a study abroad, and the way they make themselves feel at home and comfortable here in Berlin (for example building up routines, going to specific places, eating particular food, listening particular music, meeting people; basically anything you can think of). I'm also interested in the meaning of home to you, and whether your study abroad made you feel different, or more aware, about home.

What we would do is have an interview to talk about these things, which takes about an hour/hour and a half, and which preferably takes place in your room. (And I won't ask difficult questions, it will be more a conversation than an interrogation :)
I also will ask you to take some photographs (5 to 10) of things/places/people/events/experiences, etcetera, which helped or help you to feel at home and comfortable in Berlin. During the interview we then talk about these photos.

So just think about it, would be really nice if you would like to participate!
Looking forward to your answer!

Viele Grüße,
Inge de Vries

Appendix 3

Second e-mail to participants

Hallo ...!

Thanks you that you are willing to participate, that's so nice of you!

So as I told you, part of the research is that you take some pictures (about 5 to 10) of things/people/places/experiences/etc. that make you feel at home and comfortable here in Berlin. These could be things in your room or house, or outside, and may be particular or obvious things. Take it very broad, think also of routines, and anything you may feel attached to.

Don't hesitate to ask me questions if anything is unclear!

Which date and time suit you?

Viele Grüße,
Inge