

# **Socio-spatial identity-construction amongst international school students.**

How do 'Third Culture Kids' relate to and live in the city around them? An ethnographic study of urban practices and preferences.

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# Abstract

Most major cities today currently boast at least one “international school”. The proliferation of such schools and the extent to which students who attend them develop both 1) place attachment and 2) place identity alongside 3) an “international” identity remains an understudied phenomenon. Although international schools are not new, their recent expansion is a result of significant increases in global mobility flows. The organisation and curricula of these schools tends to be a “copy paste” format which does not recognise or acknowledge the place-based characteristics of the location and surrounding locales in which the school is spatially situated. The term ‘third culture kid’ (Unseem, 1976) is used to refer to young people living abroad and who most associate with neither their parents’ nor the host country’s ‘culture’. Instead they generate a ‘third’ one amongst themselves. This thesis uses phenomenological research methods, interviews, academic literature and popular culture (blogs, youtube) to investigate to what extent growing up in a hypermobile elite environment impacts how students inhabit and live out their relationship with urban space. The case studies presented are of two international schools in Copenhagen and Madrid respectively.

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# **Socio-spatial identity-construction amongst international school students: how do ‘Third Culture Kids’ relate to and live in the city around them? An Ethnographic study of urban practices and preferences.**

## **1. Introduction**

Most major cities today currently boast at least one “international school”. The proliferation of such schools and the extent to which students who attend them develop both 1) place attachment and 2) place identity alongside 3) an “international” identity remains an understudied phenomenon. Although international schools are not new, their recent expansion is a result of significant increases in global mobility flows. The organisation and curricula of these schools tends to be a “copy paste” format which does not recognise nor acknowledge the place-based characteristics of the location and surrounding locales in which the school is spatially situated.

It is my hypothesis that such students do engage in “urban” practices and associate with urban phenomena. However this remains largely tied to spaces (and therefore people) related to the international school environment they are acquainted with. The view will be taken that “the architecture and location of schools often reveal their original attitude to the community” (Allan, 2002, p. 124 cited in Meyer, 2015, p. 67). This position will allow for interpretations and extrapolations regarding the mindsets with which these schools were built and consequently endorsed amongst the student community.

There has been some academic research on the local dimension of international schools, however the focus tends to remain on pedagogical aspects. Poore (2005), for example, critiques the lack of integration of local cultures and settings in the schools’ curricula, which tends to be only “superficial” in nature (p.352). Schwindt (2003) conducted research on the labour market within such schools to analyse the relationship to host country nationals and any discriminations that may occur. These studies focus specifically on activities within the schools’ confines. They seldom analyse students’ habits outside of school hours. There is therefore a lack of research into the spatial practices of young people studying at international schools. How they conceive, move through, appropriate and territorialise urban space is thus an understudied feature of the ever-developing international school phenomenon.

This thesis intends to use phenomenological research methods, interviews, academic literature and popular culture (blogs, youtube) to investigate to what extent growing up in these hypermobile environments impacts how students inhabit and live out their relationship with urban space.

This study seeks to shine light on the subjectivities of what remains a unique and elite group of young people whose everyday practices occur across a context of transnational hypermobility. Within this sphere it is the norm to have attended schools in three or more countries by the time of graduation. It is then assumed that a student will attend university by 'returning' to their passport country or going to an Anglo-Saxon higher educational establishment. The following chapter is an overview of some academic literature on the topic of international education; the 'Third Culture Kid' (TCK) identity which is commonly attributed to these people and the key terms providing a groundwork for the study to come. As the sociologist Ossman (2004) concisely describes «attention to the lives of people who have lived in more than two countries can lead us to a better understanding of new forms of subjectivity, new styles of self narration that are taking form» (p. 113).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Place and Belonging

Appadurai (1991) has postulated that ethnographic research is now tasked with investigating "the nature of locality, as lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world" (p.19) precisely because "groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically un-self-conscious, or culturally homogenous" (Schiller, 1995, p. 49). Instead, there has been an acceleration of mobilities accompanied by a decentering of national-place.

Massey, in her 1993 essay *A global sense of place* describes the neighbourhood of Kilburn, in London, as a dynamic and multifaceted place conferring an "extroverted" sense of identity espousing "the global in the local" (p.63). As will be seen, this conceptualisation of identity may be what best applies to international school students; it recognises an identity formation which exists outside rigid mono-dimensional and deterministic views concerning the relation between place and identity. Instead, it recognises their lived experience of existing beyond such dualities and developing an identity composed of an array of different ones which may produce an overarching "European" or "Global" identity.

Sheldrake explains 'belonging' as "both our connection to specific places and also our existence within networks of stable relationships" (2001, p. 49). This will be central to how international students develop their own sense of self and identity which some academic literature argues is more dependent on relationships than spatial surroundings.

Given how 'rooted in place' identity has traditionally been, helps to understand the attitudes to the concept of "travel"; that is, the practice of transcending or subverting the traditional view of self and place. The term "travellers" has been used to denote undesirables of a lower social strata, without attachment to a piece of land. It evokes fear and a threat to rural conceptions of stable domesticity; those who travel are merchants or Gypsies - *Gens du voyage* - and cannot be expected to adhere to the social mores of the local autochthons (Sheldrake, 2001, p.51). Medieval anti-semitism refers to the 'travelling Jew' - a concept to be later concealed under the more innocuous term of 'cosmopolitan'. What these groups denote is a perceived absence of organic connection to the place-based social environment. They are condemned to always be 'outsiders' passing by. This will be related to how research into 'third culture kids' has found they have more ease in developing meaningful connections with people who have had a similar 'internationalist' upbringing and that interactions with monocultural people are less fluid.

Augé's (1990) thesis on "non-place" would most likely view these young transnational migrants as exclusively inhabiting non-place and therefore having a less defined identity. Sarah Sharma (2009) explains that "[i]n fact it is not the non-place that displaces the local or creates asocial facelessness inasmuch as the theorist of non-places [Augé himself] erases the local in these accounts of non-place" (p. 134). From the viewpoint of people who frequent a place regularly or

work there, it will shift from what may first have been experienced as a non-place to an anthropological place. One author who has also written about Augé and transnational mobility has accepted this main premise that non-place exists, however goes on to state that it is exactly this which allows for transnationals to feel at home; “the non-lieu, precisely because of its apparently blank quality, can be a salvation for the individual [from the constraints of anthropological place]” (O’Brien, 2006, p.48). Other authors celebrate spaces where there is supposedly no prevailing culture as this will allow for an emergence of a culture unsullied by any overarching one; “exposed to multiple cultural traditions, [third culture kids] have the opportunity to achieve identities informed by all, constricted by none, balanced on the threshold of each” (Schaetti and Ramsey, 1999). This view is echoed by Triebel (2015, p. 100) who claims TCKs should assert and celebrate their non-place identity and the openness and flexibility this can grant them.

## **2.2 Lifeworld**

Lifeworld refers to the cultural, social and physical environment people inhabit and what occurs within it, usually in a non self-reflexive way. The concept relates to the pace and practices of everyday life. Regardless of whether an experience or event is mundane or extraordinary, the lifeworld tends not to be at the forefront of people’s consciousness (Seamon, 2000, p.14).

The “natural attitude” is the a term relating to people’s inner experience of the lifeworld whereby they take it for granted in an unquestioning way, rarely considering it could be any different (Seamon, 2000, p.9). The “lifeworld” and the “natural attitude” represent the inner and outer worlds which a phenomenological study investigates. Central to the experience of the lifeworld is its ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (ibid).

## **2.3 Urban space and the public**

Part of what this thesis aspires to do is analyse the way in which international school students inhabit public urban spaces and relate to people within these. Pratt (1992) refers to ‘contact zones’ as the spaces within which people belonging to diverse groups encounter one another. Such spaces do not suggest sites of cohesive mingling and celebrations of diversity but are instead described as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (Pratt cited in Peters and Haan, 2011, p.171). Pratt describes how the “colonial gaze” and its ideological construction is inherently “othering” in that it objectifies the observed.

In a Western European city, “contact zones” could be considered spaces where diversity is “consumed”. Although still present, the colonial gaze becomes distilled, in an appreciation or celebration and participation of multicultural difference. This is the view taken by urban scholars who praise the importance of catering for spaces which cause diverse others to find themselves physically close to each other (Sennett, Loftland, Massey). The idea is that racism and prejudice is diminished through people having to engage in routine, but not necessarily meaningful,

encounters with one another. Amin (2006) questions this heralding of the importance of physical public spaces and argues that, whereas it may have been true of ancient Rome and Athens, contemporary civic and political opinions are molded outside the traditional “public forum”. Public culture and opinions occur through the medium of “books, magazines, television, music, national curricula, transnational associations” (Amin, 2006, p.3) not in specific sites of the city. With regards to international school students, this thesis will ask where the main sites of their own political and cultural formation are located and how this is impacted or played out through their interaction with spaces and people in the city.

## **2.4 Third Culture Kids**

The term “Third Culture Kid” was coined by Ruth Unseem to refer to people who spent their childhood in a country other than that of their passport and consequently identify with neither the passport country nor the host country but rather a supranational multiculturalism which makes it easier for them to relate to those with similar upbringings rather than people born and bred within a monocultural setting (Unseem and Downie, 1976, p. 105).

Unseem however was conducting research on white American children in recently decolonised 1950s India whose parents were expatriates there. For this reason authors such as Tanu (2015) have criticised the term as an “unreflexive [...] American centric approach” (p.13). Furthermore, this fails to recognise the power dynamics between the privileged ‘expat’ social spaces and the relation to the host community which may be seen as a less significant “backdrop” (ibid).

Greenholtz and Kim (2009) coined the term “cultural hybridity” to refer to people who conceive of themselves as willing and able to shift their perceived cultural behaviour depending on the context they are in. It was however held that such people have the greatest ease to “connect” and feel genuinely understood with people who experience themselves in similar ways.

The term “Multiculturalism” when used to describe individuals has been referred to as the ability to perform two or more cultures. Adler (1977) speculates that his historical period places great emphasis on “belongingness” whereby a person is, in a self-conscious way, owned by or owner of a culture which has the capacity to navigate through shifting perceptions of reality. This is an adaptive and fluid identity which does not rely on stable, fixed pillars upon which to construct itself but instead is receptive to change (Adler, 1977, p.29).

One study (Lyttle et. al, 2011) of ‘Third Culture Kids’ intended to measure how interpersonally sensitive such individuals were compared to others born and bred in a single cultural setting. In line with the hypothesis, TCKs were found to be on average more sensitive, aware of, and able to respond to varying social scenarios and encounters with different others. This was explained by TCKs having to adapt to changing cultural scenarios and so developing enhanced fluency and literacy in managing such contexts.

The term “biculturalism” is introduced by LaFromboise et al. (1993, p. 395) to “overcome the linear model of cultural acquisition” and argue that an individual can be fluent in two ‘cultures’ without losing hold of their own identity or feeling the need to choose one cultural identity over the other. Developing a second culture - e.g. through relocating to a place containing a new culture - will likely cause a degree of stress however this can be resolved through the ability to establish social networks in both cultures a person inhabits (p.407).

Due to their specific social networks and shifting places of residence, Fail et al. (2004, p.323) identify that some Third Culture Kids will suffer from social marginality in non-multicultural settings due to difficulties relating to and building meaningful social ties with monocultural others. Dormer (1979, p.5) holds that this becomes particularly acute in situations of TCKs “returning” to their passport countries for higher education and discovering they experience the place and people as foreign and are themselves not considered as being from that country. The ways in which a person experiencing themselves as a foreigner chooses to relate to their surroundings has been referred to as encapsulated marginality - someone who remains excluded and outside social relations with different others - and a marginality said to be constructive - whereby an individual endeavours to establish rapport with others outside of their sphere (ibid, p.7).

The academic literature and colloquial use of the term TCK appears to largely associate this concept with the wealthy transnational expatriate class and neglects the fact it could be used to describe the lived experience and identity-gap of so-called “second generation” immigrant children. These may have parents who, for example, arrived in Brussels during the 1970s to respond to Belgian manufacturing needs for low-skilled labour; they may have moved into neighbourhoods with a large density of people from similar economic backgrounds. Consequently their children may grow up feeling disconnected from the cultural reference points and ways of life their parents are connected to but, due to their spatial, ethnic and social situation, do not feel an identity conferring sense of belonging to the country they are in. Although so much differentiates the transnational expat children from the “second-generation immigrants” in terms of economic, social, positional status, there is some overlap in terms of their experience of identity and difficulty to define themselves *vis à vis* those who have no qualm in answering the archetypal question “where are you from?”.

A shortfall in some of the current literature on Third Culture Kids has the tendency of “othering” this group as well as presenting it as a homogenous unit which is always the same across time and space. This allows researchers to generate a more cohesive theory about such subjects which claims to be valid for people who could be considered as belonging to this category. We see this, for example, in Lidjadi et al. (2015) who claims that TCKs do not develop “a sense of belonging and attachment to one place” and that that this meant “life was never boring - it was always changing” (p.126). This is both a generalisation about how such people experience place-attachment and a romanticisation of it. The authors suggest that regularly moving from one place to another will mean that a person’s life experience will be more exciting and engaging than if they were more sedentary. The authors further this tendency for generalising

with a later comment that “TCKs grasp for anything that could give them a sense of belongingness” due to the absence of a “stable societal or school context for socialisation” (p.126).

A further trend of reductive homogenisation of TCKs is one which suggests that life in these spheres is one devoid of nationalism or xenophobia and where people live cohesively and happily with each other. This conception is apparent in academic literature and the discourse espoused by promoters of international schools who present such places as celebrations of diversity and bastions of tolerance. The Turkish author Elif Shafak, who grew up attending international schools debunks this misrepresentation in her autobiography describing her school as “like a mini United Nations” where each child was considered “‘representative’ of the land he or she came from”. This led to the situation whereby “whenever something negative occurred in relation to a country, the child associated with that country was held personally responsible – which meant mocked, ridiculed and bullied” (Shafak, 2011, p.41).

Having myself grown up attending a ‘European School’ in Brussels, I find Shafak’s description strikingly incisive. Students who had never lived in their passport country had to put up with the perception that they represented everything which originated from there. This concerned not only the students amongst themselves but also the teachers. An example occurred after Nigel Farage, the then leader of the UK Independence Party, gave a particularly virulent speech at the European Parliament in which he accused Herman Van Rompuy of having “the charisma of a damp rag and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk”. The following day an (Belgian) Economics teacher singled out the students associated with the UK (due to their being in the anglophone section of their year group, several, for example, were Irish) to tell them how shocking it is that English politicians seem to consider it acceptable to behave without regard for common rules of courtesy in political debate. It was a French language teacher who summed this phenomenon up most accurately when she said that she “never believed in nationalist stereotypes until becoming a teacher at the European School”. Shafak’s use of the term “mini-UN” to describe her school is pertinent as it demonstrates just how conventionally politicised such places can be. Regardless of the ‘living together in joyful diversity’ rhetoric which shrouds it, when push comes to shove people are quick to retreat to the seemingly secure confines of nationalist certainties and identities.

One critique of the Third Culture Kid concept is expounded by Benjamin and Dervin (2015) who claim that given the lack of a specific territory for a ‘third culture’ to manifest and evolve, such a culture cannot be considered to exist and that these people are in fact “culturally homeless” (p.6). What this view fails to recognise however is that from the perspective of some students, the international school itself consists in a psycho-geographic and territorial unit. When they find themselves within the meaningful place of international schools, they experience a unique but recognisable cultural atmosphere which they identify with. They have articulated this ‘cultural space of international schools’ as manifesting through their feeling that they did not have to be ‘on guard’ about being judged or misunderstood. The school generates a culture whereby they feel comfortable and capable of relating to others in a more ‘honest’ way.

One Youtube comment under a TEDx talk about third culture kids reads “Home is when you meet a fellow TCK and instantly connect! Because you can finally relate to someone (other than your siblings). I need to find more TCKs in my city, it would make me feel more at home”. In reply, another viewer said “I often find that where I feel most at home is in International Schools that are full of people just like me”. What is described here is similar to the notion (stereotype?) of e.g. two Americans who happen to cross paths in a foreign country and are overjoyed by how each reminds the other of “home”. They feel they can be more fully themselves and do not run the risk of being misunderstood or misinterpreted.

(1) They take relief in meeting someone they perceive as sharing similar ways of being in the world and assume the other will have had similar experiences in relating to the foreign surroundings they currently find themselves in.

(2) When they return to the US, they may describe a sense of relief about rediscovering a shared sense of who they are and the reassuring notion of common ways of viewing and expressing things.

By claiming that the non-territoriality of TCKs means they are not a “culture” fails to recognise that point (1) does not necessarily have to apply to territorial nationals. With regards to point (2), the ‘territory’ from which their shared sense of the world originates is the site of international schools themselves. This means that returning to such a school or being in a similar context composed of people used to transnational mobility may generate similar senses of belonging and ‘cultural’ security.

The concept of Third Culture Kid is further criticised for being analytically vague: it appeals to a large array of people who have had international upbringings but is as imprecise as “French” or “Spanish” as an analytical point of investigation. Tatu (2015) proposes that a more nuanced concept of “transnational youth” can better respond to describing children growing up abroad or across multiple countries. The concept of ‘transnational youth’ opens itself to a number of external factors which will produce entirely different urban practices and experiences as they will cause such youth to find themselves in different social spaces. These factors are nationality (the extent to which their passport allows them to travel easily); socio-economic status (are they the children of corporate employees or domestic workers); the causes of their mobility (the children of diplomats vs those of asylum seekers); anglophone fluency (English being the dominant language, children with a solid grasp of it will feel more in place and attached) (Tatu, 2015, p. 30-33). Given that the research carried out for this thesis is focused exclusively on a small group of students from highly privileged backgrounds attending fee-paying international schools, the term TCK is considered appropriate and will be kept.

## **2.5 International schools**

The definition of an “international school” is an ambiguous and contested one. Symbolically, the calling of a school “international” may be seen as elevating it to the status appealing to a transnational, anglophone elite incarnating values of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and global civic responsibility. Three ‘types’ of school can be distinguished which make a claim to

this title; 1) schools which offer the international baccalaureate (possibly only to certain students; 2) schools which cater essentially to an elite local population providing anglophone curricula aimed at assisting students to accede to top Western universities; 3) schools whose student body is mainly composed of students whose nationality is different from the host country and providing a non-local curriculum.

Cambridge and Thompson (2001, p. 5) argue the precise definition of such a school will be context-dependent. However certain criteria can be established:

- A transplanted national education system catering to expatriates' children from a specific country (American Embassy Schools)
- A transplanted nation education catering to expatriate children from other countries
- A mix of local and transplanted curricula catering to both expatriate and local students
- A rhetoric and ideology of global civic responsibility, multiculturalism and peace

As Wylie (2006, p.11) remarks, international schools are intimately tied up with colonial and postcolonial practices and the perpetuation of systems of domination or exploitation. They were the sites of imposing Western behaviour upon indigenous people by missionaries and colonial projects. By imposing curricula of international 'colonial' content the control of non-Western minds and bodies became successful. Since international education is so closely tied up with globalisation and economic relations of power, Quist (2005, p.3) holds that a study of education ought to integrate post-colonial discourses. For Wylie, although such schools seek to embody "symbolic identities of internationalism" in practice they also "serve hegemonic interests in the shift from colonialism to post-colonialism to global civil society" (2006, p.17).

The high appeal of "international education" is compared by Cambridge (2002, p. 227) to a successful globally branded product; that is, like "soft drinks and hamburgers: a reliable product conforming to consistent quality standards throughout the world". This desirability makes the international education label become perceived as a major pull factor to attract students or their parents. In the Copenhagen area alone there are 11 schools which consider themselves "international" and are immediately listed in a simple google search.

A key component of International Schools offering the International Baccalaureate is a course students undertake individually in their final years called Community Action Service (CAS). This can be viewed as an attempt to transcend the physical, social and mental barriers otherwise present as it requires students to engage in voluntary activities in the local community. In practice however there are a number of ways students can achieve their CAS credits through voluntary projects within only the school community itself (e.g. setting up a school sports team). Lack of grasp of the local language may be a contributing factor to their seeking such alternatives to undergoing unmediated cultural exchanges with the local community. A further alternative is going abroad to volunteer on an 'international (sic) development' project in an 'exotic' poor country. Although students are bound to learn from such experiences, they are also escapees from perhaps more intimidating and less glamorous engagements with the local city or area their school is in.

## 2.6 Transnational migration

Appadurai (1991, p.19) has postulated that ethnographic research is now tasked with investigating "the nature of locality, as lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world" precisely because "groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unself-conscious, or culturally homogenous" (cited in Schiller, 1995, p. 49). Instead, there has been an acceleration of mobilities accompanied by a decentering of national-place.

The global restructuring of capitalism under post-fordism expounded by Harvey (2000) and Sassen (1991) has led to the restructuring of the welfare state and, globally, a shift in the concentration of infrastructure and resources to regions and cities which already have a positional advantage vis-à-vis others. States do not endeavour to remediate unevenness of development but instead build upon this causing "reterritorialisation" - a rescaling of territorial organisation whereby places compete with each other to attract globally mobile capital (Brenner, 1999, p.432). The demographic consequence of this phenomenon has been a rise in transnational migration from both ends of the socio-economic spectrum. The transnational migrants wielding high economic and cultural capital typically work for multinational organisations and intergovernmental institutions and are commonly referred to as "expatriates". Although this phenomenon has its roots in colonialism it has significantly grown since the 1980s with the increasing liberalisation of economies and mobilities. For Schiller et al. (1995), the notion of 'transnationalism' is worthwhile in that it allows researchers to recognise that "immigrants live their lives across national borders and respond to the constraints and demands of two or more states" (p.54). In the case of this thesis, the transnational migrants whose children attend fee-paying elite international schools may be less submitted to the "constraints and demands" of states although these will still have an impact upon their daily life. They will have decided to send their children to an international school due to lack of linguistic or other quality standards amongst the host country's schools or for their children to receive an education within a historical and ideological context which is not focused upon one single nation state.

Making this qualification perhaps assists us in further clarifying the concept of TCK. In Copenhagen, students described "being able to fit in" regardless of the context and the ability to "adapt depending on who [they] are talking to". Alongside this however was also the notion mentioned above of feeling more at ease with international school students and that they needed to be less concerned of being judged or misunderstood. Whereas these TCKs may be able to adapt to different contexts, the ones where they are comfortable are those with people like them. And who are they? Usually children of parents with substantial economic and cultural capital who choose a life of mobility. This leads us to question just how appropriate the concept of TCK - coined by Unseem et al. in 1963 - really is. There is a risk that it ends up presenting these people who are portrayed as a fusion of cultures which manifests as an all-encompassing metaphysical 'third' one as more complex individuals than the children of less economically and culturally privileged people. Within this latter category are both people who are sedentary and

transmigrants at the opposite end of the economic scale; i.e. those who find themselves “uprooted” less by privilege and more by necessity.

Here is a preliminary conceptualisation of the differences between this latter group and TCKs.

	<b>Reason for parents' mobility</b>	<b>Students' vision for post-school life</b>	<b>Prioritisation of decisions</b>
<b>TCKs</b>	Interests, career pathways	Abroad for university education and work	Reproduce hypermobile lifestyle or go to passport country
<b>“Second generation immigrants”</b>	Economic or political necessity	Remain in the city or country their parents moved to	Find employment in country they grew up in where parents now live

### 3. Methodology

Given that I myself grew up attending a European School in Brussels, analysing and researching international schools will inevitably lead me to make comparisons with my own experiences and personal reflections.

The thesis will use a hermeneutic-phenomenological research method as it appears the best way of investigating the concept of an international school lifeworld. This involves the researcher seeking to immerse themselves in the direct lived experience of students to best convey their subjectivity and experience. In practice, this will be achieved through conducting onsite observations; individual interviews, group interviews and a discourse analysis of the schools' promotional material. The schools investigated will be the Copenhagen International School (CIS) and the International College Spain (ICS) located in Madrid.

As Van Manen (2014) specifies, hermeneutics relates to the practice and theory of interpreting meaning. It is applied to written texts. However it has increasingly become used for applied research in the social sciences to "read" the meanings imbued in buildings, places, things and practices. This is a practice heralded by Barthes (1997) with his semiotic readings of buildings, streets and the city. Such a reading provides a framework from which to understand a subject's lived experience from their perspective, 'nested' in a web of environmental and historical influences. There is an agreed upon set way of undertaking phenomenological hermeneutic research. The terms upon which it will be conducted have to be delineated in each study leaving phenomenological researchers "perpetual beginners" in their attempt to discover and convey the essence of human experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p.54). This does not mean such a method will be insufficiently rigorous to be considered academic. Instead, it is a recognition that there is not any one method which applies to the investigation of every phenomena. The aspects of phenomenological research which apply consistently are the way in which the world is engaged with (Van Manen, 2014). It is then down to the researcher to develop a cogent "phenomenological sight" and accompanying "phenomenological writing" to appreciate and communicate the research (Seamon 2000, p.27). Such a methodology is not exclusively thought but must be lived. The end goal will be to plunge the reader into the lifeworld under study, away from usual reference points, moving them "along new paths of understanding" (Seamon 2000, p.29).

The phenomenological approach is based on the ontological assertion that since lived experience is an interpretative activity, a similarly interpretative conceptualisation of it is required. It is an inductive approach to theory as opposed to theory produced through a priori logical deductions.

Such a phenomenological method has an encompassing capacity which resides outside the logic of positivistic science; as such it aspires to "bypass completely, the positivist split between 'objective' and 'subjective'" (Frank, 1987, p.65). Alongside a phenomenological observation or

'story', one does not provide competing data sets but a more revealing and incisive narrative (ibid). What is at stake here is not to provide an empirically measurable delineation of a situation but the revealing of a core meaning which combines both lived experience with phenomenological theorisation. It refers to issues for which exhaustive, total knowledge and understanding is never achieved.

The aim is to withhold from judging factual observations and instead achieve 'époché' leading to 'ataraxy' - a serene state of calmness - allowing the researcher to "narrate from lived experience" (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004, p.147).

Phenomenological research is individual in that it is tied to the hermeneutic situation of the researcher. The researcher does not discover something totally 'other' such as an entirely novel concept or perspective but "possibilities of meaning" which are already attached to and inform the view of the researcher (Burch, 1989, p.209).

Van Manen considers that phenomenological approaches cause the researcher to realise that "all understanding is ultimately self-understanding" (1984, p.50). This will be particularly relevant in the present case given that I have grown up in the social environment of the Brussels 'European School' system and so will inevitably be relating my reading of the various 'texts' I will study to my own experiences. As has already been done in the previous chapter, I am relating to experiences I had both in school and in the period immediately after graduating and moving to my passport country: Durham university in the North East of England with a large conservative white middle class english student population. This was a social reality so different from what I had been within up until then that it allowed me to further reflect on the international school experience.

This notion of self-understanding is not merely self-centered and instead relates to shared understandings of meaningfulness. This falls in line with the Platonic concept of *anamnesis*; the idea that through exploring and discovering meaning in the world we are in fact engaged in a process of 'recollection' (Van Manen, 1984, p.56). It is within this methodological context that I situate this research as I will be consciously presenting the research in light of the socialisation process I underwent at an international school and the subsequent reflections I had as a result.

Objective empirical data will be used alongside and to supplement this perspective. This data is collected through on site-photography, discourse analysis of school catalogues as well as formal semi-structured interviews with students and informal exchanges with teachers. In all cases, individual students and teachers have been anonymised and different names are used in their place.

## 4. Case Studies

### 4.1 - Copenhagen International School (CIS)

The Copenhagen International School is situated in the North of the city on what is still a functioning harbour area. The state-of-the-art Star-architecture building opened in January 2017 thus moving students away from the previous campus in Hellerup. Encompassing a surface area of 25,000m<sup>2</sup> it is the biggest school in the city and has a maximum capacity of 1,200 students along with 280 staff members. The architecture firm was the Arhus based group C. F. Møller which is now one of the largest firms in Denmark. The financial supporters of the project were the Moller Foundation (Maersk), the Novo Nordisk Foundation, the Hempel Foundation, the Villum Foundation, Orients Fond and the Augustinus Foundation. Referring to the choice of location for the school, the current Headteacher is quoted on the school website saying "We are pioneers in opening a school in Nordhavn" (CIS, 2017).

This notion of breaking out into uncharted territory certainly applies to the location and design of the school. To reach it, one has to go under the railway lines which separate the neighbourhoods of Østerbro from Nordhavn and then along the winding and windy road of Sundkrogsgade through an industrial estate with buildings under construction, vacant land and office towers. After passing the shipping company DFDS' headquarters, one must turn right onto the second "jetty" of the port area past an industrial construction site before the school building comes into view.

The school itself is perched on a peer-like platform meaning it is surrounded by water on three sides. It appears as a large blue structure composed of irregularly placed tetris blocks reminiscent of the wall of stacked shipping containers standing 50m across the playground from it. There are four 'towers' which emerge at different heights from a main horizontal block. At the far end of the school, a crane for lifting containers onto ships stands only marginally higher than the tallest tower. It is of a similar colour - mat blue - to the cladding around the outside of the building and from a distance the two structures appear to be almost part of the same project. Along the water-facing side of the school is a grey coloured, two story high block on the roof of which the primary school children's playground is located. The grey colour and fact that the rest of the blue-cladded school is several dozen meters 'indented' into it adds to the shipping theme. It appears as if this lower part of the school is a ship in the docks, awaiting to be loaded up with the blue cargo containers towering high above.

There is further significance to having an international school located in a port - a traditional site of trade - as it may be within such areas that concepts of "cosmopolitanism" arose. Turner (2002) holds that "[i]n ancient civilizations, trade centres were often protected by religion and custom as places where strangers could meet for exchange without danger or harassment" with the ports of cities acting as "sites of enforced hospitality and cosmopolitanism" (p. 52). To return to Nordhavn, it is of further symbolic interest that the land upon which the school is located was

first developed in the late 1800s to act as a “duty-free” area exempt from Danish customs laws (nordhavnen.dk, 2018). This meant that ships and their cargo could dock for some time in Copenhagen before seamlessly sailing back out to international waters, unhindered by concerns for local regulations.

In the same way that one does not board a ship at water level, so to access the main entrance one must walk up a concrete slope and then across over a gangway styled bridge before penetrating into the building itself. Immediately opposite this main entrance is a wall of shipping containers causing the on-looker to feel in a somewhat closed-in open air corridor between it and the towering school structure.

The playground is spread across the tarmacked hill which leads up to the ‘gangway’ entrance. It is decorated with ludic floor painting and low-rise structures around and upon which to climb, hide and run. These structures even include a skateboarding ramp complete with a metallic tube to grind on. At the furthest end of the playground sits one lone container. It is clearly from the shipping activity taking place on the other side of a mesh wire fence. However it is within the school grounds meaning children can touch and play around it. There is also no fence or wall separating this play area from the water’s edge such that that children could walk all around the building, including the three sides which give directly onto the water.

To sum up, the Copenhagen International School is, upon first encounter, a striking project due to: 1) the somewhat arduous route to arrive at the school passing under the railway line and through a winding industrial/office complex, 2) the immediate surroundings of containers and ships visible from the school and 3) the elevated and compartmentalised design of the building itself. This generates both a symbolic and literal sense of detachment from any familiar points of reference which one may encounter and relate to in the city. Between Nordhavn station and the school is a 15 minute walk during which they will encounter no shops and services or spaces to gather and meet anyone. This results in the school existing somewhat as an island.

The school building itself appears to have been designed with autarchy in mind. Indeed one teacher told me “this place is like a city - you could live here”. After crossing the gangway and going through a heavy glass door requiring an electronic badge which most parents and older students appeared to have, one enters a welcome area with a reception desk and, to the right, a wide and bright wooden staircase leading up to one of the towers. Ahead is a smaller set of glass doors through which one can see down a set of wide gradiented stairs into the central common area of the school situated at water level. It is used as a cantine space during lunch times and a site for year groups to convene at other moments of the day. On this floor is also a 250 seat theatre; two indoor sports rooms as well as carpentry, textiles and arts workshops. The upper part of the school is divided into four “towers” grouping students together according to their age. The rationale for this explained on the school’s website which refers to “Dunbar’s number” - a sociological theory claiming that people cannot keep close contact with more than 150 people. This led the architects to structure the social and pedagogical space grouping students together by no more than 100 at a time. This, the school claims, “increases students’

sense of community, responsibility and belonging” (CIS, 2017). It goes on to describe the school as having been:

[...] modeled on a town centered around the town square with restaurant and library and administration, sports and cultural facilities adjoining, with venues and areas for increasingly larger groups of people, depending on function and relationship: classroom, year group, section/tower, whole school” (CIS, 2017).

Within each “tower”, the design of the different spaces and the classrooms is described as follows:

‘Cave’ spaces for individual focus study, ‘Watering holes’ for peer work, ‘Campfire’ spaces for lecture and traditional calls learning and the community spaces. The increasing autonomy of the different age groups is reflected in the design (CIS, 2017).

This ideal of a cohesive and structured “town” is further manifest in promotional videos produced by the school. The cosmopolitan/global citizen ideology often ascribed to international schools is made explicit by one teacher talking on camera about how “[t]he world is getting smaller and smaller. We expect our students to travel everywhere in the world when they start working” (CIS, 2017). This is supplemented by the director saying that “the challenges of tomorrow are not national challenges, they are international challenges. Our vision is that we are creating champions for a just and sustainable world”. This was added to by a student describing notions of global social responsibility; “Community Action Service [CAS - an accredited IB course] is meant to prepare you for university and not just studying and being selfish”. There is a desire to manifest an awareness of their privileged position and of a moral responsibility towards those in their immediate vicinity to whom they feel they can bring assistance as part of their International Baccalaureate diploma which includes a ‘service’ (CAS) module;

-“You don’t focus only on your grades (...). Service is very important. It helped me to grow up. From helping disabled people ride ponies to playing soccer at school every Saturday. It has made me a better person”

-“The service helps you get in touch with the society, with those who need it and aren’t as privileged”

-“It is a compulsory element which helped me understand what it is to give to society”

-“It involves giving to the community and not doing it for your own benefit”

This is brought back to and framed within the notion that an International Schooling experience will make students well-rounded global citizens who take pride and value in

diversity; “[t]his is what school is about; learning to be with people from different cultures. The IB shows you that this what you should do as a child” (Student, CIS, 2017).



*Figures above: Photos of the CIS building taken from the side facing the containers (author's photos).*



*Figure above: one of the 'cave' spaces for recreational activity.*



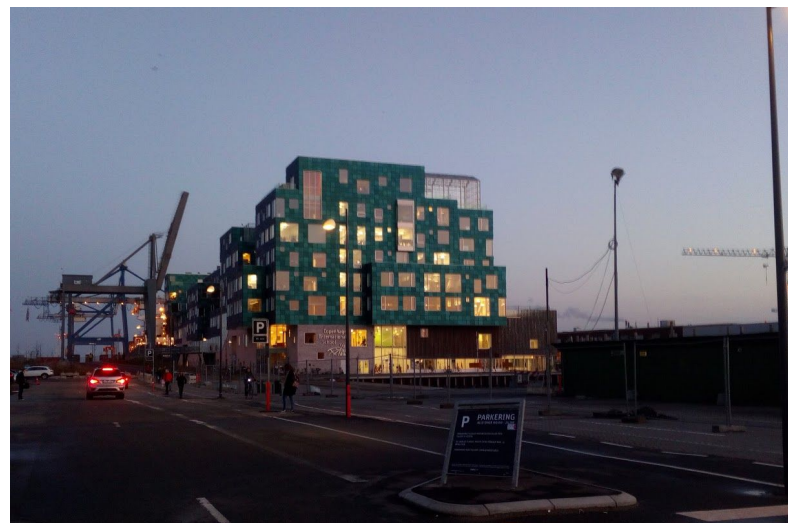
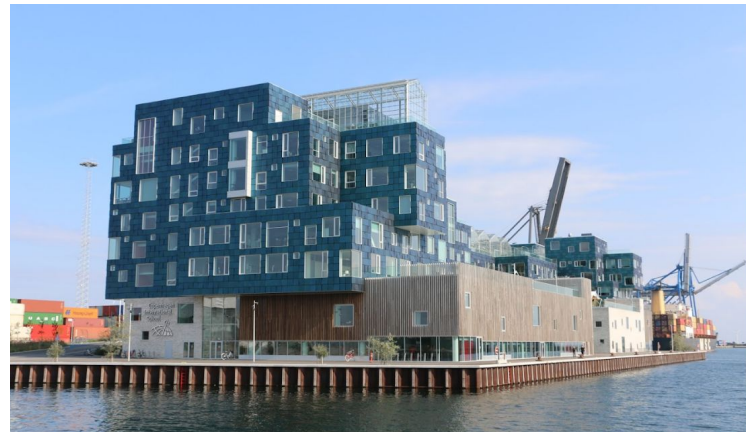
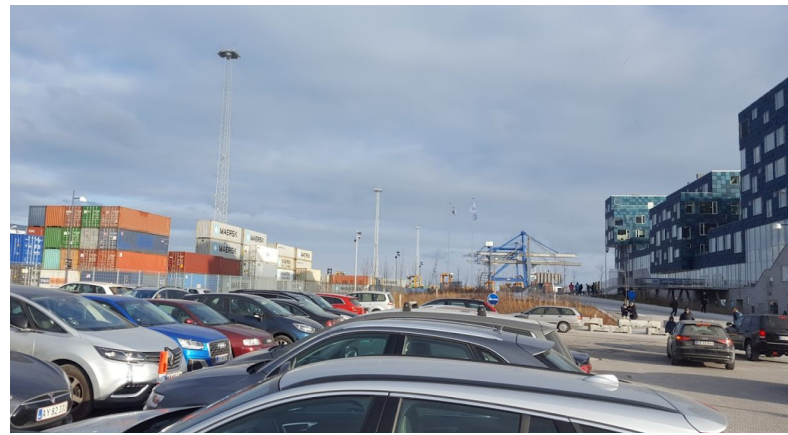
*Figure above:: A standard CIS classroom (author's photos)*



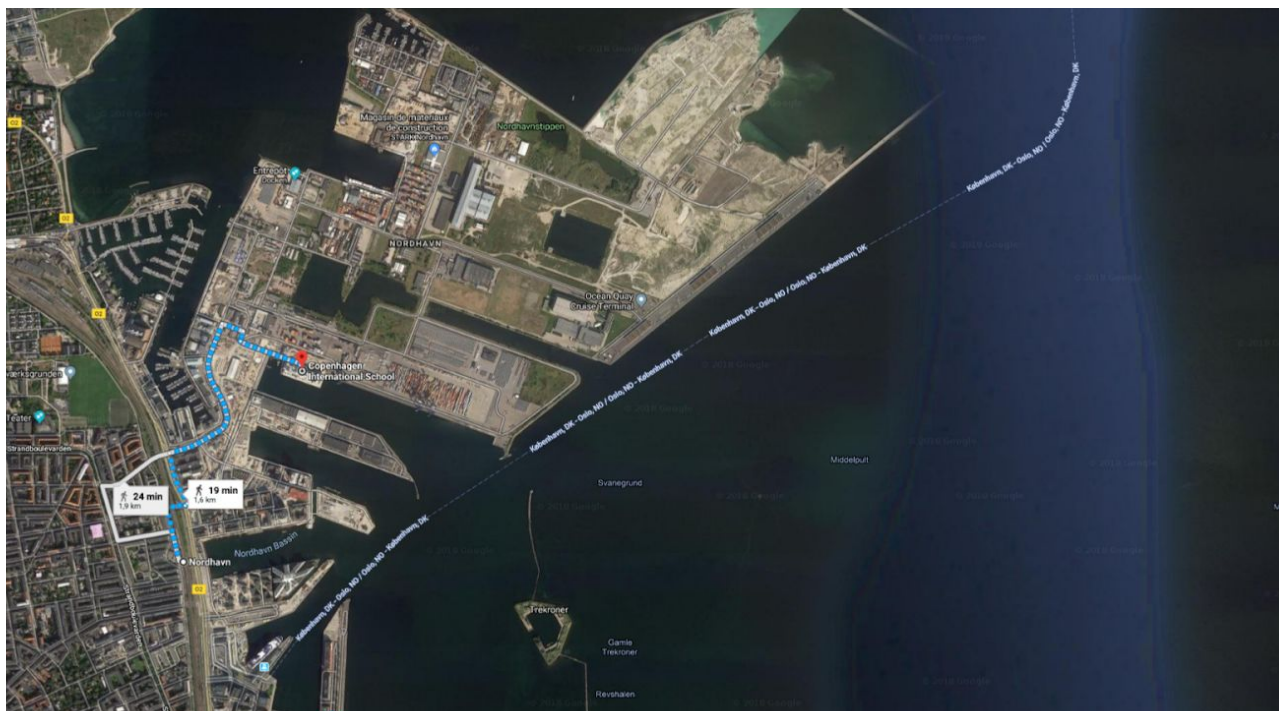
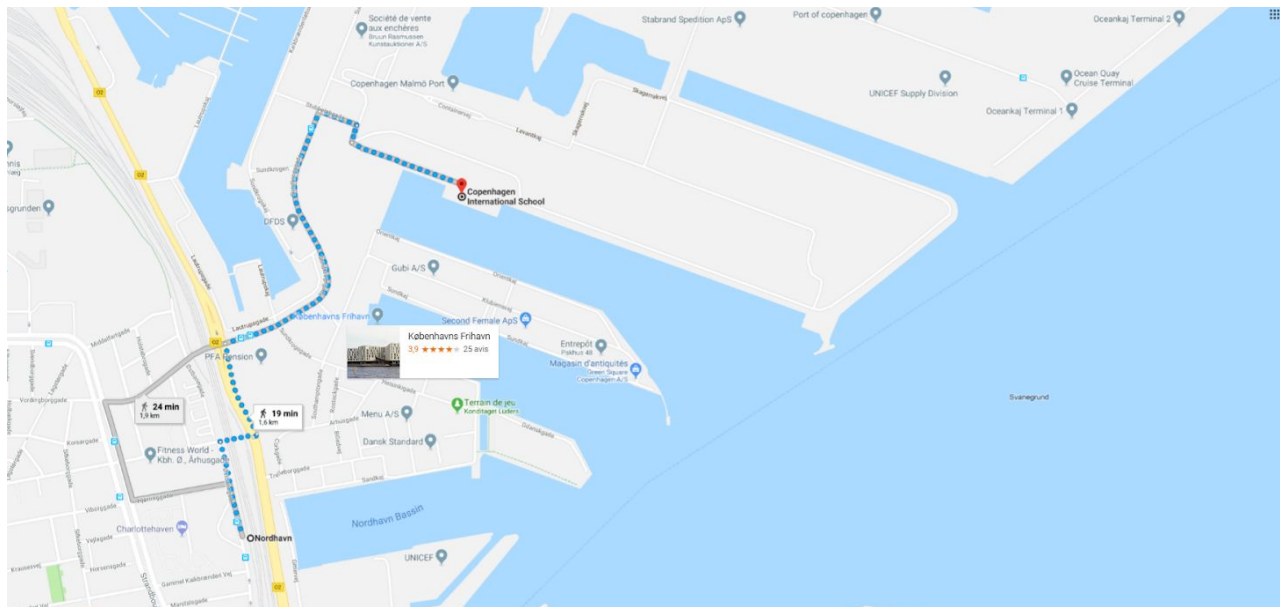
Figures: clockwise from top left: skateboard ramp in playground; footpath up to the entrance; view from a classroom of playground overlooking the harbour; the two 'gangways giving access to the school building (author's photos).



Figures above: view onto an elevated children's playground with a netting fence around it; view onto the cranes and open harbour area from CIS' rooftop greenhouse.



*Figures: clockwise from top left: view of shipping containers in front of the school (source: google maps images); CIS with its two sides giving on to the water. N.B. there is no barrier at ground level to prevent people from walking (or cycling!) into the water (source: google maps images); the school lighting up as darkness falls. The rooftop greenhouse is visible on the right of the main 'tower' structure (author's photo); the street leading from the train station which students must walk or cycle down to reach the school. This street corner also serves as an informal gathering point after class as it is a crossroads from which students will take different directions towards home (author's photo).*



*Figures above: maps showing the Nordhavn harbour area with the +/-20 minute walking route they must take to go from the train station to the school (produced by author using Google Maps).*

#### **4.1.1 The research process**

I conducted fieldwork at the Copenhagen International School on the 7th and 8th of December 2017. After emailing the school administration and teachers I received an invitation to attend classes of 9th and 10th form students whose ages ranged from 14-17 years old. The classes were in an International Baccalaureate (IB) course called “People and Societies” which involves studying 20th century social movements and human geography. The teacher was pleased to receive my request as he had recently been discussing concepts of “home” as well as studying “megacities” with his students. Having an external researcher come into the class was something he thought would be interesting and engaging for the students involved.

The methodology I used was as follows. One week before going to the school I sent the contact teacher a google survey and asked him to communicate it to his students. The online survey was designed to collect basic empirical data about the students (their nationalities; places they had lived in; their street name in Copenhagen; means of transport for getting to school) as well as begin acquiring data regarding their places of interest in the city; extracurricular activities; neighbourhood preferences. The second stage in my methodology was site-specific research. I collected ethnographic observations from time spent in classrooms and communal spaces around the school and produced photographic documentation of the buildings. The ethnographic observations involved the breaks between classes, pauses during classes, lunchtime recess, morning arrivals and afternoon departures from the school. The third methodological practice was interviewing. I conducted 4 group interviews of 30-40 minutes with 4 or 5 students each time as well as 5 individual interviews of about 20 minutes with some of them. Informal discussions with teachers also occurred and will be referred to.

#### **4.1.2 CIS survey results**

There were 61 responses to the google survey out of 5 classes consulted. The reason for such a high response rate is that all students at CIS have their own laptop which they use in each class and my contact teacher had asked his students to complete the survey during class time.

The bulk of respondents were 14 years old (24.6%) and 15 years old (63.9%). There were five 16 year olds and two 17 year olds.

The responses to the questions “What are you passport nationalities” and “Which are your mother tongue languages” are almost so varied that they can only be taken on an individual case by case basis. The same goes for the answers to “Which cities have you been to school in?”.

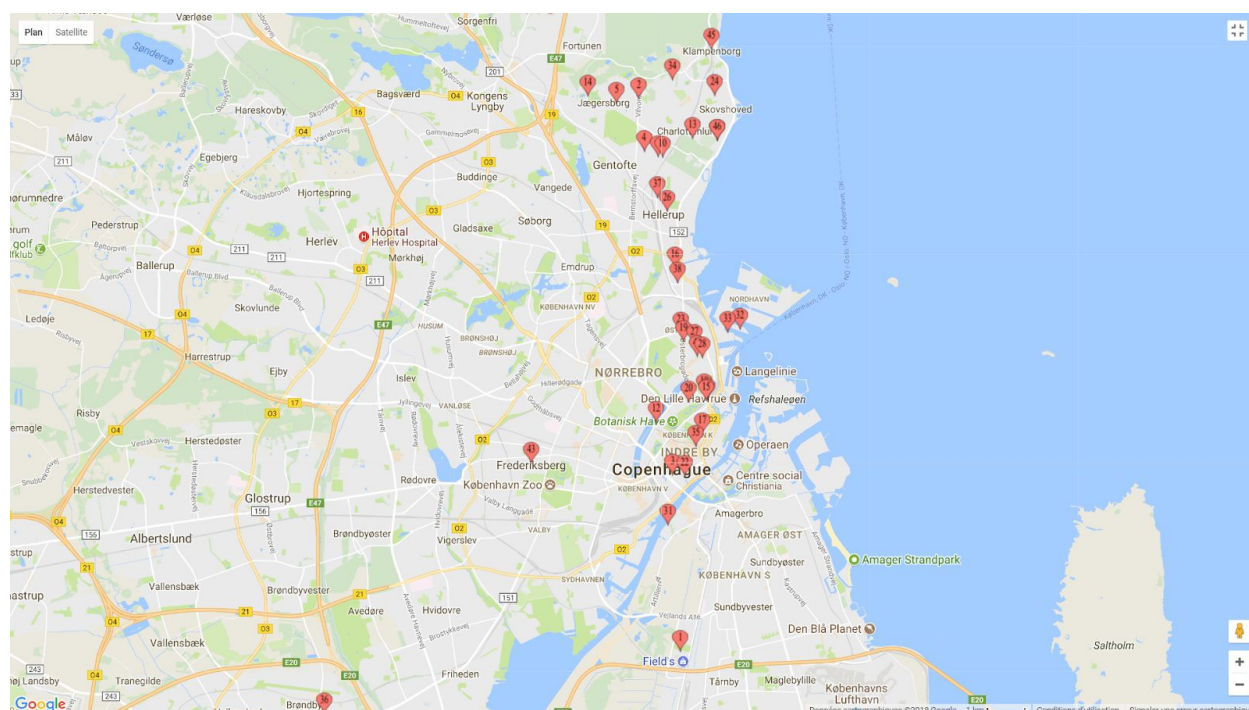
The nationalities students reported having were as follows;

Dutch and British (1); Uzbek (1); French (2); Norwegian (1); Danish (13); Estonian (1); American (5); Ethiopian (1); Portuguese and Canadian (1); British and American (2); Canadian (2);

German and Danish (1); Australian; Dutch (2); Italian and Swedish; Swiss and Iranian and French; Finnish; Spanish (3); Danish and Egyptian; Spanish and British; British and Swedish and Finish; Czech; Romanian and American; Trinidad and Tobago; Irish; British (2); Russian; Danish and American; Danish and British; Swiss and Danish and Italian; Italian; Romanian and Moldovan; Swedish and German and Canadian; American and Belgian; Chinese; Botswana.

There are 37 different nationality groups within the 61 respondents. The single largest national group are Danes with 13 students who hold only this nationality. There are five additional students who hold a Danish passport as well as one other nationality. The second largest group is students with an American passport of which there are 9, including four dual-nationals. Four students are holders of three different passports. This likely means they were born in a third (*sic*) country to parents who both have their own respective nationality.

The below map shows the streets the respondents live on (produced by author):



There is a clear trend of students living towards the North of Copenhagen, especially in the wealthy suburban Hellerup district. Indeed there is a section of the school's website with advice from the parent's association entitled 'Where to live' saying that "[p]opular areas to live include Hellerup, Charlottenlund, Klampenborg, Lyngby, Gentofte, Østerbro and Ordrup" (CIS, 2017). These are predominantly leafy, wealthy suburbs of the city.

In response to the question "Which cities have you been to school in?" there is an even higher correlation between the number of students and the number of answers. These are as follows:

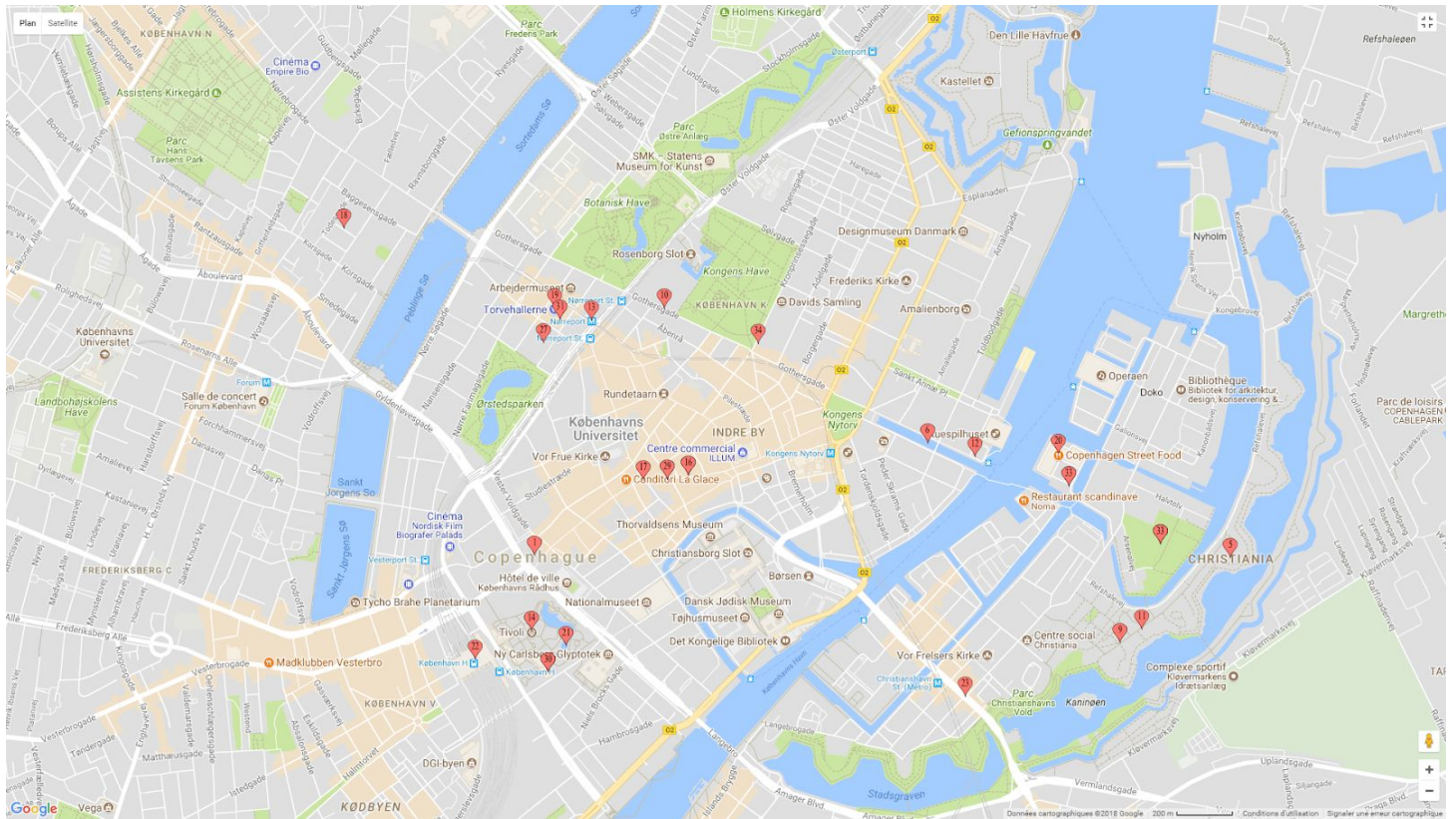
1	Copenhagen (6)
2	The Hague (2)
3	Tashkent
4	Geneva, Khartoum
5	Tunis, Alger, Casablanca, Paris, Bordes-Bricards, Mumbai
6	Oslo, Trondheim
7	Milan, Stockholm, Poznan, Berlin
8	Rome, Tallinn
9	Lyon
10	Barcelona, Frankfurt
11	New York, Luanda
12	Marseille, Annecy
13	Denver
14	Toronto, London
15	Amman, Khartoum, Berlin
16	Sydney
17	Johannesburg, New York City
18	San Diego, Houston
19	Moscow, Port of Spain Trinidad, London
20	Milano, Neuchâtel, Zurich
21	San Diego, Houston
22	Boston, Atlanta, Maseru, Dodoma, Brussels, Basel, Geneva
23	Greenville, Houston, Atlanta
24	Helsinki, Beijing
25	Budapest, Cape Town, Amman, Lausanne, Bucharest
26	Ferney-Voltaire, Barcelona
28	Barcelona
29	Calgary, Denver and Muscat
30	London, Doha, Singapore

31	Doha, Almaty
32	Paris, Ho Chi Minh
33	Prague, The Hague
34	Geneva, Monterey
35	Doha, Amsterdam, Limerick
36	Shanghai, Charlotte
37	Trinidad
38	Moscow
39	Miami, Dubai,
40	"Too many!"
41	Hellerup and Nordhavn
42	Beijing, and Mexico City
43	Kampala
44	Milan, Lugano
45	Melbourne, Fribourg, Montreux
46	Milano, Lugano
48	Sarajevo, Virginia
49	Calgary
50	Lemmer, Houston
51	Nice, Luxembourg
52	Moldova
53	Holbæk, Ordrup, Helsinki
54	Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Maputo
55	Doha
56	Beijing, Shenzhen, Shanghai
57	Gaborone, Ramotswa

This data confirm just how unique the place-based pathways of students attending an International School might be. Only six of the students had attended school exclusively in Copenhagen. Almost a third of students had already been to school in three or more cities before arriving in Copenhagen.

So as to further establish the extent to which these young people can be considered to have a hypermobile lifestyle they were asked to estimate the number of times they would travel abroad in an average year. Only 16.6% of respondents travel abroad three or fewer times a year. Over half (55%) of them go abroad 4 or 5 times a year and close to a third (28.3%) go abroad 6 times or more in any given year.

The following part of the survey sought to grasp their place-based urban practices and preferences. The places and areas students mentioned as their favourite destinations in the city are plotted on this map:



*Figure: Map of CIS student urban preferences, December 2017 (produced by author).*

In response to the question, 12% of respondents simply replied that it was “the city centre” which they liked most. The rest of the replies were split between references to 1) specific sites of consumption or recreation and 2) plazas or neighbourhoods of Copenhagen. Amongst the first category, people cited small scale local eateries (Wagamama restaurant in Frederiksberg; Emils Kebab) as well as well known locales such as Tivoli, cited by 17% of respondents. The second category refers to public places which are desirable for the particular social atmospheres generated there as well as being nodes for consumption and recreation practices. These were Israel Plads, Blågårds Plads, the pedestrian shopping street Strøget (12%); the trendy food court alongside re-converted docks warehouses Papirøen; Nyhavn and Christiania (7%). Outside of the above map, people also cited their favorite places as being Hellerup; Gentofte; Frederiksberg park; Fælledparken. Also noteworthy is that 14% of respondents cited their “house” as their favourite place in the city.

Whereas asking about their “favourite” places in Copenhagen gives an idea of what they are familiar with and where their preferences lie, it does not indicate how frequently and in what

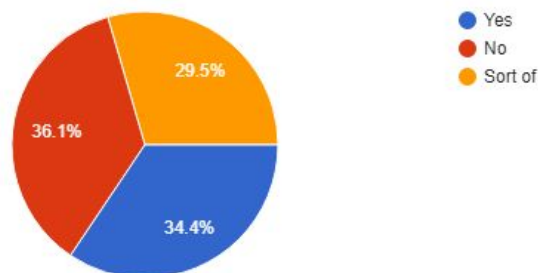
ways they actually move through the city to go to these locations and locales. As a result, the subsequent point of inquiry was regarding their routines. From the responses provided, it appears that two thirds of students' weekly practices are triangulated between going from school to home plus one other site of recreational activity - either visiting a friend's house or a sports/cultural activity outside the school. During the subsequent group discussions it became evident that one of the reasons for students finding themselves shuttling from school to home is due to the large amount of extracurricular activities on offer within the school itself. Students described finding they had little opportunity or reason to go outside of the home-school dichotomy, perhaps only taking the train into the city for an afternoon during the weekend.

After asking about students' favourite and most frequented places, asking about areas they fear or dislike would bring additional insight into their psycho-geographic perception of the city. 40% of students responded there was no such place within their vision of Copenhagen and that they would go everywhere. For several of these students, the only places they don't like are those with "large crowds and noise". A few others did however admit they did not yet know Copenhagen well enough to make an informed decision. Others were more explicit about places they didn't like such as the Central station "because it is crowded". 19% cited the multiethnic neighbourhood of Nørrebro as a place they would avoid or are fearful of. Reasons for this ranged from its prominence in public debate at the time due to highly mediatised events of gang violence; concern that it is a place of "gangs made from refugees"; that their parents forbade them from going there; that they are scared of being "robbed or shot"; that they had already been mugged there in the past and did not want to return. The second most feared or avoided place is Christiania, with 15% of people saying they would not go there. This was justified with reference to their parents prohibiting them; saying that they "don't want to get involved with drugs" and that it is "the home for drugs"; whereas others simply "don't like the smell of drugs" and so avoid this area.

Aside from immediate preferences to certain places of the city, a further way of assessing the extent to which one is 'connected' with the city and its various (social) spaces, is manifest in the extent of social acquaintances and friends outside of one's immediate sphere of encounter. For students at CIS this would involve knowing people who do not attend their school.

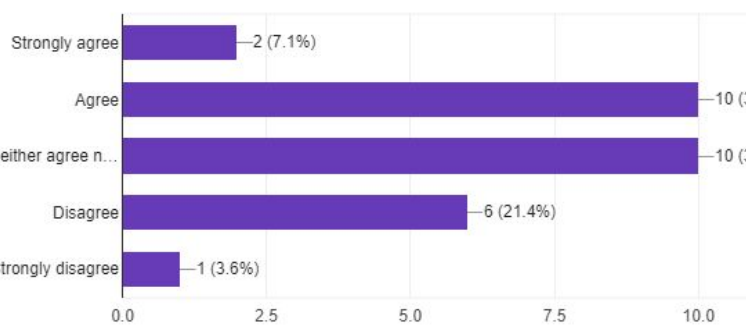
## 20. Is it difficult to meet people outside your school?

61 responses

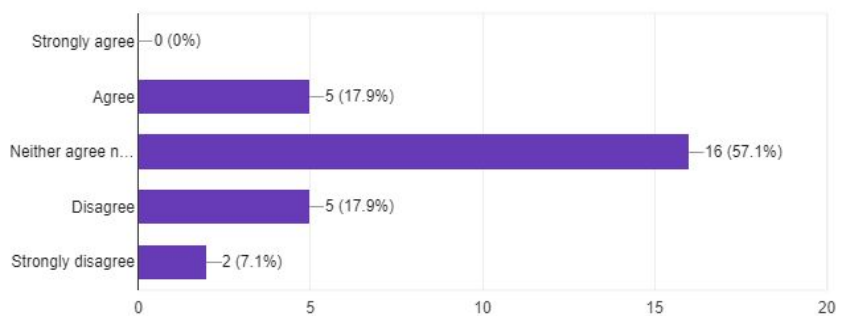


As the pie chart demonstrates, opinion about the ease of encounters beyond the social and physical perimeter of CIS is fairly evenly split in three ways. A quarter of students cited the language barrier as the main obstacle for their either having access or not to non-CIS social circles. Others, who would appear to want more possibilities for outside interaction placed the burden of responsibility upon the school which “does not interact with other Danish schools, making it hard to meet new people”. Some report the aforementioned triangulation of student life as the main reason for not knowing locals: “You never really get the opportunity to meet them, as you are either at school, at home, or doing a school activity”. A more qualitative reason for not knowing outsiders, which 15% of respondents made reference to, was the cultural disconnect between themselves and youths attending Danish schools. One Danish respondent who had partly grown up abroad explained that “I’m not like most Danish kids, I don’t have the same background and therefore feel hard to connect with most normal Danish kids”. Another, referring to his or her lack of outside acquaintances said it was because “[t]hey don’t know what International Life (*sic*) is like”.

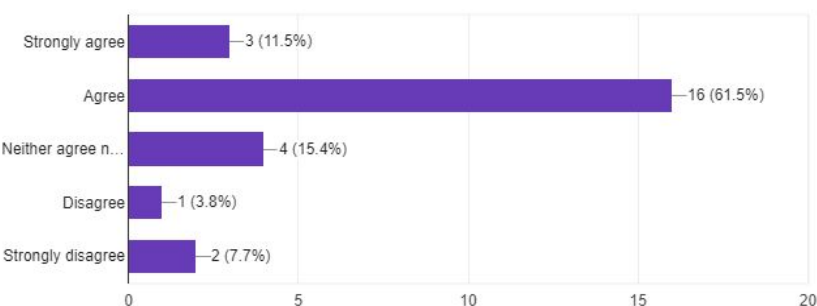
25. "As a student at CIS I feel integrated in Danish society"  
28 responses



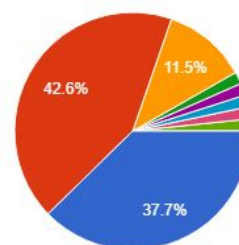
26. "I don't feel a strong national identity and think the concept of 'global citizen' best describes me."  
28 responses



27. "Even though I have lived in different cities, it is easy to make new friends and feel comfortable in a new place"  
26 responses



19. Where do most of your good friends live?  
61 responses



- Abroad
- In Copenhagen, mostly at CIS
- In Copenhagen, mainly not at CIS
- In Denmark but not Copenhagen
- A mixture of Denmark but not CIS, Denmark at CIS, and abroad...
- I have a lot of good friends in the US and in Copenhagen
- Both in Copenhagen and abroad
- Both Abroad and in CIS

#### **4.1.3 On site research**

On both days I conducted research I was met by my contact teacher in the reception area where I would be given a visitor's badge with my name and the date printed on it.

On Thursday 7/12/2017 I arrived at the lobby area at 8.25 am. In the large communal area I could see an activity with several classes was already underway. The popular 1980s song *Eye of the tiger* is being blasted out of loudspeakers in the middle of the open communal area. In the main hall children around 8-10 years old are sitting at tables in front of their own laptops with an overhead projector shining information onto the wall. A teacher greets them speaking into a microphone "Hello year group! Welcome to the fourth annual programme for coding". My contact teacher then arrived and took me up to the 'tower' in which he teaches. He showed me his office where he works when not giving class which he shares with two other geography teachers. He then took me up to the rooftop terrace where an empty greenhouse had been the site of a party for the older students the previous week. Given the 'Dunbar's number' design of the building - keeping students in groups of max. 100 - the teachers also find themselves segregated within each of the four towers. There is only a small cramped staff room in each of these. Teachers described how unpopular this spatial arrangement is for staff as it prevents opportunities to see other teachers.

At 10:15 am the first class with grade 10 began. The teacher started by showing a promotional video advertising an upcoming week-long surfing holiday in Portugal during the summer break. Students could choose to participate for the price of 7000 Danish krone (about 940 euros).

At the start of each class I would introduce myself and the project and students could volunteer to participate. The group discussions were useful for developing further insights and qualifications of students' experiences. I was occasionally surprised by how once a discussion began I would no longer have to mediate it but instead was observing exchanges unfold between the participants. Students were entirely at ease with discussing their travel histories and opinions of international schools.

#### **4.1.4 Significance of place of residence and relations to outsiders**

Whereas the majority of students lived in wealthy suburban Hellerup or Gentofte, there was a portion (20%) who lived in the city centre. When asked whether they liked where they lived in the survey, the large majority (89%) said they did. It appeared that whether they lived in the inner city or the suburbs they were content with it. A student explained how "some international families have relocation experts. So for us, someone told us 'this is what to expect'". Regarding the reasons why they liked the places of residence it tended to be because they saw it as coinciding with their preferences; "I live one street away from the Queen. [...] It's good because it's not [only] residential - you can go to shops and all things are nearby". Another student living in Gentofte explained; "I sometimes go to the centre but it's like a 25 minute train ride. I prefer it here because there are parks where I can play sports". They sometimes even appeared to have

played an active role coming to the decision of location: “we decided to be in the city because otherwise we would stay there if we lived in Hellerup and would probably do nothing at the weekend”. Or another telling that “we had a choice between Gentofte and the city centre and in the end we chose Gentofte because before in Barcelona we lived in the centre and my mum hated the noise”. With regards to a sense of place in their neighbourhood they described being somewhat outside of local Danish society and living without feeling particularly part of it; “In our apartment complex there are three other expat families and we’ve met them all and they speak to us but the Danish families don’t really speak to us”.

Across discussion groups there was often a ‘them and us’ conception with regards to state schools as opposed to international schools. Students described from their own experiences how the degree of intimacy and closeness which might be built up between people who attended a local state school all their life would be qualitatively different from the experience of international school students; speaking from his own experience having attended a Danish school prior to CIS, one student explained how after years together local state school students have “grown so accustomed to each other. It’s like a relationship you can’t break. Here people lose touch more easily when they move away.” This concept of how emotional ties could be experienced differently was reflected upon in another group with a student sharing; “I always wonder what it would be like to go to a public school and be in one spot compared to moving around the world”.

There was an acute sense that a hypermobile lifestyle made them more capable of smoothly adapting to different locations and people. This was not only the case with regards to specific individuals but created a social environment within the international school supportive and nurturing of this; “We’re all in the same boat at CIS. We all understand the view point where we’re coming from”. There was a self-aware sense that their capacity to socialise and build new friendships had been highly refined: “When I got here I was surprised how everyone was so experienced in International Schools [...] they’ve learnt from what they did in other schools and then they come in here and they just know exactly what to do”. The students perceive a notable difference between themselves and others who have not had the same exposure to mobilities; “I see my cousins, for example, are very awkward around new people because they didn’t have that”. The concept of ‘comfort zones’ was a recurring one with a student describing how at CIS there is no choice but to learn about different nationalities.

Regarding students’ sense of ‘emotional ties’ it is important not to overlook the importance of the built forms in which they find themselves socialising. Given that they had only recently moved into the new school at Nordhavn, they were able to provide incisive accounts of the social and psychological experience which each produced. Students described how the previous building was more “personable” and “homey”. Their responses also posed direct criticism of the theory upon which the new building’s segmented social structures is based; “It feels a bit split up with you know that all the ninth graders and all the 10th graders will stay on their own floor” with others saying that now “there’s nowhere to go” and “the chances to go outside were better in the old school because here we just stay inside the whole time”.

Given the prevalence of the discourse around “open-mindedness” within international schools academic literature, I probed as to how far outside the confines of CIS it may extend. It appeared those who could talk of having close friends in Copenhagen had previously attended Danish schools or spoke Danish fluently. One girl who didn’t have any acquaintances beyond CIS explained that “the only way is to meet people through mutual friends”. Another described how she felt “more isolated” in Copenhagen, after having lived in Switzerland where “people would come up and speak with me”. A reason for this lack of local contacts was also put down to age as “it’s easier for older people because they are more mature”. When asked whether this lifestyle of mobility was one they aspired to maintain into their own work lives, students were cautious to embrace it. Whereas most knew they would not live in Copenhagen, there was a sense they would like to experience a more sedentary life; “I’d definitely want to move less. I’ve had to move so many times in the States and here. I just want to keep it grounded for like 7-9 years.” A minority of others however felt suited to the expat life; “after 4-5 years I get sick of where I am - I just want to change”.



*Figure: promotional poster placed in the CIS' lobby area (author's photo).*

## 4.2 - International College Spain (ICS)

The International College Spain (ICS) in Madrid was more difficult to approach than its Copenhagen-based counterpart. After initially contacting the school's administration by phone to explain who I was and the intention for research, I was given the contact details of teachers and staff with whom to proceed. The first written reply I received was from a teacher expressing enthusiasm and interest in the research project. However he voiced concern regarding the online survey I used in Copenhagen and had sent him. He informed the head of the secondary school about this who I then later contacted independently to provide further information and guarantees of anonymisation. This person replied encouragingly but cited legal concerns and told me a team of the schools' lawyers were analysing my request, the decision of which I would be informed of shortly. After waiting for another two weeks I enquired again about this process but received no response. All of my subsequent attempts to contact the schools' staff went unanswered. Due to this, I chose to go on location to the school and seek to collate as much information about it as possible. This proved fruitful as I was able to speak with secretarial staff and acquire substantial documentation about the school's activities and prospectuses provided to parents. This also allowed me to experience the local public transport networks and streets and acquire photographic material of the neighbourhood, the streets surrounding the school and the school building itself.

### 4.2.1 The school

The main international school in Madrid is the *International College Spain* located in the peripheral Alcobendas municipality in the northernmost point of the city. It was founded in 1980 by the late Iranian entrepreneur and philanthropist Manouchehr Farhangi who, a Zoroastrian, left his country after the Islamic Revolution and lead a successful pharmaceutical business based in Spain.

The school itself is composed of secondary and primary level buildings located on a site of 3 hectares with sports fields and grass-covered gardens. None of the buildings give immediately onto the road but are instead placed within the grounds. The main school building which stands at the entrance of the gate appears as large domestic residence constructed in white brick. It embodies a sort of monumentalism which one would not associate with a modern day school. At first glance, it seems more like a grand villa than an educational establishment. The side of the building facing the playing fields consists of a semi-circular structure extending outwards. There are two rows of pillars along the ground floor and first floor. A terrace going along the breadth of the first floor allows students to walk or sit up and down this area which overlooks the trees and grass below. Indeed a shipping metaphor (like in Copenhagen) is not out-of-place to describe this building's appearance. From the side facing the gardens, none of the facades are flush with the ground but are instead indented back, allowing the building to reach out over the earth. Similarly, none of the entrances are immediately at ground level; one must go down a small flight of steps to 'disembark' from the building. The handrail running along the first floor is

reminiscent of the one existing along a ship's promenade deck which passengers - and here students - can walk up and down on. Square 'cabin' windows running along this floor as well as the contrast between the beige-washed walls and red external flooring add to this perception. The longer rectangular windows above appear like a captain's control room, emphatically angled outwards and providing a 180° vision of all the surroundings. The shape of the concrete playground below extends the direction in which the building is 'pointing' such that it could be considered the 'deck' at the bow of a ship. This impression is added to by the bushes and trees which have been grown in close proximity around it which emphasise the distinction between it and the surroundings.

As a pedestrian walking up towards this part of the school, one is surprised by the proportions: visually the building appears as a residence which could be conceived as a large detached family house. However one must instead come to terms with the reality that it is in fact surprisingly larger than this. This expansive stately dwelling's features are emphasised by its apparent distance from all other constructions. The 'view from the sky' as well as the pedestrian street level perspective both confer an impression of boundless presence across the whole area. The aerial picture below used in promotional material puts the school on a par with the Cuatro Torres Business District looming above the horizon as physical and symbolic structures of wealth production. The angle of the photo appears to suggest that attending this school will seamlessly lead to a career within this sphere or beyond.



*Figure above: Aerial view of the International College Spain featured on the back of a prospectus magazine. The shot makes clear the low density suburban neighbourhood and Cuatro Torres business district visible in the distance.*



*Figures above, clockwise from top left: ICS building as visible from the road; entrance to the building not at ground level but up a 'gangway'; the school's 'lobby' area complete with international press and motivational literature; promotional poster in the playing fields visible from the road boasting "The world at their feet" and showing a pair of shoes with the globe printed onto them (author's photos).*

The cost of sending a 16 year old to ICS is 12,740 euros per year, as well as an additional 2,950 euro enrolment fee. Should the school deem that the child requires additional learning support or be provided 'English as a Second language' classes, these courses will each come at an added cost of 3,900 euros per annum. This means sending a child here could cost in the region of 20,000 euros per year. The school also claims to be able to provide - for an additional fee - mother tongue language classes with a choice from "more than 20 different languages".

#### **4.2.2 The neighbourhood**

It is difficult to access the school by public transport as, from the centre of Madrid, this requires taking the extensive line 10 metro to the end of the final station before taking an extension of the metro line followed by a 25 minute walk. There is a regional bus line with a stop outside the school. However this runs only every hour and, as I discovered, is not punctual enough to rely upon for arriving in school at a predetermined time.

La Moraleja neighbourhood has been described by Spanish media as "El Beverly Hills" of the Alcobendas municipality (Telemadrid, 2017). The school's website describes the neighbourhood as being "exclusive within the Madrid community, with high security patrols helping children and parents feel safe and secure" (ICS, 2018). The neighbourhood is one of upper-class large detached houses with high perimeter fences and private security guards posted at the entrance of each property. The 'guard's outposts' have been integrated into the perimeter walls and they sit behind a pane of mirrored glass. The experience of walking through these streets becomes one akin to Jeremy Bentham's "panopticon"; one is never aware whether a guard is watching from behind the mirror, and consequently, one alters one's behaviour accordingly by assuming this to always be the case. Standing still for a few moments on the way to the school to tie a shoe lace or take a photo becomes an anxiety-inducing moment making one feel 'out of place' and fearful that a guard will step out from behind a gate and one will need to justify one's presence there. Opaque glass is not only used at the gates but also on a number of the large cars driving through the silent streets. This is surprisingly similar to the experience Kracauer describes whilst walking through a space which probably could not be more of a polar opposite to this one: the 1930s working class Grenelle quartier in Paris' 15th arrondissement; "I found it difficult to go on, and I sensed that invisible nets were holding me. [...] As my eyes glided from its facade to the others, I suddenly became aware that I was being observed. [...] They didn't say a word, just kept staring at me. A terrible power emanated from their mere presence, and I regarded it almost as a certainty that it was they who fettered me" (Kracauer, 2009).

Down the kilometer long street, Paseo del Conde de los Gaitanes, stretching from Plaza de la Moraleja to the school, one rarely encounters other people also moving by foot. Those who are there appear to be mainly ethnic Latin American domestic workers making their way towards public transport pick-up and drop-off points which seem to be there exclusively for this purpose. Walking through these streets one has the inhospitable experience of being 'walled in' - the large perimeter fences and hedges prevent the pedestrian from seeing into the properties rendering many of the houses invisible as well. This incapacity of seeing the presumably opulent homes lying just out of sight generates a sense of curiosity and intrigue. Similarly to Kracauer who "would have liked best to explore all the courtyards and search through one room after another" (2009) of Paris' 15th arrondissement, the *flâneur* in La Moraleja is overcome with a frustration-mixed yearning to know what these gates conceal and why their occupants are so intent on erecting such an apparatus around themselves. This desire to know and discover is forced to compete with the omnipresent impression that one's presence there is unusual and suspicious, generating a sense of unease and timidity. It is not the sort of place which lends itself to meeting, playing or spontaneous activity. These are things which ought to happen elsewhere, i.e. within the private sphere of the home. Indeed these streets cannot be considered properly public space in that, even though one is permitted to pass through them, they prevent the manifestation of any other form of life.

One could ask whether it is even reasonable to refer to such a place as a "neighbourhood" rather than merely a spatially disparate grouping of properties. The real estate developers and residents of these streets leading to the school have succeeded in transcending precisely what De Certeau describes as the neighbourhood; "a system of relationships defined by space" (p. 15, 1998). It is this "relationship between the formal aspect of encounter and the random aspect of its content" (ibid.) which this territory neither provides nor even allows for. Life within these sanitised spatial and social territories whether within or in the immediate surroundings of the school remove from a crucial aspect of the 'lived' process of urbanity; something De Certeau identifies as unmediated and unpredictable confrontations which the neighbourhood provides: "the place for a decisive social apprenticeship that, in the same way as family, school, or professional life, introduces one, in a particularly powerful way, to the apprenticeship of everyday life" (p.113, 1998). He goes on to state that there will be a "singularization of this social space through the everyday practice of the dweller who thus reinforces his or her identity as a social partner" (p.113, 1998). In the case of this neighbourhood, even if one initially had aspirations to inhabit the space differently, one would quickly be prevented from doing so by what the space is constantly pushing its occupier towards doing.




*Figure above: the street view of the perimeter walls and integrated guards' outposts to houses along the street Paseo del Conde de los Gaitanes which leads to ICS (author's photos).*

*Figure below: an extract from an ICS Madrid promotional flyer*


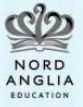



**9 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

Exclusive geographical location with a spacious campus.



**10 A HALLMARK OF QUALITY**

ICS is fully accredited by NAE, CIS, IBO, NEASC and the Spanish Ministry of Education. ICS was one of the first full IB approved world schools with over 30 years of established education experience.

The school appears to uphold the area where it is built as highly desirable and conducive to creating a fruitful learning environment for the children. Although it refers to its “location, location, location” - the immediate surroundings of the site are devoid of any services, shops or places where young people may want to congregate and encounter. Indeed, the graphic representation of the supposed “location” - a plot of land floating in the air as a detached independent entity - demonstrates how the school administration conceives of itself and believes it ought to present itself to prospective parents.



*Figures above, clockwise from top left; view of the Cuatro Torres from the footbridge leading to the La Moraleja neighbourhood above the ring road separating it from the rest of the city; an outpost of the security company which patrols the neighbourhood; the entrance and exits to the Plaza de la Moraleja node grouping together a handful of exclusive restaurants and bars. Walking through these spaces is the route one must take when arriving to the school from the nearest public bus stop (author’s photos).*

Also noteworthy regarding the surroundings is that there are three golf clubs within a 2km radius of the school and the La Moraleja neighbourhood is home to four other private schools;

Runnymede College, the Lycée Français de Madrid, the Scandinavian School in Madrid and the King's College boarding school.

#### 4.2.3 Spatial movements in the city

It is possible to gather an impression of ICS students' spatial movements across Madrid by looking at the locales which the parents' association recommends as good places to shop, consume and play. Below is a map showing just this:

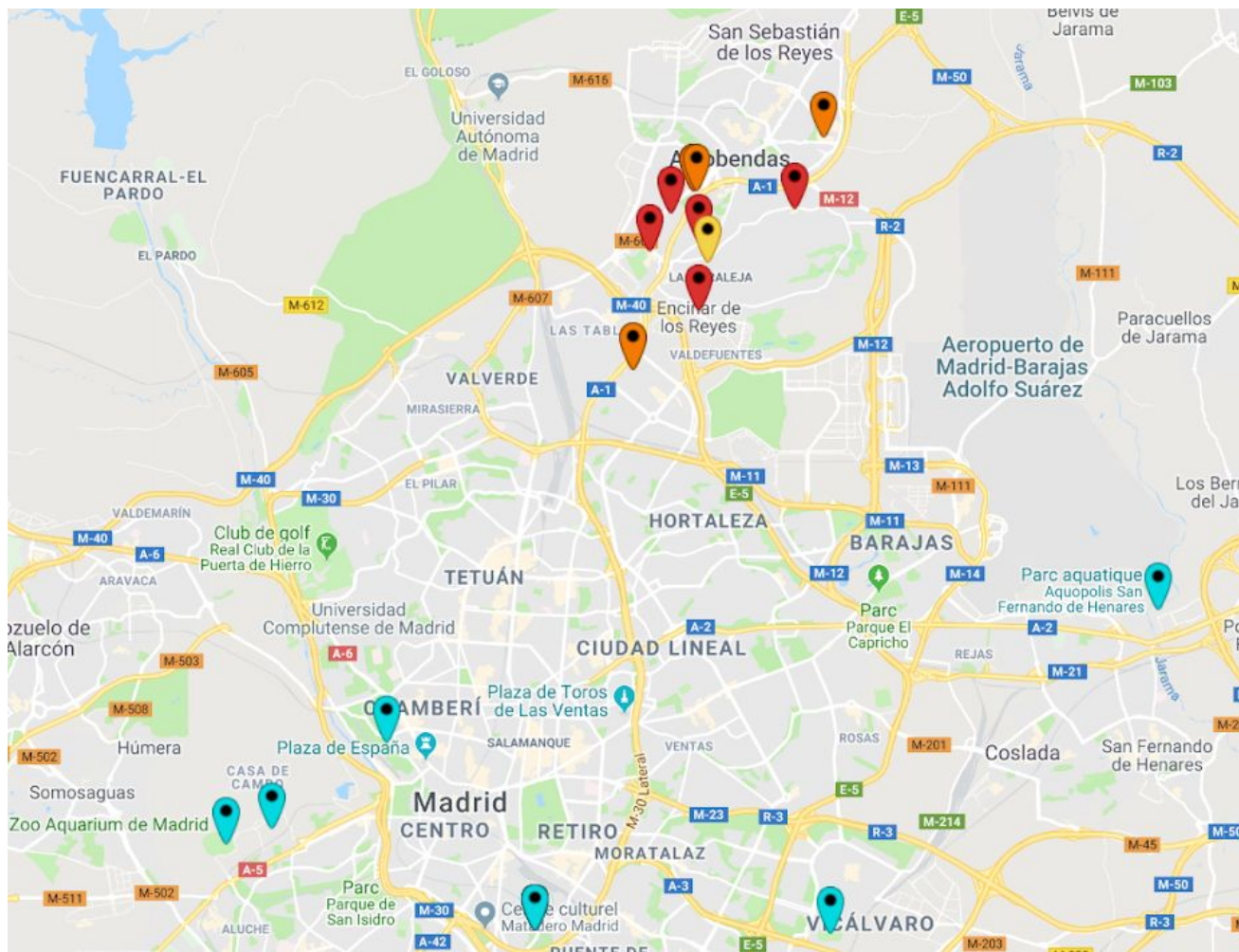


Figure above: map showing ICS places of interest (produced by author).

**Yellow pointer:** International College Spain

**Red pointers:** what the ICS parents' board refers to as "grocery stores near ICS"

**Orange pointers:** the recommended "Chain Stores" - Corte Ingles, Decathlon, Fnac, Tienda Animal (pet shop).

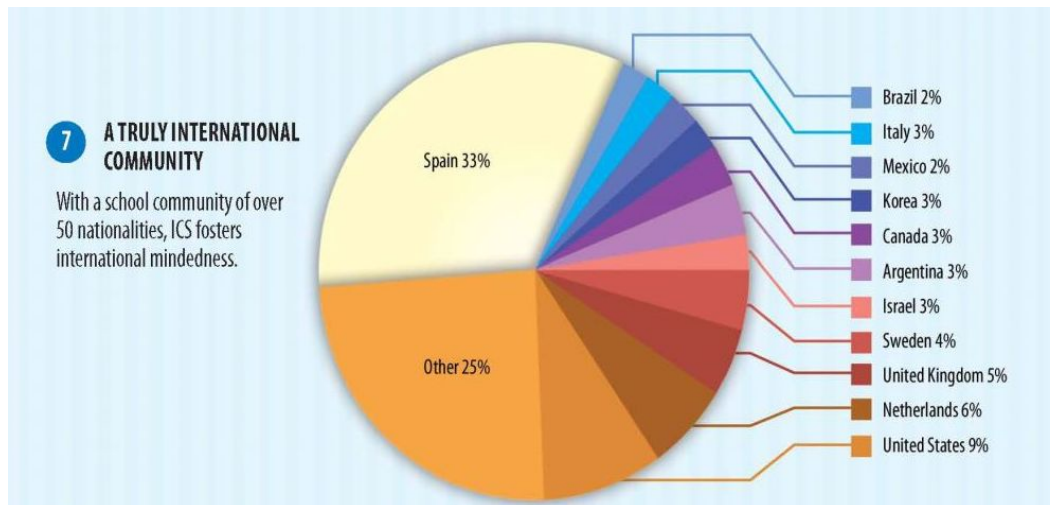
**Blue pointers:** These are suggested as "Children's attractions in Madrid" - Parque de Atracciones Casa de Campo; Warner Brothers Theme Park; IMAX; Planetario de Madrid;

Zoo-Aquarium Casa de Campo; Cable car (Teleférico); Aquópolis San Fernando de Henares (Waterpark); Faunia (Ecopark).

Other than doctors and dentist recommendations, this is the sum of places which new parents to the school are told about and where they will be most likely to bring their children. The way these points are scattered over the map of Madrid provides an initial indication of the sorts of spatial practices which the students and their accompanying parents could be expected to enact. The fact that they choose to suggest exclusively “chain stores” and “grocery stores” near the school demonstrates either that it is assumed parents will choose to live in this neighbourhood or is an indication that it is the norm for children to be driven to and from school in the private family car. It is noteworthy that amongst the ‘places of interest for children’ theme parks are a central feature. Students in Copenhagen, when asked their favourite places in the city, were numerous to cite the different theme parks available, most notably Tivoli. What stands out from the choice to put forward these shopping centres and theme parks is that all of these places are “private spaces open to the public” (Sorkin, 1992, p. 15). There is no mention of the diverse and accessible actual public spaces of Madrid such as the parks (Casa de Campo, Retiro, Parque del Oeste). Instead the emphasis is exclusively on the private spaces of consumption thus making Sorkin’s lamentation of the proliferation of such places all too relevant; “globalised capital [...] and uniform mass culture abhor the intimate, undisciplined differentiation of traditional cities” (1992, p. 8). The decision to endorse these large “chain stores”, shopping centres and theme parks suggests that this is what parents seek out and will thus be likely to socialise their children in them.

Shopping centres are largely similar in most countries and so can play the role of providing a nostalgic sense of ‘home away from home’. One of the reasons this ‘international community’ is likely to be more prone to seek out these places is due to these people experiencing themselves as an ‘outgroup’. They will have few to no pre-existing social bonds upon arriving in a new locality and are likely to be unacquainted with the ‘local’ places, customs and the language. This means both engaging in activities (theme parks) and going to places (shopping centres) which resemble those of their home country or previous host countries will bring a sense of continuity and familiarity to an otherwise highly mobile and changing lifestyle. That there are few, if any, recommendations of places in the dense urban centre of the city is an indication this area is considered unattractive or out-of-bounds to these families. Indeed this process is what is likely to have caused suburban and somewhat reclusive preferences and turn to those who may be similar to themselves who they might meet at the two other places advertised to parents; the *International Newcomers club of Madrid* and the *American Women’s Club of Madrid*. This result of people not feeling that they can participate in wider society is noted by de Certeau who holds that “[w]hen the public sphere no longer offers a place for political investment, men turn into ‘hermits’ in the grotto of the private living space. They hibernate in their abode, seeking to limit themselves to tiny individual pleasures.” (De Certeau, p. 148, 1998). It is valid to recognise these difficulties of expat life are likely to create an idealisation of the homeland which they must patiently wait for from inside their cave.

#### 4.2.4 Producing a sense of internationalism



To encourage enrollment, the website describes the school as “Truly International” generating a “community made up of over 60 nationalities, fostering international mindedness in every way” (ICS, 2018). The above graphic represents the school population by nationality group. Given that one third of the student population are native Spanish shows it is the biggest client group the school caters to. Part of the reason for this segment would be that Spanish parents see this school as generating opportunities for their children outside of Spain - or possibly increase their market value within the advanced producer services industry job market located around the Plaza de Castilla business district just a few kilometers further south towards the city. Indeed, the school’s curriculum upholds “promoting global citizenship relevant to a rapidly changing world” which will lead to “success in the global employment market” (ICS, 2018). It claims to be able to do this by providing a holistic educational training which would respond to students’ “academic, social, emotional, physical, technological, aesthetic and moral needs” (ICS, 2018).

The school’s claim that it encourages “international mindedness in every way” panders to the ideology of supranational organisations such as the United Nations. It is keen to show how open and inclusive it is to difference, stating in the above graphic that it is a “community of over 50 nationalities” and elsewhere on the website increasing this to “over 60 nationalities”. Elif Shafak’s concept of a “mini-UN” could be demonstrated here - but with the balance of power in favour of Spain and the US only coming in a late second. The image of inclusive diversity is something the school is intent upon conveying with each photo within its prospectus magazine and website showing children of varying ethnic, national or religious backgrounds all engaged in getting on well and having fun. Behind the receptionist’s desk in the lobby area of the main school building is a poster of a young girl wearing a headscarf and playing with a another girl

who isn't wearing a headscarf. All of the staged material on the website of both students and teaching staff seeks to convey this 'multi-ethnic' perspective with the only pictures falling short of this trend being photos taken during a school play and sports event which appear as rather mono-ethnic in comparison.

The poster below endeavours to promote this and reinforces the desired message by referring to their "socially-confident students". This concept of being a 'social butterfly' or a 'multicultural chameleon' is a recurring theme within what could be considered 'international school ideology'. Indeed the practice of "cosmopolitanism as a normative political project" (Jerrey and McFarlane, 2008, p.421) is most clearly seen in Manouchehr Farhangi's (the school's founder) letter published in the 1990 yearbook. In it, he describes his motivation for investing in the school as coming from his belief that "the most effective way of eliminating conflicts amongst individuals as well as nations is for them to meet, to exchange views, to begin to understand one another's aspirations and to try and sympathise with one another's problems" (farhangifoundation, 2018)<sup>1</sup>. It is a theme which students described at Copenhagen International School and is prevalent throughout the academic literature on Third Culture Kids. It is the idea that students raised in this environment develop a social acuity and congeniality which places them far above the mark of others raised in a more 'mono-cultural' setting. This assumption suggests they have greater ease interacting with others or people who are considered different from them.

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<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps significant to mention that Manouchehr Farhangi was assassinated outside his home in La Moraleja in 2008 in circumstances which Spanish police declared "unclear" but that some describe as a politically motivated act by groups faithful to the government of his former home country (CAIS, 2018).



As is common with international school websites, there is an extensive section aimed at providing non-school related practical advice to parents. In the case of ICS, there is the recommendation of the suburban neighbourhood around which the school is located:

“Find out what it's like living in Madrid. Get to know the Moraleja area of Madrid, a family friendly part of the city where we are based” (ICS, 2018).

Such use of language demonstrates the assumptions and attitudes held by the school. By suggesting that one will discover Madrid by familiarising themselves with the Moraleja neighbourhood, they are adopting a contained and narrow view of what the life of a family sending a child to this school is expected to consist in. The possibility that a family would be interested in moving into the denser, more urban part of the city is never actually taken into account. The inner city is recognised as a place for cultural consumption but not one in which it would be desirable to spend any extended period of time. Indeed the webpage intended for parents' advice is headered with the affirmation that “Madrid offers amongst the best diversity of culture, nightlife, family activities *and great ways to escape the city too*” (ICS, 2018 - italics mine).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Physical, social and mental boundaries

There appears to be an inconsistency between the highly insular aspect of the school and the discourse of inclusive heterogeneity. Some of the younger participants wanted to demonstrate a willingness to having contact with the host population however expressed not being able to do so due to language, schedule, spatial and social distance barriers. The results demonstrate that they do however have a fairly restricted urban spatial and social mobility. Meyer (2015, p.80) calls for greater “intercultural exchange” between international schools and host countries although it is not clear what form such “intercultural experiences” would take without reinforcing the elitist character or view of the school.

Hernes (2004) builds on Levefbvre to put forward a tripartite concept of boundaries as physical, social and mental ones. The CIS describes their students as displaying physical (‘internationally travelled’), social (‘globally responsible citizens’) and mental (‘multicultural’) mobility. The students themselves were keen to emphasise ‘mental mobility’ by describing the ease with which they can adapt to situations and people they encounter. Their physical immobility was emphasised by the new location and building which students described as cut-off from the rest of the city (especially compared to the previous location which was next to a local Danish school and closer to the city center). A portion of the students lamented this change and their experience of the internal and external design of their new school. What came across in their regrets about it was the intimacy and sense of attachment they had lost and felt the new build could not provide. They criticised it for feeling impersonal like a “hotel” or “designer constructed” seeking to only be “pretty looking” and ending up as a “cold” and “isolated” “square out in the ocean”. What is manifest here is the importance of locales which are integrated into the wider urban continuum and provide a more personable sense of place; “the old place was more cosier, you know? The hallways were very tight, you could find your around more easily. It was “homey”. This [new campus] place is more like an airport; you’re always passing through, there are wide spaces. It’s nice in its own way but the [previous campus] was more like a weird house.” (CIS student, 2017).

Their social boundaries are clear in that they had few to no interactions with people outside of the school. Some students even held that their elite privileged status actively caused them to be unwilling to engage with others outside of this group. There was a general sense of agreement in one discussion circle after a student said that “CIS people are very cautious when they throw parties” and would “only want people from CIS”. Another student explained this in that “as CIS is a private school people are used to growing up in wealthy homes and stuff like that so they’re not as welcoming to just let people they don’t know into their house.” When questioned about encountering people outside their house, the first student replied that “It’s just that [CIS students] are not social and like they can be scared to just like meet new people”. However he

did later go on to say that “most Danish people - maybe outside of the Hellerup area - are so welcoming” and that his personal impression of Denmark was that it is easy to meet with people.

When asked to describe how their urban practices differed from one school - and city - to another, those who noted the more marked differences had attended schools in non-European and usually non-Western countries. Going to an international school in a poor country meant their lifestyle was drastically different from what they currently enjoyed in Copenhagen. One boy who had lived in Mumbai - a city of 12 million people - explained how this meant his entire experience of mobility was mediated through his chauffeur-driven car where he would end up having to spend several hours each day due to the traffic, spatial distances and safety concerns; “It was very different from here. The only means of travel was with a car. So you would be with a car for two hours maybe to go from one place to the other. Everything was in a rush. Here it’s like more freedom. [In Mumbai] you were with your driver all the time. Here it’s like train, bicycle - more independent. It’s a lot different in autonomy and everything else.” Another student who had been in South Africa described how she and her friends could not go outside alone. This, she said, would not prevent her from seeing them and participating in social events only these would be mediating from within secure compounds. As a result, “there would be these compounds where they would have a lot of houses and places to be because it wasn’t common to go out and these sorts of things. You could be with your friends but there would be a long commute to go to places” (Student, CIS, 2017).

Realising that students have experienced such unconventional and unusual spatial practices in their everyday lives gives an deeper indication of the ways they will have been socialised as perceiving the world and people outside of the safe confines of the school as potential dangers. It would be largely for this reason that Madrid’s ICS considers it necessary to highlight the “security patrols” around the neighbourhood. They are dealing with a clientele who have become acquainted with a certain order, rationality and distinction between themselves and the immediate, local outside world. The students in Copenhagen were however explicitly appreciative of how much autonomy and freedom they were granted compared to their parents’ previous points-of-call. Simply being able to go outside alone, by foot, to ride a bicycle or train to school was something they saw as a worthwhile privilege.

## **5.2 Home and belonging**

The concept and experience of “home” will be crucial to how international school students develop a sense of place and attachment. Given their mobile lifestyle there is not necessarily a fixed reference point upon which to base themselves. Indeed assuming that one ought to have this fails to recognise that “[h]ome’ does not exist in stasis, but rather as many concurrent and layered places, times concepts and people” (Le Bigre, p.122, 2015). Such a definition is not necessarily something the students would explicitly articulate and when asked about it tended to hold a more traditional view of what ‘home’ should be. One student for whom CIS was her first international school and had previously lived in her passport country all her life commented “I think that unlike most people here I really know where home is because I have only moved from

Holland to here.” Another girl described how “I’ve actually never lived in Ireland but that’s where my family live and so going back there during holidays has been the only constant in my life.” For her, ‘home’ symbolised a constancy which she had become acquainted with through multiple trips over the years.

Roudometof (2005) suggests understanding how ‘in place’ a person is by putting forward a “cosmopolitan-local continuum” which aspires to measure the “degree of attachment to a locality” and measuring this along a spectrum with “cosmopolitan” and “local” at opposing ends (p. 125). Here, the former suggest low attachment levels and higher openness to difference and the latter suggests stronger attachment and greater level of “ethnocentrism” (the conviction that the political positions and practices of one’s own country are always correct). This “continuum” is measured with regards to respondents sense of attachment to the neighbourhood and city; the state and nationalist policies such as protectionism; support for and attachment to local culture (ibid). One may expect international school students to score highly towards the “cosmopolitan” end of the continuum on all counts however this is not necessarily the case. The majority of responds from the CIS survey answered with the name of one single country when asked what they considered their “home” showing that they value being a native born of a specific nationality. In group discussion others described in detail how much they liked their neighbourhood and what its unique specificities were. In this case it would seem that their potential or propensity for transnational mobility has lead them to develop a sense of appreciation and reflexivity on their surroundings which they may not otherwise develop had they lived there all their lives. It is mainly Roudometof’s third point - “degree of attachment to and support of local culture” - which these students fall markedly short from. More than two thirds agreed with the question “Is it difficult to meet people outside school?” and a majority cited language barriers as a central impediment to participating in local cultural activities. The students demonstrate an ability to adapt to new social and spatial surroundings with relative ease and rapidity. They describe feeling strong senses of attachment to their surroundings (“I feel Copenhagen is like a community. The whole city itself”) but are also entirely lucid about the transience of their stay (“I’m 100% certain I’m not going to live here”). For some, this lifestyle is suffered with a degree of defeatism; a sense of being pulled around the world by their parents. Others already described with glee the fact that six months later they would leave Copenhagen for another destination.

Even within the literature on identity and TCKs, there often remains an underlying statist normativity. Fail et al. for example say that «it is perfectly normal to feel foreign in a foreign country. What is not normal is to feel foreign in you own country» (2004, p.4). Even though they are operating within an international school system, they maintain an underlying assumption that a person be ‘from a country’ and should therefore experience themselves as ‘belong to it’, or at least not feeling foreign within it. This falls into what the Franco-Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf refers to as a commonplace desire to enforce an identity upon oneself and others derived from an essentialist concept of the nation. When pushed to its extremes this is what provokes «identités meurtrières»; recognising only those who fall within one’s own narrow identitarian group and neglecting the human worth of those outside this. Maalouf describes the

process through which people may see themselves coerced to “find within themselves a so-called fundamental belonging which is often religious, national or ethnic” (2004, p.14). Assuming that one ought to be able to justify one's identity by referring to a nation state also risks interlinking nationality with ethnicity and religion. Maalouf goes on to describe that “whoever upholds a more complex identity finds themselves marginalised” (2004, p. 15). Indeed the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, has increasingly adopted the rhetoric of belonging to attack people who would wish to supercede the nation. In her 2016 party conference speech she went as far as to hold that “if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere” (May, 2016). This demonstrates a desire to discredit and belittle those who consider themselves ‘post-national’ or merely ‘not primarily national’. Turner (2002) addressed this when he explained that a cosmopolitan is not necessarily someone who associates with no “homeland” but is instead capable of exerting “a certain reflexive distance from that homeland” (p. 57) - something Theresa May clearly does not believe ought to be possible. Commenting on the US foreign policy approach in the middle east, Ossman suggests that as far as the government is concerned «a person who appears at home everywhere, but belongs nowhere is seen as a menace to peace and security and an orderly world» (2004, p.111).

This refusal to recognise a plurality of ‘belongings’ alongside or beyond that of a specific nation state and the cultural baggage attached to it, is also the difficulty of not reducing a person to their ethnic or national background. In Kundera's novel *Ignorance* (2002), the character of Irena - a Czech émigrée to Paris who left in the wake of the 1968 Prague Spring - laments how she is ‘boxed’ by the gaze projected upon her by French society and even her Swedish lover Gustaf; “he was seeing her exactly the same way everyone else saw her: a young woman in pain, banished from her country” (Kundera, 2002, p. 23). What upsets her all the more are the double standards prescribed to her whilst compared to him; “everyone applauds him as a nice, very cosmopolitan Scandinavian who's already forgotten all about the place he comes from” (ibid.). As Kundera tells us however neither of them escape this assuming gaze which reduces them to one-dimensional entities for “[b]oth of them are pigeonholed, labeled, and they will be judged by how true they are to their labels” (ibid.). This frustrates Irena all the more given that she very much appreciates her new life in Paris and sees the city as an integral part of herself. Commenting on how one might perceive transnational people's relation to concepts of home, Le Bigre suggests that the “[a]ssumed chronology of ‘home’ as place A followed by place B ignores the potential simultaneous presence of multiple ‘homes-as-place’” (Le Bigre, p.124, 2015).

### **5.3 The double edged sword of a ‘cosmopolitan’ upbringing**

Perhaps it is precisely the capacity to experience and reflect upon these apparent dichotomies which makes international school students capable of achieving what Turner (2002) describes as “cosmopolitan virtue” - a conceptualisation of “human rights obligations” within a world of post-national identities (p. 46-47). Turner makes the case that the proliferation of “human rights” and the discourse surrounding them has been accompanied by a distinct lack of corresponding “obligations” for the citizens of the world to take up. Without sufficiently strong transnational public support for such rights and the institutions intended to enshrine them, their very

conception risks being forgotten or sidelined. To remediate this situation, Turner proposes “cosmopolitan virtue” however suggests that it can only truly be achieved through acquiring a “Socratic irony”. This is an ironic self-reflection which allows the development of a “reflexive distance from [one’s] homeland” (2002, p.57). Successfully achieving a “distance from the polity” is necessarily for understanding and respecting others’ cultures (ibid.). A further aspect of achieving this “intellectual distance from one’s own national or local culture” is having a degree of “uncertainty as to the ultimate authority of one’s own culture” which liberates one from needing a “strong or hot version of otherness” against which to define one’s own (reactionary) identity (ibid). Turner’s propositions are highly relevant to international school children as these have had to - or are in the process of trying to - negotiate their own identity vis à vis those around them in their school, nuclear family, extended family and acquaintances in their passport countries. This constant confrontation with different national identities will oblige them to recognise that they are not alone within their national cultural subjectivity. As one student at CIS stated “I think from this international programme we’ve all learnt how to communicate and not make it awkward.”

Within the “transnational social spaces” (Roudometof, 2005, p. 127) of international schools it is difficult to maintain an ethnocentrist perspective. That said, so as to affirm an identity in something, students may well define - or find themselves defined by others - as “English”, “American”, “Turkish” and be considered as culturally representative of these countries. As has been widely documented in academic research on TCKs, it is often only after graduation and “returning” to their passport country that they will abruptly discover just how ‘other’ they are perceived as by the ‘born and bred’ citizens of these countries. It is this ‘reverse culture shock’ which is likely to be most decisive in pushing them to develop “ironic self-reflection” and to realise that “ironic distance is functionally compatible with globalized hybridity, because we have all become urban strangers” (Turner, 2002, p. 58).

This theme of the ‘reverse culture shock’ or the let down after the ‘Great Return’ is central Kundera’s (2002) book *Ignorance*. This is manifested through Irena’s return to Prague after a 20 year Homeric odyssey out into the unknown. Odysseus’ own great return to Ithaca, also after two decades abroad and being shipwrecked in Phaeacia, was experienced as a bittersweet homecoming; it seemed that much less had happened to the people of Ithaca and yet they appeared somewhat different, or not as they had been nostalgically remember; and whereas they appear glad to recount what has changed there, not once do they consider to ask Odysseus about his own personal experience during this time; where *he* has come from and what he has been through (Kundera, 2002, p.124-126). Indeed they have no reason to do so for he is a local there and has finally returned after a long journey. It then dawns upon Odysseus, as it does to Irena, that “the very essence of his life, its center, its treasure, lay outside Ithaca” (Kundera, 2002, p. 33). What Odysseus realises about his time as a foreign guest in the royal court of Phaeacia, and Irena as a Czech exile in Paris, is that they had an objective nostalgic reference point around which to construct themselves and which lead people to express interest in them and their journey outside of it. Similarly, international school students, whilst they may still self-identify as nationals of a country, often describe the disconnect they feel upon

‘returning’ there and being confronted with friends and relatives who’s more sedentary lifestyle leaves these students noticing they have far less in common than may have been assumed. As a student explained; “I see my cousins, for example, are very awkward around new people because they didn’t have that [international school experience]” (CIS Student 3, 2017). One study cites an international schools alumnus who struggled with the Odyssean myth of the Great Return and describes how “[h]ome was not home - anywhere else would have been fine” (cited in Fail et al., 2004, p.333). The authors explained that the alumnus who experienced ‘a major identity crisis’ after leaving school for university was doing much better now that he had moved to a nice cosmopolitan city (ibid., p. 327).

It is not always necessary to wait until ‘graduation and repatriation’ to become aware of this desire for international mobility and several students at CIS agreed with one girl who said that “after 4-5 years I get sick of where I am - I just want to change” (CIS Student 7, 2017). It appears that for some of these students, they are on a constant Odyssey, with their passport country playing the role of a distant Ithaca - from which to claim provenance and towards which to direct nostalgic longings - however it is their experience within the liminal spaces of Phaecia which provides the substance for their discussions and exchanges.

#### **5.4 Memory, friendship and place**

In general, it is to their school(s) that students are most attached and to which they will most identify. A CIS student explained how “International schools are also a lot more comforting because there’s not that much of a change. You’re surroundings might have changed but the school you go to is similar.” Another student very matter-of-factly asserted that “[t]his is my third international school and it’s the same.” This sense of the insignificance of the wider geographic surroundings to the students’ concerns was further manifest in one saying that “I would rather live in a shit city full of really fun friends who go to my school. If you have a really good social life, you don’t have to worry about the city so much”. This view was echoed by other students who placed having good social relations at the top of their value hierarchy so much so that the “city” became close to irrelevant.

Significantly, the concept of “memories” was evoked multiple times during these discussions pointing to an awareness of the transience of their stay in a given place and a desire to have something they will be able to hold on to for posterity once they and their peers find themselves all-too-quickly moved on; “[t]his is the 7th country and the 8th school I go to. I don’t feel like I was pushed going out of my comfort zone because I always knew what I wanted. You wanna have fun with your friends and make great memories”. Here, the creation of “memories” becomes part of the students’ direct aspiration and they are aware that it is all they will be left with once they inevitably go their separate ways. As a result, they intend to busy themselves with their production. The notion expounded around Walter Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood* that “the child is collector, flâneur and allegorist in one” (Eliand in Benjamin, 2006, p. xiv) manifests itself through this desire to collect ‘souvenir’ experiences of their adolescent days. In his essay *Excavation and Memory* (1999), Benjamin’s claim that “memory is not an instrument for

surveying the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried” resonates somewhat with the approach of these students; their hypermobility has meant that, during times of play, their medium for approaching the world has the aim of memory production. Benjamin however goes on to say “[h]e who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging” so as to “establish the exact location of where in today’s ground the ancient treasures have been stored up” (1999). This is not the students’ experience for two reasons. Firstly, because they have not left sufficient time for there to be anything above these memories to excavate. Instead, their vision of reflexively generating memories means they are choosing, filing and cataloguing them before these have had the chance to find themselves buried into the hidden depths of their mind. Secondly, their approach to memory producing experiences is ageographic. They are convinced that location is of little import and ought instead to focus exclusively on their interpersonal entourage in order to fill their “collector’s gallery” (Benjamin, 1999) with treasurable recollections.

It is probing to reflect on why this may be the case. In her research on North American students studying abroad, Amit (2012) identified the phenomenon of *communitas* as “most strongly felt in situations of liminality, when people were outside their usual routines and relationships” (cited in Désilets, 2005, p. 157). Given the number of times international school students have found themselves living in different parts of the world, it is possible to perceive them as living within a space of liminality. This ‘outside existence’ is felt through always being ‘other’ with regards to the wider society and means that a strong sense of *communitas* is rapidly produced. Liminality creates the need for rapid relationship forming to occur. Students at CIS identified and explained this ease of contact which accompanied their increasing mobility; “International Schools in general, moving around, it’s easier to make friends faster and to be more comfortable with trying to make friends” (CIS student, 2017).

## **5.5 How international schools sell: constructing cosmopolitanism as a political project**

The ways schools use the concept of “being international” appears both within an ideological standpoint - international is necessarily best - as well as a market driven one - furthering career pathways. A meaningful community is thus constructed by bringing forward terms which create the community and the way it ‘ought’ to be viewed. Promotional material shows that these schools want to be viewed and view themselves as bastions of multi-ethnic, multicultural collaborative learning with the aspiration of impacting the wider world.

What comes through in analyses of international school pedagogical and promotional material is this construction of an internationalist persona with a sense of global civic responsibility. The discourse within the international schools therefore appears more like “cosmopolitanism as a normative political project” (Jerrey and McFarlane, 2008, p.421). As was seen with CIS, the school explicits their view that “the challenges of tomorrow are not national challenges, they are international challenges” and their subsequent intention; “[o]ur vision is that we are creating champions for a just and sustainable world” (CIS, 2017). A similar rhetoric is seen in Madrid’s

ICS with the main promotional video on their website and youtube channel featuring students' voices speaking off camera as it pans between scenes of the science labs, sports fields and mahogany wooden staircase;

"We, are the leaders of tomorrow.

The dreamers, the innovators, the movers, the shakers, the gamechangers.

We defy the odds, push the limits.

We are confident, ambitious, ready for the world, ready for tomorrow."

It is in this sense that they clearly aspire to Turner's proposition for "cosmopolitan virtue as a set of obligations" (2002, p. 57) which is partly derived from a recognition of one's privileged status in the world and awareness of "the vulnerability of persons and the precariousness of institutions" (ibid.). This ideological concept of creating the 'leaders of tomorrow' who will bring forward a mature new vision of intercultural realities to the global stage and thus participate in supporting peace and consolidating international institutions is a recurrent theme in these schools' discourse. Where CIS describes "learning to be with people from different cultures" as well as "giving to the community and not doing it for your own benefit" (CIS, 2017), ICS Madrid lauds how it is "open to people of all nations" and "[fosters] respect for other people's identity and culture" (ICS, 2018). This appears to be in sync with the kind of ageographic universalism which Nussbaum espouses in her book *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism* where she asks "what is it about the national boundary that magically converts people toward whom we are both incurious and indifferent into people to whom we have duties of mutual respect?" (1994, p. 16). She goes on to cite Plutach's *On the Fortunes of Alexander* upholding that we "regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbours" (cited in Nussbaum, 1994, p.17).

When considering just how 'open to difference' people may be, Beck (2010) warns against correlating increased transnational mobility with cosmopolitanism describing such a process as the "cosmopolitan fallacy". This risks masquerading as a "facade for national interests where cosmo-credentials mask or mix with anti-cosmopolitical mentality" (Beck and Grande, 2010, p. 419). Such a claim can certainly be held against those international schools set up in [post]colonial contexts to provide an 'authentic' western education to the children of expatriated civil servants and foreign industrialists. Even in a European context, given that a significant portion of attendees are the children of diplomats and executives of multinational companies, the accusation that these schools are in fact furthering statist needs is reasonable. The marxist critique of the cosmopolitanising phenomenon is that the elite within a heightened field of capital flows will easily get on with each other; "the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country" (Marx and Engels 1952: 42, cited in Harvey, 2000, p. 530). This view holds that proponents of cosmopolitanism are simply putting forward an ideology coherent to and supportive of a transnational neoliberal elite which is by no means politically neutral or 'inclusive' of a diversity outside of itself. Harvey criticises conceptions of cosmopolitanism which are insufficiently political or do not adequately recognise the historical-geographical events which have lead to the present day condition. As such, the cosmopolitanism put out by Held (1995) or Nussbaum

(1996) has “as much to do with making the world safe for capitalism, market freedoms, and social democracy as it has to do with any other conception of the good life” (Harvey, 2000, p. 560).

Even within the schools themselves, Elif Shafak’s description of how, underneath the cohesive cosmopolitan rhetoric, there was a rabid and vindictive nationalism whereby individual students would be held personally responsible for what the government of their home country was seen as doing. Contrarily, Iyer (2000) aptly reminds us that “a true cosmopolitan is not someone who has travelled a lot so much as someone who can appreciate what it feels like to be the Other” (cited in Roudometof, 2005, p. 129). Part of the extent to which international school students can be considered ‘truly cosmopolitan’ will therefore depend of whether they experience the ‘Other’ at all. The ‘homogenisation factor’ and drive towards self-regulation and self-censorship so as to fit in and meet perceived expectations of peers will both be counteracting how much ‘otherness’ is around. As one female student at CIS put it; . “When I got here I was surprised how everyone was so experienced in International Schools [...] they’ve learnt from what they did in other schools and then they come in here and they just know exactly what to do” (CIS Student, 2017). This was added to by a student who saw this mobile lifestyle as increasing self-confidence; “I think that’s what going to an International (sic) does to you - it gives you that confidence. I think you gain more confidence everytime you go to a new school. And it gets easier to introduce yourself and make friends.”

## **5.6 Comparison between the case studies**

Clearly a direct, empirical comparison between the subjective lived experiences and life trajectories of students at CIS and ICS cannot be demonstrated to the extent which conducting interviews and surveys with the students at ICS would have allowed. That said however, there are nonetheless significant traits to be drawn between the two case studies and what they indicate about the neighbourhoods, architecture and promotional self-representation of these schools. Both case studies provide extensive overview of the ways in which these schools market themselves online and in printed promotional material. Even though they are not part of the same ‘network’ of international schools, they use almost the same phrases to describe how they want to be seen and interpreted. This includes maintaining absolute adherence to promoting an image of ethnic and national diversity amongst the student and teacher populace. The idea is that this those attending these schools will later play instrumental roles in promoting peace and coexistence.

It is partly as a consequence of this performative message that a stark contrast can be drawn with the built locales and locations in which these students will be educated and socialised. In both cases, the schools are located in areas which could be considered highly segregated or isolated from the rest of the city. This means even merely visual encounters with non-students in the school’s periphery are almost non-existent. Either the school exists on a deindustrialising harbour area with only offices planned to be built in its surroundings or it finds itself in the most exclusive suburban neighbourhood of Madrid with private security guards and gated homes all

around. Both location choices appear to demonstrate a desire to remove oneself as much as possible from immediate contact with the city, further accentuating the sense that it is merely a passing 'tenant' of a place who does not intend to remain there indefinitely.

With regards to the built form of these schools they are keen to accentuate their independence and uniqueness with designs harbouring somewhat of a 'shock factor' when considering that they are schools. With Copenhagen International Schools' 'star architecture' structure, significant reflection has been put into building something which appears - both symbolically and visually - as recognising and participating in the direct location. The school's PR goes to great lengths to talk of how integrated it is with the surroundings and it is aesthetically comparable to the containers still stacked nearby. Regarding International College Spain, even though the large features and form of the main building is initially surprising, it cannot be recognised as 'Spanish architecture' nor does it pertain to a specific architectural tradition; it demonstrates neither symmetry nor 'balanced asymmetry'. What the two have in common however is their propensity to lend themselves to nautical semiotic readings - further reinforcing the notion of the impermanence and detachment of their passengers from the surroundings.

These close similarities reinforce the idea that it is possible to speak of 'an international school experience' because the students are confronted to similar spatial scenarios, social environments and pedagogical settings. It was also possible to receive nationality data from ICS to hold that both schools will also produce similar social environments. The main visible difference is that at ICS there is a higher proportion of local Spanish students (30%) compared to about 15% of Danes at CIS.

## **5.7 Reflections on the research process and interpretation of results**

A number of issues arose during and around the interview process which it is important to be aware of. The students interviewed, who were in the age range 14-16, occasionally appeared to contradict themselves or to say things they may have thought I wanted to hear or that they should say either to portray their school and lifestyle in a positive light or try and be polemical and possibly appear more 'interesting'. Others however seemed very much at ease with reflecting on their situatedness in an abstract and intellectual way, even engaging in extended debate and dialectic discussion with each other. Those students who were possibly the most responsive and willing to engage in discussions and disagreement happened to be those in the younger of the two year groups who participated. This was in fact something one of the teachers had anticipated, suggesting that the older students could be getting slightly "too cool for school" for critically and whole-heartedly engaging in the topics put forward. This does seem to have been the case and I noticed significant differences in the discussion 'atmospheres' even between the groups of people from the same class who volunteered after each other to participate. Proposing an alternative view of what appeared to be 'consensus opinions' happened at a higher rate with the younger year group. Interviewees in the group discussions also appeared more willing to speak for a longer period of time without requiring regular cues from the interviewer or looking to the others for further input. The ways in which the fluidity of

these discussions took place however presents a difficulty for analysing it. Given that students tended not to speak either alone or amongst themselves for more than a minute at a time, it meant regular intervention was required from the interviewer. Wiles et al. (2005) highlight that this form of interview structure impacts the data conveyed however does not necessarily manifest itself when quotes are treated as “discrete units” which may not contain the accurate “contextual analysis and interpretation” (p. 97) as they are provided outside of the wider context. Indeed, putting forwards specific quotes - especially when extracted from group interviews - risks overlooking the unique and often surprisingly humorous symbiosis between the participants which may have lead to it, as the following transcription demonstrates;

**Julia** - The plans [for the new CIS building] were also very different. it was supposed to be more compact and cosy where you'd be able to sit on the window ledges and floor but it didn't turn out like that.

**Chloe** - it became more of a kind of...

**Julia** - - hotel.

**Chloe** -designer constructed. Because instead of being more efficient its more..

**Julia** - - pretty looking..

**Heather** - sometimes it just gets really cold and they don't put on the heating.

**Chloe** - I really think that we're more isolated in this school. If I compare it to all the other schools that I've been to, this is the most...

**Julia** - separated.

**Chloe** - If you look at it from a bird's eye view on google maps, we're kinda just like in a little..;

**Julia** - - corner.

**Chloe** - ... square out in the ocean.

As academic literature on qualitative interviewing indicates, the issue of interviewees contradicting themselves is more frequent than may be expected. Indeed this is something which happens regularly in day-to-day conversation and ethnographic interviews are clearly no exception. For example, this is an intervention from a girl in the older year group;

I also feel it's this culture clash in a way. Because when there's that difference of culture you might not feel comfortable in the same way that you would -

especially with people that aren't specifically Danish or from Northern Europe they might have a different approach to it and then the Danish culture might seem a little... over confident.

From what she says here, there is an immediate contradiction between those who are open to social interaction as being Danish or not Danish or whether the "culture clash" she refers to is between CIS students and people outside of CIS - whether these be Danes or non-Northern Europeans. In the heat of a group discussion, it is difficult for the interviewer to question her on exactly who it is she is referring to and ask that she clarify these apparently opposing statements. Furthermore even the more conventionally coherent parts of the interviews are still subjected to the array of factors influencing the students participating. This means the information gathered ought not to be considered as 'raw data' but rather the perception of the interviewees at a given time and within the specific context of an individual or group interview.

## 6. Conclusion

“Serial migrant” students of international schools find themselves moving within highly similar liminal spaces. In some respects, the international school appears as a Lefebvrian pure form. Once within its confines, this liminality vis à vis the outside makes it “a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity” (Lefebvre, 2003, p.118). It brings together individuals who, from a spatial-pathways perspective, embody vast diversity. It is a site of significant exchange and sharing in an open peer-to-peer manner.

They are different from the standard dichotomies of the migrant who comes from a place and has a destination to another place. Given that the children do not choose when and where a move occurs, they must put up with it regardless of their preferences. This is something a number of them had integrated into their identity of themselves and do not seek to resist, instead accepting that friendships, just like schools and cities of residence, are transient and even eagerly looking forward to the new experiences and memories they will make at their following point of call. In his *Espèces d’Espaces*, Georges Perec describes the all-too-human nostalgic longing for places which are “unchanging, deep-rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin” before going on to state that “[s]uch places don’t exist, and it’s because they don’t exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident” (1974, p.71). Through their approach to hypermobile lifestyles, these students recognise the accuracy of Perec’s claim. They develop an acceptance of mobility pathways which assists them in departing from one spatial and social environment and integrating another. One could counteract this claim by holding that the students are in fact moving from one “self-evident” space to another and that if this weren’t the case they would not be able to approach such changes so nonchalantly. Whereas it is true that the international school and their social environments do display strong similarities, it would be mistaken to “other” TCKs to the degree of claiming that they are entirely unmoved (*sic*) by their parents’ spatial displacements.

These young people are “anchor points for the burgeoning global middle-class transnational networks that provide them with this cosmopolitan sense of belonging to the world” (Désilets, 2005, p. 159). These schools’ target audience are the children of a transnational political and economic elite. Their claim that they are harbouring “the leaders of tomorrow” can be considered somewhat accurate given the phenomenon of parent/child path determinancies and social reproduction. As has been seen, these schools often operate as islands detached from the social fabric of the rest of the city, ensuring that students rarely or never encounter the city around them or other people who compose it. Eric Corijn’s (2015) lamentation that “countries are lead by suburban people” with suburban mindsets and agendas is something which international schools risk being seen as reproducing.

This said however, as was seen, individual students attending these schools do themselves have highly ‘urban’ lifestyles and interests. Students at CIS described the types of ‘routes’

through the city center they would take when going out during the day to consume in shops and cafés or at night to attend bars and nightclubs. It was with reluctance that many moved to the “isolated” location of the new school. Nonetheless, the fact that these schools are so ex-centric, existing independently as their own self-referential units detached physically and symbolically from their wider surroundings will impact the current and future perceptions and preferences of their users. This aestheticization distances them from what Barthes calls the “sociality” of the city, for whom it was “essentially and semantically, the place of our meeting with the other, and it is for this reason that the centre is the gathering place in every city; the city centre is instituted above all by the young people, the adolescents” (1997, p. 54). Teenagers, nudged towards suburban peripheries by the location of their daily educational area, thus find themselves deprived from being able to easily partake in their ‘role’ as urban beings. Rasmussen’s claim that “[m]an is less lonely when he feels he is part of a general movement” (1964, p.32) is an indication of the degree of isolation which may be experienced by the students and teachers attending the schools seen here. There is no coherent continuity between them and their surrounding neighbourhoods. Instead, they appear as implanted within areas where there are few immediate surroundings. Even though the schools identify themselves as super-diverse bastions of multiculturalism, the way these spaces have been built and operate causes the construction of social, spatial and psychological barriers alongside them. The notion that these schools are places where difference is recognised and valued and that the new-comer is welcomed and invited to feel a participant in the whole is contentious. If one holds that cosmopolitanism means having a sense of what it means to be other, these students only go so far as to be sensitive to what their own shared otherness means. It is from here that their liminally produced *communitas* springs forth.

Portraying international schools as locales of emancipated post-national cosmopolitanism would therefore be inaccurate. Elif Shafak’s description of the “mini-UN” in which nationalisms were simply exaggerated and emphasised is a point in case for not over-idealising these places. Furthermore, one of the survey questions asked students where felt most like “home”. The large majority of responses cited a single nation. One person said airports. When asked whether they felt the term ‘global citizen’ best described them, not a single respondent said they ‘strongly agreed’ with this. However if there exists any identifiable group who could be considered ‘post-national’, international school students would appear highly eligible for this title. Indeed, within a lived praxis, it may be more the case that these students are post-national. Even if so, when it comes to articulating their identity and sense of belonging in the world, the all-pervading nationalist zeitgeist is too influential to resist. As a result, even though some have never lived in their passport country, the pressure to reduce their identity to its confines wins the upper hand. This occurs regardless of their consciously recognising that ‘born and bread’ nationals from their ‘home’ countries are very different from themselves.

This leads them to remain within the ‘safe-space’ bubble of the international school where they are surrounded by others like themselves. They are similar economically and culturally, the only variant being their spatially sporadic track records, which, in the end brings them together. The spatial and symbolic barriers behind which these students are socialised mean their encounters

with those on the other side will be rare and unusual. Instead they are likely to find themselves either holding on to notions of a distant Ithaca to which they belong or choose to embrace their shipwrecked condition and continue sailing the seas of the Eastern mediterranean.

## 7. Bibliography

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