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00:00.000 --> 00:09.840

Hi and welcome to Welfare Podcast.

00:09.840 --> 00:14.360

My name is Mascha and I'm here today with a friend of mine, Aitor.

00:14.360 --> 00:17.880

So I thought first we could just introduce ourselves.

00:17.880 --> 00:19.560

Do you want to start?

00:19.560 --> 00:21.120

I can start.

00:21.120 --> 00:23.080

Hi, hello everyone.

00:23.080 --> 00:24.080

Thanks for tuning in.

00:24.080 --> 00:25.960

I'm Aitor.

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I come from Spain and I'm currently a PhD student at the University of Savanger.

00:33.920 --> 00:43.160

I first came to Savanger as an exchange student in the Erasmus program.

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One thing led to another and I ended up just applying for a PhD and I'm still here now.

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So that's my story.

00:51.040 --> 00:52.040

Mascha?

00:52.120 --> 00:57.640

Yes, that's also when we met because when you came as an exchange student, I also came

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to Savanger but as a full-time student for a two-year program.

01:02.600 --> 01:09.720

I'm originally from Germany and yeah, today I actually just finished my thesis.

01:09.720 --> 01:12.700

So it's nice to have a talk with you.

01:12.700 --> 01:14.520

It's also related to my thesis.

01:14.520 --> 01:24.680

So the general topic is being an international student here in Savanger and yeah, we want

01:24.680 --> 01:32.160

to talk a bit about that and how it relates to my thesis and how the life is in Savanger.

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So yeah, I was telling a friend of mine yesterday that I was going to do this podcast about

01:38.440 --> 01:46.600

being an international student and he's from Bangladesh and then he questioned whether

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I actually am an international student and I never thought about that before because

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I thought as long as you're not Norwegian, that makes me or us international students.

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How do you relate to this term?

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Yeah, so I believe I understand that there is a different perception regarding what it

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means to be an international student because on one side, there's the people who come from

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abroad to a different country and they are joining a bachelor program or a master's program

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and then on the other side, there is the people who come on exchange who are in a different

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position because it's more temporary and they're funded also by the Erasmus program.

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So I guess there is a slight difference between these two.

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It's true that when I came from my exchange, I used to define myself as an exchange student

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rather than international student because of this same reason.

02:55.560 --> 03:01.960

But I don't know, I feel like at some point it doesn't matter that much and we all fall

03:01.960 --> 03:06.160

into the same community.

03:06.160 --> 03:10.880

There is not big of a difference because as myself as an exchange student, I've hanged

03:10.880 --> 03:17.120

out with many international students who are enrolled into a program here at UAS.

03:18.120 --> 03:28.480

But when it comes to how I identify myself, I would view myself as an international student.

03:28.480 --> 03:35.040

I feel like it's such a big topic to talk about the self-identification and I also have

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to say because I was an exchange student before a few years back and at that time, I did define

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as an exchange or an Erasmus student because I came with the Erasmus program.

03:48.160 --> 03:56.160

But now being here full-time, I define more as an international student.

03:56.160 --> 04:05.760

So for me, it was a bit surprising to be perceived as a European because I'm from Europe.

04:05.760 --> 04:09.200

But still I identify as an international student.

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And then related to my thesis where I talk about how exchange or Erasmus students get

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in touch with the Norwegian culture or Norwegian people, I read a lot of studies of whether

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these Erasmus people actually feel European or not.

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And it's kind of difficult to say whether those people do feel more European before

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their exchange already or whether they identify with Europe more after the exchange because

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the exchange leads to that.

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How was it for you?

04:48.600 --> 04:58.280

So I wouldn't say that I feel more European than before, especially because during my

04:58.280 --> 05:01.520

exchange, it hasn't been only Europeans.

05:01.520 --> 05:04.000

It's been people from everywhere.

05:04.520 --> 05:11.760

So I haven't had this feeling of European community or anything like that.

05:11.760 --> 05:17.520

I've perceived it more as an international experience because I've met people from everywhere,

05:17.520 --> 05:21.560

from places that I would have never imagined.

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So I don't think in my case this European feeling or this European Erasmus thing they

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want to encourage or I don't think that applies to me a lot personally.

05:37.560 --> 05:40.240

Yes, I think I relate to that as well.

05:40.240 --> 05:48.480

I feel like going on an exchange connects you to people from a lot more countries than

05:48.480 --> 05:50.920

just the European countries.

05:50.920 --> 05:54.800

And that's why I think I prefer the term of international student because it leaves a

05:54.800 --> 05:59.440

lot more space than just talking about Europeans.

05:59.440 --> 06:00.440

Absolutely.

06:00.600 --> 06:08.160

So maybe we can move a bit more into my thesis where I kind of find out that the exchange

06:08.160 --> 06:14.480

students that I interviewed, they don't engage a lot with Norwegian culture and Norwegian

06:14.480 --> 06:15.480

people.

06:15.480 --> 06:22.520

And I come to the conclusion that there are four main barriers, which include the language,

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then the culture, the university and how it kind of distributes or separates internationals

06:34.120 --> 06:36.240

and Norwegians.

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And then also the term I call living the same experience because the Erasmus students come

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with similar expectations or share a similar lifestyle and bubble when they come here.

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What are your thoughts on these barriers?

06:53.880 --> 06:58.760

Which ones do you think stick out?

06:58.760 --> 07:01.640

So you mentioned language.

07:01.640 --> 07:05.720

I would say language is really important.

07:05.720 --> 07:14.840

So coming from Spain, I wouldn't say I was never bad at English.

07:14.840 --> 07:18.180

I felt quite comfortable speaking English.

07:18.180 --> 07:24.220

But you come to a country where you have to speak English, unless you speak Norwegian,

07:24.220 --> 07:28.020

of course, you have to speak English in your daily life.

07:28.020 --> 07:37.500

And the way you speak and the way you develop your new language that you're not maybe comfortable

07:37.500 --> 07:43.460

with in the beginning really starts to define you in a way as a person.

07:43.460 --> 07:48.260

And the way you communicate is a big part of who you are, I believe.

07:48.260 --> 07:55.140

And the thing is, here in Norway, everyone can speak English.

07:55.140 --> 07:57.260

Mostly everyone can speak really good English.

07:57.260 --> 08:02.380

So it's never a problem, really, as long as you speak English.

08:02.380 --> 08:14.300

But there is this feeling of you can communicate, but you can't really get to or have maybe

08:14.300 --> 08:20.340

more intimate conversations with Norwegians if you don't break that language barrier.

08:20.340 --> 08:28.100

It feels like you can get to know them well, but there is always this language barrier

08:28.220 --> 08:35.820

in the end that it's difficult to break, even if they speak perfect English.

08:35.820 --> 08:42.420

There is always something about your native tongue, right, your mother tongue, that is

08:42.420 --> 08:47.140

difficult to surpass in a way.

08:47.140 --> 08:50.140

That's my thoughts on the language part.

08:50.140 --> 08:54.340

Did you attempt to learn the language during your exchange?

08:54.340 --> 08:56.540

Yeah, I did.

08:56.980 --> 09:03.780

I actually joined the A1 course because it was offered to international students for

09:03.780 --> 09:05.860

a reduced price.

09:05.860 --> 09:12.020

And because I was really interested, I like learning languages and I enjoy the process.

09:12.020 --> 09:19.380

And I thought it would be an interesting experience as part of, you know, integrating myself in

09:19.380 --> 09:22.700

another country for a few months.

09:22.780 --> 09:28.460

And it was a nice experience, but the main problem is that you don't really get to practice

09:28.460 --> 09:35.140

a lot because, as I said earlier, everyone speaks perfect English.

09:35.140 --> 09:37.700

So you never really need to.

09:37.700 --> 09:47.660

And there is this awkwardness about having to speak Norwegian to a Norwegian when you

09:47.700 --> 09:52.900

barely speak and you don't want to make them lose their time in a way.

09:52.900 --> 09:57.580

So it's like if they speak perfect English, they can just switch to English in a second.

09:57.580 --> 10:04.460

So there is this feeling that you never get to practice in a way.

10:04.460 --> 10:07.580

It's not like you have to learn this language to survive.

10:07.580 --> 10:08.980

Not at all.

10:08.980 --> 10:14.180

So I think that's why it's kind of a slow process, unless you really engage yourself

10:14.780 --> 10:18.820

and try to join many activities where you practice the language.

10:18.820 --> 10:21.900

It's really not easy, I would say.

10:21.900 --> 10:23.940

Yes, I feel a similar way.

10:23.940 --> 10:28.980

And that's also a picture I got from the other exchange students I interviewed, that it takes

10:28.980 --> 10:35.980

a lot of courage and proactiveness from the exchange students themselves.

10:35.980 --> 10:43.740

But then I also feel like the university carries a lot of responsibility because they kind

10:43.820 --> 10:49.460

of keep the exchange students in their micro communities or in their bubbles.

10:49.460 --> 10:55.780

Like if we take a look at the activities they organize or the organizations, I feel like

10:55.780 --> 10:58.100

there's a lot of separation.

10:58.100 --> 11:00.580

Have you experienced that?

11:00.580 --> 11:01.820

Right.

11:01.820 --> 11:09.260

So when I first came for my exchange, there was this integration week, if we can call

11:09.260 --> 11:10.660

it like that.

11:10.660 --> 11:18.100

And in this integration week in my department, I was put in a group with other international

11:18.100 --> 11:20.860

students.

11:20.860 --> 11:27.820

So from the beginning, there was this separation, which I understand it makes sense as a first

11:27.820 --> 11:33.820

touch because you get to meet the other people who you're going to be spending some months

11:33.820 --> 11:36.740

with and it's a nice first touch.

11:36.820 --> 11:45.220

But from the beginning, there is this separation that you mentioned that activities organized

11:45.220 --> 11:51.540

for international students are targeted towards international students.

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They are also open for everyone, but somehow these activities don't reach the locals the

11:58.340 --> 11:59.340

same way.

11:59.340 --> 12:05.900

Like personally, when I've joined international activities organized for international students

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mainly, you rarely see Norwegians in these activities.

12:12.860 --> 12:21.300

So this is also I do agree that this is a big reason why you end up in a group full

12:21.300 --> 12:28.420

of international students with maybe just maybe you become friends with one or two Norwegians,

12:28.420 --> 12:32.780

but it's really rare, as you mentioned.

12:32.780 --> 12:38.100

So that's really, really, really applies to my experience, what you mentioned.

12:38.100 --> 12:39.100

Yes.

12:39.100 --> 12:46.620

And then I can see from that, I think it connects really well together how these Erasmus students

12:46.620 --> 12:48.940

come maybe with different expectations.

12:48.940 --> 12:57.100

Maybe they move a bit away from this academic aspect and come here to experience the culture

12:57.100 --> 13:02.340

and the nature and then how they might not speak the language because everything works

13:02.420 --> 13:04.460

so well with speaking English.

13:04.460 --> 13:10.220

And then there's the university who places the international or exchange students together

13:10.220 --> 13:14.020

who organizes events for them.

13:14.020 --> 13:18.980

And I think on the one hand, that's really nice because as an international, you or I

13:18.980 --> 13:24.540

at least felt very welcomed and I was able to meet a lot of people.

13:24.540 --> 13:30.100

But at the same time, I was kept in this bubble of other international students.

13:30.140 --> 13:32.660

And I think that's what I get from you as well.

13:32.660 --> 13:33.660

Yeah, absolutely.

13:33.660 --> 13:36.940

Like, for me, it was really nice.

13:36.940 --> 13:45.060

I was really surprised by how welcome you feel and how easy it is to meet people no

13:45.060 --> 13:49.260

matter what kind of activities you like.

13:49.260 --> 13:54.740

There is stuff for everyone and it's really easy for you to, you feel really welcome.

13:54.740 --> 14:03.060

But again, there is this barrier with Norwegians, which is really interesting.

14:03.060 --> 14:09.340

Yes, that brings me a bit off to a broader statement about the Erasmus program in general

14:09.340 --> 14:16.020

that I conclude in the end of my thesis, which is Erasmus promotes cultural interaction,

14:16.020 --> 14:20.100

but not necessarily with the culture of the host country.

14:20.100 --> 14:23.380

What comes to your mind hearing this sentence?

14:23.420 --> 14:24.420

Hmm.

14:25.260 --> 14:26.260

So.

14:27.740 --> 14:31.180

It's true that

14:31.300 --> 14:38.220

as part of these activities for international students, they try to introduce the culture

14:38.220 --> 14:39.980

of the host country, right?

14:39.980 --> 14:44.580

They try to teach you how the Norwegian culture is.

14:44.580 --> 14:50.180

You do hiking, which is a big part of the Norwegian culture.

14:50.180 --> 14:56.340

They invite you to the Christmas dinners, typical Norwegian, and

14:56.980 --> 15:03.660

as a big part of international students, they introduce these activities, which

15:03.660 --> 15:08.540

are nice because you get to learn a lot about the host country.

15:09.900 --> 15:15.060

But there is cultural interaction with this

15:15.100 --> 15:22.300

in these activities, but not you are experiencing the Norwegian culture, but not with Norwegians.

15:22.300 --> 15:26.260

That's the key part that you are stating here, I guess.

15:26.260 --> 15:27.260

Right. Yes.

15:28.980 --> 15:30.940

Yeah, I do feel like that.

15:32.260 --> 15:40.660

It really fits with my experience that you don't really get to interact much.

15:41.260 --> 15:46.700

Like, I don't know, you meet Norwegians and they are really welcome and they really

15:46.700 --> 15:49.500

accept you and they're really welcoming and they're really nice.

15:49.500 --> 15:55.220

But I guess this could also apply to all Norwegians, to any country, right?

15:57.100 --> 16:00.660

As a person who comes to a country temporarily,

16:02.780 --> 16:09.580

it's I guess it's also not easy to for people from the host country to

16:10.660 --> 16:15.740

welcome you into their friend group, if we can call it like that, because in the end,

16:15.740 --> 16:24.780

you're in a temporary state where you also don't speak the same language, the same native language.

16:25.420 --> 16:27.660

So it's really interesting.

16:27.660 --> 16:35.100

And I think this really applies at least to my case, to my single Erasmus experience I've had.

16:35.620 --> 16:38.940

That what you mentioned really applies to what I experienced.

16:39.740 --> 16:46.620

Yes, I also feel like I got to experience so many different cultures and they have a lot of events

16:46.620 --> 16:52.460

here where you try food from different cultures and get presentations about different cultures

16:52.460 --> 16:54.700

from people that are actually from the country.

16:55.620 --> 17:01.940

But then the engagement with the Norwegian culture, yes, there is some, like you said,

17:01.980 --> 17:07.060

like you go on hikes and maybe participate in things that Norwegians would do.

17:07.060 --> 17:11.140

But then you do it with international students instead of Norwegians.

17:11.980 --> 17:17.500

Do you have any spontaneous ideas on how to improve this interaction?

17:18.420 --> 17:20.140

Any spontaneous ideas?

17:23.180 --> 17:31.900

So perhaps instead of because this is usually organized by some international students

17:32.620 --> 17:42.580

office or union, and it's maybe very targeted towards international students in how it is presented.

17:44.620 --> 17:49.180

So maybe if this was announced as a more global,

17:51.740 --> 17:58.140

yeah, global activities from university rather than this little group that does things for international students,

17:58.540 --> 18:00.580

maybe more Norwegians would join.

18:00.980 --> 18:01.700

I'm not sure.

18:04.140 --> 18:11.420

I guess it's not an easy question to answer, but surely things can be done in this direction.

18:12.860 --> 18:20.420

Because also different people who come as international students or exchange students will be looking for different things.

18:20.420 --> 18:28.620

Some of them will be seeking more cultural integration or, but others might prefer

18:29.620 --> 18:32.380

just staying with people from their countries.

18:32.900 --> 18:41.540

I've met people with really different goals regarding the exchange program.

18:42.620 --> 18:47.140

But surely stuff could be done in this direction.

18:47.140 --> 18:52.980

And I think it's really interesting that we are raising this and in order to, you know,

18:53.300 --> 18:56.340

have the richer exchange programs.

18:57.300 --> 18:58.580

Yes, I think so too.

18:58.580 --> 19:05.300

I think it already starts, for example, with the Minsk where a lot of events are promoted.

19:05.300 --> 19:10.740

And then the Norwegian ones has different events than if you put it into English language.

19:11.300 --> 19:15.100

So like you say, people come with different goals.

19:16.180 --> 19:20.900

But at the same time, I think even though they have these different goals, they should be able to

19:20.900 --> 19:26.220

even though they have these different goals, they should be presented the same choices.

19:26.220 --> 19:28.740

Yeah, the same things to choose from.

19:29.860 --> 19:39.140

So I feel like it's on the one hand, of course, it's maybe the proactiveness and it depends on the exchange student themselves.

19:40.860 --> 19:49.100

But I also feel like the university could try to give more opportunities to encourage this interaction.

19:50.900 --> 19:56.860

Do you feel like there's something changed when you transition now to being a PhD?

20:01.060 --> 20:10.260

So, yeah, I was a student, a master's student for one year in total, and then I started my PhD.

20:10.740 --> 20:14.900

And sure, that was my thought.

20:15.700 --> 20:20.980

Now I'm studying full time in Norway for a few years.

20:21.540 --> 20:30.820

I'm going to be officially an employee at a Norwegian university and I'm going to engage more with Norwegians.

20:31.540 --> 20:40.500

But it's true that in academic institutions, it is a bit different.

20:40.500 --> 20:48.260

In my case, as a PhD student, in my department, we have maybe 20 or 30 nationalities.

20:48.900 --> 20:57.060

And it's mostly other PhD students, other researchers, with a majority of internationals as well.

20:57.780 --> 21:05.300

So again, I'm surrounded by international students in a different context because it's a work context.

21:05.300 --> 21:08.340

And I do have more exposure to Norwegian language.

21:08.900 --> 21:12.980

I also have to read Norwegian documents for my research.

21:12.980 --> 21:17.540

And of course, I have a salary here.

21:17.540 --> 21:21.540

I have to understand the basics.

21:21.540 --> 21:28.100

And in a way, I feel more integrated in the Norwegian life and Norwegian work.

21:29.380 --> 21:37.940

But when it comes to social activities, again, I end up hanging out with internationals.

21:38.500 --> 21:42.260

And I end up in activities regarding internationals.

21:42.900 --> 21:51.460

And yeah, it's not that much has changed regarding this engagement with Norwegian culture.

21:52.180 --> 21:56.900

And I still have hang out with mostly internationals.

21:57.460 --> 21:59.700

So that's really interesting.

21:59.700 --> 22:07.220

Perhaps if I went into industry instead of academia, it would be really different.

22:08.660 --> 22:17.380

So yeah, but in my case, coming back to university, it just feels really similar to my exchange experience.

22:18.260 --> 22:25.460

That's really interesting because some studies, they describe exchange students as travelers or

22:25.460 --> 22:29.460

visitors because they're only here for a certain period of time.

22:30.100 --> 22:34.580

But even though you are now here full time, of course, you have to adapt to the system and

22:34.580 --> 22:38.580

everything, but then your bubble is still filled with internationals.

22:39.460 --> 22:45.940

For me, even though I wasn't an exchange student from the beginning, but like a full time student,

22:46.900 --> 22:52.500

I have a similar experience since I also ended up with the exchange students.

22:52.500 --> 23:00.100

And I feel like the aspect of being here long or the aspect of time didn't change so much.

23:00.100 --> 23:03.540

I'm still with the same people, kind of.

23:04.420 --> 23:04.660

Yeah.

23:04.660 --> 23:09.460

And maybe it is a big part plays the language, I think.

23:10.340 --> 23:10.500

Yeah.

23:11.300 --> 23:15.300

There is many things that you've been mentioning that kind of add together.

23:16.900 --> 23:20.820

And contribute to this idea, your thesis statement.

23:22.740 --> 23:29.140

And it's true that now, as now working here, it's a different mindset, of course.

23:29.140 --> 23:32.340

It's not the same as when I came for a few months.

23:34.740 --> 23:40.500

But this, your thesis statement is like really applying to me in a way.

23:42.180 --> 23:44.020

So yeah, really interesting.

23:44.020 --> 23:45.140

Really interesting.

23:45.140 --> 23:47.860

Yes, I think we're already at the end almost.

23:47.860 --> 23:53.860

And so thank you so much for joining me today and for this interesting conversation.

23:53.860 --> 23:55.300

Of course, it was a pleasure.

23:55.300 --> 23:57.460

Thank you, Masha, for the invitation.

23:57.460 --> 24:03.380

It was a really nice conversation and hopefully with a lot of insight for the future.

24:03.380 --> 24:06.260

I hope you enjoy it as well when you listen to it.

24:07.140 --> 24:08.100

Goodbye.

24:08.100 --> 24:08.660

Thank you.

24:15.140 --> 24:16.520

Goodbye.