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Between Aisles and Identity

Exploring sojourners' acculturation in retail spaces

by

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Abstract

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Keywords: sojourner, retail spaces, grocery store, space, market-mediated space, consumer acculturation, imposed acculturation, consumer acculturation agents, identity

Purpose: The objective of this study is to explore sojourners' acculturation process within the context of retail spaces and gain a deeper understanding of market-mediated spaces in consumer acculturation.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative research approach. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews with sojourners from eight Asian countries were conducted. The analysis of the data was guided by the approach of Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018).

Theoretical Framework: To gain an understanding of how sojourners navigate their acculturation process within retail spaces, this study draws on two interrelated Spatial Theories to analyze the empirical data. Lefebvre's (1991) 'Spatial Triad' is utilized to explore embedded power structures within space, and Soja's (1996) 'Thirdspace' perspective to grasp the vastness of spatial possibilities.

Conclusion:

The study reveals that sojourners have an 'explorative identity' as we conceptualize it, moving between cultural identity and exploration and navigating retail spaces in three different ways. (1) They develop certain market competencies and knowledge. (2) They turn towards a variety of acculturation agents to overcome barriers they face within the unfamiliar retail setting and allow them to explore. (3) They reproduce familiarity by re-envisioning spatial settings and gaining access to familiar groceries and thereby resisting imposed acculturation. Retail spaces as market-mediated spaces reveal themselves as active acculturation agents that can support and restrict the acculturation efforts of sojourners.

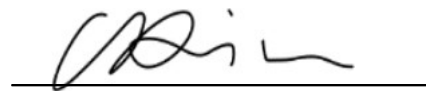
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Lund (Sweden), June 2, 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CH', is written above a horizontal line.

Charlotte Himmelsbach

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Bernath', is written above a horizontal line.

Mirjam Bernath

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1 Introduction

*This introductory chapter presents the research topic of this thesis, **Between Aisles and Identity - Exploring the navigation of sojourners' acculturation in retail spaces**. First, we will provide the background of this research topic in chapter 1.1, outlining the current trend of short-term global mobility in the outbound student mobility and the implications it has for receiving countries, thereby focusing on Sweden. Following this, we present in chapter 1.2 the problematization, clarifying the core concept, and the positioning of this research and the research question. We will then outline the research purpose in chapter 1.3 and the intended contributions, and conclude with the outline of this thesis in chapter 1.4.*

1.1 Background

Global mobility of short-term migrants has attracted growing attention in recent years. In particular, international tertiary student mobility in OECD countries has increased significantly, with the number of enrolled students rising from approximately 3.5 million in 2010 to over 6 million in 2020 (OECD, 2025). These internationally mobile individuals are known as “sojourners”, individuals who move to a foreign country with a specific purpose (e.g., educational purpose) and intend to return home after achieving it (Bochner, 2006, p.181). This distinguishes them from other border-crossers, such as immigrants, who relocate with a long-term focus (Yu et al., 2021), and global nomads, who cross borders frequently and only reside for a short time in one location (Bardhi et al., 2012).

Central to the global ‘sojourning trend’ as we term it, are Asian countries. China and India, holding 17.1% and 8.1% of the global outbound student mobility in 2020, are expected to remain the main sending countries till 2030. According to Harrison et al. (2024), the primary driver of outbound student mobility is a nation’s growing GDP and an expanding social middle class. This becomes evident when looking at the numbers of the countries with the strongest increasing volume of outbound student mobility, being China, Vietnam, Nepal, and India,

where the numbers of middle- and high-income households have grown substantially (Harrison et al. 2024). Other countries show strong potential for outbound student mobility due to their positive macroeconomic trends and favorable economic risk profiles, including Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Harrison et al. 2024).

This ‘sojourning trend’ is also evident in Sweden. Beyond appreciating the cultural diversity and new perspectives that international students sojourning to Sweden bring to the Swedish Universities, international educational export has gained importance for the Swedish economy, particularly since the introduction of tuition fees in 2011 for free moving sojourners who are not citizens of the European Union (EU) or the European Economic Space (EES), and their growing number (Swedish Institute, 2022). According to the Swedish Institute (2022), the total economic impact of international students in Sweden ranges between 3.5 and 4 billion SEK annually, whereby 50% of the income is generated by fee-paying free-movers, comprising their tuition fees and their general consumption in Sweden, in terms of living, groceries, travelling, and leisure activities.

In light of current numbers and future prognoses, it becomes apparent that studying sojourners, particularly those from Asia, is gaining in importance, as they present an emerging consumer group with potentially unique consumption practices and market demands.

However, studying abroad is not just an enriching experience that allows students to immerse themselves in new cultures while enhancing their academic development and future employability. It also comes with its challenges. Moving abroad means leaving loved ones, familiar environments, and routines behind. Furthermore, it means being confronted with an unfamiliar cultural and material setting, where consumption practices have to be newly learned and redefined, which can challenge one’s cultural identity.

Within consumer research, this phenomenon of border-crossing and adaptation to a new environment has been extensively examined in the context of long-term migrants under the concept of ‘consumer acculturation’ in the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Peñaloza's (1994) widely acknowledged definition explains this as “the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country” (p.33), by adopting certain consumption strategies. In other words, acculturation is understood to take place within the marketplace. Consumption is therefore not merely an activity for satisfying needs; rather, everyday practices such as buying groceries can serve as a

means of negotiating cultural adaptation and identity abroad (Askegaard et al., 2005; Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Oswald, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994). Consequently, retail spaces play a central role in the acculturation of sojourners. In particular, grocery stores are sojourners' main arena of consumption, as they only reside temporarily abroad, have restricted financial means, and tend to avoid purchasing items that are difficult to transport due to their plans to return home. Additionally, grocery stores are essential retail spaces that need to be visited on a daily basis to satisfy basic needs. Alongside sojourners' international everyday life on university campuses, grocery stores represent one of the few everyday spaces where they come into contact with the local population and the host culture. As food is seen to be a defining part of who we are (Lupton, 2011), as the German saying, "you are what you eat", mentioned by Fischler (1988, p. 279), depicts. The unfamiliar culinary setting of grocery stores becomes an important arena for sojourners' exploration and negotiation of their identities when abroad.

These dynamics, coupled with the growing number of students studying abroad, highlight the need to expand our understanding of sojourners' consumer acculturation within grocery stores.

1.2 Problematization

This study is situated within Consumer Culture Theory, contributing to the research streams of global mobility and market-mediated spaces. The acculturation of long-term immigrants has been extensively researched within the consumer acculturation literature. Early consumer acculturation research focused on understanding how the consumption patterns of immigrants differ from the dominant consumer society and what these differences reveal about the immigrants' level of cultural assimilation (Deshpande et al., 1986; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Reilly & Wallendorf, 1987; Saegert et al., 1985). This initial perspective of gradual assimilation has been interrupted by post-assimilationist scholars. They instead examined how immigrants use consumption practices to actively negotiate their identities with the dominant culture and thereby build fluid and integrated identities (Askegaard et al., 2005; Oswald, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994). Furthermore, it has been emphasized that an individual's consumption behavior is informed and shaped by external sources known as 'acculturation agents' in their new environment (Luedicke, 2011). These agents were said to originate from the home and host culture of the immigrant (Peñaloza, 1994) or transcultural flows (Askegaard et al., 2005).

Overall, the post-assimilation research is focused on the individual's acculturation process through consumption. This study takes departure from post-assimilationist theory.

However, it is important to highlight that recent research is moving away from the individualistic view of consumer acculturation, recognizing that this process of acculturation is embedded in a broader societal context (Luedicke, 2011), as well as influenced by multiple macro-institutional forces (Visconti et al., 2014). Some scholars have investigated one force at a time, analysing ideologies (Jafari & Goulding, 2008) and sociocultural structures (Üstüner & Holt, 2007), while Veresiu and Giesler (2018) investigated various institutional forces that are at play, spanning from actors of the political sphere, the market research, the retail sphere, to the consumer itself.

In contrast to previous work on institutional forces (Veresiu & Giesler, 2018), Veresiu's (2020) research challenges the assumption of consumer passivity in the face of institutional forces, revealing how a marginalized group exercised agency to resist imposed acculturation efforts embedded in spatial arrangements by local power holders. Imposed acculturation, in this context, refers to the enforcement of "a dominant culture ... onto an immigrant group socialized within a different cultural background" (Veresiu, 2020, p. 345). Furthermore, space emerged in Veresiu's (2020) study as an "active consumer acculturation agent" with the capacity to either limit or enable consumer agency (p. 356). By that, she further expands the field of acculturation agents. Overall, Veresiu (2020) encourages researchers to delve deeper into consumer acculturation experiences across diverse state-subsidized and market-mediated spaces. Similarly, Visconti and Thompson (2012) highlighted the need for more research on understanding space in the light of ethnic consumer identity construction. Responding to these calls, this study contributes to the consumer acculturation discourse by investigating retail spaces as market-mediated spaces that remain understudied, although they affect a multitude of people, compared to the specific living conditions that Veresiu (2020) focused on. Besides being a site of consumption, retail spaces are also sites of cultural exchange (Ogada et al., 2025; Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999), negotiation of one's identity (Jamal, 2003; Peñaloza, 1994), and encounters with different institutional and cultural influences (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013; Veresiu & Giesler, 2018).

The second stream of literature addressed in this study focuses on a specific group of border-crossers, the so-called sojourners. Various fields of research have dealt with sojourners and their adaptation to their new host country, particularly through the lens of food consumption.

For instance, nutrition studies have focused on sojourners' dietary changes abroad (Edwards et al., 2010; Perez-Cueto et al., 2009; Shi et al., 2021), while other studies have explored the connection between food consumption and emotional well-being (Brown, 2009; Brown et al., 2010). Others have explored the relation between food consumption, identity, and familiarity (Collins, 2008; Yen et al., 2018).

However, in consumer acculturation research, sojourners have received relatively little scholarly attention. In contrast, there has been extensive research on long-term immigrants (Luedicke, 2011). The few studies that have addressed sojourners, explored topics such as status consumption and acculturation (Huang, 2025), social ties and acculturation (Cappellini & Yen, 2013), the role of brands in acculturation (Vredevelde & Coulter, 2019), as well as acculturation strategies regarding food and media consumption (Yu et al., 2021). While these studies offer valuable insights, they highlight the marginal role of sojourners in the current consumer acculturation literature and leave specific spatial settings where sojourners' acculturation unfolds, understudied.

This scarce research on sojourners within consumer acculturation research is problematic, given that the existing literature on immigrants within this field cannot be directly transferred to sojourners. Sojourners differ from immigrants as they exhibit touristic as well as settled characteristics during their stay abroad (Yen et al., 2018). Furthermore, their clear home orientation due to their temporary stay distinguishes them from immigrants (Yen et al., 2018), as well as their fluid identity that allows them to switch between their preserved cultural identity and other cultural positions (Yu et al., 2021). Considering this, sojourners' consumer acculturation process and the related consumption behavior could differ from immigrants and therefore require greater research. Especially in light of their growing economic relevance for host countries, scholars have emphasized the relevance of further investigating them (Cappellini & Yen, 2013; Yen et al., 2018). However, given these dynamics, retail spaces, which are visited by sojourners daily, remain underexplored. Those places pose arenas of cultural negotiation, potential alienation, and exploration. Therefore, departing from a post-assimilationist consumer acculturation theory, this study aims to interrelate the two identified

research gaps: (1) the limited focus on sojourners within consumer acculturation research and (2) the underexplored role of market-mediated spaces in consumer acculturation theory. By addressing those gaps, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of sojourners' consumer acculturation. Hence, this study addresses the following research question:

How do sojourners navigate retail spaces?

To empirically answer this question, the Swedish grocery store has been selected as the retail space under examination. The grocery store represents a place of social interaction and exchange, a site of social legitimization, and a setting for getting to know existing consumption practices of the dominant culture (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999). Moreover, the grocery store is a place that sojourners must visit daily to meet their basic needs and is therefore an unavoidable point of contact with the host culture, next to their mostly very international university life. Having a closer look at Sweden, the dominating grocery shop chains are ICA, Axfood, Coop, and Lidl (DLF, 2024).

1.3 Research Purpose and Aimed Contributions

The purpose of this study lies in gaining insights into the overall process of sojourners' acculturation within retail spaces. Hereby, we want to explore the experiences and behaviors that emerge while being confronted with those unfamiliar spaces and how sojourners negotiate their identities throughout this whole process of acculturation. Furthermore, by identifying the experiences and behaviours of the invested sojourners, we intend to understand the role that retail spaces play in sojourners' navigation as well as the unfolding of imposed acculturation within retail spaces.

With this in mind, this study aims to theoretically contribute to the global mobility literature by broadening existing knowledge on sojourners, particularly in consumer acculturation literature, and thus deepening the understanding of their identity formation abroad. In addition, we intend to advance the current knowledge of consumer acculturation agents in acculturation literature. Furthermore, this study seeks to enrich the literature on market-mediated spaces in acculturation literature by exploring the role of space as an active consumer acculturation agent.

From a managerial perspective, understanding the acculturation process of sojourners will help marketers to make informed decisions about strategies, products, and environments to respond effectively to the specific needs of sojourners during their time abroad, leading to positive economic outcomes. Simultaneously, knowing more about sojourners' acculturation can help marketers to provide a more inclusive environment. Furthermore, because of the economic and academic relevance of sojourners for higher education, understanding sojourners' needs and behavior can help higher education sectors to attract more sojourners. Moreover, it can provide all students attending higher education with intercultural skills and a diverse mindset, which could have a positive impact on both the economy and an inclusive society. On a societal level, knowing more about the acculturation of sojourners helps to support the development of policies that directly address their concerns and, with that, help to provide a more inclusive environment.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. With the presentation of the background in the first chapter, the context of this study is set, which leads to the problematization and research purpose and intended contribution of this thesis. Within chapter two, key literature and concepts regarding the research topic are reviewed. Chapter three presents the theoretical lens that is used to analyze the findings. Within chapter four, the methodology of this thesis is described and argued for, regarding the data collection techniques and the scientific approach. In chapter five, the empirical findings are presented and analyzed to address the research question and the objectives of the thesis. In chapter six, the findings are discussed with the existing literature. Chapter seven offers a conclusion by summarizing the main findings of this research, discussing practical implications, and giving impulses for future research. Lastly, the references and appendix to this thesis are provided.

2 Literature Review

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the existing research relevant to this study. In chapter 2.1, we will introduce the beginnings of consumer acculturation research, followed by a detailed elaboration of post-assimilation literature in consumer acculturation. Finally, we will turn to the new wave of acculturation literature, in which consumer acculturation is investigated under a broader societal lens. In chapter 2.2, we will shift the focus to sojourners and present the literature that investigates acculturation and sojourners. Furthermore, sojourner literature from various fields of research with a focus on food will be outlined.

2.1 Consumer Acculturation

The following chapter will provide an overview of the consumer acculturation research from its beginnings to the recent literature. We will start with presenting the early acculturation literature, as it paves the way to the post-assimilationist literature of consumer acculturation, which our study takes its departure from. After that, we turn towards the new wave of consumer acculturation research, which sees consumer acculturation in a broader mediated context, as in our study.

2.1.1 Early Consumer Acculturation Theory

Berry's (1980) model of acculturation plays an important role in the evolution of the consumer acculturation research domain, although it is rooted in the field of social psychology and is not related to the consumption context (Luedicke, 2011). His research primarily tried to understand, "what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context when they attempt to live in a new cultural context?" (Berry, 1997, p. 6). The model encompasses four strategies that individuals of a non-dominant culture adopt in encounters with the dominant culture. (1)

Assimilation refers to the strategy of deciding to shed the former cultural identity and seeking contact with the dominant culture. (2) Those who adopt the strategy of separation hold on to their cultural identity and refuse the encounter with the dominant culture. (3) Integration manifests in the process of individuals valuing and staying in touch with their own cultural identity while pursuing contact with the dominant culture. (4) Marginalization, on the other hand, is seen as a consequence of negative encounters with the dominant culture, which entails losing contact with the original cultural identity and the dominant culture (Berry, 1980). The beginnings of the research vein on consumer acculturation are marked by research that assesses the degree of cultural assimilation based on consumption choices of Mexicans and Hispanics in comparison to Anglo Americans (Deshpande et al., 1986; Saegert et al., 1985; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983). Mehta and Belk's (1991) investigation of the comparison of the favorite possession of Indians who have migrated to the US with those back in India revealed an over-identification of Indian migrants with their cultural identity. They actively preserve their cultural identity through extensive identification with artifacts from their former home, while simultaneously incorporating American consumer culture for practical reasons (Mehta & Belk, 1991). Same as Mehta and Belk (1991) Wallendorf and Reilly (1983) research on Mexican-Americans indicated that the process of assimilation is not as simple as outlined in Berry's (1980) model. Instead, the investigated Mexican Americans established new consumption styles for some products, detached from Mexican and American consumption culture, oriented by stereotypical ideas of outdated American consumption practices, pointing at a time-related influence on assimilation.

The insights gained from early consumer acculturation research, which examined the assimilation process of immigrants, revealed that this process is more complex and less linear than previously thought. Thus, paving the way for post-assimilation research, which views acculturation as a non-linear and dynamic process (Luedicke, 2011).

2.1.2 Post-assimilationist Consumer Acculturation Theory

Peñaloza's (1989, 1994) pioneering work marks the departure from early acculturation research. Peñaloza (1989) defines consumer acculturation as the way "cultural consumption values, knowledge, and behavior are learned" by migrants to participate in the dominant consumer culture (p. 112). Her ethnographical study on consumption experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States revealed that learning processes to navigate consumption in a

new environment go beyond personal socialization and are mainly shaped by the cultural influences an individual is subject to in their immediate environment. Hereby, she refers to acculturation agents who build the central role of transferring information regarding consumption behavior to the immigrants (Peñaloza, 1994). Those acculturation agents comprise, according to Peñaloza (1994), friends, family, institutions, and media, and help the immigrant to either reproduce the consumption patterns of one's home culture in one's new environment or learn the consumption behavior of the dominant culture. The transfer of the information by the acculturation agents was identified to happen through "modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction" (Peñaloza, p. 49). In Peñaloza's (1994) study, acculturation agents of Mexican and American culture gave guidance to the Mexican immigrants on how to reproduce those cultures in their new environment. The study revealed that they quickly adopted visible American cultural objects as instruments of acceptance. On the other hand, they used consumption to strengthen Mexican cultural ties, for example, in terms of food consumption. They also used consumption behaviors adopted from the dominant culture to strengthen cultural ties with their families and friends in Mexico, by using phones to call them or having a car, something that was said to be not normal for the average person in Mexico. They also showed resisting behavior towards the dominant and Mexican culture (Peñaloza, 1994). Inspired by Berry's (1980) fourfold model of acculturation, active resistance found in Peñaloza's (1994) study breaks with the passive marginalization stated in Berry's (1980) model. Peñaloza (1994) presents four acculturation outcomes. (1) Assimilation refers to immigrants adopting many consumption behaviors of the host culture, while (2) maintenance refers to immigrants preserving elements of their home culture, as well as adapting consumption practices of the host culture. (3) Resistance to cultural adaptation can occur when immigrants feel that certain values are being imposed on them; they do not wish to adapt as they conflict with principles that they want to live by (e.g., materialism, individualism). This resisting behavior can be directed against both the host and the home culture. (4) Segregation arises when immigrants are spatially segregated from the dominant culture and therefore reside with their home consumer culture (Peñaloza, 1994). According to Peñaloza (1994), migrants use these strategies to shape their sense of self by blending multiple consumption practices but rarely assimilating to the dominant culture. This emphasizes that there is no one-size-fits-all framework of acculturation, as shown in the studies of Mehta and Belk (1991) and Wallendorf and Reilly (1983).

Another important study in the second wave of consumer acculturation is by the postmodernist researcher Oswald (1999) on Haitian immigrants in the United States. It echoes Peñaloza's (1994) results that immigrants adapt on an instrumental level, not fully assimilate to the dominant culture, and eagerly maintain their cultural heritage. The Haitian informants in Oswald's (1999) study engage in 'culture swapping' through consumption to negotiate the cultural differences they encounter. Rather than blending the two cultures into one fixed identity, they embrace according to Oswald (1999) several identities. Depending on what is advantageous in a certain situation, they switch. The author underlines that switching can happen through language, but also through consumable objects such as food or clothes. Oswald (1999) shows that the market allows migrants to assemble their identity to a certain degree freely and free themselves from imposed structural forces.

Both Oswald (1999) and Peñaloza (1994) overlooked the transformative impact of transnational consumer culture on consumer acculturation. Askegaard et al. (2005) picked this up as a third acculturation agent next to home and host culture. They view transnational consumer culture on the one hand as destabilizing traditional understanding of cultures, but on the other hand, elevating consumption variety and providing a space of cultural neutrality (Askegaard et al., 2005). In their research, they examined existing post-assimilationist research by studying immigrants from Greenland in Denmark. Thereby, they reject Oswald's (1999) concept of 'cultural swapping' as oversimplifying reality, neglecting the complexity and emotional intensity of identity negotiation. Likewise, they reject Berry's (1980) model for being too rigid, failing to account for the fluid nature of ethnic identity formation (Askegaard et al., 2005). Askegaard et al. (2005) instead highlight the dynamic, reflexive, and context-dependent ethnic identity work of immigrants using cultural consumption, rather than viewing it as a tactical decision proposed by Peñaloza (1994). According to Askegaard et al. (2005), the transcultural negotiation of ethnic identity manifests itself in being fluid and moving on a continuum of 'hyperculture', where consumption of commodified Greenland is used to become even more Greenlandic, integration of cultures, assimilation, and the 'oscillating pendulum' that swings between attraction and rejection of home and host culture.

In contrast to the previously discussed studies, the study of Jafari and Goulding (2008) adopted a broader structural lens by focusing on ideology as a force that shapes and reshapes ethnic identities (Visconti et al., 2014). Jafari and Goulding (2008) examined the dilemmas faced by Iranians living in the UK, who are caught between two opposing political ideologies: Iran's

theocratic state, which enforces conformity through religious doctrine, and Western neoliberalism promoting individualism, manifested in liberatory consumption practices. These socio-political tensions result in feelings of a 'torn-self'. One strategy to ease these tensions is using objects as a communication and construction tool of one's own identity (Jafari & Goulding, 2008).

As presented above, post-assimilationist research has mainly focused on the individual's acculturation journey of migrants assembling hybrid and evolving identities through the consumption of commodified cultural goods in their encounters with the dominant culture (Askegaard et al., 2005; Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Peñaloza, 1994; Üstüner & Holt, 2007). However, structural conditions that significantly shape the acculturation experience are just briefly touched upon in post-assimilationist literature (Askegaard et al., 2005; Peñaloza, 1994), resulting in a partial understanding of the overall process, and need further investigation (Luedicke, 2011; Visconti et al., 2014). Jafari and Goulding (2008) pose an exception.

2.1.3 New Wave of Consumer Acculturation Research

Visconti et al. (2014) pointed out that lately, studies have taken on the role of macro-institutional forces (Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999; Üstüner & Holt, 2007; Veresiu, 2020; Veresiu & Giesler, 2018). Jafari & Goulding (2008) and Üstüner & Holt (2007) are among the first that demonstrate the power of institutional forces on the acculturation process, focusing on one force at a time (Visconti et al., 2014). Jafari and Goulding's (2008) study highlights the potency of opposing national ideologies on the (de) construction of ethnic identity. Unlike Jafari and Goulding (2008) and earlier studies, Üstüner and Holt (2007) noticed that the ethnic identity project within acculturation is far less an individual choice; rather, it reflects a collective consumer identity shaped by the sociocultural structures an individual is subject to (Üstüner & Holt, 2007). Within their study, they investigated the spatial segregation of Turkish women living in squatter settlements outside of Ankara. The daughters in this study aspired to a modern Western-centered lifestyle/ identity, called *Batici*. However, structural inequalities of lacking financial, cultural, and social resources left this acculturation dream unfulfilled and resulted in 'shattered identities'. The 'dominated consumer acculturation', as Üstüner and Holt (2007) termed it, made the young women lose their previous and aspired identities due to the sociocultural structures they were confronted with (Üstüner & Holt, 2007).

Although studies in consumer acculturation such as Jafari and Goulding (2008) and Üstüner and Holt (2007) have started to examine the influence of sociocultural conditions within acculturation, only a few scholars followed the call of Visconti et al. (2014) to investigate various institutional forces acting simultaneously, such as Brunk et al. (2013) and Veresiu and Giesler (2018). Veresiu and Giesler (2018) introduced the model of ‘market-mediated multiculturalism’, which describes the neoliberal logic of approaching ethnic discrepancies through the market rather than through active political integration. According to this approach, various institutional actors—including politicians, market researchers, retailers, and consumers—shape immigrants and indigenous populations into marketable ‘ethnic consumer subjects’ via four interconnected market-based socialization strategies (Veresiu & Giesler, 2018). According to Veresiu and Giesler (2018) this process of “commodification of differences” results in an obscuring of the ultimate structural injustices experienced by different ethnic groups and reinforces the persistent power imbalances (p. 554).

Moving away from the passivity of immigrant consumers Veresiu (2020) provides a different perspective. In her study on a state-sponsored Village for Roma outside of Pisa, she gained new insights into how space functions both as an instrument of control and a potential site of resistance for marginalized groups. The decision to build the village was made by Italian policymakers to acculturate Roma to the dominant local norms and values, due to ongoing conflicts with the local Pisan community. Veresiu (2020) elaborated that the spatial structures constructed by local market actors can be seen as ‘imposed acculturation’, a phenomenon originally stated by Berry (1997) and explained in Veresiu’s (2020) study as “a dominant culture is forced onto an immigrant group socialized in a different home culture” (p. 345). Veresiu (2020) identified three different spatial acculturation strategies the local power holders employed, as well as three corresponding acts of resistance by the marginalized group during her inquiry. The strategies of the market actors encompass (1) spatial segregation of the Roma from the dominant populations utilizing ‘race-restrictive zoning’. Moreover, (2) values of cultural conformity and sedentary behavior are intended to be conveyed through ‘domestic space standardizing’ of the Village houses, resembling the dominant middle-class homes. The last strategy (3) intends to promote ‘technological self-surveillance’ in terms of achieving behavioral conformity via installed CCTV cameras. However, the imposed spatial disciplines in Veresiu’s (2020) study are challenged by the village inhabitants. First, they see the segregation as a protective measure for their community, rather than an imposed prison. Second, they engage in ‘domestic space rearranging’, reflecting nomadic traditions, and third, they ‘test

behavioral boundaries’, such as lighting fires despite being prohibited (Veresiu, 2020). This highlights that space is not merely a backdrop. Veresiu’s (2020) study thus highlights that “space is an active consumer acculturation agent”, that can empower but also restrict consumer agency (p. 356).

Hence, unlike recent consumer acculturation research (c.f., Veresiu & Giesler, 2018), the study of Veresiu (2020) recognizes the agency of marginalized consumers even though they are exposed to imposed acculturation, emphasizing the importance of extending research in this field.

2.2 Sojourner

The following chapter provides an overview of recent research on sojourners. Sojourners characterise themselves as being abroad with a certain goal in mind and intend to return home after achieving it (Bochner, 2006). Therefore, sojourners differ from immigrants regarding their time of stay abroad and their identity characteristics (Yen et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2021), hence challenging the transferability of immigrant-focused literature on sojourners, which has been elaborated in chapter 2.1. Hence, we will first focus on the existing literature on sojourners in consumer acculturation, which is a central part of this study. Following this, we present further studies from papers of various disciplines that address the identity construction of sojourners. As the research will focus on how sojourners navigate retail spaces (the grocery store), food will have a central role in our study. Therefore, we close this chapter by highlighting the literature on sojourners’ food consumption and food adaptation from various research fields.

2.2.1 Sojourner and Consumer Acculturation

There is a relatively small body of literature that is focused on consumer acculturation and sojourners. This academic literature, however has revealed the themes of sojourners’ flexibility and fluidity in the acculturation process in connection with status consumption (Huang, 2025), social connections (Cappellini & Yen, 2013), different consumption fields (Yu et al., 2021), and brands (Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019).

Firstly, a recent study by Huang (2025) examined how status is connected to consumption while sojourning. Her investigation of Chinese sojourners' acculturation in the US underlined that the sojourners, while having the economic resources, lost their status due to sociocultural constraints when moving abroad and turned towards the consumption of home country national products. Furthermore, Huang (2025) discovered that the sojourners were not trying to adapt to the US consumption patterns but tried to regain status through familiar home country products. The fluidity of acculturation is therefore seen in the navigation between multiple consumption fields.

Another study focusing on global consumer culture is the longitudinal study of Cappellini and Yen (2013). They investigated the everyday food consumption patterns of Chinese one-year degree students in the UK and discovered how social connections influence the students' acculturation. In three different phases, students' reasons for rejecting or consuming home and host country food varied depending on the strength of ethnic and non-ethnic ties (Cappellini & Yen, 2013). Therefore, this longitudinal study emphasizes the fluidity of sojourners acculturation process by showing how acculturation can change during their stay.

While previously mentioned studies from consumer culture theory on sojourners investigated sojourners moving to Western countries like Britain (Cappellini & Yen, 2013) and the US (Huang, 2025), Yu et al. (2021) provide a new perspective by investigating British students moving to China. Additionally, they contribute to the acculturation literature by illustrating that acculturation can be diversified. The authors identified that acculturation strategies can vary between different consumption fields and the social contexts or areas: sojourners use an integration strategy for food, a separation strategy for news and entertainment, and an assimilation strategy for social media. Based on this insight, the authors underline the fluidity and pragmatism of sojourners' acculturation strategy. Furthermore, they highlight that "sojourners' cultural identity is swifter and more fluid than immigrants" (Yu et al., 2021, p. 685).

Next to Yu et al. (2021), Vredevelde and Coulter (2019) highlight the pragmatism of sojourners and investigate their cultural identity. The study explored how sojourners use brands and consumption of brands for authentic experiences, which depend that the experiences can depending on "three prominent cultural experiential goals" (Vredevelde & Coulter, 2019, p. 279). The authors found that while these experiential goals were pursued in their host country, the sojourners maintained their home cultural identity, wanting to go back to their consumption

when returning home. They only use the brands for cultural immersion during their stay abroad without trying to build emotional relationships (Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019). Additionally, the paper next to Cappellini and Yen (2013) and Huang (2025) highlights the fluidity of sojourners. The authors link the fluidity to the liquid consumption framework from Bardhi et al. (2012). Bardhi et al. (2012) investigated the relationship to possessions and state that nomads have a “liquid relationship to possessions” (p. 542). This, they describe, is shown through possessions having a ‘situational value’, an ‘instrumental use value’, and an ‘immateriality’ for nomads. Vredeveld and Coulter (2019) argue that for sojourners, brands have a ‘situational value’, in the form of the brands having a certain value in a specific context. Regarding the ‘instrumental use value’ Vredeveld and Coulter (2019) state that they expand the view of Bardhi by demonstrating “that a brand’s instrumental value can stem not only from functional meanings, but also from symbolic meanings“ (Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019, p. 286).

Throughout this section literature on consumer acculturation of sojourners was outlined. However, only three of these articles focused explicitly on acculturation. According to Vredeveld and Coulter (2019), their article focuses more on global consumer culture and the consumer journey. This stated paucity, combined with the findings that underline the specificity of sojourners’ consumer experiences, highlights the need for future research. This thesis seeks to contribute to the exploration of sojourners in acculturation literature.

2.2.2. Sojourner and Identity

The previously mentioned studies from consumer acculturation examined sojourners and their identity when going abroad (Huang, 2025; Vredeveld and Coulter, 2019; Yu et al., 2021). Additionally, studies have taken a closer look at sojourners and their identity. Yen’s et al. (2018) explorative study on the food habits of Chinese sojourners in Britain showed sojourners “swift transformative identity” (p. 198). Their findings demonstrated that students showed different food consumption patterns, with a distinction between ordinary consumption exercised more during the week and extraordinary consumption followed more frequently during the weekend (Yen et al., 2018). Ordinary consumption is associated by the authors with sojourners following more of an immigrant’s food adaptation process, consuming homemade Chinese food, global food for reasons of convenience and familiarity, and British food for reasons of convenience. However, over the weekend, the sojourners’ behavior follows a tourist’s way of living, trying out different global food brands, international cuisine, and Chinese food at restaurants (Yen et

al., 2018). The authors emphasize these insights to highlight the “unique characteristic of sojourners, who are neither immigrants nor simply tourists, as they often engage in both work and tourism during their sojourn” (Yen et al., 2018, p. 205). Furthermore, Yen et al. (2018) emphasize that the marketplace offerings in a host country can be diversified and thus influence the food intake and different consumption patterns. This is critiqued by the authors as an under-researched field.

Another study that took a closer look at sojourners is Collins (2008). The article investigated South Korean students’ consumption behavior in New Zealand under the theoretical lens of globalization and transnationalism. The research reveals how restaurants and food can serve as a form of familiarity and create feelings of belonging, comfort, and routine for sojourners when being in a new host country. Food choices are not made to preserve a Korean identity but more to recreate everyday living (Collins, 2008). Familiarity in this context is referred to by the authors as everyday life before relocation, and therefore not only includes local products from Korea but also global products or global food chains frequently visited in South Korea. Moreover, they highlight that cooking Korean food with Korean friends or dining at Korean restaurants or global chains together allows recreating familiar social settings. The food itself takes a back role (Collins, 2008).

Another aspect of sojourners’ identity is discussed by Brown (2009). She highlights that sojourners can undergo “changes of the self” during their study’s abroad (Brown, 2009, p. 507). The sojourners are confronted with new values and behaviours in the host country, and the distance from familiar settings and cultural expectations gives them the freedom to re-evaluate their values, enabling a process of “self-discovery” (Brown, 2009, p. 517). The author identifies in total nine different ways how the sojourn is seen to be acting as a transformative power, ranging from “confronting the cultural aspect of self” to “becoming independent” (Brown, 2009, p. 518). Furthermore, the paper contradicts the assumption of previous research that there is a link between cultural identification and change by highlighting that students with strong nationality and cultural identification also experienced change (Brown, 2009). Additionally, the paper of Brown (2009) takes the whole process of a sojourners journey into account and also highlights what happens when sojourners return home.

2.2.3 Sojourner and Food Consumption

This thesis focuses on the retail space, grocery store. Therefore, literature on food consumption and the food adjustment of sojourners can help to understand the navigation of sojourners in the grocery store. A great deal of sojourner research from various research backgrounds has investigated sojourners' experience with food. This includes consumer acculturation literature on sojourners (Cappellini & Yen, 2013; Huang, 2025), research in connection with identity (Collins, 2008; Yen et al., 2018), research from the nutrition field (Edwards et al., 2010; Perez-Cueto et al., 2009; Shi et al., 2021), and acculturation and well-being (Brown et al., 2010, 2019).

Food And Nutrition

Outside of the consumer acculturation literature, research has investigated sojourners' food consumption in the new host country with a focus on dietary changes (Shari et al., 2021). The study of Perez-Cueto et al. (2009) examined the changes in the eating habits of international students at the University of Ghent in Belgium with a focus on healthy eating. Their findings showed that 85 % of students adjusted their nutrition and an increase in the consumption of certain product categories. Additionally, they determined that gender influences food choices, with males more likely to change dietary habits than women. Whilst Perez-Cueto et al. (2009) did not analyze the underlying reasons behind the dietary changes, other studies have investigated this (Alakaam & Willyard, 2020; Wu & Smith, 2016). The study from Alakaam and Willyard (2020) elaborated on dietary changes and related health issues and showed different factors of the diet change, ranging from food environment, campus environment, religious preferences, time, and economic factors. In addition to Perez-Cueto et al. (2009), who examine nutrition-balanced diet, Edwards et al. (2010) link nutrition-balanced diet to acculturation. In their study, they give insight into the changes in food neophobia of international students. Neophobia is defined "as the rejection of foods that are novel or unknown" (Dovey et al., 2008, p. 182). In Edwards et al. (2010) study, food neophobia was higher for Asian international students compared to European international students. Additionally, the results of their study showed that neophobia rose after three months, highlighting the evolution over time. Nevertheless, this insight was only significant for European sojourners. Although Edwards et al. (2010) attempt to acknowledge acculturation, the connection between consumer acculturation or further explanations on acculturation is not being made.

Food and well-being

A study about the *role of food* in students' sojourn was carried out by Brown et al. (2010). Brown et al. (2010) discovered in their research on sojourners in England at the beginning of their sojourn that "eating home country food offered emotional and physical sustenance"(p. 206). This provided feelings of comfort, stability, and serving as a nostalgic connection to home (Brown et al. 2010). Consuming home country cuisine enabled students to temporarily transcend their current stressful situation by reconnecting with memories of comfort and security (Brown et al., 2010). Next to emotional health, the authors identified that food from their home country was consumed to maintain physical health. This behavior was also found in multiple papers on food consumption of sojourners (Shi et al., 2021). Additionally, the study of (Brown et al., 2010) underlines that home country food can also be a chance for sojourners to maintain and show their cultural identity abroad.

In a later study, Brown et al. (2019) investigated the role of food in the adjustment journey of Nigerian students. The study revealed that consuming home country food can have a positive emotional impact and can be a means to connect with other people. Further, the authors described how the students try to adapt at the beginning of their stay, but return to their home country diet due to taste reasons. As a result, the students bought ingredients, brought them along, or had them sent to them (Brown et al., 2019). Overall, the study sheds light on how culinary practices influence the well-being of international students and offers practical measures for universities and local providers seeking to support well-being.

3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter describes the theoretical framework we used to analyze our empirical data in Chapter 5. We will present the ‘Spatial Triad’ of Lefebvre (1991), which provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how space is socially produced and how power relations are embedded and experienced within space. Furthermore, we will introduce the ‘Thirdspace’ perspective of Soja (1996), which builds on Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘Spatial Triad’. Soja (1996) highlights here the ‘radical openness’ of the ‘Thirdspace’, which expands the geographical boundaries and allows for the reimagination of space, and resistance to the dominant order to arise. By adopting these theoretical lenses, we aim to disentangle how retail spaces are more than mere physical settings for sojourners, but potential sites of struggle, possibilities, and emancipation.

Spatial Theory

As stated above, the theoretical framework of this thesis is based on the Spatial Theory of Edward Soja (1996), as well as on the influential ‘Spatial Triad’ of Neo-Marxist Henri Lefebvre (1991). Lefebvre (1991) challenges the conventional notion of space being a mere receiving container, arguing instead that space is socially produced and reproduced. It emerges from past social actions and thus shapes the possibilities for future actions while enabling and constraining certain behaviors (Lefebvre, 1991). To conceptualize this ‘production of space’, Lefebvre (1991) introduces three dialectical interrelated spatial dimensions to highlight the connection between social and spatial relations, as well as the inseparability of power and space. The three dimensions comprise: (1) ‘Spatial practice’ producing the ‘perceived space’, (2) ‘representation of space’ constituting the ‘conceived space’, and (3) ‘spaces of representation’ being the directly ‘lived spaces’. Soja (1996) builds on Henry Lefebvre’s idea and expands it. He names the spaces ‘Firstspace’, ‘Secondspace’, and ‘Thirdspace’ to make them clearer.

(1) ‘perceived space’ constitutes the first dimension of space, according to Lefebvre (1991). In Soja’s (1996) conceptualization, this space is referred to as ‘Firstspace’. It is the material dimension of space that is socially produced and continuously reproduced. This dimension of

space is directly observable and measurable. It encompasses physical structures (e.g., museums, playgrounds), but also activities and social relationships that are carried out within the space and which unreflectively (re) produce the current social structures and thus shape and define the space, which then produces those structures itself (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996).

(2) The mental depiction of space builds the second dimension of space in Lefebvre's (1991) 'Spatial Triad' and refers to it as 'conceived space'. Soja (1996) terms this dimension 'Secondspace'. For Lefebvre (1991), the 'conceived space' is the dominant space of epistemological power, where the design of the constructed space is informed by experts, such as planners, architects who produce conceptualization of space (e.g., maps, drawings) that are not neutral but informed by ideological and practical ideas. Those mentally constructed depictions of space are, according to him, assigned with concrete exchange value and thereby enforcing a homogenized, manageable order, which Lefebvre (1991) refers to as 'abstract space'. This 'abstract space' stands in contrast and leads to tensions with the use value people intend to draw from the lived 'social space'. Soja (1996) aligns with Lefebvre (1991) perception of the 'conceived space' and points out Lefebvre's (1991) central focus on dominant power structures within space. For Soja (1996) the 'Secondspace' comprises the "mental images of space that we all carry with us in our daily life" and project into the material (p. 79).

(3) The third dimension of space is termed by Lefebvre (1991) 'lived space' and in Soja's concept 'Thirdspace'. 'Lived space' is seen by Lefebvre (1991) as the symbolic dimension of the combination of 'perceived space' and 'conceived space'. It is the lived sensually experienced space, which informs through observable or non-observable symbols about ideologies, and social relations (Soja, 1996). Soja's (1996) account of 'Thirdspace' is not just a binary combination of the 'Firstspace' and the 'Secondspace' but goes beyond the combination of imaginary and material space. However, he emphasizes that he believes Lefebvre (1991) had a similar understanding, but did not explicitly state it. For Soja (1996) 'Thirdspace':

"is a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange, where the geographical imaginations can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable." (Soja, 1996, p. 5)

The 'radical openness' of the 'Thirdspace' allows for positions and spaces of resistance against the dominant order to emerge, also called 'counterspaces' by Soja (1996), that challenges the binary nature of thinking and operation (Krahmer, 2017).

For a better understanding of the 'Thirdspace', similar to Lefebvre's (1991) 'Spatial Triad', an example is elaborated on a student, Anna, going to a café. The 'Firstspace' in this case would be the physical room of the café with its interior, and baked goods. The 'Secondspace' is Anna's mental perception of the space. When she thinks about going to the café, she has an empty and quiet café during the mornings in mind, where she can study. When she enters the café and sits down, a servant comes up to her and informs her that she cannot work with a laptop here, as there are many reservations today. This encounter brings her into the lived moment 'Thirdspace', where the 'Firstspace' and her 'Secondspace' intersect. Anna is confronted when being in the 'Firstspace' with a new image of the café being a popular place, not a quiet study place, and thus has to re-adjust her 'Secondspace'. In the 'Thirdspace', everything comes together, the different meanings of the space, the debate of Anna, seeing the use-value of the space as a study place, while the café owner perceives it as a profit-focused space, there to generate exchange value. In the 'Thirdspace', the different meanings of a space become visible, which open up the potential for transformation and reimagination.

4 Methodology

Within this chapter, we will give a detailed explanation of the methodology applied in this thesis. We start by presenting the underlying research philosophy of this work by addressing the ontological and epistemological considerations. This is followed by an elaboration of the chosen research approach. After that, we present our method of data-gathering and analysis, which encompasses the presentation of sampling and selection criteria, the development of the interview guide, and a detailed description of how the interviews were conducted and analyzed. Following this, the research quality of the study will be assessed based on quality criteria of validity, reliability, and generalizability. Finally, we will close this chapter by reflecting on the research ethics.

4.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy forms the foundation of a study. It determines the appropriate methods and outlines the boundaries that the chosen philosophical stance imposes on the research process. Therefore, it is essential to define the research philosophy, in this case, consistent with an ontology and epistemology.

Ontology

Ontology concerns the core philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and how it can be investigated (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). To holistically address our research question, we seek to explore the different ways sojourners navigate their acculturation within retail spaces. We therefore decide on relativism as the best fitting ontological stance, as it challenges the notion of an absolute discoverable truth. Instead, it acknowledges the existence of multiple truths of a phenomenon, dependent on the unique perception of the observer (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). With that, we acknowledge the inherent diversity of the sojourner and each unique

view of being a truth, shaped by their socio-cultural background, experiences, and interests, hence resulting in varying experiences of navigation to be observed.

Epistemology

Epistemology concerns itself with the methods that are used to understand the physical and social worlds. In line with the adopted relativist ontological assumption of this thesis, we adopted a social constructivist epistemological stance, as it recognizes that reality is socially constructed through the meanings individuals attribute to their ongoing experiences in their daily encounters (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The social constructivist lens, therefore, offers us the possibility to inquire into the unique experiences of sojourners navigating retail spaces, while exploring the social encounters of the space that are shaping their understanding of their experience.

4.2 Research Approach

To explore the various ways sojourners, navigate retail spaces, we followed an abductive research approach in this study. In chapter 3, we have outlined the theoretical lens, that we utilized to analyze the empirical data. Besides using the stated theory to analyze the data, we still wanted new insights to arise from the empirical data, which made us choose an abductive research approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). An abductive approach to exemplify it, “creates fruitful cross-fertilization where new combinations are developed through a mixture of established theoretical models and new concepts derived from the confrontation with reality” (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559). Therefore, abduction is not about verifying existing theory but about continuously developing it (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Given that we investigated the individual experience of sojourners navigating retail spaces, abduction allowed us to draw plausible connections between our insights and existing theory (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), thus enabling us to refine existing theoretical understanding of sojourner.

Hence, we decided on a qualitative approach, as it aligns with the abductive reasoning, and shares the same assumption that knowledge is subjective, and meaning is socially constructed through interaction as our adopted philosophical stances, and therefore has to be investigated from the affected perspectives (Yilmaz, 2013) Choosing a qualitative approach provides us

good pre-conditions to understand the phenomenon of sojourners' navigation within retail spaces, as we investigate it from different involved perspectives (Jackson et al., 2007; Yilmaz, 2013). This allows us to gain an in-depth understanding of the various ways our participants navigate retail spaces and the meanings and reasoning they attribute to them, which is best explored through a qualitative approach. This, along with the critical understanding we needed to gain to holistically answer our research, justifies our methodological decision.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Although various qualitative methods can be employed to investigate a phenomenon, our objective is to uncover how sojourners experience and make sense of a phenomenon, navigating retail spaces, which constitutes the inherent purpose of qualitative interviews (Jackson et al., 2007). Furthermore, the method of qualitative interviews is known to be employed in research to gain a deeper insight into humans' perspectives (Rowley, 2012). Therefore, qualitative interviews were chosen because they allow us to understand the behavior, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes regarding grocery stores from the participants' point of view. These personal insights are crucial for answering our research question.

When we decided on the type of interview, we followed the call of Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) to choose the method that delivers the needed insights. The balance between structure and flexibility made us choose 'semi-structured interviews'. On the one hand, it allows us to ensure consistency and comparability by covering pre-defined topics across all interviews, which is essential for identifying patterns and effectively answering our research question. On the other hand, flexibility is given in terms of asking the pre-defined questions when it feels right, ensuring an intuitive conversation flow, as well as giving room for new insights to arise by the possibility of leaving the interview guide when unexpected perspectives arise (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Moreover, the decision to conduct individual interviews, was guided by the importance to offer an environment in which our participants felt safe to share their experiences, as some of the inquired topics concern sensitive themes such as feelings of belonging and challenges they encounter in Sweden, that may would not be that honestly answered in a more open setting. To further support our participants' comfort, we offered them the choice between doing the

interview online or in person. Additionally, as we are both international students in Lund, we were able to relate to the experiences shared by our informants. Our similar age and situation contributed to a more comfortable and trusting interview environment that encouraged the participants to speak openly.

4.3.1 Sampling and Selection Criteria

Sampling involves the researcher defining which units of analysis are needed to address the objectives of the study most effectively (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Our study requires participants to meet certain criteria to be eligible to take part. Therefore, we utilized the non-probability sampling approach of purposive sampling, which strictly determines characteristics needed for participation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Within this study, four specific criteria were set: First, the participants had to be enrolled students for a full degree at a Swedish University, with their home countries being in Asia, ensuring their sojourner status. This choice was made due to the high presence of Asian international students in the ‘sojourning trend’, as well as the relevance of international students in Sweden. Both topics are discussed in more detail in chapter 1.1. Secondly, the participants were required to live in the same city. This single city focus ensures that the participants navigate within the same retail environment, which enhances the comparability of their experiences. In this case, the city of Lund was purposely chosen, as it is the top choice for international students choosing to study in Sweden (Lund University, 2025a). With almost 12.700 international non-exchange students (Lund University, 2025b), it gave us access to a diverse population of Asian sojourners, in an environment of consistent Swedish grocery stores (e.g., ICA, Coop, Willys, Hemköp). Thirdly, they had to be living in Sweden for no longer than three years and not have lived in another European country for longer than one year before. This ensured that our interviewees were in the early stages of their acculturation process in Sweden and had not experienced anything similar in Europe before. The final criterion we ensured to be met was the diversity of the home countries of our participants across Asia, as it is important to represent the variety of students from Asia coming to study in Sweden and get to know their experiences in Sweden.

To find eligible participants for our studies and minimize the bias in the data, we reached out to people outside of our immediate circle. We did this by asking our roommates and classmates to connect us with their fellow students and friends who met the set participation criteria.

Besides this, we created a Google Form, which we shared in multiple WhatsApp and Facebook groups, and can be found in **Appendix A**. The form outlined the participation criteria along with a brief project description. Interested students who met the criteria could select their preferred interview dates and format and provide their contact details so we could get in touch with them.

In total, we interviewed 15 students from seven different Asian countries, aged between 22 and 28. We stopped interviewing after conducting 15 interviews as we noticed that insights were starting to repeat themselves, and therefore considered the empirical data gathered as sufficient. In **Table 1** below, the participants of this study are briefly presented with their country of origin, their pseudonym to ensure privacy concerns, while maintaining human proximity, their age, gender, study program, their time already spent in Lund, and whether the interview was conducted online or in person.

Country of Origin	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Study Program	Time in Lund	Place of Interview
Japan	Mei	26	Female	Sustainability Master	1 year, 8 months	in person
Thailand	Tawan	24	Male	Entrepreneurship and Innovation Master	8 months	in person
Sri Lanka	Salini	22	Female	Biomedicine Master	8 months	online
Bangladesh	Eva	28	Female	Human Geography Master	8 months	online
China	Ying	24	Female	Biotechnology Master	8 months	online

Vietnam	Anh	23	Female	Medical Science Master	8 months	online
India	Tamil	24	Male	Bioinformatics Master	1 year, 8 months	online
Vietnam	Minh	25	Female	Finance Master	8 months	online
China	Anna	22	Female	Biomedicine Master	8 months	online
India	Amir	22	Male	Biotechnology Master	8 months	online
Vietnam	Linh	23	Female	Biochemistry Master	8 months	online
China	Lilly	24	Female	Media and Communication	8 months	online
Indonesia	Ninda	28	Female	Economics Master	8 months	online
Japan	Hana	23	Female	Sustainability Master	8 months	online
Japan	Emi	25	Female	Sustainability Master	1 year, 8 months	in person

Table 1: Overview of Interview Participants

4.3.2 Development of the Interview Guide

The development of the interview guide for this study started before this thesis project. Within our master's course of "Qualitative Research Methods," we conducted a mock study on how students from Asia navigate the unavailability of home country food items in Swedish grocery stores. During this pilot project, we interviewed four students from four different Asian countries: Thailand, Bangladesh, Japan, and Sri Lanka. The insight we gathered from the mock study helped us establish certain sections of this study interview guide, which we found particularly interesting and wished to get more insights on.

The refinement of the interview guide of this study was an iterative process that happened throughout the whole data collection process. Following the first three interviews after the mock study, we realized that our informants were repeating themselves due to questions that triggered similar responses. We decided to cut these questions, which helped to reduce repetition in the answers, making the conversation feel fresh and taking up less of our participants' time. The repetitive questions were in regard to their daily food intake and the differences in the grocery store. In this context, we also changed the question of a typical grocery shopping trip from the section 'Grocery Store experiences' to 'Adaptation and Agency of the persona'. Furthermore, we also rearranged the order of the sections 'Cultural Interaction' and 'Adaptation and Agency of the persona', as we realized that it builds a natural transition to first explore the cultural experiences encountered in Swedish grocery stores and then elaborate on the informant's adaptation and agency. This readjustment also helped to better reference on previous points mentioned. Another adjustment comprised the rephrasing of three interview questions, as they were too broad and needed further explanation by us before the participants were able to answer them. Making them more precise solved this difficulty. Lastly, we added two questions in regard to what people generally think of the grocery store and if they have been shopping frequently at home before, since we realized during the first interviews that this information would help to understand the answers in regard to sojourners' emotions towards the grocery store better.

Before the interview started, the participants were informed about the recording of the interviews as well as ethical and data protection considerations and consented to these. (1) To ease the tension, we started the interview with some general questions about the person, followed by (2) two questions regarding the general sense of feeling at home here in Sweden.

This was intended to get an overall feeling of the person's emotional state in their acculturation process, the attitude towards the host country, and their sense of belonging. (3) The main part started with questions about the grocery store experience, focusing on the initial experience of Swedish grocery stores as well as the emotional experiences associated with the grocery store. With this, we were aiming to get an understanding of the overall attitude towards the grocery store. (4) This was followed by questions that focused on the cultural reflexivity of the sojourners and helped get insights into the experience of culture and cultural identity in the space of the grocery stores. (5) The last section of the main body was conducted towards the agency of acculturation. For each question, follow-up questions were prepared to fully understand when something was unclear. (6) Finally, participants were allowed to share any thoughts or experiences related to grocery shopping that had not yet been mentioned but that they considered important, (7) as well as to express a wish for the future of grocery stores in Sweden that could improve their experience.

An overview of the interview topics is provided in the following list, while the complete interview guide can be found in **Appendix B**:

1. Opening Questions Regarding the Persona
2. Questions Regarding the General Sense of Feeling at Home
3. Grocery Store Experiences
4. Cultural Dimension
5. Adaptation and Agency of the Persona
6. Final Questions

4.3.3 Data Collection Process

The 15 guided interviews were conducted between the 15th of February and the 26th of April. Three of our fifteen interviews took place in person in a reserved group room at the LUSEM library of Lund University, while the remaining interviews took place online via Google Meet, according to the participants' preferences. The interviews for the mock study lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, while the subsequent interviews each lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. All

interviews were recorded with the participants' consent to facilitate the transcription process and ensure the accuracy of the data gathered. Throughout the interviews, both of us were always present. One person interviewed while the other took notes. However, the note-taker was still able to ask follow-up questions, which added greater depth to the research, as it was examined from multiple perspectives (Denzin, 1978).

During the interviews, it was important to us to give the participants the time they needed to think and respond. Providing this patient approach was especially important, as our participants were not native English speakers and some required a little longer to find the right words to express their thoughts to their satisfaction. Additionally, some participants expressed worries about the language barrier in the beginning. By giving them time to answer as well as not interrupting them, we eased their concerns and made them feel more comfortable. This patient approach resulted in the interviews taking longer than initially expected. Instead of the expected 30-45 minutes, we had to adjust our expectations to a more appropriate time frame of 50 minutes to one hour. With this, we could guarantee that some participants had enough time to think, while highly communicative people had enough time to fully express all their feelings.

4.3.4 Analysis

Once all the interviews had been completed, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymized, cleaned of filler words, and corrected grammatically. The refined transcripts were then analyzed using Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) three-step data analysis process of sorting, reducing, and arguing. As emphasized by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), we devoted much time to the first phase of analysis, 'sorting', to get familiar with the empirical material, to be able to treat it as originally as possible. We read the transcripts multiple times to discover recurring patterns of what our interviewed sojourners said, with our research topic in mind, and started with 'initial' coding as Charmaz (2014) termed it. Hereby, we assigned codes based on the participants' own words, to avoid pushing a selective frame on the material and risk missing important insights (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). As coding became more stable and the codes were used more frequently, we moved to 'focused' coding, as termed by Charmaz (2014), by grouping similar initial codes under more abstract terms (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This 'focused' coding system allowed us to get more targeted within our search, enabling us to find emerging patterns. These focused codes were then organized into subthemes to generate a more abstract explanation of the empirical data, which simultaneously contributed to the

development of the overarching themes. However, as qualitative data is rich, it must be reduced to keep it manageable and to avoid producing what is already known (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Therefore, we moved on in the process to ‘reducing’ described by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), applying their introduced ‘categorical reduction’ by cutting entire categories. This allowed us to provide only the themes that provide interesting insights regarding our research topic. Below we present the evolution from Initial Codes to Themes.

Initial Code	Focused Code/ Subtheme	Theme
Self-checkout, weighing, product variety, differences between grocery stores, price, quality, vibe, navigation	Practical learning ground /Building functional marketplace skills	Developing market competencies
Trust, environment, trusting personal, food standards, plastic, organic, vegan, observing, Swedish people, Swedish diet	Cultural learning ground/ Decoding cultural norms and consumption behaviors	
Taste, ingredients, don't know what to use them for, don't know them, recommendations, friends, customer, free sample, watch other people	External guidance/ Addressing the lack of knowledge	Overcoming navigation barriers by leveraging acculturation agents
Google translate, ChatGPT, translator, challenge, basic words, pronunciation, searching for words, learning Swedish	Language barrier/ Addressing structural barrier	
Asian store, sending, bringing, Asian Section, group chat, food from back home	Satisfy unmet needs/ Seeking cultural familiarity beyond Swedish grocery stores	Enforcing agency to reproduce familiarity
Entertainment, leisure, spending time with friends	Grocery store substituting missed activities/ Recreating familiar spaces	

Figure 1: Coding Process

The final step, ‘arguing’ as outlined by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), required us to get our empirical findings into dialogue with existing literature. By drawing informed connections between them, we were able to highlight the significance of our results and novel insights and concepts we contributed to the existing body of literature.

To support our analytical process, by maintaining an overview of the emerging categories and allowing us to work together on the same project, we used MAXQDA for the entire coding process. MAXQDA is a computer-assisted qualitative data and text analysis software that facilitates the iterative refinement and organization of text segments into categories.

4.4 Ensuring Research Quality

Qualitative research is constantly in question for not being scientific enough. Critics point out that the analytical process is opaque. Besides that, qualitative research is criticized for not stating well enough why a certain method is being used. Furthermore, the results are seen as subjective, influenced by the researcher’s perspective on the researched phenomena (Noble & Smith, 2015). Because of these concerns, reviewing research quality is essential to ensure the credibility of the results (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Noble & Smith, 2015).

Quantitative research has well-established quality criteria that ensure scientific rigor, in contrast to qualitative work. Those criteria encompass: validity, reliability, and generalizability (Noble & Smith, 2015). Those criteria, according to Noble & Smith (2015) can be used within qualitative studies if they are adapted to the qualitative context.

Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) introduce the concept of assessing authenticity, plausibility, and criticality within qualitative research to convince readers of the worthiness, or in Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) terms of its “ ‘validity’ ”, to read it (p. 126). Authenticity within a study is achieved through researchers demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon by fully engaging with the research object, without preconceived ideas (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). To guarantee authenticity in this study, we conducted an extensive literature review to get a full understanding of the different literature streams underlying our research. Furthermore, we clarified any potential misunderstandings during the interviews to ensure that the intended meaning of our informants was captured to prevent any

misrepresentation within the analysis. Plausibility constitutes the importance of conducting a study (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). The importance of conducting this study is explained in detail in the problematization and the purpose and aimed contribution in chapter 1.2, and 1.3. Criticality is evident if the study makes the reader aware of their assumptions and surprises them with novel insights (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). By presenting the various voices, we were able to capture through the interviews in the findings, we offer readers a space to engage with these diverse perspectives, which may prompt them to reconsider previously held assumptions.

Moving to reliability, the second research quality criterion. Reliability in constructionist epistemology concerns whether the same result would be achieved if the study were to be repeated (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Our study ensures reliability as we continued conducting interviews until repeating patterns appeared, which reflects, within this context, saturation. Nevertheless, it must be considered that this study's subject is dependent on geographical, temporal, and socio-cultural variables.

Generalizability in qualitative research refers to the capacity of findings to be diverse enough to apply to other research contexts. Hence, non-probability sampling is being criticized, as it doesn't represent the broader population (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, we aimed to provide a broad range of perspectives by selecting participants from various Asian countries with different cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the scope of this study is too limited to claim generalizability. Still, we believe that our findings could be relevant to similar experiences of individuals migrating to a country where they don't know the language of, with labels in supermarkets being written in a foreign language. Further (individual) case studies in this field could be synthesized to form a more comprehensive picture.

4.5 Methodological Limitations

As it becomes apparent from the previous section, research methods have their limitations. Using non-probability sampling limits the generalizability of our findings and therefore increases the risk of bias (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, while adhering to the specified participant criteria essential to this study, we aimed to ensure as much diversity as possible within the scope of our delimitations and showed transparency towards our sampling techniques

to reduce the risk of bias. Furthermore, by focusing only on students in one city, and therefore, one grocery store landscape, the study cannot capture the whole variety of possible ways in which sojourners navigate retail spaces. Different geographical settings with different grocery store availability or ethnic food options could lead to different navigation strategies. Additionally, bias can also arise from the selected questions being asked, which the interviewer selected within a certain preconceived frame, as well as the follow-up interpretation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). To counteract this, we asked open questions so that respondents were able to answer freely. Further, we asked open follow-up questions to avoid the potential bias of a set question framework and get closer to the interviewee's reality. To minimize the bias of a one-sided perspective influencing the empirical data, we were both present during the interviews and asked questions. Additionally, we both worked on the analysis, allowing us to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive view (Denzin, 1978). Us being in the same international students' situation as our participants helped create a trusting, non-judgmental environment, where they were able to truly express their thoughts, without feeling the need to hold back or modify their answers due to perceived inappropriateness (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Acknowledging the limitations doesn't diminish the value of the findings or their relevance to the understanding of our research topic. Instead, it primes us to consciously interpret the findings and it also provides a foundation for future studies to continue working on and challenge the limitations of this study.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

In our study, we followed the ten key principles of research ethics outlined by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), which can be separated into "protection of research participants" and "protection of integrity of research community" (p. 173). To ensure the protection of the participants, different actions were taken. During the interview process, we were aware of ethical considerations regarding cultural appropriateness. Since acculturation is about adaptation to a new host country and, consequently, to a new culture, differences between living in the home and host countries are topics that can arise. Additionally, with both of us coming from Germany, follow-up questions about understanding the exact differences of Asian products that are unavailable or depicted wrong in Sweden were predicted. To ensure our participants feel

comfortable, we consulted international students from Asia during the interview guide writing process to avoid inappropriate questions. Before starting the interview, the participants were first informed that there are no right or wrong answers and that they could answer the questions to the extent they felt comfortable. Furthermore, it was emphasized that not all questions need to be answered, and they can choose to skip questions. The latter was especially important since we asked questions that thematized cultural differences and cultural identity. Secondly, all participants were informed about the interview process, data usage, and data protection measures before giving their consent to participate. The information given directly before the interview can be found at the beginning of the interview guide in **Appendix B**. To guarantee the anonymity of the participants, the names were pseudonymized.

Moreover, during the interview, we avoided misleading questions and asked follow-up questions to avoid wrong interpretations and findings.

5 Findings

Within this chapter, the empirical findings of the research will be presented and analyzed. The Spatial Theories outlined in chapter 3 will be used to interpret the findings. To clarify, when the findings in the context of Lefebvre (1991) are analyzed, the terms ‘perceived space’, ‘conceived space’ (also known as ‘abstract space’), and ‘lived space’ are used. When using Soja’s (1996) work, the terms ‘Firstspace’, ‘Secondspace’, and ‘Thirdspace’ are used. As outlined in Chapter 3, these concepts are quite similar. However, Lefebvre (1991) focuses more on the power structures embedded in space, while Soja (1996) concentrates more on the openness of the ‘Thirdspace’.

Three themes have been identified that demonstrate how sojourners navigate retail spaces. They navigate the retail spaces by (1) developing market competencies, (2) overcoming navigation barriers by leveraging acculturation agents, and (3) enforcing agency to reproduce familiarity. Each theme has sub-themes that explain how the sojourners, in more detail, navigate retail spaces.

5.1 Developing Market Competencies

The first theme that was identified within the conducted interview was ‘Developing Market Competencies’. The section begins by exploring the subtheme ‘Building functional marketplace skills’, which highlights the acquisition of functional competencies that sojourners gain throughout their stay. This is then followed by ‘Decoding cultural norms and consumption behaviors’, which takes a closer look at the sojourners identifying and engaging with cultural norms. Together, these subthemes give a deeper understanding of how sojourners actively cultivate knowledge and skills to navigate the retail space of Swedish grocery stores.

5.1.1 Building Functional Marketplace Skills

In the first subtheme, we identified that sojourners gain market knowledge and skills through learning local shopping systems while navigating the retail space during their sojourn and consciously choose where to shop due to the gained market knowledge.

Mastering local shopping systems

The first insight revealed that, to have a more seamless shopping experience, sojourners had to learn how to manage local shopping systems, that are embedded and continuously practiced in the ‘Firstspace’ of the Swedish grocery store. This learning process allowed them to acquire new skills and find value in those new encountered practices in the ‘Thirdspace’. The self-checkout was new for most of the international students and was mentioned as a difference from grocery stores back home. This highlights that the preconceived images they carried of grocery stores in their ‘Secondspace’ mismatched the actual ‘Firstspace’ of grocery stores in Sweden. For some, this mismatch presented challenges in the ‘Thirdspace’ that needed to be overcome. This was emphasized by Lilly from China and Anh from Vietnam, who found the system confusing in the beginning. One way to get used to the self-checkout was in the case of Anna learning the regulations, or in the case of Emi and Lilly learning the operational nuances of the technology. Furthermore, Lilly emphasized that the necessity to understand the different self-checkout systems across the different grocery stores made the adjustment to this newly encountered system more difficult.

Lilly: “... the checkout machine is a bit confusing for me, for the first several times, because I think each supermarket, each brand has their own system, and it's a bit hard for me to know how to work with it. And sometimes I would ask for the staff to help me. But sometimes, as I mentioned, I just don't want to talk with anybody. I just want to finish this trip on my own.”

Interviewer: “But do you still use the self-checkout, or do you go to the cashier?”

Lilly: “I use the self-checkout more now, because I'm used to it now.

But it took like half a year for me to get used to every [one] of them.”

- Lilly, China

It becomes noticeable from this excerpt that Lilly did not give up on learning this practice despite facing setbacks, but actively chose to engage with this practice. She could have chosen to avoid the challenge of learning how to navigate the various self-checkout systems by simply

going to the cashier. This is particularly interesting because Lilly is only planning to stay for two years, which indicates her strong willingness to adapt and engage with local shopping practices despite the temporary nature of her sojourn. This can be understood through Lefebvre's (1991) 'production of space', where the presence of the self-checkout counters and their continual use of people becomes a 'spatial practice' that shapes the 'perceived space' and appears as the expected mode of behaviour within the space.

Lilly's commitment to learning how to handle the self-checkout could be a sign of her wanting to fit in with the shopping practices of the dominant culture. This behavior could be connected to an assimilation or integration approach of consumer acculturation presented by Peñaloza (1994). Other interviewed sojourners highlighted the self-checkout as something positive and convenient, as depicted by Minh.

"There is one thing that I am really amazed by, when I go to the supermarket here, it's ... the self-checkout. It's really convenient."

- Minh, Vietnam

Minh's statement illustrates that the self-checkout system provided by the grocery store enhances and facilitates her shopping experience. This gives another perspective, indicating that the general adaptation to the self-checkout system is driven by the functional value it provides to her and therefore she likes to use it, rather than being driven by the adaptation to the Swedish shopping customs.

Another local shopping practice that sojourners learned was weighing vegetables and fruits themselves. While some sojourners described it as a challenge at first that needed to be overcome out of necessity, Emi from Japan also saw it as an opportunity to differentiate prices more easily.

"I think the system of weighing is very cool in Sweden. When you buy vegetables, you grab what you need and then you weigh the grams, and then you buy just that. I think it's nicer to see the prices by weight rather than per vegetable, because I think it's easier for me to compare the prices with other items."

- Emi, Japan

Emi's statement indicates that she finds personal value in the weighing system. Before coming to Sweden, she did not weigh fruits and vegetables herself and thus encountered this new

practice happening in the 'Firstspace', the Swedish grocery store. Rather than perceiving it as imposed by the grocery store, she evaluated the new system and gave personal meaning to it, beyond just weighing her goods. This resonates with Soja's (1996) idea of 'Thirdspace', where people can negotiate and assign meaning to practices surpassing the given physical and mental structures of a space.

Overall, it shows that sojourners develop functional competencies, on the one hand directed by the want to fit in with the dominant culture, out of practicality, but also through genuine appreciation of the received value that is gained through the adaptation.

Conscious grocery store selection

Another theme we identified was sojourners exhibiting agency by consciously selecting which grocery store to visit, due to gained market knowledge regarding the characteristics of different Swedish grocery stores. This knowledge became evident when the interviewees were asked how they would describe Swedish grocery stores to people who had never been to Sweden. Responding to this question, some of the international students provided detailed explanations of the differences between the grocery stores. Showcasing that they have drawn a detailed mental map in the sense of Soja (1996), exemplifying their conceived developed knowledge of the grocery store landscape. This is illustrated by Ying's response.

"There are different groceries that have different things, maybe if you want certain things, you go to Lidl. If you want fresh fruits, you go to ICA, and if you want more choices of meat, you go to Coop. So, different grocery stores have different things. Before, I didn't understand it, but now I do."

- Ying, China

Ying's statement not only highlights that she learned the differences between the grocery stores, but also that she would go to different grocery stores because of the quality or product variety of certain products. Next to the quality, price was a common factor mentioned by sojourners that determined which grocery store they chose. Lilly mentioned that she just buys basic ingredients at Coop, although the store is the closest to her home.

"... Coop is a bit expensive. I would only go there to buy something like Potato chips, milk, or just some drinks."

- Lilly, China

The conscious selection of the grocery store stated in both examples above can be seen as sojourners engaging in agentic behaviour while grocery shopping. Unlike Veresiu's (2020) study, this agentic behaviour is not directly directed against imposed acculturation; rather, it is directed to achieving the greatest personal benefit, similar to the use value people want to draw from their lived experience in the 'lived space' by Lefebvre (1991). As the students familiarized themselves with the characteristics of each grocery store through experiencing them, they reflected on what mattered to them, which were mentioned to be quality, product variety, and price. Based on these reflections, they decided where they wanted to shop, showcasing their agentic value-driven behaviour. This can be connected to Soja (1996) idea of 'Thirdspace', where individuals can evaluate meaning for themselves and make informed decisions that align with their preferences and thereby exert agency within a dominated space.

Besides quality, product variety, and price, the physical structure of the grocery store, the 'Firstspace', can influence sojourners' decisions on where to shop. Some sojourners explained to avoid Lidl due to its bad structure and the difficulties of navigating it. Additionally, the atmosphere influenced by the layout of the grocery stores can also be a reason for avoiding or visiting a store. Lilly mentions that she does not like the atmosphere in Lidl and therefore visits Willys and Ica, where she has the feeling that the displays and structure make her feel inspired. Additionally, Tamil describes in detail the reasons why he prefers the vibe in Willys and Ica.

"... when you enter Willys or ICA. There is this vibe you get. There is the basket that you need at the entrance, and you just go in. You get greeted with freshly baked goods and fresh vegetables. In Lidl, when you enter, it's like three doors of like gates, like they have three gates that you have to cross and a door, which closes behind you and doesn't open if you want. And it just feels like you're entering something that you have to buy at least one thing to even exit out. Which I find a bit intimidating. Yeah. And when you enter, it's like a comparatively dimly lit and they do not have a consistent thing that I see when I enter the grocery store."

- Tamil, India

This statement underlines how the layout of Lidl, the 'Firstspace', and the comparisons Tamil made with his images of stores in the 'Secondspace' led to an overall feeling in the 'Thirdspace' that made him feel intimidated and gave him a negative feeling towards Lidl. Therefore, it amplifies that the experiences in the 'Thirdspace' of some grocery stores are the reason why some sojourners take on agency and choose not to visit these spaces anymore.

Based on these responses, it can be assumed that the experiences in the grocery stores lead sojourners to take agentic behaviour in choosing grocery stores due to the quality, product range, or structure of the grocery stores to fulfil their use value.

5.1.2 Decoding Cultural Norms and Consumption Behaviors

The second subtheme highlights the different cultural norms and consumption behaviors sojourners encountered while grocery shopping in Swedish grocery stores and how they engage with these new insights when navigating the grocery store.

Getting to know cultural norms

First, the interviewed sojourners subtly or directly shared in the interviews different kinds of values they identified and connected to Sweden while going grocery shopping, ranging from trust and transparency to environmental consciousness. This is interesting because these insights lead them to negotiate and evaluate their values to the newly encountered.

Some participants described how Swedish grocery stores reflected for them a culture of interpersonal trust and institutional transparency. Some informants directly mentioned trusting the food standards in Swedish grocery stores, perceiving them as high. Besides this, the institutional transparency can be seen by Lilly from China, pointing out that she perceives the law to show the kilo price for every item, as particularly honest, assuming that she wasn't used to this back in China. Furthermore, Minh and Linh from Vietnam share similar stories of realizing that they got charged twice by mistake. They shared being surprised by the trust they encountered from the personnel working in the grocery store and being refunded without struggle, although they didn't react within the moment.

“... in Vietnam, it's like, if we do not speak out problems [out] at the moment, you cannot come back later and stuff like that. So even when I come back home and I come back again tomorrow to explain my problem, I still get the really good customer support.”

- Minh, Vietnam

In the statement of Minh, it becomes apparent that she is comparing her experience in Sweden to those she had made before in her home country. This comparison suggests a negotiation taking place in the 'Thirdspace', which led to an understanding of the grocery store giving her

interpersonal trust. Her ‘Secondspace’ as described by Soja (1996) was initially informed by the expectations and rules she had internalized in Vietnam. However, when she was confronted with the overcharging, she re-evaluated how she was treated as a customer in the ‘Thirdspace’ and came to the conclusion that the grocery stores in Sweden are showing her trust. Therefore, her image of the grocery store, her ‘Secondspace’, changed into perceiving the grocery store as a trustworthy environment. Additionally, she further mentions that this realization of interpersonal trust from the grocery store made her feel “cherished”, which could be interpreted as her appreciation of the new values encountered.

Next to encountering a trustworthy environment within the grocery store, environmental consciousness is being associated by some sojourners with Sweden. The wide organic and vegan food options, which are affordable for everyone within grocery stores, are seen as a reflection of Swedish people caring about the environment. Furthermore, the handling of plastic in Swedish supermarkets has been linked to environmental consciousness by sojourners. Multiple interviewees shared that in their home country, plastic bags and plastic packaging are commonly used within the grocery store, while they identified in Sweden less packaging and the custom of bringing own bags when going shopping. Although bringing their own bag posed a challenge for some in the beginning, most sojourners adapted to the practice. The connection towards environmental consciousness can be seen in the debate about the newfound practice of bringing your own bag in Sweden:

Linh: “In Vietnam, we use a lot of plastic bags, and there’s no strong encouragement to reduce plastic use or use your own bag, like a canvas bag. However, in Sweden, customers are encouraged to bring their own bags instead of buying a new one. Instead of plastic bags, fruits and vegetables are wrapped in paper or paper boxes. This experience has shaped my routines, and now I always bring my own bag with me when I go shopping. I think this is the biggest lesson I’ve learned.”

Interviewer: “And how is this for you?”

Linh: “Yeah, I think it’s a nice experience and a nice habit.”

Interviewer: “Could you imagine continuing it if you move somewhere else?”

Linh: “Yes, definitely, because I want to help save the environment. I’ve seen a lot of Instagram reels about ocean cleanups, and seeing all the plastic bags in the ocean made me feel really bad. So I’m trying to help by using canvas bags and paper bags.”

- Linh, Vietnam

Drawing upon this statement, it becomes apparent that mastering the local customs of the bags is connected with the internal debate about the positive results it may have by adopting this practice. The sojourners are encountering the societal expectations of paying attention to the environment by consuming less plastic in the 'Thirdspace'. This could lead to the evaluation of their own values and ideals as well as the connected behaviors towards the topic of environmental consciousness in the 'Thirdspace'. In the case of Linh and Minh by deciding to not only adapt to the new practice but also stating they would like to continue this practice when returning home, they both decide that the values they encountered and associate with Sweden are values they agree with, and are now part of their 'Secondspace'. This complete integration of the practice into one's behavior and mental acceptance can be connected to Peñaloza's (1989) assimilationist approach, of fully integrating the consumption practices of the dominant culture. Furthermore, this re-evaluation of values and even change of behavior can be connected to Brown (2009), who depicts the transformative power of sojourn, developing and accepting new values as a form of transformative power of the sojourn.

Getting to know Swedish food culture

When talking about their encounters with Swedish culture in the 'Firstspace' grocery store, many shared getting insights into what people like to buy through observation. Be it recognizing which aisles are emptier than others, reflecting on the product assortment, or observing what people buy, as illustrated within Amir's quote.

"Another thing that stands out to me is the variety of sweets and candies. Back home, we do have candy, but it's usually packaged by brand things like regular chocolates. But here, it's different. There's a wide assortment of loose jelly candies, different types and flavors, and it feels like a big deal. I've noticed that Saturdays in particular seem to be when people stock up on candy. It's like a tradition or habit."

- Amir, India

Amir further explained that he does not observe people on purpose, but the practice of buying candy was so particular that he had to notice. Ying and Lilly, on the other hand, even share that they actively observe Swedish people while buying to better understand the Swedish food culture. Ying sometimes takes this further by directly asking customers why they purchase certain items, to fully understand it.

“... I will watch other people, other Swedish people, what they buy in [the] grocery stores. Sometimes I don't know why they will buy this kind of thing, so I ask them. Oh, hi, excuse me. I don't know what this is and how to cook it? And then they explain, like, you can just do this, or you can add this sauce, and so on. That's when I realize, this is part of their everyday food, and maybe I can try it too.”

- Ying, China

This shared curiosity indicates that the sojourners are overall interested in the food consumption behavior of the dominant culture and want to explore it. Their desire to explore aligns with Yen et al. (2018), who found that sojourners have dual roles; besides being working students, they are also tourists with an urge to try out new things and the desire to discover different food cultures. Furthermore, the interview excerpts reveal that the grocery store functions not only as a space to satisfy basic needs but also as a space of cultural exchange for sojourners. This new interpretation of the grocery store, which transcends the original concept of the ‘Secondspace’ embedded in the ‘Firstspace’, they create a ‘Thirdspace’ that transcends the predefined spatial purpose and responds to their cultural needs.

Another finding is that all of the participants show attentiveness towards Swedish eating habits. Rather than fully adopting or rejecting them, they selectively decide which ones to integrate into their diet and which to refuse. An example of this is the debate about frozen fruits and vegetables, which is mentioned to be relatively unfamiliar or even stigmatized in some participants' home cultures. In Sweden, however, frozen products are, according to the informants, commonly used and valued for their convenience, long shelf life, and cost-effectiveness, leading in some cases to changing purchasing behavior as in the case of Tamil. This indicates the instrumentality of integrating aspects of the Swedish food culture based on practicality or personal preferences, rather than adopting the consumption behavior of the dominant culture to fit in. Furthermore, the statement illustrates that sojourners adapt behaviors in the new host culture that would be not accepted at home. This can be further explained by Brown (2009) who emphasizes that sojourners undergo cultural learning and become more open-minded, understanding, and tolerant during their sojourn.

5.2 Overcoming Navigation Barriers By Leveraging Acculturation Agents

The second theme identified that sojourners leverage acculturation agents to overcome barriers they encounter in their 'Thirdspace'. In the first subtheme, the barrier of 'the lack of knowledge is being addressed with the help of different acculturation agents. In the second subtheme, the 'structural barrier' of language is also tried to be addressed with the help of different acculturation agents.

5.2.1 Addressing the Lack of Knowledge

This subtheme explores sojourners' lack of knowledge regarding unfamiliar products and their reliance on external help to safely try out new goods.

Lack of knowledge

The curiosity to try unfamiliar goods in Swedish grocery stores is generally shared among the informants. Hereby, we could identify curiosity concerning not only typical Swedish products like meatballs but generally towards a variety of western cuisine that is available at the grocery stores, ranging from pasta to specific dishes from France offered in cultural weeks at the grocery store. However, acting out this curiosity is closely tied to a certain level of prior knowledge, as depicted in Amir's statement.

"... if it's something that catches my eye, probably, and if I've heard about it before, I definitely want to try it. Basically, I like to try out different cultures. I want to try them out as much as I can, and if that stuff is available, and if it's at a decent price, I mean, why not?

Let's go for it."

- Amir, India

Amir shares his general openness and eagerness to try different cuisines abroad. This is similar to the findings of Yen et al. (2018), where the investigated sojourners, embodying besides the role of a working student during the week, the role of a tourist on the weekend, who wants to try out different cuisines and activities. However, here curiosity is not only driven by something catching his eye in the 'Firstspace', but his desire to try out unknown food is also dependent on

knowing about it. This shows that this curiosity cannot simply be lived out so easily and freely in the 'Thirdspace' but is dependent on certain circumstances.

Other sojourners mentioned factors such as price, unfamiliarity with the taste of a product, uncertainty of the ingredients, and lack of knowledge on how to prepare them as barriers to following their curiosity. Lilly's quote highlights this common handicap faced by sojourners.

" It's more like having limited choices, because there are a lot of things that I don't even know. I don't know what I can use them for, so I always choose not to buy them. They feel like some blind zone for me. "

- Lilly, China

Lilly's statement reveals that her limited choices in the Swedish grocery store are not due to a limited product selection or lack of curiosity, but rather her unfamiliarity with the products. This can be connected to Lilly lacking the knowledge of Swedish grocery stores and its provided product range in her 'Secondspace', which leads to her feeling overwhelmed in the 'Thirdspace', when she is being confronted with the given product range in the 'Firstspace'. Her decision to avoid buying unfamiliar products indicates that she relies on external help in the lived 'Thirdspace' to confidently buy unknown products in the grocery store. This resonates with the idea of acculturation agents stated by Peñaloza (1994), who are supposed to guide immigrants to acquire the needed consumption behavior to handle the newly encountered marketplace. By describing this unknown field of goods as a "blind-zone", she amplifies her informational disadvantage and reduced agency to take full advantage of the space. The grocery store, therefore, doesn't provide the guidance she needs and restricts her agency of confidentially moving and using it. This is similar to Veresiu's (2020) study, where space becomes an 'active consumer acculturation agent' that can either restrict or engage consumers' agency.

The statements reflect sojourners' curiosity towards trying out unknown groceries in Swedish grocery stores. However, this curiosity is hindered by a lack of product knowledge.

Turning towards acculturation agents

The interviews highlighted the importance of recommendations from friends, other customers, group chats, the grocery store itself, or recipes for the interviewed sojourners to overcome barriers to trying new foods in Swedish grocery stores. The following interview excerpt depicts

how sojourners source guidance through personal recommendations and observations to safely navigate unfamiliar product offerings.

“I think recommendation is actually quite important because sometimes when I hang out with my friends here, they often suggest what kind of meatballs are cheaper and taste better. I always follow their advice and try those the next time I shop.”

- Lilly, China

Next to direct recommendations from friends, many sojourners saw cooking and eating with others as an opportunity to try unfamiliar dishes and food products that they wouldn't have had the courage to try on their own. As reflected in Anh's experience.

Anh: “I think it was Halloumi, the grilled cheese. My friend made it for me once, and I really liked it. What else? Or pesto sauce. Yeah, like I think pesto sauce is not very common in Vietnam. So, I didn't have a chance to taste it... before my friend made me pesto pasta. And it turns out very nicely.”

Interviewer: “So, do you cook pasta pesto sometimes, now?”

Anh: “Yeah, it's a quick meal.”

- Anh, Vietnam

Besides personal recommendations from related connections, other customers at the grocery store also serve as a source of information for the informants. Observing what other customers are buying is done by many of the sojourners to know what is popular and, therefore, safe to try. Seeking direct contact with local customers, as in the case of Ying, is thus rarer.

“I will watch other people, other Swedish people, what they buy in grocery stores. Sometimes I don't know why they will buy this kind of thing, so I ask them ... And then they explain, like, you can just do this, or you can add this sauce, and so on.”

- Ying, China

The statements highlight the important role of social recommendations in helping sojourners navigate the lived ‘Thirdspace’, grocery store, particularly when it comes to trying out unfamiliar products. By Lilly sharing that she and her friends regularly exchange information about which food they should try, and discounts when they meet up, and her immediately following those recommendations, depicts the high level of trust she places on the information

from her social circle. Furthermore, the fact that food-related topics are a recurring topic in their conversations showcases how central these information exchanges are for sojourners to navigate their food consumption abroad and try out new products. Anh is also introduced to foods through friends, but by being able to try those dishes at a friend's place. This not only reflects the general openness and curiosity of her towards trying out new dishes and the openness to incorporate those in her diet, but also emphasizes the importance of gaining knowledge before being able to do so. In Anh's case, it is the opportunity to taste them, in Linh's, it is the verbal recommendations of friends, and in Ying's, it is the observation of what other people are purchasing. Each of them relies on different social cues, which help them establish a new image in their 'Secondspace', to be able to navigate the unfamiliar food environment in the 'Firstspace'. Furthermore, this can be linked to Peñaloza's (1994) idea of acculturation agents, who provide immigrants with guidance on how to produce consumption patterns of the host or home culture in an unknown environment. However, the role of the acculturation agents here is about giving sojourners the validation of being explorative in their consumption, rather than adopting Swedish shopping habits. This explorative behavior is similar to the touristic role of sojourners in the study Yen et al. (2018).

Next to social validation, sampling stations in grocery stores were stated by sojourners to provide them a low-risk opportunity to explore new foods. For some of the sojourners, those sampling stations were seen as an opportunity to try out new food without the fear of wasting money on items they may not enjoy, as Ninda explains.

*"Interviewer: You told me that you tried out something in the supermarket at this counter.
Ninda: "Yeah, because it's free. That's why I want to try [it]. So, if there's a free sample, I'll try it. But if I don't like it, I won't buy it, because I don't want to waste my money."*

- Ninda, Indonesia

For others, the tasting stations provided help to overcome taste uncertainties that would prevent them from buying unknown products. Emi and Linh share that they miss the in-store testing station here in Sweden that would provide them with a low-risk opportunity to explore unfamiliar local flavors, as can be derived from Emi's statements.

"I think it was a bit sad for me, I haven't tried many Swedish foods since coming here, and I want to try something new, and I want to explore, but oftentimes I don't have enough time or the courage to try something new. I'm a bit concerned about if it is not delicious. I'll have to

waste the food. Then I'm left wondering, what should I do with the rest of the food if I can't finish it? So, think it would be nice to have that kind of tasting [here]."

- Emi, Japan

Drawing upon those statements, it becomes clear that the grocery store next to the social recommendations is not neutral and can act as an acculturation agent. This is similar to Veresiu's (2020) study, where space is conceptualized as an active agent of acculturation, which can either enable or limit the agency of its inhabitants in navigating their acculturation. Unlike Veresiu's (2020) study, where Roma inhabitants resisted spatially imposed acculturation and asserted their agency within a dominated space, the sojourners discussed here are limited in their ability to navigate their acculturation when a certain infrastructure is not provided. However, the grocery can support sojourners in trying out unfamiliar goods in a low-risk situation or leaving them with just the option they know. Linking this to Lefebvre (1991), the decision to provide tasting facilities within grocery stores originates from the 'conceived/abstract space' of the managers. As Lefebvre (1991) argues, such decisions are driven by the aim of generating exchange value. These abstract intentions are then either implemented or not within the 'perceived space' and thus directly impact the 'lived space' of individuals such as Ninda, Emi, and Linh, whose enactment of curiosity is determined by the tasting station being provided or not provided.

Overall, we found that sojourners are proactively turning towards acculturation agents to lower their barriers to explore new foods in Swedish grocery stores. However, they are dependent on this external help, otherwise, their food consumption is limited to a small repetitive selection.

5.2.2 Addressing Structural Barrier

This second subtheme of 'Overcoming navigation barriers by leveraging acculturation agents' highlights the strategies sojourners use to overcome the structural barrier of the Swedish Language, to navigate retail spaces more effectively and with greater ease.

Technological strategies

Most sojourners stated that language was the main challenge they encountered in the grocery store. To overcome this challenge, we identified that sojourners use different technological strategies, as Minh's statement describes.

“Okay, one difficulty I think is the language, because the labels of the products are all in Swedish. So, I have to use Google translate when I go to the supermarket ... it's difficult for a foreign international student like me.”

- Minh, Vietnam

Besides Minh, almost all sojourners stated that they use translation tools such as Google Translate, Apps, or ChatGPT to help overcome the language barrier. These technological tools can thus be seen as a helping hand in navigating the structural barriers existing in the grocery store, the ‘Firstspace’, and in reducing the resulting tension they face in the ‘Thirdspace’. Similar to the acculturation agents described by Peñaloza (1994), which provide immigrants with guidance in learning consumption behaviors within their new environment, those technological tools take on a supportive role here for the sojourners. While they do not offer direct guidance, they enable more informed consumption by translating product information and thus contribute to the acculturation process in a supportive way. However, the translation tools also come with their limitations. Some sojourners reveal that they still need to ask others for help to be able to differentiate between products. Ying reveals that without a premium subscription, she can only upload a limited number of pictures on ChatGPT. Furthermore, Emi finds it time-consuming, and Lilly underlines that the need to translate everything makes shopping more complicated. Contrary, Linh underlines that technological use is better than asking people for help, as it is more convenient and less time-consuming. This suggests that translation tools can help sojourners to acquire a form of agency in their acculturation process by enabling them to shop almost independently.

Learning Swedish as a strategy

As technological tools are not considered fully sufficient for navigating their shopping in the grocery store, some sojourners stated that they have picked up some Swedish words through repeated searching of products on the scale, labels, and terms they use, as the quote by Ying depicts.

“I think maybe a few months ago, I tried to learn Swedish words in grocery [store] ..., because I have to weigh the vegetables and fruits by myself, and I have to enter the name. So, I don't know what it is called in Swedish. So, I have learned these words. So, I think it's good. It's a good way to learn Swedish, but just some words.”

- Ying, China

Based on Ying's statement, one can argue that the student learned Swedish not out of interest but due to the encountered structural circumstances of the store. This assumption is supported by her later comment that she wouldn't learn Swedish if she could easily navigate within the store by simply knowing English, since Swedish is only spoken in Sweden. This underlines the characteristic of Ying being a sojourner. Her incentive to learn the language is low, as she will return home after her sojourn and has no further use for it. However, she still learned some Swedish because the grocery store layout seems to act not only as a site of consumption, but as pointed out by Veresiu (2020), as a consumer acculturation agent, pressuring her to become linguistically accustomed to using the space without barriers. She is therefore confronted with the power of the dominant order that is inscribed in the physical space, expecting the people to speak Swedish to use the space barrier-free. This relates to Lefebvre (1991), who describe this tension as a lived confrontation with the 'conceived space/abstract space', which is designed and planned by experts to generate exchange value. In this case, the designers most likely had a Swedish-speaking customer as the financially most valuable in mind and thus conceptualized the room to meet their needs (e.g., scales). This non-inclusive conceptualization, which got realized in the 'perceived space', handicaps non-Swedish speakers in their 'lived space', and leaves them either with learning Swedish or making their navigation in the retail space harder.

Nevertheless, Swedish language encounters within the grocery store are also appreciated and consciously sought by some sojourners, to practice their Swedish, and to realize that they live in Sweden, as their daily Uni lifestyle doesn't give them the feeling.

5.3 Enforcing Agency To Reproduce Familiarity

The last theme that was identified contributes to the research question by illustrating that sojourners take agency to reproduce familiarity while navigating retail spaces. The first subtheme highlights how sojourners try to take agency to preserve their own cultural identity by 'seeking cultural familiarity beyond Swedish grocery stores' during their sojourn, as these stores do not fully cater to their needs. The second subtheme explores how sojourners reproduce familiarity within retail spaces through the process of "recreating familiar spaces".

5.3.1 Seeking Cultural Familiarity beyond Swedish Grocery Stores

This first subtheme highlights the unmet culinary needs of sojourners within Swedish grocery stores and the connected imposed acculturation, which leads them to actively seek alternative sources of groceries that meet their needs.

Unmet needs in Swedish grocery stores

Almost all participants emphasized that the Swedish grocery stores cannot fully cater to their culinary needs and wants, as they do not provide the goods they need for preparing dishes from their home country, which they desire. Even though some sojourners appreciate that grocery stores attempt to include food from their home countries in the so-called ‘Asian sections’, but they criticize the limited product variety, lower quality, and lack of authentic taste of the products offered. As a result, only a few international students admit to purchasing basic ingredients from this section. Some sojourners explicitly express the impression that the Asian section is tailored for European taste preferences rather than for those seeking true cultural representation. This can be seen in Lilly’s statement when she was asked about what she wished for the Swedish grocery store.

“I would wish that there could be more Chinese Choices. But I think it might not be that possible because the supermarket is not catering to the Chinese. So, I feel like it's impossible, but if I could, I do wish that there could be more Chinese choices.”

- Lilly, China

This statement exemplifies that Lilly thinks the grocery store does not cater to the culinary needs of people from China. Similarly, Hana shared she has the feeling she is not allowed to wish for a wider Asian section because the target group of Asian people is economically too small and therefore not worth providing. This highlights their awareness of the economic logic underlying the grocery store, which prioritizes economic exchange value by targeting the dominant needs rather than accommodating the individual needs of minority groups. This dynamic can be connected to Lefebvre (1991), who explains that the ‘abstract space’ is conceptualized to generate exchange value by the dominant order, and clashes with the expectations of the users in their lived ‘social space’, where they seek use value.

Additionally, we found that the Asian section confronted sojourners with how other cultures depict their food culture. Anh from Vietnam was surprised about the different variations and in

her words, “strange combinations”, and was hesitant to try them. Ninda states that she would tell Asian people who have never been to Sweden, “*don't expect the taste of Asian seasoning in ICA, as it has nothing to do with taste for [people from] Asia.*” She also asserts that she does not try them. In this excerpt, it becomes apparent that sojourners don’t feel that their food culture is presented authentically, which causes them to avoid buying those products. In the case of Ninda and Anh, both of them have a clear idea of what the products from their home cuisine should look like. When confronted with the food portrayals, they choose not to buy them.

Overall, the Swedish Grocery store does not give the sojourners the possibility to maintain their cultural identity in terms of food consumption. The retail space limits them to certain product offerings and therefore forces them to adapt to a specific food consumption, if they didn’t have any other option, which can be interpreted as an imposed acculturation of the space, as depicted by Veresiu (2020).

Leaving the Swedish grocery stores

However, the interviews revealed that the sojourners actively expanded their grocery shopping landscape. In line with Veresiu (2020), they showed resistance and agency towards the imposed acculturation embedded within market-mediated space, the grocery store. This resistance takes place in the sense of Soja (1996) in the ‘Thirdspace’, as the sojourners reconfigure their foodscapes to leave their marginalized spatial position in the given ‘Firstspace’. The resistance occurred in three ways: (1) buying at local Asian grocery stores, (2) shopping at Asian Online Shops, and (3) supplying from their home country in the form of sending or bringing goods.

First, we identified that sojourners visit Asian grocery stores such as Lockchan and Indopark in Lund to recreate meals they are used to eating in their home countries.

“And if I'd like to make some of the Chinese cuisine, then I need some of the ingredients from the Asian store that you cannot buy in the grocery [store] like Ica.”

- Anna, China

The excerpt demonstrates that Anna is aware of the restrictions the Swedish grocery store poses and consciously seeks out the Asian Grocery store to be able to cook familiar meals from her home. This enables her to maintain her cultural identity in terms of food consumption while being in Sweden. However, almost all participants highlighted that the Asian grocery stores in

Lund are very expensive. Whilst Anna is willing to pay the high price to maintain her cultural identity, some other students rarely visit the grocery store because of the price. One further limitation of the Asian grocery store mentioned was the product range. Although Asian stores offer a wider range of cultural ingredients than Swedish grocery stores, sojourners state that they still do not provide certain products that they need to be able to cook certain traditional dishes or that they generally miss.

Therefore, most of the interviewed sojourners are taking further steps to preserve their cultural identity in terms of food consumption during their stay abroad. (2) To avoid the higher prices in the Asian grocery stores, some students started buying ingredients from online Asian stores, as shared by Lilly.

“Oh, and also I'm trying to use some online Asian supermarket website, and they are really helpful, because usually they would be cheaper than the offline Asian supermarket.”

-Lilly, China

Lilly's willingness to invest time in searching for cheaper alternatives reflects how important it is for her to maintain cultural ties to her home through food during her sojourn. This can be connected to the findings of Peñaloza (1994) where the Mexican immigrants in America stated that their food consumption has not changed that much since they immigrated to America. However, in the case of the Mexican immigrants in Peñaloza's study, the barriers of accessing Mexican food were much smaller due to the abundance of Mexican shops in America compared to the facilities available to the sojourners interviewed. This is due to the large number of people of Mexican origin living in the US, compared to the much smaller and therefore less visible consumer group of Asians living in Sweden.

(3) The third way sojourners resist the imposed acculturation by the grocery store, which does not provide the products they needed to prepare traditional dishes, is by having food sent or brought from home. The sojourners take agency by asking their family or friends to send goods when they realize the products they are missing are unavailable where they live now. However, due to cost and complexity, not all sojourners chose to do this. Some students, instead, brought food with them when they visited or were visited by friends and family from back home. Others brought supplies when they first moved to Sweden, considering the unavailability and price of products when packing. For some, social contacts in Sweden played an important role upon

first arrival. Before coming to Sweden, Hana, Ying, and Ninda contacted students already living in Sweden for insights about the Swedish grocery stores.

Ninda: "Actually, I brought some seasoning from Indonesia, because it's hard to find it here, or maybe the price is very high, so I brought something."

Interviewer: "And how did you know that it's going to be hard to find it here? Did somebody tell you?"

Ninda: "Because we have an Indonesian Student Association."

- Ninda, Indonesia

Through reaching out to friends or via chat groups, the sojourners were able to gain pre insights about the retail space in Sweden. This provided them with an early understanding of the grocery store and helped them anticipate the limitations. In the sense of Soja (1996) they were able to build upon those insights their first mental map in the 'Seconospace' of the Swedish grocery store. This allowed them to take proactive control in the 'Thirdspace' to be not confronted with imposed acculturation in the 'Firstspace' when they arrive. Furthermore, Ninda and Lilly noted that these chats go beyond simply asking what to bring along, sojourners use those digital platforms to organise themselves to help each other out in getting food from back home once they are in Sweden. In doing so, they exercise agency by forming informal collectives that help preserve their cultural identities abroad. This form of organizing themselves can be understood in parallel to Soja's (1996) notion of 'counterspaces', alternative spaces that are socially created to resist the dominant order of space. By establishing their informal support networks as depicted by the international students, they create spaces of resistance within the dominant physical structure to preserve their cultural identity abroad.

The food that has been requested or brought along plays a bigger role for the sojourner than merely cooking a meal; it can be seen as a tool for rebuilding cultural identity abroad. Furthermore, it provides sojourners with stability and a connection to their home culture. Anh says that she feels less homesick when she eats food from home. For Minh, it brings a sense of safety, and Mei emphasizes the feeling of home when she eats the products that were sent to her. Additionally, when Eva was asked what she would do if the spices she brought to Sweden were no longer there, she emphasized the emotional value of the spices.

“We would feel super sad because that makes us feel at home. Because when we are cooking, when we're eating traditional food, we feel like we feel more comfortable. Finally, having food from back home, I think that's a very big thing when you're outside of your home country, food makes you feel more connected. We would be depressed, and we would want to get those spices back from Bangladesh. We would ask our parents to send them over. Or if someone comes, maybe they could bring them with them.”

- Eva, Bangladesh

In Eva's statement, it becomes further apparent that the prospect of losing access to familiar flavors of home evokes strong feelings of sadness and even despair. This highlights the important role of food as an anchor for emotional well-being while abroad. The emotional significance of food for the well-being of sojourners is also recognized by Brown et al. (2010).

Overall, by employing different strategies to reject the imposed acculturation of the retail space, which fails to sufficiently provide the desired foods, sojourners can actively maintain their cultural identity while abroad.

5.3.2 Recreating Familiar Spaces

The second sub-theme explores how sojourners exercise agency to recreate the spaces they miss from back home within their new environment in Sweden. This insight emerged during the discussion about their feelings towards the Swedish grocery store. While some sojourners said that they had neutral feelings about grocery shopping and saw it as a mundane activity, others expressed strong positive emotions. These ranged from always feeling good when visiting the store to excitement and enjoyment in discovering new products.

Furthermore, several interviewees viewed grocery shopping as a leisure activity, either enjoying it alone or with friends. What stood out in these accounts was the way this activity filled a gap, compensating for the lack of entertainment options in Sweden that they were used to and liked to do back home, as illustrated in Anna's statement.

“I like to go to the grocery store because there's no shopping mall here, and so maybe the grocery store is like an after-class [activity] and entertainment here.”

- Anna, China

Furthermore, Mei explained that she misses going shopping for clothes here in Sweden, as there aren't as many stores she likes in Lund. She sees grocery shopping now as a fun experience, which she compares with going "shopping" in the traditional sense. Similarly, Minh highlighted the lack of places to visit with friends in Sweden for leisure. Consequently, she and her friends often go grocery shopping together.

Interviewer: "Okay, grocery shopping in Vietnam was also an activity you liked to do for leisure, did I understand this right?"

Minh: "Yes, but like not that frequent compared to here in Sweden. Because in Vietnam I have a lot of places to go with my friends, more than just the grocery store. But here it is usually the grocery store or a café, but in Vietnam there [are] much more activities."

- Minh, Vietnam

Drawing upon these statements, it becomes apparent that grocery shopping is, to an extent, seen as a replacement for missed leisure activities they did before. Moreover, one could argue that the grocery store is transformed into a different space by the sojourner where sojourners can adapt their social practices and leisure activities they were used to at home in a new surrounding. In doing so, they reassign new meaning to the grocery store and transform it beyond its original function, to be able to preserve elements of their life before their sojourn that would not be there in Sweden otherwise. This resonates with Soja's (1996) concept of 'Thirdspace', where individuals can agentically reinterpret a space that was initially differentially conceived in the 'Secondspace' by planners and physically constructed in the 'Firstspace', transforming it to a space that reflects their interests and needs.

Overall, the grocery store plays a broader role in how sojourners navigate their acculturation. They not only navigate the space in terms of food consumption, but also a site where they actively recreate environments that they enjoyed visiting for leisure back home.

6 Discussion

In the previous chapter, the findings of the interviews were outlined and analysed. In this chapter, we will further discuss the findings and elaborate on how our findings agree, contradict, and extend existing literature. By this, we aim to give theoretical contributions to existing literature. To elaborate on the insights, the chapter is divided into two parts. In chapter 6.1, we will discuss how sojourners' identities impact their navigation of retail spaces. Building upon this navigation influenced by identity we then highlight in chapter 6.2 the navigation of the active retail spaces, which can impose acculturation on sojourners but also can help with the acculturation of sojourners.

6.1 Sojourners Explorative Consumer Identity

Our findings of the semi-structured interviews in chapter 5 reveal that our empirical data support the notion of existing research that sojourners show flexibility and fluidity in their acculturation process (Cappellini & Yen, 2013; Huang, 2025; Yen et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2021) and possess swift and fluid identities (Yen et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2021).

To begin with, our findings reveal that, on the one hand, sojourners want to maintain their cultural identity, which can be seen in the efforts of sojourners seeking cultural familiarity beyond Swedish grocery stores. On the other hand, our findings illustrate that sojourners are open and curious to experience the new host culture as well as other cultures in the form of actively observing Swedish food culture and wanting to try out new foods. Therefore, our findings suggest that sojourners' identity formation during the navigation of retail spaces is fluid and that they have an 'explorative identity'. We conceptualize 'explorative identity' as sojourners maintaining their home cultural identity while at the same time exploring new cultures, being curious, and willing to adapt to the consumption practices of the dominant culture. Home country orientation and exploration are hereby situated on a continuum. With this conceptualization of 'explorative identity', we contribute to a more nuanced understanding

of sojourners' acculturation in the global mobility research and expand the literature on consumer acculturation that underlines the identity formation of border-crossers (Askegaard et al., 2005; Oswald, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994) by highlighting sojourners' identity formation.

Our findings regarding 'explorative identity' are similar to those of Yen et al. (2018). They state that sojourners have a "swift transformative identity" and distinguish between ordinary consumption during the week and extraordinary consumption on the weekend (Yen et al., 2018, p. 218). In contrast to our findings, they differentiate between time and settings and position extraordinary food consumption to sojourners following tourist traits and ordinary food consumption to sojourners following immigrants' traits. We bring in a different perspective and do not separate these two. Moreover, most parts of the ordinary food consumption, which we relate to the holding on to home culture side of the 'explorative identity', and the extraordinary food consumption we relate to the explorative side of the 'explorative identity', were identified to occur simultaneously. These findings echo those of Askegaard et al. (2005), who challenge the assumption that immigrants adopt a fixed identity position. Instead, their research highlights the fluidity and contingency of the identity positions of immigrants. Like Askegaard et al. (2005), our findings also contrast with Oswald's (1999) notion of 'culture swapping'. Furthermore, we advance the view of Askegaard et al. (2005) by shifting the focus from immigrants to sojourners.

The holding on to the home culture side of the 'explorative identity' could be seen in sojourners seeking familiarity while being abroad. The findings reveal that getting the food from back home can give stability, safety, and a connection to the home culture. These findings align with those of Brown et al. (2010), who demonstrated that food from the home country can provide sojourners with comfort and stability. Furthermore, the maintenance of cultural identity aligns with current literature on sojourners (Huang, 2025; Vredeveld & Coulter, 2019; Yen et al., 2018) and thereby supports it.

Our study also contributes to the literature on consumer acculturation agents (Askegaard et al., 2005; Peñaloza, 1994; Veresiu, 2020) by illustrating how sojourners engage with them. One of our main findings shows that although sojourners express curiosity to try out new food encountered in the grocery store, and therefore show an 'explorative identity', they experience a barrier of knowledge that can hinder them from trying out food. In this context, we found that food consumption can depend on external help. We call this 'social dependent exploration' and link it to Peñaloza's (1994) idea of acculturation agents. One way to overcome the barrier of

knowledge was through the recommendation from others. This finding is similar to Yen et al. (2018), who discovered that the extraordinary food consumption over the weekends, which includes the consumption of food around the world, is influenced by the recommendation of friends and online platforms. Furthermore, Cappellini and Yen (2013) highlighted that social connections can have an impact on students' acculturation, in particular on the consumption of home and host country food. However, they focused on the impact of ethnic and non-ethnic ties on food consumption in general and across time. Our findings, on the other hand, draw more attention to the impact of social connections when sojourners are curious. Additionally, the insight of 'social dependent exploration' expands the traditional view on consumer acculturation agents by Peñaloza (1994), which focuses on long-term immigrants, by bringing in the perspective of sojourners. Peñaloza (1994) suggests that the acculturation agents are aligned with either the host or the home culture of the immigrant and inform them how to produce consumption patterns of the dominant consumer culture or reproduce consumption patterns of their home culture. However, our findings indicate that sojourners are not just reaching out to consumer acculturation agents to produce or reproduce home or host culture consumption patterns; they also reach out to them to be able to explore unfamiliar products. Interestingly, in the case of exploring unfamiliar products, the cultural origin of the acculturation agent is irrelevant to the sojourners. It is just about the external support to overcome the barrier of a lacking knowledge regarding unfamiliar products.

Furthermore, the insight of lack of knowledge as a reason for not trying out food advances the literature on food consumption adjustment of sojourners by offering a more nuanced understanding of food neophobia from a consumer acculturation perspective. Edwards et al. (2010) investigated sojourners' food neophobia over time for different product categories. While they acknowledge acculturation, they go into detail about why the food neophobia, the rejection of the unknown, is taking place. We therefore extend the knowledge by demonstrating that food neophobia cannot just be seen as the fear of the unknown, but in the case of the sojourners, as a need for support in navigating the unfamiliar. Hereby, we identify acculturation agents as a tool to overcome the neophobia.

Some adaptations to the dominant culture are made by the sojourners out of pragmatism rather than cultural curiosity. We found that sojourners learn Swedish out of necessity to navigate more easily in the grocery store, but had no motivation to learn the language due to their short stay and lack of long-term advantage of learning Swedish. Vredeveld and Coulter (2019) also

highlight the pragmatism of sojourners. In their study, sojourners use brands for their experiential goals in the host country while maintaining their home culture identity. In contrast, we could not identify any pragmatism in achieving the goals that the sojourners had set for themselves.

Furthermore, a way sojourners navigate retail spaces is in the form of negotiation and debating their own values with newly encountered values experienced in the grocery store. This led them to debate their own cultural values and even leave culturally accepted behaviours from their home country behind, as in the case of plastic bags. This resonates with Brown's (2009) findings, which revealed that international students question previous behaviours and traditional social roles from their home countries because of new observations they made in the host country, intending to modify or abandon them.

Therefore, our findings correspond to the same mechanism of questioning and changing culturally shaped behaviors. Furthermore, Brown (2009) refers to this as part of the 'transformative power of sojourn', a view that is supported by our findings.

6.2 Sojourners Engaging with the Active Retail Space

In our empirical investigation, we were able to discover different behaviours and adaptation strategies sojourners employ in their acculturation process occurring in the retail space, the grocery store. By exploring these different behaviours in the grocery store, we were able to gain insights into the role retail spaces play in sojourners' navigation. Moreover, by this we could illuminate different ways space imposes acculturation as well as different ways sojourners resist this imposed acculturation and take agency. With these insights, we contribute to the current literature on institutional forces being at play in consumer acculturation (Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Üstüner et al., 2007; Veresiu & Giesler, 2018) as well as market-mediated spaces (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016; Veresiu & Giesler, 2018) and acculturation in retail spaces (Ogada et al., 2025).

Firstly, our findings support the view of Veresiu (2020, p. 356) that space "is an active consumer acculturation agent", functioning both as an instrument of control, trying to impose acculturation, and as a potential site of resistance for the marginalized groups. Veresiu (2020)

investigated Roma living in state-subsidized spaces and discovered three different spatial governmentality strategies and three responses of resistance from the Roma. Similarly, in our study, we observed comparable patterns within the market-mediated space of the grocery store. While the grocery store was designed for the functionality of grocery shopping and tried to impose acculturation on sojourners through product offerings, layout, and prices, the sojourners resisted mentally by giving the space a new meaning in the form of recreating familiar spaces. In this way, we discovered that the space acted as a replacement for leisure activity and social interaction. This quest for familiarity and opportunities for social interaction in the new host country environment can also be found in Collins' (2008) work on sojourners. However, in contrast to our study, the sojourners are visiting spaces they know from back home, such as restaurants that serve traditional food from their home, as well as global chains, in order to recreate familiar social settings. Our research builds on this view and shows that the attempt to recreate familiar social settings can also take the form of transforming a space into a place of familiarity that has no relation to the known spatial setting from back home.

Moreover, the findings further contribute to the understanding of market-mediated spaces and their role in the acculturation of border-crossers. We illustrate how sojourners experience retail spaces not as mere backdrops of consumption, but as spaces that carry meaning, and can expand their intended function through Lefebvre's (1991) 'Spatial Triad' and Soja's (1996) 'Thirdspace' perspective. Similarly, Ogada et al. (2025) highlight that retail spaces can hold deeper meaning to border-crossers. They argue that the experiences of shopping "evoked nostalgia and a sense of belonging and served as a social space for exchanging cultural knowledge" for immigrants that help them in their acculturation (Ogada et al., 2025, p. 7). While this paper focuses on grocery stores of the host country, Ogada et al.'s (2025) paper focuses on immigrant grocery stores; both underlining the spatial role in consumer acculturation.

We furthermore advance the insights of Veresiu's (2020) study on resistance responses to spatial structural conditions by stating that resistance towards the imposed acculturation of a market-mediated space can happen not only in the mental and physical space but also beyond the borders of the physical space. Our findings reveal that to maintain their cultural identity, sojourners take agency in the form of seeking cultural familiarity beyond Swedish grocery stores. This acting out of agency occurs in three ways: (1) buying from local Ethnic grocery stores, (2) shopping at Ethnic online shops, and (3) supplying goods from their home country,

either by sending or bringing them. Strategies one and three are also found by Brown et al. (2019) in the case of sojourners rejecting the host country's food due to taste preferences. While we identify the same strategies, we offer a different perspective on the reasons why sojourners employ them. Whereas Veresiu (2020) investigated a spatially segregated group of people restricted by spatial governmentality, we examine a free-moving consumer group acting in the retail space. As such, our findings suggest that the retail space provides more opportunities for diversified resistance.

Building on Veresiu (2020), our findings expand the view on space as an acculturation agent, showing that the space itself can not only restrict and enable consumer agency but also support consumers. Firstly, our participants got pressured by the grocery store to learn the Swedish language to overcome the structural barrier of language they face within the grocery store. This aligns with Veresiu (2020), demonstrating that space can impose acculturation and thus restrict sojourners. Furthermore, our findings suggest that space can restrict the agency of international students to explore new foods by creating a barrier through high prices. Consequently, they are unable to enjoy food exploration during their time abroad as they would like to. This experience can be connected to the 'shattered identity projects' of pre-acculturation dreams of young Turkish women studied by Üstüner and Holt (2007). Here, the women were left with broken identities because the modern lifestyle they aspired to was unattainable due to their socio-cultural situation. Therefore, while Üstüner and Holt (2007) focus on the influence of sociocultural structures, our study emphasizes the forces of the market-mediated space. Secondly, in contrast to Veresiu (2020), our findings reveal that market-mediated spaces, in our case, the retail space, can also function as a supportive acculturation agent. In this regard, our study aligns with Peñaloza (1994), who highlights the guiding and helping role of acculturation agents. We find that sojourners facing challenges in their acculturation due to their lack of knowledge find support in the grocery store. Some participants shared that their hesitance to purchase unfamiliar products can be overcome with free food sampling stations provided by the grocery store.

Another noteworthy finding is that sojourners take agency when navigating market-mediated spaces by consciously choosing between Swedish grocery stores once they have acquired market knowledge. Herby, various factors within the grocery store influence their decisions. In particular, interesting is the finding that the layout of the grocery store affects their experience in the grocery store, which prompts them to take agency. This aligns with research in the retail

field showing that layout can influence shopping behaviour (Alawadhi et al., 2016; Behera & Mishra, 2017) and consumers' in-store experience (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017). We therefore advance the research on retail spaces by introducing a consumer acculturation perspective.

Overall, our findings underline that consumer acculturation in market-mediated spaces cannot be fully understood without taking the role of the space as an active consumer acculturation agent into consideration. Sojourners navigate retail spaces and the imposed acculturation at play by realizing it, evaluating it, and resisting it, and therefore taking agency. Furthermore, we discovered that the retail space can act as an acculturation agent, not only restricting but also helping sojourners with their acculturation.

7 Conclusion

In this concluding chapter we will highlight the main findings of the research that have been established through analysis and discussion and address the research question. Furthermore, we will give practical implications for management, higher education and society. Lastly, we will address the Limitations and give suggestions for Future Research.

7.1 Main Findings

This study aimed to explore how sojourners' overall process of acculturation unfolds within retail spaces. To address this, we looked into the existing literature body of global mobility, more specifically into consumer acculturation literature, market-mediated spaces within acculturation literature, and literature on the border-crossers' sojourners. To address this objective, we articulated the following research question:

How do sojourners navigate retail spaces?

To answer our research question empirically, we conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with sojourners living in the University city of Lund in Sweden. Through this, we identified three ways in which sojourners navigate retail stores.

Firstly, sojourners navigate retail spaces in the form of developing market competencies. The learning of competencies necessary to master the retail space can be driven by genuine appreciation, practicality, or the desire to fit in. Furthermore, the developed market knowledge enables sojourners to take agentic behaviour in choosing between retail spaces. Additionally, sojourners decode cultural norms and consumption behaviours through the retail spaces. This can lead to a negotiation about own cultural norms and values.

Secondly, to overcome navigation barriers in retail spaces, sojourners leverage acculturation agents. Although sojourners want to explore and adapt to new consumption patterns, they need

help from acculturation agents to overcome the barrier of lack of knowledge in retail spaces. We call this ‘social dependent exploration’. Additionally, retail spaces can act as an active consumer acculturation agent that can restrict sojourners in their navigation but also support them and solve the barrier of lacking knowledge. Furthermore, sojourners use technology as an acculturation agent to overcome the structural barrier of language.

Thirdly, sojourners take agency in their navigation of retail spaces to reproduce familiarity. They resist imposed acculturation that they experience through the product offerings, layouts, and prizes in the retail spaces to maintain cultural identity. This agency can occur in various ways. (1) buying at local ethnic retail spaces, (2) shopping at online marketplaces, (3) and supplying from their home country in the form of sending or bringing goods. Furthermore, the sojourns give retail spaces different meaning and recreate familiar spaces in the retail spaces that they miss in the new host country.

Based on the ways sojourners navigate retail spaces, we could gain more insights into sojourners characteristics and the role of market-mediated spaces in their acculturation, which contributes to the two research gaps of (1) the limited focus on sojourners within consumer acculturation theory and (2) the underexplored market-mediated spaces in consumer acculturation theory. We found that sojourners have an ‘explorative identity’, as we conceptualize it, which can be seen in the different ways the sojourners navigate the retail spaces. They, on the one hand, want to maintain their cultural identity and seek cultural familiarity beyond retail spaces. On the other hand, they are curious about new products and offers and want to experience the new space. However, this exploration is dependent on external actors, namely acculturation agents. Besides social support also retail spaces as market-mediated spaces take on an active role in sojourners’ navigation of the market-mediated space. Retail spaces act as active consumer acculturation agents, which can on the one hand constrain sojourners and impose acculturation, leading sojourners to take agency in their navigation and leaving the market-mediated space. At the same time, retail spaces can also support sojourners and help them overcome barriers they face in the retail space.

7.2 Practical Implications

The findings of our research can give important insights and implications for society, universities, and businesses.

Managerial implications for grocery stores can be derived from the findings of our study and abstracted to other retail stores. Firstly, for retail spaces to act as supportive rather than restrictive, imposing environments, managers should understand the different ways that retail spaces can restrict sojourners and the opportunities available to support them in their acculturation. Following this, it is recommended for grocery stores with high international student frequency to lower the structural barrier of language and implement translations in an economically reasonable manner. From an economic perspective, it is equally important for marketers to understand customers' needs in order to implement a targeted promotion strategy. Our findings reveal that reduced prices and free food sampling stations can help to lower the entry barrier for the overall curious sojourners. Therefore, it is recommended to have promotional sales on a variety of products at the beginning of the semester. This approach builds early trust with sojourners and has economic benefits in the long term.

Furthermore, as the presence of international students continues to grow within higher education institutions, our findings can offer valuable insights into how universities can actively support sojourner's acculturation process. They could integrate activities such as 'Getting to Know the Grocery Store' and 'Introduction to Swedish Products' into their Buddy Programs to help sojourners overcome knowledge barriers that restrict them from trying out new things and following their intrinsic curiosity. Additionally, assigning grocery shopping buddies at the beginning of the semester could help sojourners feel more comfortable during their initial shopping experiences. Universities could also organize potluck events where local and international students share and try different foods. Such events give sojourners the opportunity to experience local cuisine in a low-pressure and financially risk-free environment, and therefore can help them to overcome the knowledge barrier they would otherwise face.

On a societal level, our findings provide municipalities with valuable insights on getting a better understanding of sojourners and their everyday needs, enabling them to foster environments that embrace the growing diversity within cities. Municipalities could begin by promoting intercultural exchange and thereby fostering social cohesion by making public spaces available

for intercultural exchange and leveraging media presence to make the growing diversity of cities visible. In regards of policies, municipalities might consider developing specific guidelines for grocery stores to have their signage in multiple languages, and broaden their cultural product selection, to make these spaces more welcoming for vulnerable groups of society and support their well-being.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations in this study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively low with only 15 interviewees due to time constraints. Furthermore, twelve out of the fifteen participants were female, which could have resulted in gender biased answers particularly regarding consumption behaviour. In addition, the small sample size could not depict an accurate representation of the full diversity of cultural backgrounds of international students from Asia living in the examined city. Additionally, the interviews were not conducted in the participant's native language. Although efforts were made to give the participants enough time to re-articulate their answers, this language barrier could have affected the depth of their responses. Due to the limited time available, this study was conducted within a single geographical area to ensure comparability, as the participants draw on the same grocery store landscape. Further research in the field of acculturation and sojourners in retail spaces should consider cross-city comparison to observe potential behavioural differences between sojourners living in rural or urban areas and the connected difference in product availability and retail space offerings. Additionally, due to time and resource constraints, only semi-structured interviews were conducted. We suggest future research to expand the methodological approach by conducting an ethnographic study alongside interviews. The approach allows for observing the actual behaviour and interactions that unconsciously happen and therefore cannot be grasped within interviews. This approach could provide a more holistic understanding of how space is navigated by sojourners. As this research revealed that sojourners are recreating missed spaces and activities mentally to find a sense of familiarity in their new environment. Future research could build on this by investigating these imagined spaces to get a deeper understanding of their relevance for the acculturation process of border-crossers and their well-being.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Link to Google Forms

As part of this work, a Google Form was created to get in contact with eligible participants for our sample. The Google Form can be accessed via the following link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/172NTRveu3OAMvZOHartm7klvjZFrCjDNnWtSAfb1g48/edit?ts=67f393cf>

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction

- Hi and welcome! How are you? First of all, thank you so much for participating and taking the time! We really appreciate it. We are Mirjam and Charlotte, master's students in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University. For our master's Thesis, we are conducting research on the grocery shopping experience of international students from Asia in Swedish Grocery Stores.
- During this interview, we will ask you several questions, and you are welcome to share your thoughts and experiences freely and in as much detail as you feel comfortable with. You don't need to have any previous knowledge; there are no right or wrong answers. If you don't feel comfortable answering a question, just let us know, and we will skip the question and move on.
- Before we get started, we would like to assure you that your answers will be treated confidentially, and no conclusions can be drawn about your person.
- To ensure we accurately capture all your responses in a transcript, we would like to get your consent to record this interview. We will make sure you remain anonymous

throughout the entire process, and once the project is completed, the recording will be deleted from our computers. Would you agree to a recording?

- For your information why two people are here: Charlotte/Mirjam will conduct the interview, while Charlotte/Mirjam will take notes.
- Would you like to take part in this study?

Opening Questions Regarding the Persona

- To begin with, from which country are you from, and since when are you studying in Lund?
- How old are you?
- What is your field of study?
- Since when have you been in Lund?
- How long are you staying in Lund?

Questions Regarding the General Sense of Feeling at Home

- How do you feel now living here? Have you settled in?
- Can you tell me what you generally miss in your everyday life?
 - How do you feel about it?
 - And how do you deal with it?

Grocery Store Experiences

Initial Experiences:

- Can you tell me about your first grocery store experience in Sweden?
 - How does this experience differ from grocery stores in your home country?
- Imagine you are describing Swedish grocery stores to someone who has never been to Sweden before. What would you tell them?
- Can you think of any positive aspects of shopping in Swedish grocery stores?
- Can you tell me about your experiences with grocery shopping in your home country?

Emotional Experiences:

- Imagine going shopping in a Swedish grocery store (for example, Coop, ICA, or Willys). How does this thought make you feel?
- What do you relate to going to grocery stores?
- Have you ever had an experience in the grocery store that you needed to share with someone else? What happened?
- What have been some of the main challenges or difficulties you've experienced while grocery shopping in Swedish grocery stores?
 - How did those experiences make you feel?
 - What did you do to ease those tensions?*If the Asian grocery store was mentioned:*
 - What role does the Asian grocery store play in this context for you?

Cultural Dimensions

- Can you tell me about an interaction that you had in the Swedish grocery store that you still remember? What happened?
- Can you share insights that you have gained about Swedish culture from visiting Swedish grocery stores?
- Have you noticed any products or store sections in Swedish grocery stores that seem to offer food from specific cultures? What do you think about that?
- Can you tell me how Swedish grocery stores helped you with your arrival and adjustment to Sweden?

Adaptation and Agency of the Persona

- Can you tell me about a typical grocery shopping trip for you now? Where do you usually go, and what do you usually buy?
If the Asian grocery store is mentioned:
 - Why do you go there?
What do you think about the Asian grocery store?
- Thinking about your food choices and what you buy at the grocery stores, how have these changed since you started living in Lund?

- Can you tell how your grocery shopping choices are influenced by the availability and types of products in the Swedish grocery store?
- Are there things you are missing in the grocery stores here? And how do you deal with it?
 - How did it make you feel when you realized that you couldn't get XY?
 - Can you tell me why these things are important to you?
 - What do you consume instead now, and how do you feel about it?
- Have you brought any food items from your home country, or had things sent to you, and what?
- Can you share an experience of trying new foods or ingredients that you have discovered here in the Swedish grocery stores?
 - What was it?
 - How was the experience?
- Can you describe a moment when you've chosen not to buy or were hesitant about certain Swedish grocery products?
 - What was your reason for making this choice?

Final questions

- Before we finish, is there anything else about your experiences with grocery stores in Sweden, or anything related to food shopping, that we haven't talked about yet, but you think is important to mention?
- If you could change one thing to improve your overall experience with grocery stores in Sweden, what would it be and why?

Appendix C: Use of AI

In this Master's thesis, we have utilized the advances of AI technology. Firstly, we used the aiatlund.chat tool provided by our master's program to assist us with AI. We used AI in the beginning to generate ideas for our Problematization and Background regarding global mobility and sojourners. Furthermore, in the process of writing our thesis, we used Gemini 2.0 Flash Thinking Experimental to help us with the structure chapters. Regarding our Theoretical Framework, we used ChatGPT to scenario-proof our theory before deciding on applying the framework to our findings. AI was also used to improve grammatical accuracy. As English is not our mother tongue, we also used AI to clarify words and suggest synonyms. In general, we did not use any references generated by AI and always critically questioned the output.