Tampere University

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CAPTURING SECURITY

A Photovoice Study on International Degree Students' Everyday Security Perceptions in Tampere, Finland

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ABSTRACT

Emma Fuchs: “Capturing Security: A Photovoice Study on International Degree Students’ Everyday Security Perceptions in Tampere, Finland”
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The number of international students is steadily rising and with it, the need to understand their daily experiences abroad. Identifying situations that international students perceive as secure and insecure can help improve their integration and well-being in a foreign context. To explore this topic in the city of Tampere, Finland, sixteen international degree students were included in this study on everyday security perceptions. Using the photovoice method, each student took photos of their environment which evoked feelings of security or insecurity. These photos were used as the main points of discussion during follow-up interviews with each participant. Lastly, the students were invited to a focus group discussion to discuss potential solutions to issues identified in the interviews.

The photovoice method was effective in gaining insights into the security experiences of the participants. The students discussed their experiences based on the photos collected as part of the study. Physical safety, emotional well-being, and social inclusion were identified as key components of the students’ definitions of security. The subjective nature of security was highlighted, as the perceptions and experiences were closely tied to individuals’ daily routines and surroundings in Tampere. Moreover, the students’ feelings of security were influenced by several factors such as their physical environment, language barriers, seasonal changes, and financial stability.

Based on their photos, the students developed recommendations to address identified challenges. The recommendations focused on awareness and cultural change, public safety and nightlife, language support, university and government collaboration, and community engagement. Specific recommendations included providing better language support in public services and increasing the availability of sober social activities. These findings have practical implications for universities and local authorities.

Taken together, the study's results offer insights into the perceptions, challenges, and opportunities of international degree students living in Tampere. Importantly, the findings can help improve issues faced by this demographic, ultimately supporting their overall well-being. However, further research with a larger sample size is needed to improve the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: Everyday Security, Security Perceptions, International Degree Students, Tampere, Finland, Photovoice, Higher Education, Human Security, Student Wellbeing, Qualitative Research

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

1. Introduction

Tampere, Finland, is a popular destination for international students. With three major higher institutions, Tampere University, Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK), and the Police University College, Tampere is Finland's second-biggest student city (City of Tampere, n.d.). These three institutions comprise almost 40,000 students, of whom around 3,500 are international students. While the Police University College does not offer English programs, Tampere University and TAMK offer about 50 international degree programs (City of Tampere, n.d.). The international student community in Finland is steadily growing. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2023), Finnish higher education institutions have received over 60,000 international applications in 2023, which is a record number.

International degree students in Tampere, Finland, like international students worldwide, face numerous challenges in their daily lives. These can include adjusting to a new academic and cultural environment, navigating complex bureaucracy, and dealing with language and social integration (Nadal-Vicens & Beresin, 2021). However, one of their key concerns is their everyday security. Everyday security describes the feeling of safety and security that individuals experience daily, including on campus, in public spaces, and their accommodations. Despite the importance of everyday security for the well-being of international degree students, little is known about their experiences and perceptions on this issue. In addition, little is known about how they can be empowered to identify, address, and promote solutions to improve their security.

This study explores the everyday security experiences and perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, Finland. It also looks into how the method of photovoice can empower them to identify, address, and develop recommendations to improve their security. Photovoice is a participatory research method that combines photography and narrative to allow participants to express their experiences on a particular issue, in this case, everyday security (Wang & Burris, 1997). Using photovoice, international degree students can become active participants in the research process, sharing their individual perspectives and experiences.

This study explores the following research question: What are international degree students' everyday security experiences and perceptions in Tampere, Finland? By addressing this research question, the researcher provides a better understanding of the experiences of international degree students in Tampere. Its findings can also help improve concerns faced by the students, contributing to their overall well-being.

2. Background and Context Description

International students studying at higher education institutions are key for enhancing cultural diversity, improving academic environments, and sharing knowledge internationally (Sawir, 2013; Beine et al., 2014). Tampere, Finland, is becoming more and more popular among international students due to its strong academic community (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2023). On their academic journeys in a foreign country, it is beneficial to understand the students' daily experiences, including their perceptions of security.

Security is a complex concept that extends beyond just physical safety. In the context of international students, personal safety and a wide range of experiences can impact their well-being, academic success, and overall quality of life. Therefore, it is important to consider the multifaceted nature of security when looking at this issue (Nyman, 2021). The main objective of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that international degree students encounter during their academic journey abroad.

2.1 Conceptualizing Everyday Security

Human security

The concept of security has changed over time to cover various meanings and applications. Initially, security focused on protecting people and property from criminal activity and military invasion (Wolfers, 1952). As societies became more complex, security started to include wider interests, such as protecting economic interests and maintaining social stability. In the mid-twentieth century, security became closely linked with preventing nuclear war and global conflict (Buzan, 1991; Walt, 1991). Now, security is seen as a multifaceted concept that is influenced by personal experiences. It can encompass a variety of concerns, including those related to war, unemployment, health, and safety (Meerts, 2018). As different individuals and communities may perceive and prioritize these aspects differently, it is important to consider diverse perspectives when discussing security.

The human security paradigm marked a significant shift in security discourse, moving away from state-centric security perspectives to focus on safeguarding and empowering individuals. First introduced in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, this idea covers various threats to individual well-being, extending beyond the conventional focus on military threats. It encompasses "economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security" (UNDP, 1994, pp. 24-25). The idea that security cannot be achieved just through military means or at the national level is central to this paradigm. Instead, it must address the conditions

threatening individuals' lives and dignity (Paris, 2001). This holistic and multidimensional approach recognizes that threats to human security are interrelated and can stem from various sources, such as economic deprivation, social inequality, environmental degradation, and human rights violations (UNDP, 1994).

Dimensions of Human Security

The human security paradigm is also relevant in the context of international students. It focuses on personal security and psychological well-being, often overlooked by traditional security concerns (Paris, 2001). This paradigm recognizes that threats to an individual's security can take many forms, including exposure to violence, living in a hazardous environment, or experiencing mental health challenges due to social isolation or cultural dislocation. Paris (2001) notes that it encourages the development of policies and support systems that address these diverse aspects of security, intending to create an environment where individuals can live with dignity, free from fear, want, shame, and vulnerability.

The human security concept introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1994) has several characteristics:

- It is universal.
- Its components are interdependent.
- Focus on early prevention rather than late intervention.
- It is people-centered.

According to Tavanti and Stachowicz-Stanusch (2013), sustainable human security encompasses four key pillars that align with the current understanding of human security, development, dignity, and sustainability (Figure 1). This notion is based on the 1994 UNDP report. The first pillar, freedom from fear, protects individuals and communities from disasters, violence, and conflicts, ensuring human survival. The second pillar, freedom from want, is centered on human development and tackles issues of poverty in various forms. The third pillar, Freedom from Shame, emphasizes human dignity, upholding fundamental human rights, and respecting diversity. Lastly, freedom from vulnerability deals with human sustainability, safeguarding people from natural disasters, and reducing environmental threats. The framework brings together political, economic, social, and environmental responsibilities in a sustainable approach that focuses on capacity building rooted in human rights (Tavanti & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2013).

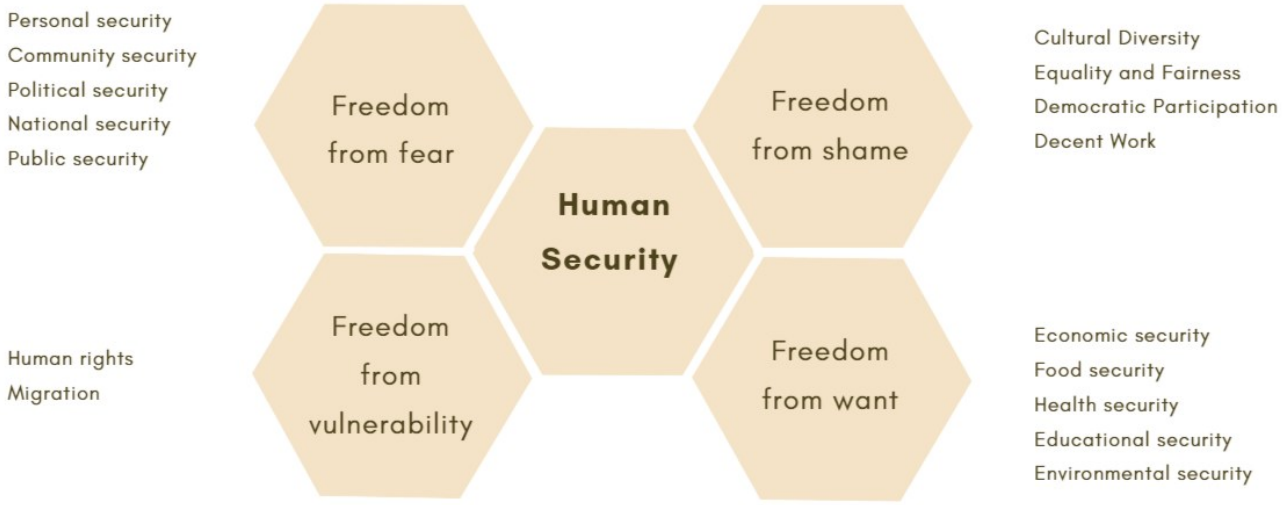

Figure 1. Framework of Sustainable Human Security (Tavanti, 2013).

The Human Security framework, according to the UNDP (1994), considers multiple interconnected components, that are supported by further academic literature:

1. **Economic Security:** Financial stability is critical for physical security (access to housing, food, and healthcare) and psychological well-being (reducing stress and anxiety about financial matters). Thomas and Tow (2002) discuss the role of economic security in promoting stability, and well-being, and addressing central human security issues related to vulnerability such as food and health security.

2. **Food Security**: Having access to nutritious food is crucial for physical health. Pinstrup-Andersen (2009) highlights the importance of food security in guaranteeing the well-being of households and individuals. It plays a critical role in promoting nutritional security along with access to clean water and sanitation. This, in turn, supports the importance of food security in maintaining good physical health and psychological well-being.

3. **Health Security**: Health security includes physical and mental healthcare, emphasizing the importance of psychological support and well-being. According to Chattu, Knight, Reddy, and Aginam (2019), human security is about prioritizing health and well-being over the traditional notion of national security. This is because health security plays a crucial role in safeguarding fundamental freedoms and basic livelihoods, protecting against socioeconomic threats and stresses.

4. **Environmental Security**: Ensuring physical safety from environmental hazards and the psychological impact of adapting to new environments is critical as it can affect mental health.

Bhatt (2022) examines the impact of environmental factors on human security, explaining the importance of environmental security in protecting individuals.

5. **Personal Security**: Protects from physical harm and violence and also addresses the psychological trauma and fear that can arise from threats to personal safety. Paris (2001) emphasizes the importance of personal safety and protection from violence within the human security paradigm.

6. **Community Security**: While prioritizing cultural and social connections, it also affects psychological well-being by providing a sense of community and support. According to Newman's (2001) perspective, human security is dependent on community cohesion and social bonds. These two elements are considered essential for maintaining a sense of security among individuals.

7. **Political Security**: Ensures physical protection from political repression and addresses psychological well-being by safeguarding freedoms and human rights, reducing fear and stress related to political instability. Huliaras and Tzifakis (2007) discuss political stability and repression-free environment as crucial components of human security.

Paris (2001) emphasizes that the human security concept is ambiguous and broad, and while it seeks to shift attention from state security to individual well-being, it faces challenges in implementation due to its comprehensive agenda that lacks clear prioritization. This leads to the critique that human security, by trying to cover too many areas, risks becoming a catch-all term that is difficult to apply effectively in specific contexts and policies (Paris, 2001).

Newman (2001) argues that various socio-cultural and geostrategic orientations result in different, and sometimes competing, conceptions of human security. The variety within the concept emphasizes its adaptability but also results in negative feedback due to its lack of a consistent approach. This can lead to a lack of clarity in its application and comprehension within the fields of international relations and policymaking, as noted by Newman (2001).

Although there is no single metric to assess Human Security, a range of indicators, resources and publications can be used (Koundouri & Dellis, 2023). While the human security paradigm is progressive and offers a people-centered approach to understanding and dealing with global insecurities, it also has challenges. One issue is the broadness and ambiguity of its scope, which can make it difficult to implement practically. Another issue is the differing interpretations of the

concept, which can hinder its practical application. These critiques suggest that more focused applications and clearer definitions are needed.

Despite its vagueness and generality, the human security framework remains relevant and adaptable. The framework focuses on individual well-being instead of state security, making it useful for addressing the complex challenges faced by international students. By prioritizing human-centered approaches, we can tailor the framework to meet the specific needs and insecurities of international students, ensuring their safety, well-being, and academic success.

Everyday security

In recent years, security has evolved in response to new challenges, including cyber threats, terrorism, and climate change. Security encompasses various issues today, from individual privacy and data protection to international relations and global governance. Buzan (1991) points out that each individual perceives security differently. More researchers (Wolfers, 1952; Ranasinghe, 2013) agree with this statement, making security an individual experience and introducing the holistic concept of everyday security based on human security.

Everyday security refers to how people experience and handle security daily. It focuses on how individuals and communities perceive and respond to security risks, threats, and challenges and their approaches to cope with them (Nyman, 2021). In contrast to the conventional security concepts that usually deal with national security and military defense, everyday security focuses on the safety and well-being of individuals in their day-to-day lives. It recognizes that security is not only about preventing violence or crime but also about addressing the social, economic, and political factors that affect people's daily lives, such as access to resources, social justice, and human rights (Nyman, 2021).

The concept of everyday security acknowledges that security is not only a technical or objective matter but also a subjective and social construct shaped by people's experiences, values, and beliefs (Nyman, 2021). Understanding and considering the diverse perspectives and needs of various communities and individuals is crucial when designing and implementing security policies and programs.

Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) discuss the three dimensions of security in daily life: time, space, and emotion. Time refers to the daily routines and patterns that shape people's lives. Space refers to the physical and social environments where people live, work, and move. Emotion refers to the

feelings of safety, fear, and anxiety people experience. All three dimensions are essential to consider when talking about security.

Nyman (2021) followed up on this, rephrasing the dimensions to space, practice, and affect (Figure 2). In other words, these factors refer to the physical environment one lives in (space), the actions and behaviors one engages in (practice), and the emotions and feelings that arise from one's experiences (affect). This framework applies to international students' everyday security perceptions.

The concept of 'space' plays a critical role in examining how the physical environment, comprising the university campus and city infrastructure, shapes the security perceptions of international students. By exploring students' daily behaviors and actions, the 'practice' aspect of the framework sheds light on how their routines and interactions impact their sense of safety and security. Additionally, the 'affect' component is instrumental in understanding security's emotional and psychological dimensions, providing insights into how students' experiences in a new cultural and academic environment can influence their overall well-being. By applying this framework, the research can provide a holistic view of the factors that affect the security perceptions of international students. This approach also takes the physical and psychological dimensions. into account.

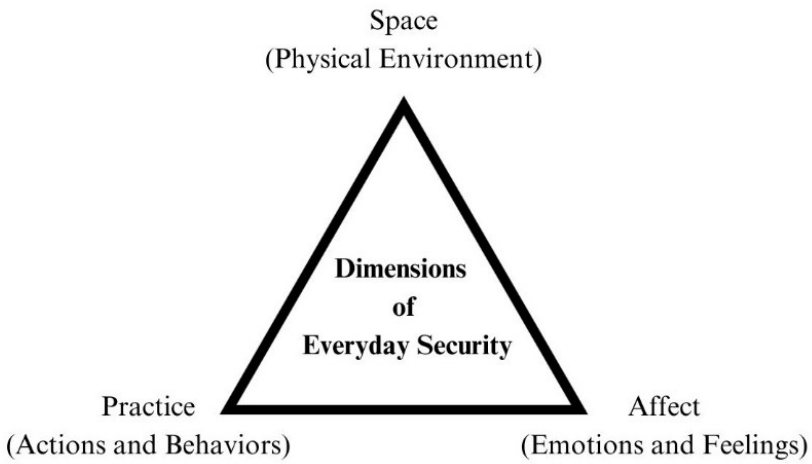

Figure 2. Dimensions of Everyday Security (Nyman, 2021).

Overall, everyday security provides a more comprehensive approach that acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of security challenges and the need to address them to reflect on people's daily experiences and needs.

International Students and Everyday Security

One important aspect that distinguishes international students and national students is the intercultural experiences they encounter. According to Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010), international students' experiences are shaped by several dimensions, including language proficiency, social interaction, personal growth, and academic success. These dimensions are interconnected and contribute to the student's overall adjustment process in a foreign environment. Gu et al. (2010) emphasize that adaptation should not be viewed as a linear process. Instead, it is a complex set of changing dynamics that interact between individual, pedagogical, and environmental factors. This perspective highlights how the diverse experiences of international students can lead to a reshaping of identity as they navigate different cultural, academic, and social contexts.

Building on this, Kaya (2020) looks into the experiences of international graduate students in the United States, highlighting the complex "worlds" they navigate. These worlds consist of individual challenges, opportunities, and communities. Kaya's (2020) research shows how international students form their own spaces and networks within the academic environment. These spaces and networks contribute to their personal and professional growth while still facing several obstacles. This aligns with Gu et al.'s (2010) four-dimensional framework.

These insights highlight the importance of taking a broad approach to supporting international students. It is important to recognize that these students face a range of challenges and opportunities and to provide them with a supportive environment that fosters their academic, personal, and social development. The broadness of Nyman’s framework (2021) on everyday security makes this holistic approach possible as it can be applied to international students' experiences to explore how their environment influences their sense of security and well-being. For example:

1. **Space**: International students often have to navigate unfamiliar physical and social spaces, which can affect their sense of safety and security. Universities and host communities can either be perceived as inclusive or exclusive, which can impact students' ability to feel welcome and safe.
2. **Practice**: The daily routines and interactions of international students can also be seen through the lens of security. How they manage their days and socialize with their peers reflects their efforts to establish a sense of normality and security while living abroad.

3. **Affect**: The emotional dimension of Nyman's framework is closely related to the personal development aspect of Gu et al.'s (2010) model. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, or belonging can considerably impact international students' overall sense of security and well-being.

Kim et al. (2023) conducted a study on foreign international students in South Korea which further confirms the significance of comprehending the social, temporal, and spatial aspects of students' lives. This aligns with the frameworks proposed by Gu et al. (2010) and Nyman (2021), suggesting that the findings have global relevance beyond English-speaking countries. Overall, Nyman's framework provides a strong baseline for gaining a better understanding of the complex daily security experiences of international students.

To go further into detail, international students face unique security challenges when they move to unfamiliar cultural and geographical environments. Research shows that linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and adjusting to new surroundings can affect their sense of safety and security. These challenges can make them more vulnerable, impacting their overall experience studying abroad and how they interact with their new environment (Hayar, 2018). In the context of learning outcomes, language barriers and cultural differences can result in bad experiences, influencing their perception of security and belonging (Safipour, Wenneberg, & Hadziabdic, 2017). These challenges extend beyond the classroom to social and professional settings, as shown in studies of international nursing students in Finland (Pitkajarvi, Eriksson, Kekki, & Pitkala, 2012).

Communication challenges are frequently reported as a significant barrier to adjusting to university life in new countries, with financial difficulties and cultural adaptation issues following closely (Taş, 2013). Cultural barriers, such as language and time zone differences, also impact learning performances in online programs (Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010).

As shown by Nyman (2021), everyday security comprises multiple dimensions, reflecting the diverse facets of individuals' lives. These dimensions encompass physical safety, emotional well-being, economic stability, and social integration. International students' everyday security perceptions are influenced by how they navigate these dimensions in their host country. For example, concerns about physical safety may intersect with their emotional well-being, as feelings of isolation or discrimination can influence their overall sense of security. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for comprehending the nuanced experiences of international degree students (Liu, Sheng, Pato, Mutinda, & Wu, 2023).

For international degree students, the concept of everyday security is of high importance. Moving to a foreign country for higher education poses unique challenges related to cultural adaptation, language barriers, and social integration (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir & Forbes-Mewett, 2010; Hayar, 2018). These factors impact how they perceive their security daily, affecting their academic achievement, personal development, and overall welfare. It is important to recognize the value of everyday security in international students' lives and explore their unique experiences and stories within Tampere, Finland.

2.2 Overview of the international student population in Finland and Tampere

Finland as a safe country

Finland is widely known as one of the safest countries in the world, and this plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of international students who come to study here. Its reputation can be attributed to its internal security approach and emphasis on prevention (Ministry of the Interior, 2022). The 2022 Finnish Ministry of Interior's report on internal security highlights Finland's stance on addressing the root causes of security problems through social measures such as employment, education, and health services, rather than relying exclusively on reactive law enforcement.

According to a civil security survey, 89% of the Finnish population perceives Finland as a safe country and 96% feel safe in their personal lives (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Kekki, 2021). The perception of safety in Finland is shaped by various factors, including the people's trust in their security operators and each other, low crime rates, a stable political environment, and high-quality living standards (Ministry of the Interior, 2022). All of these factors contribute to an environment where international students can focus on their academic and personal development without too many concerns for their physical safety.

Looking at Finland's crime rate, which has been steadily dropping for the past 30 years, a tiny segment of society is responsible for a significant proportion of crimes (Ministry of the Interior, 2022). These individuals often exhibit risk factors such as low socio-economic status, problems spanning multiple generations, and substance abuse. Although violence is faced by few, it has a higher prevalence than in its neighboring countries, and alcohol is a factor in 80% of homicide cases (Danielsson, 2020).

The Finnish health system is known for its wide-ranging coverage and easy accessibility. Therefore, it plays a key role in maintaining the well-being of its population. Despite the system's challenges, it

ensures that all residents can access high-quality healthcare, contributing to the overall security of the country (Keskimaki et al., 2019). Finland also has taken measures to improve local community safety and security, which reflects the country's approach to risk management and emergency preparedness. These efforts ensure that both urban and rural areas are prepared to handle emergencies, further strengthening Finland's reputation as a safe country (Laurikainen, 2016).

The quality of Finland's education system is also an important aspect of shaping the experiences of international students. Finland's high-quality teacher education and leadership have resulted in constant high performance. This has led to improved student learning and academic outcomes in the country (Sahlberg, 2011).

Research on student migration has highlighted the need to integrate international students into Finland's workforce and create a supportive environment for them and their families. This supportive environment increased the retention rates of international students in Finland (Mathies & Karhunen, 2021). Generally, there is a growing interest in keeping international students in Finland for long-term economic growth. However, according to Mathies and Karhunen (2021), as the degree level of international students increases, the likelihood of them staying in Finland after graduation decreases. Instead of focusing only on graduation rates, efforts should be put into the integration of international students into the labor market and establish a supportive environment for their families (Mathies & Karhunen, 2021).

Looking at Mathies and Karhunen's study (2021), it becomes apparent that there still are challenges faced by international students connected to their integration. These challenges encompass language barriers and cultural differences. For example, international students are more likely to encounter an unsupportive clinical learning environment and have poorer communication with staff compared to native Finnish students, according to Pitkajarvi, Eriksson, and Pitkala (2012). These challenges, along with others discussed in the following section, underscore the need for ongoing efforts to enhance the integration and support of international students in Finland.

In summary, Finland is perceived as a safe and high-quality living environment. However, international students, in addition to the usual day-to-day challenges, face challenges that natives may not.

Demographics and Characteristics of International Degree Students in Tampere

Tampere, a city located in the Pirkanmaa region in Finland, is home to around 40,000 students, with approximately 10% of the student population at Tampere University being international students (Tampere University, 2023).

International students in Tampere represent a diverse group, with the latest enrollment data suggesting a steady increase over the past five years (Tampere University of Applied Sciences, 2020). Most of the students in the city are from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Gender distribution shows a relatively balanced ratio, with slight variations across different faculties (Statista, n.d.). Finnish universities and European Union programs offer scholarships and funding opportunities as a crucial support mechanism, enabling a bigger demographic reach among potential international applicants.

In recent years, the Finnish government has made efforts to attract more international students to the country, including by introducing a new scholarship program for non-European students (Tampere University, n.d.-a). The presence of international students in Finland and Tampere has contributed to a diverse and multicultural academic community. It has helped to strengthen Finland's position as a global leader in education.

Motivations for Studying in Tampere

Tampere's schools are known for their innovative research, practical approach to teaching, and strong connections to industry. People who want high-quality education and hands-on experience are attracted to Tampere. The city is also recognized for its quality of life, including safety, cleanliness, and social services. According to the International Student Barometer, a survey by Tampere University, international students rated the university highly in areas such as arrival, learning, living, support, recommendation, employability, and well-being (Tampere University, 2021).

Beyond academic pull factors, personal and experiential motivations drive students to Tampere. The city's reputation as a safe, peaceful, and socially progressive environment resonates with international applicants (City of Tampere, 2023). The city's cultural scene, including festivals and arts, also provides a well-rounded experience beyond the classroom.

The decision to study abroad is influenced by both push and pull factors. While Tampere offers compelling attractions, circumstances in students' home countries, such as limited educational opportunities, economic instability, or political unrest, often play a critical role in the decision to pursue education abroad (Fakunle, 2021; Calikoglu, 2018). This interplay of factors underscores the complex dynamics behind international educational migration.

Experiences and Challenges Faced by International Students

Adapting to a new cultural and academic environment presents various challenges. Khanal and Gaulee's study (2019) on the challenges of international students emphasizes their biggest struggles: Language barriers and financial and cultural issues. Language stands as a primary barrier; although English-taught programs are prevalent, daily life and social integration can be held back by limited Finnish or Swedish language skills (Li & Pitkänen, 2018). This language divide can extend to the classroom, where academic communication and expectations may differ from students' previous experiences.

Social integration is another concern, with some international students reporting feelings of isolation and difficulty forming meaningful connections within the university and the broader community (Li & Pitkänen, 2018; Calikoglu, 2018). This feeling was also reflected in the International Student Barometer of Tampere University (2021) findings. The stark contrast in social norms and the reserved nature of Finnish social conduct can exacerbate such feelings.

Furthermore, international students may struggle to afford Finland's high cost of living, leading to financial insecurity and stress. The cost of living and the difficulty of finding an opportunity to earn money next to studies can also impact their ability to meet basic needs and have a sense of stability and security in their daily lives (Tampere University, 2021). Additionally, during the pandemic, it was considerably easy to find accommodation. However, with mobility rising again, less and less accommodation is available, causing stress and anxiety during the beginning of studies. Especially in 2023, the number of applicants for housing has increased significantly, leading to record numbers and leaving students struggling to find housing (Yle News, 2023).

Concerning security, Tampere is generally perceived as a safe city; however, students occasionally report xenophobia and discrimination, which can impact their sense of security and well-being (Tampere University, 2021). These experiences underscore the need for discussion and support structures within the academic and city system of Tampere to ensure the safety and security of the international student body.

Finally, rising anxiety and depression rates are also a concern in the experiences of international students. Research indicates a concerning prevalence of anxiety and depression among this demographic. A study by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2021) reveals that one in three students at higher education institutes reported symptoms of anxiety and depression, with higher incidence rates among women.

Additionally, Brandolin, Lappalainen, Gorinelli, and Lappalainen (2023) highlight the psychological distress often experienced by international students. It is higher than the rate for domestic students, stressing the need for understanding and explaining the cause for this. Cultural adjustment, social isolation, and academic and financial stressors contribute to this increased vulnerability. The gap in mental health outcomes highlights the need for adapted support systems that address the unique challenges faced by international students (Brandolin et al., 2023). This approach fosters a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Negative experiences and challenges faced by international students in Finland can make them feel insecure and vulnerable, affecting their mental health and well-being. Therefore, universities and the wider community must address these barriers and create an inclusive and supportive environment for international students. No specific research has been conducted on the everyday security perceptions of international students in Tampere, highlighting the current study's importance in bridging the literature gap. By studying the unique environment of Tampere, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the security perceptions of international degree students and add to the existing body of knowledge.

University support services

University support services are an essential aspect of the student experience in higher education. They offer a wide range of resources to ensure students' well-being, academic success, and overall development. As highlighted by Ciobanu (2013), these services can include academic advising, mental health counseling, career guidance, and social engagement opportunities. They help address the diverse needs of students, promoting a supportive and inclusive campus environment. By giving access to these resources, universities can not only enhance the educational journey but also contribute to the overall development of students, preparing them for future challenges and opportunities (Ciobanu, 2013).

At Tampere University, the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) provides health care services, including general, mental, and oral health care, for Bachelor's or Master's degree programs (Finnish Student Health Services, n.d.). These services are accessible to students who have paid their student union membership fee linked with the FSHS. Additionally, international students with social security coverage in another EU/EEA country, Switzerland, or the United Kingdom can use the FSHS's services without paying the healthcare fee.

Tampere University offers a comprehensive support system for the well-being of its students, including international degree students. This support system is designed to ensure a positive study experience and address the various needs of students, ranging from academic guidance to mental health support (Tampere University, n.d.-b). The university provides different forms of help through its faculties and joint services. One key service is the Navigaattori, a student counseling and well-being support system that combines resources across the university community. This service is available both on-campus and online, offering flexibility and accessibility to students (Tampere University, n.d.-b). However, no information is available regarding how many students use these services or know of their existence.

Moreover, Tampere University offers specialized programs like the Student Well-Being and Life Skills course, which aims to improve students' psychological well-being and coping skills. This course is complemented by the Student Compass online program, designed for self-paced learning in both Finnish and English (Tampere University, n.d.-b). Additionally, the university provides individual study arrangements tailored to the needs of students with learning difficulties, illnesses, disabilities, or other medical conditions.

Tampere University also employs innovative approaches to ensure their health and well-being. One such initiative is the electronic health questionnaire (eHQ), which is part of the Finnish Student Health Service's (FSHS) health examination process for university students (Paldanius et al., 2020). The eHQ system is designed to evaluate students' self-reported health, habits, social relationships, and studying, and to identify those in need of further medical attention or mental health support. This initiative aims to screen students for health checks efficiently, enabling timely interventions and support. In a recent study, Paldanius et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of early detection of mental health problems and enhancing academic achievement through participation in the health examination process. This approach by Tampere University and the FSHS demonstrates their commitment to student welfare and contributes to the development of evidence-based practices in preventive healthcare for university students.

These broad support services and the university's commitment to student welfare can play a crucial role in shaping the everyday security perceptions of international students in Tampere (Tampere University, n.d.-b). The university's approach not only addresses academic needs but also focuses on the holistic well-being of students, creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Nevertheless, no data indicates whether these services are used by students and how well they work.

2.3 Previous Studies on Security Perceptions

As already mentioned, over 90% of the Finnish population feels safe in their everyday lives according to the 2021 report on safety and security (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Kekki, 2021). However, this report does not distinguish between nationals and internationals living in Finland. Therefore, more insights are needed into the security perceptions of the international residents of Finland.

Recent studies on general security perceptions highlight the complex relationship between subjective feelings of security and the objective reality of safety. Schneier's (2008) paper on the psychology of security brings up this distinction, emphasizing that people's perceptions often differ from the actual level of security. For example, while national and international research indicates a long-term trend of decreasing violence, public perception often leans towards the belief that the world is becoming more dangerous. Several factors, such as location, experiences, and mental biases, contribute to this difference. Studies show that security perceptions can significantly differ at individual and country levels, and these differences are shaped by a range of mental and cultural factors (Stoetman, 2019).

Considering these findings when reviewing security perceptions among international students and general populations is important. Schneier's (2008) study highlights the need to differentiate between perceived and actual security. This means recognizing how personal experiences, influenced by various factors, can shape one's sense of safety and well-being. By acknowledging these subjective experiences, it is easier to understand security perceptions and work towards creating safer environments.

The research conducted by Lieberz (2015) develops our understanding of security perceptions across different European countries by assessing security perceptions in detail. Lieberz (2015) utilized various methods to evaluate perceptions of physical safety, territorial integrity, environmental security, and other dimensions, forming a comprehensive picture of European security perceptions. Although the study did not focus on Finland, its findings on the three primary principles that shape security perception—freedom from want, freedom from instability, and freedom from fear—provide a useful framework for considering security perceptions in the broader European context, which may also apply to Finnish society. This approach further emphasizes the need to consider numerous factors that influence the public's sense of security, beyond just crime rates.

Additionally, Stevens and Vaughan-Williams (2014) expanded on the discussion to include different levels at which individuals perceive security threats. These levels range from personal to global scales. Their research highlights the psychological foundations and political actions resulting from these perceptions. With this, they provide a broad framework for understanding how security concerns manifest across different societal levels. This approach to security perceptions can be relevant when analyzing the different levels of security concerns among different groups within Finland, such as international students, local communities, and national populations.

Furthermore, Greco and Polli (2020) presented a fresh approach to monitoring and assessing public security perceptions through social media analytics. This method offers a timely perspective on public attitudes towards security, contrasting with traditional, slower survey methods. This method is applicable in many contexts, including Finland. It enables a more instant understanding of security perceptions. This can be useful for evaluating the impact of specific events or policy changes on public opinion.

These methodologies and perspectives match the insights provided by Nyman's (2021) study. It employs participatory photography to explore the everyday life of security of citizens in Beijing. The study presents an original perspective into the everyday life of security, focusing on how space, practice, and affect interact with one another. The photovoice method provides a multi-dimensional security analysis, highlighting its presence in the mundane aspects of daily life.

Nyman’s study (2021) highlights the importance of considering local, lived experiences in security discourse instead of only looking at the perspectives of influential people. It is important to take a more inclusive and diverse approach to security studies, considering how security affects individuals in their daily lives. Nyman's study is relevant for understanding the perceptions and experiences of international students in Tampere, as it provides a framework for analyzing how their sense of security is shaped by their everyday environments, routines, and emotional experiences.

Nyman's (2021) approach is complemented by Ferhani and Nyman's (2023) study on interpretive photography to capture and understand security perceptions. Their research highlights how visual methods can show how people experience and interpret security in their daily lives, especially in diverse settings like China and the UK.

The studies conducted provide a strong basis for exploring security perceptions not only within the general population but also among international students in Tampere. These studies highlight the multi-layered nature of security and emphasize the importance of considering various levels of

security threats. Innovative methods have been adopted for a better insight into how security is experienced and perceived. This holistic approach is important to develop recommendations and support systems that can contribute to the academic and social environments of university students.

Focus on International Students

Recent studies have contributed to understanding the security perceptions among international students. For instance, research focused on the experiences of international students in China has highlighted academic, sociocultural, and accommodation factors. In contrast, student health, safety, and discrimination remain less explored (Qadeer et al., 2021).

This study emphasizes the importance of reflecting on a wide range of factors affecting international students. On the one hand, these factors include satisfaction with academics, and on the other "home life, job, relationships, security and meaningful community engagement" (Arambewela & Hall, 2013, p. 983). Furthermore, Beine et al. (2014) underscore the value of international students, noting their benefits to host countries and institutions regarding campus internationalization, financial benefits, and cultural enhancement. The experiences of these students, varying across regions and influenced by multiple dimensions, highlight the complex nature of their security perceptions and the need for tailored support and policies (Qadeer et al., 2021).

The study conducted in 2009 by Sawir et al. sheds light on the social and economic well-being of international students in New Zealand. Its findings offer valuable insights into the security perceptions of international students. Although the research was mainly focused on New Zealand, its outcomes are widely relevant and contribute to the conversation on the security perceptions of international students. The study delves into critical aspects such as financial stability, language barriers, social integration, and personal safety. These factors play a role in determining international students' overall sense of security.

Sawir et al.'s study (2009) highlights the multidimensional nature of security perceptions. It reveals how economic and social factors influence students' feelings of security in a foreign country. The challenges of integration, financial stability, and experiences of discrimination directly impact the students' well-being, both in physical and psychological terms. The findings from this highlight the gaps between policy frameworks and the lived experiences of international students.

A later study conducted by Sawir et al. (2012) emphasized the link between English-language proficiency and the overall security of students whose mother tongue is not English. The study,

interviewed 200 international students and discovered that language proficiency directly affects students' independence and sense of safety. This finding highlights the importance of language support services for international students to ensure their security and well-being (Sawir et al., 2012).

Another study by Forbes-Mewett et al. (2010) provides further insights from Beijing, emphasizing the major influence of parental concerns on the security perceptions of international students. The study suggests that security is a key factor for families when selecting study-abroad destinations. It recommends that educational institutions address the security concerns of both students and their families to create a supportive environment (Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Shao, 2010).

In addition, Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) explored the complexities surrounding the security needs of international students in Australia. Through interviews with Monash University's community, they examined how cultural foreignness and adaptation challenges impact students' security perceptions. Their research emphasizes the need for universities to adopt a holistic approach to supporting international students, encompassing physical, social, and cultural aspects to enhance their sense of security (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008).

Various studies have also explored the complex interplay between subjective and objective security perceptions. Schneier (2008) and Stoetman (2019) highlight the discrepancy between perceived and actual security, influenced by cognitive and cultural factors. Nyman's (2021) and Ferhani and Nyman's (2023) work emphasize the everyday security dimensions, using participatory photography to explore space, practice, and affect. Research on international students, similar to the study of Sawir et al. (2009), further develops this dialogue, revealing the multi-layered nature of their security perceptions shaped by social, economic, and personal factors. These studies stress the importance of a well-rounded approach to understanding security perceptions in different contexts.

Overall, research exploring the everyday security perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, Finland, is lacking in the current literature. This study addresses this gap by examining the complex relationship between security perceptions and the everyday life of international degree students. The research questions of this study, guided by the understanding brought by the literature, will be presented in the following chapter.

In summary, this background description provides a solid foundation for exploring the everyday security perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, Finland. By combining existing

knowledge, the review outlines the current research landscape. It highlights the importance of examining the interplay between security perceptions and the broader study-abroad context.

3. Research needs, questions, and scope

The main objective of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the everyday security experiences and perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, Finland. This specific group is in a unique position, as they are pursuing their academic journey in a foreign environment, which presents them with specific challenges that can affect their sense of security. These challenges can include language barriers, cultural adjustment issues, financial anxiety, creating new social networks, and familiarizing themselves with the local security landscape (Nadal-Vicens & Beresin, 2021). However, there is still a gap in understanding how these factors interplay in the context of their daily lives in Tampere.

This study aims to understand how international degree students feel in their everyday lives. It looks at the factors affecting their feelings about safety and highlights both the challenges and opportunities they face. The purpose of the study is to provide recommendations for policies and practices that will help improve their safety and well-being.

Research question and sub-questions

Main research question:

- What are the everyday security perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, Finland?

The main question aims to understand how international students perceive the concept of security. It looks at physical safety, as well as psychological well-being, social belonging, and environmental comfort.

Sub-questions:

- How do international degree students in Tampere define and experience security in their everyday lives?
- What factors contribute to international degree students' sense of security or insecurity in Tampere?
- How can photovoice empower them to identify, address, and promote solutions to improve their security?

Scope

The study focuses specifically on international degree students studying in Tampere, Finland. It explores their perceptions of everyday security within Tampere and its immediate surroundings. Security perceptions include their feelings of safety, comfort, and overall well-being in various contexts of daily life. The study investigates how different aspects of everyday life, such as transportation, housing, social interactions, and leisure activities, impact the security perceptions of international degree students.

Furthermore, the study covers a specific time frame of three months to capture the experiences and perceptions of international degree students throughout their time in Tampere. The study considers demographic factors such as age, gender, nationality, academic level, and field of study to understand potential differences in security perceptions.

The study's findings may affect universities, local authorities, and organizations supporting international students. The results also include recommendations for improving the security and well-being of international degree students in Tampere.

4. Methodology

4.1 Methodological choice and research strategy

The study approach was inductive, meaning that the researcher aimed to understand a specific situation better to develop a general theory. It is a common approach for qualitative research, making a generalization based on observing a sample and looking for patterns. The conclusion is probable but not specific (Verhoeven, 2015).

The study is qualitative; the methods of photovoice, also known as participatory photography, and focus group discussion (FGD), were used. Photovoice uses photography to enable participants to share their perspectives and experiences (Wang & Burris, 1997). In photovoice, participants take photos reflecting their experiences on a topic of interest. The photographs are then used as a basis for discussion and reflection in group settings, allowing participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of the images (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice can be considered a form of visual ethnography as it combines visual data collection techniques with ethnographic principles.

Photovoice is often used in community-based research, where it is used to give a voice to underrepresented groups, such as women, youth, and marginalized communities (Wang & Burris, 1997; Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004). It is a participatory research method that empowers participants by allowing them to share their stories and experiences in their own words and on their own terms. The resulting data from photovoice is often rich and multi-layered, providing insights into participants' lived experiences that other research methods may not capture (Wass et al., 2020). It can also raise awareness and understanding of complex issues and challenge existing stereotypes and biases (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Using photovoice in this study allowed international degree students to document their everyday security-related experiences using photographs and share their stories in their own words. This approach helped reveal security aspects that may be difficult to express through other research methods, such as the emotional impact of feeling unsafe in public spaces. Photovoice also leads to collaboration between the researchers and the participants as well as between the participants. By allowing students to share their experiences and perspectives, photovoice can help build a sense of community and shared purpose among international degree students.

The ontology of photovoice research is constructivist, meaning that reality is viewed as socially constructed, and multiple interpretations exist (Allen, 1994). The focus was on participants' subjective experiences and how social context shapes their understanding of the world. In photovoice research, the participants are seen as active representatives who create meaning through their social interactions rather than passive objects studied by the researcher (Allen, 1994).

The epistemology of photovoice research is also constructivist. Knowledge is not viewed as an objective universal truth but as a product of social interactions and subjective experiences (Allen, 1994). In photovoice research, knowledge is generated through the collaborative process of participants' reflections, discussions, and interpretations of the photographs they take. Participants' perspectives and experiences are valued and treated as valid sources of knowledge. The researcher's role is to facilitate this process by creating a supportive and respectful environment that encourages the participants' self-expression and mutual learning (Allen, 1994). Constructivist ontology and epistemology emphasize the importance of social context and subjective experiences in shaping knowledge and reality. The aim was to give voice to marginalized communities and empower them to co-create knowledge and drive social change.

It is important to note that photovoice has some limitations as a research method. For example, the quality of the photographs and the interpretation of the visual data can be influenced by factors such as participants' cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the researcher needs to be aware of these limitations and take steps to ensure that the data collected is reliable and valid. A more in-depth look into the detailed limitations of this study can be found in section 6.2.

In addition, photovoice is a more time-consuming method for participants, as they need to take pictures for at least a couple of weeks, attend interviews, and optionally participate in a focus group discussion (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos & Nieuwendyk, 2011). Photovoice participants are often recruited through community organizations or networks, which may limit the diversity of perspectives represented. This can result in a sampling bias that may not accurately represent the community. The interpretation of the photographs and their meanings can be subjective, and the researcher's interpretation of the photos can be influenced by their biases and perspectives (Nyman, 2021).

Photovoice is a qualitative research method with no aim to produce statistically representative data (Allen, 1994). The findings from photovoice studies are specific to the context of the study. They may not be generalizable to other settings or populations. Finally, there are ethical considerations

around the use of photography in research, including consent, privacy, and confidentiality issues. This is further discussed in section 4.6.

To gather detailed insights into the daily security perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, a combination of photovoice and focus group discussion (FGD) were used. Photovoice was the primary methodological tool, while FGD was a supplementary approach. This decision aligns with the recommendations of Wang and Burris (1997), who emphasize the value of integrating photovoice with other qualitative methods to deepen the analysis.

After the photovoice phase, participants engaged in more detailed conversations about the themes and potential solutions presented by the photographic data during the FGD. Combining both methods allowed for the strengths of each approach to be utilized: Photovoice enabled participants to visually capture and reflect on their personal experiences, while the focus group discussion provided a platform for collective reflection and problem-solving. The FGD's dynamic interaction created a collaborative environment where participants could build upon the visual narratives from photovoice. This led to a more comprehensive and solution-oriented dialogue about their security perceptions.

4.2 Population and sample

The population of this study is international degree students in Tampere, Finland. International degree students are actively enrolled in a degree program at a higher education institution in Tampere. They will stay for an extended period, which may influence their feelings of security. Furthermore, international degree students may experience more problems and opportunities than exchange students. These can include navigating the educational system or looking for work, which may impact their perceptions of security. As a result, they are a more concentrated and relevant demographic to research than all international students combined.

Furthermore, foreign degree students were better suited for this study than any other international students because they have committed to studying in Tampere, Finland, for an extended period. This means they are more likely to be familiar with the local culture and community and have a better awareness of the security situation in the region. International degree students who have just arrived in Finland may potentially contribute valuable views and perspectives to the study. While they may not have as much knowledge of the local culture and society as individuals who have lived in Finland for extended periods, their perceptions of security may be more immediate and reflect their first impressions and experiences in Tampere.

Moreover, international degree students who have recently arrived in Tampere might have experienced a unique transition to a new country, which may have an impact on their perception of security. Therefore, incorporating these students into the research process in Finland could provide a more diverse range of perspectives and insights.

Tampere's universities provide degree programs in various subjects, making it a popular choice for overseas students. In Tampere, international degree students come from all over the world, with many of them being from Asia and various European countries. In most cases, they are enrolled in bachelor's or master's degree programs in business, engineering, and social sciences. Fifty international degree programs are available with around two thousand international degree students (City of Tampere, n.d.).

The number of international students is growing. In 2021, TAMK alone had 660 foreign-degree students, which rose from 585 in 2020 (Educations Statistics Finland, 2021a). Over 60% of international students are from non-EU countries, with most being from Vietnam, China, Russia, Bangladesh, and Kenya (Tampere Universities, 2021). Tampere University, on the other hand, had 1,560 international degree students (Educations Statistics Finland, 2021b).

As the research is qualitative, ensuring an entirely representative sample is not essential but should be selected wisely (Patton, 1990). For this reason, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling, also called non-probability sampling, includes choosing research participants based on specific criteria that align with the research question or objectives (Verhoeven, 2015).

The inclusion criteria for this study were international students currently enrolled in a degree program in one of Tampere's educational institutions and residing in Tampere. They should also own a smartphone or other device that can take pictures. They also were available for interviews and consented to participate. The respondents included both male and female students, offering a gender-inclusive perspective.

The participants of this study are from different countries such as Eastern Europe, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, Pakistan, Vietnam, Brazil, Iran, the Netherlands, Thailand, Poland, and Italy. This broad geographical representation ensured a wide range of perspectives. Additionally, the students belong to various disciplines and academic levels, including bachelor's to Ph.D. programs. They are enrolled in different faculties at Tampere. Exclusion criteria were, for example, exchange students and students uncomfortable using photography to express their views. These criteria helped ensure that the research was conducted with a relevant and engaged group of international degree students who could provide valuable insights into the topic of everyday security perceptions in Tampere.

The sample size was sixteen participants (Table 1). A recruitment strategy was used to find a sample, including contacting potential participants through WhatsApp groups and social media. The international student associations' WhatsApp and telegram groups of the Erasmus Student Network Finns and Internationals in Tampere (ESN FINT ry) and the International Teekkari Guild INTO Tampere ry aided in the recruitment of participants. The purpose of the study, the requirements, and the expected time commitment were outlined clearly. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained, including explaining the study, potential risks and benefits, and the participants' rights. Next to the interviews, there was also a focus group discussion (FGD), which four of the photovoice and interview participants attended.

Table 1. Interviewee Information.

Respondent Number	University	Level	Gender	Country of Origin	Time spent in Tampere
1	TAMK	Bachelor	Female	Eastern Europe*	2 years
2	TUNI	Master	Male	Germany	2 years
3	TUNI	PhD	Female	India	4 years
4	TUNI	Master	Female	Italy	2 years
5	TUNI	Master	Female	Japan	2 years
6	TUNI	Master	Female	Russia	2 years
7	TUNI	Master	Female	Pakistan	2 years
8	TUNI	Bachelor	Male	Vietnam	2 years
9	TUNI	Master	Female	Brazil	4 years
10	TAMK	Bachelor	Female	Germany	2 years
11	TUNI	Master	Female	Iran	1 year
12	TUNI	Master	Male	Netherlands	4 years
13	TUNI	Master	Female	Thailand	1 year
14	TUNI	Bachelor	Female	Poland	3 months
15	TUNI	Master	Female	Italy	2 years
16	TUNI	Master	Male	Bangladesh	2 years

*Respondent did not want to be identified by specific country.

For the focus group discussion, four interview respondents participated. The group comprised students from four different nationalities and academic backgrounds, reflecting a broad range of experiences and perspectives. Due to the requested confidentiality of the respondents, no

identifiable details on the FGD respondents can be given. In the remainder of this thesis, the FGD respondents will be referred to by letters A, B, C, and D. The discussion was led by a moderator (the researcher) and involved active student participation, encouraging an exchange of ideas and experiences.

4.3 Data collection

Collecting data with photo voice took the following steps (adapted from Nykiforuk, Vallianatos, & Nieuwendyk, 2011):

1. Planning: Planning included sampling the participants and preparing the study's logistics, including the meetings' frequency and duration.

2. Initial Meeting: The initial meeting served as an introduction to the research and method of photovoice. Objectives, deliverables, and the timeline were discussed during this meeting. Most importantly, ethical considerations were discussed, and participants could ask questions. Everyone interested received a participant guide to introduce them to the concept of the research (Appendix 1). Four students were present in the meeting. To make sure that all students who expressed interest could participate, even those who were not able to participate in the initial meeting received the participant guide. Overall, the initial meeting in photovoice research aimed to establish a rapport with participants, provide an understanding of the research's purpose and process, and set expectations for participation.

3. Photography: In this phase, participants took photos representing their experiences and perceptions of the research question. The pictures were all taken with their smartphone cameras. It lasted two to four weeks. A more detailed timeline is given below (Table 2). A limit of 30 photographs per participant was given to make the research and interview feasible within the time frame.

4. Semi-structured Interview (~25-60 minutes): The interviews took place after the photography phase had ended. The interview was semi-structured and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. The interview guidelines guided the participants in discussing their photographs and which ones were most meaningful to them. Questions concerning the pictures were based on a previous photovoice study (Ronzi, Pope, Orton, & Bruce, 2016). The interview guideline can be found in Appendix 2. It was made clear that the focus was on perceptions and experiences rather than the pictures. The pictures were intended to serve as visual aids to improve the interview discussion. The last step was to ask for feedback about

the participants' experience with the photovoice method. Most of the interviews took place in person, whereas four took place online per the requests of the respondents.

5. Focus Group Discussion (~1 hour): After the interviews, the participants were invited to a focus group discussion where they could discuss the main issues brought up during the interviews and brainstorm recommendations to improve them. The outline of the discussion can be found in Appendix 3. The researcher moderated the session to maintain focus on the relevant topics and ensure all participants could contribute. The FGD took place online as this provided flexibility for the participants and was a low threshold.

After these steps were complete, the data was analyzed. The analysis approach will be explained in the next section.

Table 2. Data Collection Timeline.

Week 1	Initial meeting and orientation
Week 3-8	Photography phase and Interviews
Week 10	Focus Group Discussion

4.4 Data analysis

Interview analysis

The photographs and their accompanying narratives were collected and transcribed. The primary focus of the data analysis was on these narratives. However, the photographs provided a visual backdrop, and the core of the analysis centered around coding the narratives. This process involved identifying themes or concepts from the students' verbal reflections. The data was coded twice, once guided by the research questions and once by Nyman's (2021) framework of everyday security. It involved looking at whether the data showed patterns, relationships, and insights into the students' perceptions of their everyday security.

The research questions guided the first round of coding. To link it to the first research question focusing on everyday security, the researcher looked for statements about what security means to them personally and how they experience it daily. For the second question, focusing on factors contributing to the students’ sense of security or insecurity, the researcher looked for specific

factors mentioned by students that influence their feelings of security or insecurity. Finally, for the third question focusing on the photovoice method, the researcher looked into how the discussion may have empowered the students or increased their awareness of security issues. The recommendations developed during the discussion were also documented.

Nyman's (2021) framework categorizes everyday security into space, practice, and affect. These dimensions guided the second round of coding. For space, the research looked for mentions of specific locations or aspects of the physical environment in Tampere (e.g., university campus, city infrastructure, public transport, housing) and how these spaces contribute to feelings of security or insecurity. For practice, the researcher looked for cases where students discussed their daily routines, habits, and interactions with others. Finally, for affect, the researcher focused on the emotional responses and feelings described by the students, such as comfort, fear, anxiety, or belonging. This could include reactions to specific events or general feelings about living in Tampere.

The coded narratives then underwent a thematic analysis. This phase was critical for identifying common themes or patterns from the students' descriptions and experiences (Braun & Clark, 2006). The analysis revealed the international degree students' perspectives on their sense of security, using the narratives as the primary data source. The photovoice methodology was used as a data collection tool to empower students. They actively reflected upon and interpreted the emerging themes, which were important for answering the research questions.

The final data analysis stage involved synthesizing these findings under each dimension and research question. This synthesis focused on interpreting the narratives to draw conclusions about the international degree students' experiences and perceptions of everyday security in Tampere. The outcomes of this analysis were used for the focus group discussion to develop appropriate recommendations to enhance these students' well-being and security.

While the emphasis of the analysis was on the narratives, the photographs served a complementary role. They acted as visual aids to contextualize and enrich the narratives. The focus remained on the conversation connected to these photographs rather than the visual content itself. This ensured that the analysis was linked with the issues and themes most relevant to the participants. Thematic analysis offers numerous advantages for data analysis, as it is a flexible and accessible method that can provide detailed insights. It is well-suited for participatory research paradigms, making it ideal for researchers at different experience levels (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Focus group discussion analysis

After the focus group discussion (FGD) was completed, the first step in data analysis involved transcribing the recorded session. This transcription ensured that all participant contributions were thoroughly documented. An initial review of this transcript was conducted to gain a full understanding of the discussion's content and dynamics.

The transcript then underwent a detailed coding process. Statements, expressions, and themes related to international students' security perceptions and improvement recommendations in Tampere were identified. The coding was mainly guided by the third sub-question, which focused on student empowerment and recommendations. A combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches was employed. The deductive coding focused on categorizing data according to predefined themes (such as security concerns, roles of stakeholders, and recommendations for improvement). The inductive coding aided in identifying new, unforeseen themes.

The coded data then underwent thematic analysis to refine key themes. This analysis focused on comprehending the complexities of international students' security perceptions, the roles of different stakeholders, recommendations for security improvements, and the effectiveness of current measures. Special attention was given to contrasting opinions or unique insights that could provide a deeper understanding or new perspectives.

Combining both analyses

The themes from the FGD were compared and contrasted with those identified through the photovoice method. This step was crucial for data triangulation and drawing a comprehensive picture of the security perceptions among international students. The anonymized photos presented during the FGD were used to support and enrich the narrative data, providing visual evidence of the themes discussed.

The final phase involved synthesizing the identified themes to create a sound narrative about the security perceptions of international students in Tampere. This narrative was interpreted in the context of the broader research objectives, aiming to understand how these perceptions aligned with or differed from existing literature and frameworks (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos, & Nieuwendyk, 2011).

4.5 Trustworthiness

In research, validity and reliability are two crucial concepts that help to assess the quality and trustworthiness of the research methods and findings. Reliability means how consistently a test gives the same results, while validity means how well it measures what it is supposed to measure (Verhoeven, 2015). Validity also ensures that the findings of a study accurately reflect the reality they intend to represent. In qualitative research, reliability and validity are replaced with trustworthiness, which comprises truth value, consistency, confirmability, and applicability (Noble & Smith, 2015; Cypress, 2017). In essence, it focuses on how much trust the readers have in the results of the study.

The study addressed the concept of truth value by providing a detailed account of the research context, data collection processes, and methods employed as outlined by Sutton-Brown's (2014) methodological guide on photovoice. This approach allows the readers to understand the environment where the study was conducted and immerse themselves in the participants' experiences.

To ensure consistency, the research design included rigorous data collection and analysis protocols. This involved recording and transcribing interviews and focus group discussions with the participants' consent to ensure the analysis was based on reliable information. The recording device was tested and the sound quality was checked before each interview. Keeping a consistent interview structure across all participants while still allowing for flexibility ensured that the data collected were comparable and consistent. Furthermore, on the recommendation of Catalani and Minkler (2010), two coding levels were conducted to enhance the research's quality. This strengthened the reliability of the findings.

In qualitative research, the researcher's perspective can have a significant impact on the study's direction and outcomes (Cypress, 2017). Thus, it is essential to pursue confirmability by reflecting on personal biases that might influence the data interpretation process. This self-awareness helped reduce the impact of the researcher's biases and ensured that the study's findings were based on the participants' experiences and not the researcher's biases. Noble and Smith (2015) and Cypress (2017) agree that carefully considering personal biases is critical in qualitative research.

The study evaluated the findings based on their applicability and how they can inform broader discussions, policies, and practices related to the safety of international students. However, the researcher acknowledged that photovoice has some limitations, including the subjective

interpretation of images and the possibility of researcher bias. These factors, combined with the specific non-random sampling method used in photovoice studies, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, Sutton-Brown (2014) highlights the value of photovoice in providing valuable perspectives into participants' realities. This study provides important insights into security perceptions, which can help create effective support structures for international students.

4.6 Ethical considerations

In this research, several ethical considerations were ensured based on the recommendations by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001). Especially, in regards to the photovoice methodology. Although Wang and Redwood-Jones' (2001) article is dated, it is still relevant when looking at the ethics within photovoice studies. The article covers topics such as informed consent and ownership of photographs by participants.

The most important consideration outlined by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) was obtaining informed consent from all participants. In this study, the purpose, methods, and participants' rights, including the right to withdraw without consequences, were explained during the initial meeting, as well as in the research summary that was provided to all interested parties. All consents were documented in writing; the data consent form can be found in Appendix 4.

As necessary in most qualitative methods, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was of utmost importance (Kaiser, 2009). All identifiable information was securely stored and made accessible only to the researcher. Any dissemination of findings was presented in a manner that safeguarded the anonymity of participants. Particular attention was given to photographs to ensure no identifiable features or locations were disclosed without permission.

Given the diverse backgrounds of the international students, the study was conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect. The researcher put in efforts to accommodate language preferences and cultural norms. Overall, the ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study, including ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, respecting cultural differences, and safeguarding participants' well-being (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Looking at the discussion of ownership, the participants were informed that they are and stay the sole owners of the pictures they took. This means that the pictures presented in this thesis are not

owned by the researcher but are simply lent by the participants with their consent for them to be published. This is also based on the practices of Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001).

A key focus was accurately and respectfully representing the participants' voices and experiences. Quotes were included in the results section to portray participants' voices accurately. The analysis and interpretation of data were conducted truthfully. The findings of this study aim to positively contribute to the academic community and potentially to the broader societal understanding of international students' security perceptions.

5. Main results of the research

The data collected comprises sixteen interviews with international degree students in Tampere, Finland, and one focus group discussion with four interview participants. These students represent diverse cultural backgrounds, genders, and academic disciplines, providing a mixed perspective on their everyday security perceptions.

The interviews covered a range of themes related to everyday security, including but not limited to physical safety, emotional well-being, cultural adaptation, social interactions, and experiences within the academic environment and the city. Examples of photos taken by respondents are included to show how they were used to deepen the interview. However, they were not part of the analysis. The focus group session focused on the main themes gathered during the interview and possible solutions. They included concerns about drunken behavior in public spaces, language barriers, and communication challenges with local authorities.

This section is organized according to the sub-questions of the study.

5.1 Definitions of Everyday Security

For the sub-question "How do international degree students in Tampere define and experience security in their everyday lives?", the interviews provided good insights. Table 3 presents a summary of the security definitions and experiences and the concerns of international students in Tampere. A more comprehensive coding table, structured per respondent can be found in Appendix 5.

Table 3. Summary of Security Perceptions and Experiences among International Degree Students in Tampere.

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Definitions of Security	Absence of Danger	Refers to the lack of immediate threats or anxiety, contributing to a sense of peace.
	Emotional Well-being	Includes feelings of ease, the ability to express oneself, and mental health considerations.
	Physical Well-being	Encompasses physical safety from harm and fulfillment of basic needs.
Experiences of Security	University Settings	Generally perceived as secure, fostering a positive environment for study and socialization.
	Public Spaces	Mixed feelings; some areas like parks are deemed safe, while others, especially at night, are not.

	Transportation	Public transport is generally considered safe, though concerns arise regarding crowdedness and late hours.
Notable Security Concerns	Social Integration	Challenges such as language barriers and cultural differences lead to feelings of isolation.
	Economic Stability	Concerns around job security, financial stability, and accommodation issues.
	Environmental Factors	Includes issues like road safety, cleanliness, and seasonal challenges (e.g., icy roads).

Table 3 provides a structured overview of international degree students' daily security experiences, resulting from the interview transcripts. The interpretations of security among students were diverse, including the absence of physical threats and a broader sense of emotional well-being. The diversity of the interpretations is shown in the detailed coding table found in Appendix 5.

Some students linked security with their relationships and their social surroundings. For example, respondent 5 defined security as “what makes me feel safe and comfortable, feels like home, and there are no disruptions.” This emphasizes the importance of feeling welcomed and included. In turn, they avoid situations that cause them to feel excluded or uncomfortable. On the other hand, respondent 5 said, “Insecurity is something that makes me feel anxious, nervous, and frustrated.”

When the students talked about their experiences, they provided specific examples of when they felt safe or unsafe. These experiences were closely linked to their daily routines and environments in Tampere. For example, respondent 2 stated that security means "feeling at ease in your environment even when something unexpected comes up." This feeling of ease is often related to the physical aspects of their surroundings, like the safety of university campuses, public spaces, and housing conditions.

Several students, such as respondent 6, felt secure in the "ability to do everyday things without any difficulties or problems and without feeling afraid of doing something." This also connects to financial economic security and being able to afford daily expenses. Some students felt safe in well-lit and well-maintained areas and felt comfortable in places they were familiar with, like their university offices or apartments, as highlighted by respondents 4 and 8 (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Well-lit street at night (Respondent 4)

Figure 4. Safety of my home (Respondent 8)

Some students mentioned feeling insecure in specific public spaces, particularly at night or when faced with language barriers or cultural differences. For example, respondent 7 emphasized the importance of feeling safe and being able to "express yourself, without the fear of being judged or any harm coming to you."

The students shared personal stories highlighting how cultural background, past experiences, and personal habits influence their security perceptions. Some common themes that emerged from these narratives included encounters with drunken behavior in public areas, difficulties in adapting to Finnish society, and navigating cultural norms. As respondent 10 openly stated, security involves "No immediate danger of being attacked or raped or run over by a tram." These factors often influence their feelings of safety or vulnerability in different settings around the city. For example, respondent 11 talked about "Not being worried about losing things and my personal space," reflecting on the everyday aspects of security.

In summary, security for international degree students in Tampere is a multidimensional concept. It is shaped by a combination of physical safety, social interactions, and personal experiences. Respondents 12 and 13 noted that security is about the comfort of daily life without fear and the ability to focus on personal well-being without the mental energy spent on fear. Respondent 15's perception of feeling secure further highlighted this, saying,

> From the moment you exit your house and go on with your routine there are not many interruptions because small things like falling can impact you, public transportation has consequences if it's late. Security is made of small things but together it makes a whole.

These students navigate a landscape of security, where their feelings of safety and comfort are continually shaped by their interactions with their environment and the people around them. In general, there was a positive attitude and feeling of safety in Tampere. However, there were some factors contributing to the sense of unease which will be addressed in the next section.

5.2 Factors contributing to a sense of security and insecurity

For the research sub-question, "What factors contribute to international degree students' sense of security or insecurity in Tampere?" the coding of the interview transcripts was done twice. The first coding was done according to specific factors that are contributing to security and insecurity (Table 4), and the second coding was done according to Nyman's everyday security framework (2021) (Table 5). The detailed coding tables for each can be found in Appendices 6 and 7.

Table 4. Summary of Factors Contributing to Security and Insecurity among International Degree Students in Tampere.

	Security	**Insecurity**	**Additional Notes**
Environment	- Friendly university environment - Cozy city center, safe public spaces - Cleanliness, well-preserved nature	- Exclusion due to language barriers - Stares from men, intimidation in nightlife - Unsafe construction areas, poor road safety	- Integration challenges are significant for non-native speakers - Gender-specific concerns noted - Environmental cleanliness associated with security
Infrastructure	- Cheap university food - Safe public transport, reliable public services	- Insecurity in crowded public transport - Challenges during winter, icy roads	- Affordability and seasonal changes affect the sense of security
Social & Cultural	- Tight friend group, sense of home - Diverse and inclusive environment	- Difficulty integrating, cultural adaptation - Fear of racism, feeling foreign	- Importance of social networks and cultural familiarity - Cultural and racial dynamics influence security perceptions
Financial & Academic	- Scholarship security, affordable student meals - Feeling of general safety, quiet environment	- Job security concerns, credit requirements - Financial and housing stability concerns	- Financial stability and economic factors linked to sense of security
Health & Safety	- Safety in public offices, residences - Trust in police and safety in public events	- Concerns about health insurance, social security - Unsafe areas, experiences of catcalling	- Health and social welfare concerns affect security - Personal experiences critical

Based on the interview transcripts, table 4 shows the factors that contribute to the security or insecurity of international degree students in Tampere. The table offers a detailed understanding of the different elements that affect the safety and well-being of the students.

A key factor in students' sense of security was their **physical environment**. The safety and maintenance of public spaces, including transportation systems, university campuses, and housing, were frequently mentioned as contributing positively to their sense of security. Respondent 11 emphasized the trust they have in the university campus and other students as students usually leave their coats and belongings in a public wardrobe with no security (Figure 5).

Respondent 6 highlighted the contrast in feeling secure while walking through forests in Finland as opposed to her experiences in Russia, stating, “In Finland, it's absolutely normal and like all the time you never feel scared” (Respondent 6). On the contrary, poorly lit areas or specific neighborhoods were associated with feelings of insecurity. Respondent 4 described feeling cozy in a busy city center yet uneasy in deserted areas, reflecting on how urban spaces influence safety perceptions: “I felt so like cozy because there was a lot of people... in contrast to when everything was dark and this building looks kind of creepy” (Respondent 4) (Figure 6).

Tampere was generally perceived as quite a safe city. Darkness was not necessarily seen as an issue (Figure 7). However, some factors made respondents feel unsafe. An example can be **e-scooters** which Respondent 15 highlighted as a danger to pedestrians: “I think they should be regulated otherwise they can be a source of danger for people, especially because students use them a lot” (Respondent 15) (Figure 8).

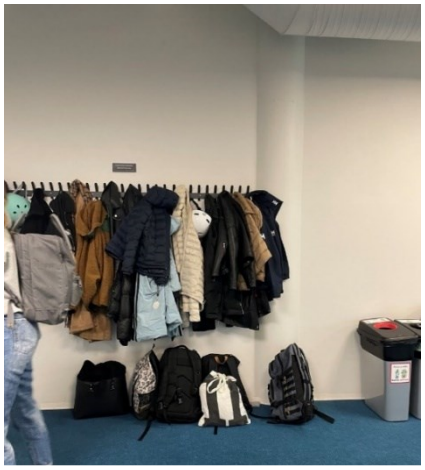

Figure 5. "This gives me this feeling of safety because people are just leaving their stuff somewhere. You don't know who might pass by, but you can trust the community" (Respondent 11).

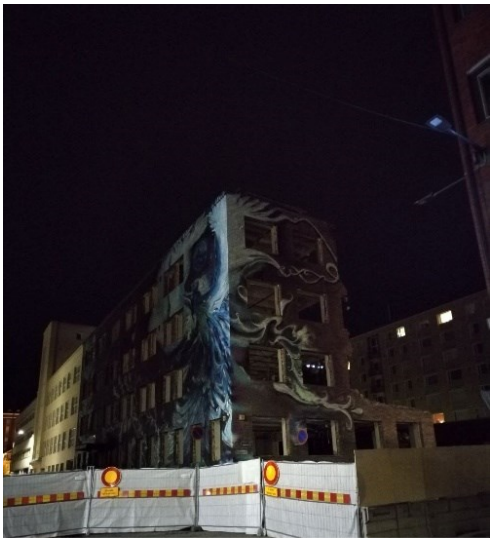

Figure 6. " …in contrast to when everything was dark and this building looks kind of creepy" (Respondent 4).

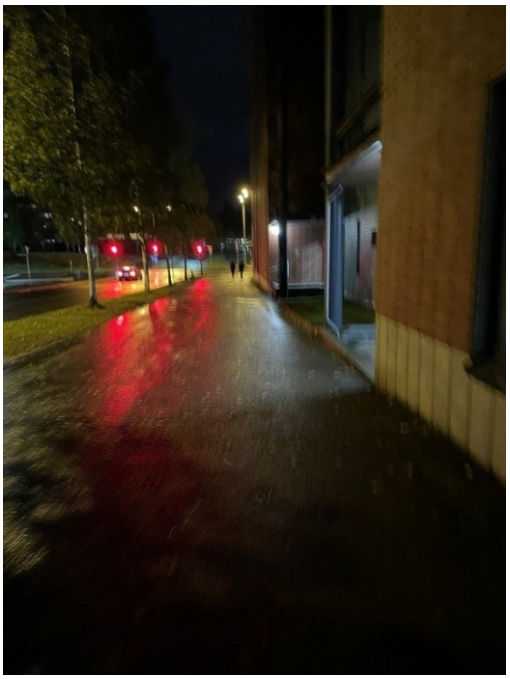

Figure 7. "It was just late in the night. I was going home and I took this picture because I wasn't feeling [uncomfortable] at all." (Respondent 11).

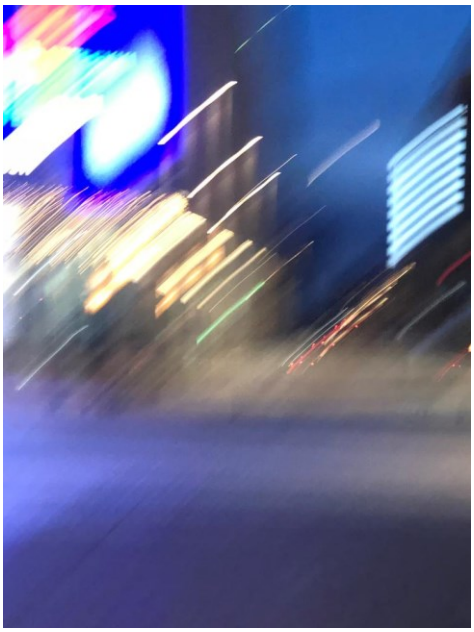

Figure 8. "I think that they are not safe because they are not regulated so people just think that they can do quite whatever like drink when they're using it and everything." (Respondent 15)

Social interactions emerged as another significant factor. The students' experiences with the local Finnish population and other international students greatly influenced their sense of security. Feelings of inclusivity, effective communication, and positive social encounters fostered a sense of safety and belonging. However, experiences of **social exclusion**, **language barriers**, and difficulties in **cultural adaptation** often led to feelings of insecurity and isolation. This is exemplified by Respondent 7's changing perception of security due to the spread of a keypad access code, noting, "That code is being circulated... which means now every random has that code so now the same thing that made me feel safe for so long now makes me feel unsafe" (Respondent 7).

Additionally, Respondent 5 discussed the challenge and insecurity brought on by language barriers: "Being in this kind of situation makes me feel so insecure because I don't know what is going on" (Respondent 5), highlighting how communication difficulties can contribute to feelings of vulnerability and disconnect in a foreign environment. This feeling can already appear when not understanding bus signs and advertisements at bus stops (Figure 9).

Regarding **inclusivity**, Respondent 8 discussed the sense of belonging and security derived from witnessing diversity acceptance in their environment. This was shown by their observation of inclusive signals in their surroundings, such as a rainbow flag, which they interpreted as a sign of welcoming diversity (Figure 10). They appreciated the presence of differences and diversity,

contrasting it with their experience in a more homogeneous culture where deviation from the norm could lead to feelings of alienation.

Respondents 2 and 8 also discussed the importance of **having a voice in society**, especially as an international student. They described how seeing a modified sign during a sitting protest symbolized freedom of speech and suggested that their opinions could be voiced without restriction. However, they also expressed concern about the vulnerability of international students, who might be easily affected by societal issues and government policies without having a say in these matters.

Figure 9. “It’s frustrating because I don’t even understand these advertisements.” (Respondent 5)

Figure 10. "I also really appreciate it when there are signs that they accept a difference here... seeing this makes me feel secure about that, like they do appreciate difference here" (Respondent 8)

Personal experiences and emotional well-being were also highlighted as important to the students' security perceptions. Individual backgrounds, including their previous experiences in their home countries or other foreign countries, impacted how they perceived security in Tampere. Respondent 3 discussed how childhood experiences and past incidents influence feelings of safety or insecurity: "It's the childhood... as well as the incidents that have affected your life in general that make you feel safe or unsafe". This is repeated by respondent 11: “You know, this is something that

I compare with my own home country. So these things are the things that I didn't have there but now I have and they fulfill me.”

Emotional responses to the environment, such as comfort, anxiety, or fear, contributed to their overall sense of security. These feelings often reflected their journeys, coping mechanisms, and adaptation to the new cultural and academic setting. Respondent 9's concern about **nightlife** and personal safety demonstrates this point: “The only time I was scared cold was when... people would come to me and say directly like hi you're so pretty or whatever but I think this never bothered me never made me feel unsteady” (Respondent 9).

Respondent 5 also discussed the impact of **seasonal changes** on her emotional state, relating it to her sense of security: "Seeing this kind of weather... makes me feel that winter is around the corner and I've experienced winter twice already and it was not really the happiest moment for me" (Respondent 5). The effect of the weather was also highlighted by respondent 9 (Figure 11).

Figure 11. “The darkness and the icey side walks really affect my mood.” (Respondent 9)

Economic and practical aspects also played a role in shaping the students' sense of security. **Financial stability**, access to necessary resources, and practical considerations like housing and employment opportunities influenced their daily lives. Concerns about **economic security**, especially for non-EU residents, and the practicalities of living in a foreign country, were repeated topics in their stories. Respondent 8 emphasized the impact of economic stability on security: “A scholarship is one of the most important things that gave me security feelings” (Respondent 8).

They also touched upon the positive impact cheap but good student lunches at university have on his daily life and finances (Figure 12).

Figure 12. “Whenever I feel like that I just go to a restaurant and grab a quick lunch without worrying too much about the money" (Respondent 8)

Mainly **job security** emerged as a central influencing the sense of security among international degree students in Tampere. The uncertainty surrounding employment prospects, especially for non-EU students, impacted their overall sense of stability and well-being in Finland. This concern was not just about finding a job but also about the implications of employment on their **legal status** and prospects. As Respondent 16 expressed:

> It's a bit of a different perspective for non-EU students because your position depends a lot on your residence permit and you depend on work and that it isn’t so easy to find in Finland. You don't feel as comfortable in and safe about your future. (Respondent 16)

This statement underscores the nature of job security with other facets of living abroad, such as legal status and personal security. It highlights the complex challenges international students face in navigating their academic and professional journeys in a foreign country.

In essence, table 5 reflects that the sense of security or insecurity among international degree students in Tampere is influenced by a complex interplay of environmental, social, personal, and

practical factors. Each of these elements uniquely shapes their experiences and perceptions, reflecting the diverse and subjective nature of security as experienced by these students.

For the second coding, the experiences and perceptions of the students were categorized under the thematic dimensions of space, practice, and affect according to Nyman's (2021) framework (Table 5). It illustrates the interplay between students' physical environment, daily practices, and emotional responses, providing a nuanced view of their experiences and challenges in navigating security in a new cultural and academic setting. A more thorough coding table structured per respondent can be found in Appendix 7.

Table 5. Summary of Security and Insecurity Factors among International Degree Students in Tampere Using Nyman's (2021) Framework.

Dimension	Factors Contributing to Security	Factors Contributing to Insecurity
Space	- City centers - University campuses - Parks - Accommodation - Public places	- Nightclubs - Tram/bus stops at night - Areas with graffiti - Crowded places - Construction zones - Icy roads - Remote areas
Practice	- Participation in student events - Pedestrian and cycling activities - Navigating nightlife safely	- Language barriers - Struggles with integration - Dependency on public transport - Exclusion due to language - Reactions to government changes
Affect	- Feelings of belonging - Comfort in clean/cozy environments - Mental security in social inclusion	- Xenophobia - Unease in nightclubs/crowded places - Anxiety related to road safety and icy conditions - Concerns about job and long-term security

Space

Students' perceptions of physical security in the space dimension were heavily influenced by their environment. This included feelings of safety in well-maintained public spaces and university environments, compared to concerns in poorly lit areas or neighborhoods perceived as unsafe. For example, Respondent 3 mentioned, "I feel unsafe in a crowd... but if I'm surrounded by my friends I feel safe" (Respondent 3), illustrating how the physical environment, coupled with social context, impacts their sense of security. Cultural and adaptation challenges also emerged, where students

navigated culturally significant spaces, like Finnish saunas or local festivals, and how these spaces impacted their sense of belonging and security. The road and sidewalk conditions in winter were also mentioned by many as a factor contributing to insecurity.

Practice

The practice dimension also impacted the students' security perceptions as it mainly focused on their actions and behaviors. This included their daily commutes through public transport and urban areas, and their attempts to adapt to Finnish cultural norms. Social interactions, particularly with the local Finnish population and other international students, played a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of security. Respondent 9's experience highlights this: "I feel very safe whenever I am in a park or a forest or in the area where there are just pedestrians and cyclists" (Respondent 9), showing how chosen practices in specific environments contribute to feelings of safety. Respondent 15 underlined this (Figure 13).

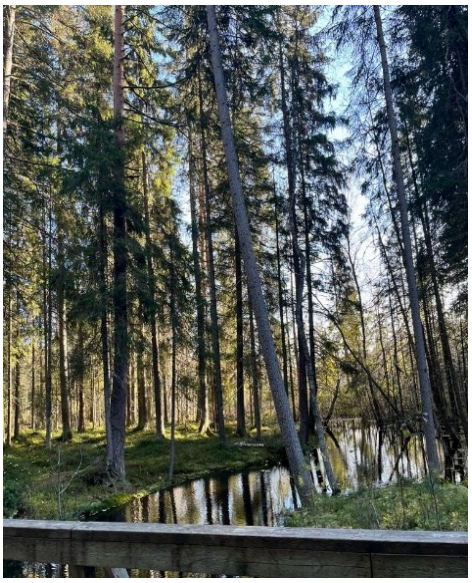

Figure 13. "The fact that there is such nice nature and quite well maintained gives me the idea that the city care wants me to walk and have this like nature experience in nature in a safe way" (Respondent 15)

Affect

In the affect dimension, emotional and psychological responses played a key role. The respondents felt secure in familiar environments and uncomfortable in others, which affected their sense of safety. Respondent 5's reflection on bus stops as a symbol of security demonstrated this: "Seeing this bus station makes me very secure... it means that I can go home" (Figure 14). Social interactions, including experiences of inclusion or exclusion and the challenges of language barriers and cultural differences, affected their emotional well-being. Economic and practical security also

played a role, as Respondent 8 described the double nature of financial stability on their emotions: "A scholarship... makes me feel secure and a bit insecure at the same time because I could lose it" (Respondent 8), highlighting the complex interplay between economic factors and emotional security (Figure 15).

Figure 14."Seeing this bus station makes me very secure... it means that I can go home" (Respondent 5)

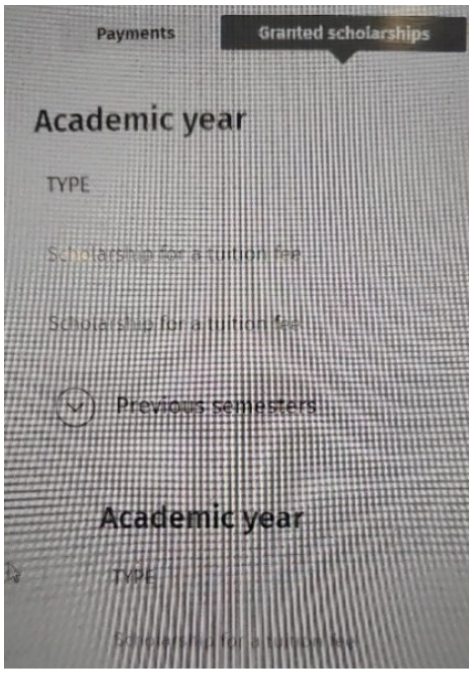

Figure 15. "A scholarship... makes me feel secure and a bit insecure at the same time because I could lose it" (Respondent 8)

During the focus group discussion, some factors were discussed in greater detail. Table 6 summarizes the main themes and insights that emerged during the discussion, categorized according to space, practice, and affect dimensions. One of the key themes that emerged was the difficulty caused by drunken behavior in public places. Students shared their experiences and concerns regarding encountering intoxicated individuals, highlighting how such encounters often make them feel uneasy and require them to be more alert. They described situations where they felt obligated to interact with drunk individuals to avoid any potential conflict or aggressive behavior, which demonstrates the negative effect of alcohol consumption on their sense of safety in public areas.

Table 6. Main Themes of the Focus Group Discussion according to Nyman's (2021) framework.

Dimension	Discussion	Quotes from FGD participants
Space	Expressed worry about encountering drunk individuals in public areas, which can make them feel unsafe. Also talked about the need for better bike lanes and other infrastructure improvements to improve safety perceptions	"Well, the first thing that comes into my mind is probably like, oh, groups of drunk people... I would feel a bit unsafe or I would be alert" (FGD respondent A)
Practice	Adaptive behaviors like avoiding eye contact with drunk individuals, seeking out crowded places or bars for safety, in nightlife situations. Cultural discussions about drinking habits and their influence on security.	"I just take a look around you know to observe my surroundings to see okay if they are out of control where should I run to... the safest task to get away from" (FGD respondent C)
Affect	Feelings of unease or alertness when encountering visibly drunk people. Emotional impacts of language barriers lead to difficulties in communication, especially in emergencies. Anxiety related to discrimination and not being fully integrated into the community.	"I think about situations... where there was this inability to communicate with [people], especially if the person is old... if I am hurt, and I need to go to the police, the language barrier will probably be an issue" (FGD respondent D)

During the discussion, a big issue highlighted was the language barrier and the communication problems resulting from it. The students expressed their difficulties, especially during emergencies, as the language barrier became a severe barrier in seeking assistance from authorities or medical services. Moreover, the lack of English support provided by public services, such as police stations, made it even harder for them to communicate effectively and get help when needed.

The focus group also discussed the complexities of navigating nightlife and social interactions. The students discussed their experiences in nightlife environments where they often felt uncomfortable

due to the unpredictable behavior of individuals who were under the influence of alcohol. They stressed the importance of staying alert and cautious, particularly in situations where alcohol hindered social boundaries.

During their discussion, the students discussed the challenges they faced while adjusting to the local cultural differences. They mainly reflected on the Finnish cultural practices, such as alcohol consumption and social interactions. The students shared their experiences of being treated differently or facing stereotypes due to being international students. This made them feel insecure. These experiences added to their struggle to adapt to the environment in Tampere.

In summary, the focus group discussion adds to the interview discussions on factors affecting the security perception of international degree students in Tampere. From dealing with drunken behavior in public spaces to navigating language barriers and cultural differences, these challenges can impact their daily lives and their sense of security in the city. The findings can be summarized according to Nyman's (2021) framework in Table 7. It combines the insights from both data sets and groups them under three thematic dimensions.

The combined insights suggest that the quality of public infrastructure and maintenance influences the perception of security in terms of space. There are also concerns related to safety in nightlife areas and certain neighborhoods. In the practical dimension, social practices such as transportation and cultural activities were found to have an impact on people's sense of security. Communication challenges and efforts to integrate into Finnish society were also highlighted as important factors. Finally, emotions ranging from comfort in familiar environments to anxiety in crowded or unfamiliar settings were recognized in the affect dimension. Adapting to a new culture and interacting with people from different backgrounds can have an emotional impact.

Table 7. Summary of the interviews and focus group discussion results using Nyman's Framework.

Dimension	Space (Physical Environment)	Practice (Actions/Behaviors)	Affect (Emotions/Feelings)
Interview Summaries	- Varied feelings of safety in different city areas, university campuses, and housing. - Concerns in poorly lit areas or specific neighborhoods perceived as unsafe.	- Daily routines and interactions with local and international communities. - Efforts to adapt to Finnish culture and language.	- Emotional well-being linked to physical and social environments. - Feelings of inclusion or exclusion impacting sense of security.
Focus Group Discussion	- Challenges with drunken behavior in public spaces. - Language barriers in accessing public services and emergency assistance.	- Navigating nightlife and managing interactions in social settings. - Adapting to local social norms and cultural practices.	- Anxiety and discomfort in certain social situations. - Emotional responses to adapting to a new culture and social environment.
Combined Insights	- Security perceptions are influenced by the quality of public infrastructure and maintenance. - Safety concerns in nightlife areas and specific neighborhoods.	- Social practices in daily life impact sense of security, including transportation and cultural activities. - Communication challenges and efforts to integrate into Finnish society.	- Range of emotions from comfort in familiar environments to anxiety in crowded or unfamiliar settings. - Emotional impact of cultural adaptation and social interactions.

5.3 Photovoice empowerment and potential solutions

The third research sub-question is "How can photovoice empower international degree students in Tampere to identify, address, and promote solutions to improve their security?". The main findings for this question, highlighting the identified security issues, how photovoice empowered participants, and the shared insights gained, can be found in Table 8. A detailed coding table per respondent on this can be found in Appendix 8.

Table 8. Summary of Security Issues Identified, Empowerment, and Collective Insights from the Photovoice Method.

Security Issues Identified Through Photovoice	Empowerment Through Photovoice	Shared Insights
- Personal and environmental safety - Social and cultural concerns - Infrastructure and public spaces - Financial and housing security	- A platform for sharing and reflecting - Increased situational- and self-awareness - Communication of security needs - Broader understanding of security needs	- Enhanced awareness and understanding of security - Identification of security concerns - Insights into environmental impact on security - Interconnectedness of different security aspects

Table 8 demonstrates how photovoice empowered the respondents to express their security concerns visually and verbally. It highlights the method's effectiveness in raising awareness of individual security issues and providing a platform for expression. Respondent 15 reflected:

> I started to think and look around and identify those elements... I realized how safe Tampere is compared to other places, but at the same time, I got myself to think, OK, there are also flaws and you need to be careful about them. (Respondent 15)

This indicates a heightened critical awareness of safety.

Photovoice served as a powerful tool for the students to express and document their security-related experiences: “It made me aware of things I didn’t pay attention to before” (Respondent 13). Respondent 11 further explains: “It helped me communicate my feelings better as I’m not that good with words so taking pictures was actually the best method for me”. These quotes demonstrate the

method's impact on awareness and communication. Through this approach, participants could better communicate their experiences of safety and insecurity.

During the photovoice process, students identified various security issues. They remarked on the significance of physical spaces and social dynamics in shaping their sense of security. For instance, one said, “It made me realize places that I’m getting anxious that I wasn’t aware of before” (Respondent 9). The method's visual focus allowed for such insights.

Moreover, photovoice empowered the students by providing a platform for their voices. Respondent 8 mentioned:

> I think that this interview and taking a picture was a really nice way to express my voice in terms of my opinions and safety. And it has in a way, increased also my own perception and it feels like my opinion counts. (Respondent 8)

This opinion was repeated by others, with Respondent 5 stating:

> From these pictures, you could explain how you feel. I thought I'm really used to living here and I thought I don't have any problems in my daily life anymore but actually there's so much stuff that is influencing my life without me noticing. (Respondent 5)

Using the photovoice method had some unique benefits for engaging participants and helping them become more self-aware. As Respondent 11 shared, “I found the reason that I participated in this study was this method of taking pictures because you don't have to fill in any forms. I didn’t have to write anything.” This highlights how the simplicity and accessibility of the photovoice technique can be effective in encouraging participation and reflection.

The visual aspect of the method also seemed to resonate more with some students than traditional written methods. For instance, Respondent 8 noted,

> It made me more aware because I remember and learn things more effectively if I use visuals. Thinking about this concept of security and taking pictures, I remember those moments more than by just writing it down. (Respondent 8)

This demonstrates how photovoice can accommodate different learning and expression styles, making it a handy research tool.

In summary, photovoice not only increased the students' awareness of their surroundings and personal security but also provided a unique and effective method of communication. This process transformed them from passive to active participants, capable of communicating their sense of security.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion aided in discussing potential solutions to the identified challenges. The starting point for discussion among the four focus group participants was the pictures they took. Based on these they were asked to identify areas that could be improved to enhance their safety and well-being. They suggested changes in public infrastructure and advocated for more inclusive social environments, and better support systems at their university. The photovoice study discussions also highlighted the need for greater awareness about the unique challenges faced by international students, both within the university community and the city as a whole.

During the focus group, the participants discussed the impact of drunken behavior in public spaces, which was a recurring topic that they found concerning their safety. A participant expressed,

> The potential danger of nightlife and clubs is way smaller but these increase reasonably when Finnish people get drunk. [...] It's like they don't have boundaries anymore and all their social boundaries are just suddenly gone. (Focus group respondent C)

To tackle this issue, the students came up with several suggestions, including raising awareness about such problems and proposing changes to alcohol policies. Additionally, they stressed the importance of having a wider range of social activities that go beyond drinking, which would provide safer and more inclusive options for socializing.

Participants expressed that language barriers and communication issues were the major concern. They faced difficulties, especially during emergencies, due to the lack of English language support when speaking with authorities like the police. One participant mentioned, "For example, I needed some when I went to the police station and I was kind of hoping that the police station had way more English language. [...] Or papers translated to English for me." (Focus group respondent D). Another added, "So, for example, translate official papers translate announcements to try to make the city as much available to international people as it is to Finnish people" (Focus group respondent B). These changes would significantly improve their ability to communicate effectively during critical situations.

The students stressed the important role that both the university and the city play in making them feel safe. They suggested creating better programs to help international students integrate. This could involve providing more personalized support and better ways to communicate. This approach would help with safety concerns and create a stronger sense of community among the students. During the discussion, the participants also addressed the university's responsibility in offering mental health assistance and emphasized the insufficient availability of such services. They recommended that expanding mental health support could be advantageous, particularly in light of foreign students' unique difficulties.

A participant suggested, "I think one of the main things is to raise awareness in different ways, one of the most accessible ways for us to do that is to take part in all these feedback surveys that are sent" (Focus group respondent A). They also noted, "While I believe that there are even more active ways to raise awareness it can be done through social media" (Focus group respondent A). The importance of community engagement was highlighted: "I also think that being present and letting them know that we exist, that international people exist and they want to participate in the life of the city" (Focus group respondent C).

A suggestion was made to create a hotline where students can anonymously report incidents. This would provide a platform for students to share their experiences and concerns, and allow for valuable data to be collected and used to influence policy decisions and security measures. The participants also emphasized the importance of community engagement and the need for programs to help international students integrate into the local society. Such initiatives could provide personalized support, help students find jobs, as mentioned by a respondent, "I think international House of Tampere has some events to help internationals find jobs" (Focus group respondent D), and create a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Categorized Solutions to Improve Security for International Students in Tampere

1. **Awareness and Cultural Change**:
    - Raising awareness about issues faced by international students.
    - Creating anonymous hotlines for reporting incidents.
    - Promoting cultural shifts in attitudes towards alcohol consumption and public behavior.

2. **Public Safety and Nightlife**:
    - Addressing concerns linked to groups of drunk people in public spaces.
    - Implementing responsible alcohol serving practices in bars and clubs.
    - Increasing the availability of social activities other than drinking.
3. **Language and Communication Support**:
    - Enhancing English language support in public services, including police and healthcare.
    - Providing translated materials and English-speaking staff in public institutions.
4. **University and Government Collaboration**:
    - Integrating more internships and job search support into university programs for international students.
    - Collaborating between universities and local government to address the specific needs of international students.
    - Individualizing support services to cater to the diverse backgrounds of international students.
5. **Social and Community Engagement**:
    - Organizing events and programs to help international students integrate and find employment.
    - Encouraging community-building activities to reduce feelings of isolation and improve social networks.

Overall, the respondents proposed practical recommendations to address their security challenges. Photovoice proved to be an effective tool in empowering international degree students in Tampere. The results show that the method helped them communicate their security concerns and contribute to potential solutions visually and verbally. The students' proactiveness shows their willingness to create a safer and more inclusive environment in Tampere.

6. Discussion and limitations of the research

6.1 Discussion of the results

The results of this study confirm that security is a complex concept, and it means more than just physical safety. It involves social interactions and personal experiences. The study shows that security means being able to navigate daily life without fear, allowing students to focus on their well-being without any mental worry. The research also shows that security is a subjective construct and varies depending on individual experiences and interactions within the environment, further confirming prior research (Buzan, 1991; Wolfers, 1952; Ranasinghe, 2013). Although most respondents feel safe in Tampere, some individuals see certain factors as threats to their security. Therefore, a broad understanding of security dynamics is needed to acknowledge different perspectives and experiences.

Definition of Security

This study suggests that security for international degree students goes beyond physical safety and includes social interactions and personal experiences. To gain a better understanding of security, this study has integrated insights from contemporary scholarly work. Meerts (2018) offers an individual understanding that broadens the traditional scope of security to include aspects such as personal, cyber, and environmental safety. This aligns with the study's findings that international students' well-being includes a range of concerns beyond simple physical threats. The need for a multi-dimensional approach to security that addresses the diverse aspects of students' lives is emphasized by this broader definition.

Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) and Nyman (2021) focused on the everyday security experienced by individuals. They highlight the importance of time, space, and emotion/affect in shaping perceptions of safety. This relates to the study's observation that international students' sense of security is influenced by their day-to-day experiences within their academic and social environments. The space dimension of security highlighted by both studies suggests that universities must consider the regular patterns and spaces in which students interact to effectively address security needs.

Looking at the combined insights of Meerts (2018), Crawford and Hutchinson (2016), and Nyman (2021), it is clear that a holistic approach to security, which includes the space, affect, and practice dimensions, is needed. This approach should be tailored to the diverse needs of international

students. This broader understanding of security can help universities design policies and environments that mirror the experiences of international degree students' lives.

Interplay of Space, Practice, and Affect

Nyman's (2021) framework of everyday security improves the understanding of security in the daily lives of international students. It emphasizes the interplay between physical space, daily practices, and emotional responses. It provides a lens to interpret the students' experiences. The study's insights into how international students navigate, perceive, and are affected by their environment contribute to a broader dialogue on human security, specifically in higher education and international mobility. Through this lens, the study highlights the importance of considering the subjective and emotional dimensions of security combined with physical and practical aspects. This can create an environment that supports the well-being and integration of international degree students.

The findings from both the interviews and the focus group discussion show an interplay between space, practice, and affect in shaping the security perceptions of international degree students in Tampere. The physical setting, such as university premises, public transport, and urban infrastructure, has a major impact on students' sense of safety. Areas that are well-maintained and secure contribute to their feelings of security, while poorly lit or neglected areas raise discomfort. The presence of noticeably intoxicated individuals in public places emerged as an important factor affecting perceived safety, highlighting the significance of the space in determining security perceptions.

The actions and behaviors of students have a direct influence on their sense of security, and this is often shaped by their cultural and social adaptation. The students may need to navigate language barriers, adapt to local customs, and integrate into the Finnish community to have a positive experience. The students' adaptive behaviors, especially concerning nightlife culture and alcohol consumption, show their ability to manage their security.

Emotional responses are often closely tied to experiences in physical and social spaces. The feelings of inclusion or exclusion, comfort or anxiety, that individuals experience are indicate their emotional well-being and are directly influenced by their interactions with their environments. The emotional impact of cultural adaptation and social interactions is big as it affects an individual's overall sense of belonging and security.

The emotional and psychological well-being of international students is a key factor of their overall security, as also emphasized by Sawir et al.'s study (2012). Their study highlights the importance of English language proficiency in students' safety. Sawir et al.'s prior study (2008) found that international students in Australia often feel lonely and isolated, particularly during the initial months, due to the absence of familiar cultural environments. The current study emphasizes the emotional impacts of language barriers and discrimination and provides a basis for future research on mental health services and emotional support systems for international students.

The findings of this study contradict the commonly held belief that international students face academic difficulties. In fact, academics were only brought up by one respondent in relation to keeping a scholarship. Instead, the study highlights the importance of social and emotional factors, such as feeling safe in public places and overcoming language barriers, as also mentioned in Sawir et al.'s (2012) research.

The relationship between space, practice, and affect is visible. The physical environment, or space, affects the practices and behaviors of students, which in turn has an impact on their emotional responses or affect. For example, when students encounter drunk individuals in public spaces, they adjust their behavior, leading to feelings of uneasiness or alertness. The sense of security is shaped by both the physical and social environment.

When the surroundings are well-maintained and safe, people tend to feel secure. However, challenging social situations such as dealing with drunk individuals can lead to feelings of anxiety and discomfort. The discussions also emphasize the significant role of social and cultural factors in shaping security perceptions. These factors not only impact their everyday activities but also their emotional responses and sense of belonging.

The focus group discussion highlighted the importance of universities and local authorities in promoting the safety and welfare of international students. The students developed suggestions for developing more personalized support programs, improving communication channels, and enhancing integration efforts. A gap was found to exist between the current support mechanisms and the specific needs of international students. There is a need to raise awareness about the diverse challenges faced by these students.

The results of this study have an impact on policy and practice. Universities and city authorities can utilize these insights to create more efficient tactics and support systems that cater to the unique requirements of international students. Improving the physical surroundings, providing cultural and

language assistance, and promoting all-inclusive social areas are important factors that must be considered.

Framework of Sustainable Human Security

To discuss the results of this study in the context of the Human Security Concept's components (UNDP, 1994), it is important to consider how the findings align with the multidimensional aspects of human security. The concept is designed to ensure that people are protected from long-standing dangers such as hunger, disease, and oppression, as well as from unexpected disruptions to their daily routines in various settings.

1. **Personal security:** The study found that students generally feel safe within university environments, but they experience a sense of insecurity in public spaces, particularly at night and when encountering drunk individuals. This feeling of insecurity in public spaces relates directly to the concept of personal security emphasized in the framework, which highlights the need for protection from physical violence. The fear of international students regarding public spaces can be seen as a lack of personal security, indicating the need for initiatives that improve safety measures and promote inclusivity.
2. **Community Security**: The research emphasizes the impact of language barriers and cultural differences on individuals' sense of safety in public spaces. This is closely related to the community security aspect, which aims to safeguard people from losing their traditional relationships, and values. Efforts to promote a more inclusive and accepting community environment that values and integrates differences can help address these concerns.
3. **Health Security**: The study does not explicitly mention it, but health security is essential for international students who are far from home. This involves ensuring access to healthcare and protection from diseases. Respondents have brought up the importance of mental health, which can be affected by feelings of insecurity or loneliness. Programs that provide mental health support can contribute to creating a more secure environment for international students.
4. **Economic Security**: International students might encounter financial anxiety due to tuition fees, accommodation expenses, and other costs associated with studying in a foreign country. Ensuring that students have access to financial assistance, scholarships, and part-time jobs can improve their sense of security. The difficulty of finding a job in Finland has been highlighted in this study, which has a major impact on economic security and should be further looked into.

5. **Food Security**: Food security, which translates to having physical and economic access to basic food, can be a concern for international students facing financial difficulties. However, Tampere's universities offer cheap but nutritional student lunches, which was highlighted by a respondent. Offering well-balanced lunches to students for under three euros can ease the financial and time strains that come with buying and cooking food.
6. **Environmental Security**: International students may have concerns about their safety and security due to environmental factors such as natural disasters and human-made threats. It is especially important to consider these factors when students are in unfamiliar geographical and climates. While natural disasters and man-made threats were no concern in this study, the climate and weather have been highlighted as factors affecting their security. Especially the long and dark winter months can affect students' well-being.
7. **Political Security**: With changes in the Finnish government, international students feel affected by the political future and may fear for their future in Finland. This change is especially affecting non-EU students. Furthermore, there are international political tensions in Europe which also affect Finland. However, these tensions were not brought up by the respondents and, therefore, not included in the scope of this study.

The study highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach to address the security concerns of international students. This approach should focus not only on their physical safety but also on their emotional well-being, social integration, and economic stability. It is key to implement initiatives that enhance personal and community security, provide better access to (mental) healthcare and economic resources, and foster a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Recommendations to Improve Security for International Students

Photovoice is a powerful tool that allowed the students to communicate their security concerns and engage in discussions about potential solutions. This approach combined visual and verbal communication to provide a better understanding of students' perspectives. It also empowered them to advocate for their well-being. However, this tool's effectiveness depends on how involved the participants are in the research and, ultimately in decision-making (Liebenberg, 2018). It requires a structured approach that not only allows for sharing experiences but also ensures that these insights lead to actions.

To achieve this, a supportive environment must be created where participants feel safe and valued, and their contributions are taken seriously by stakeholders and policymakers. Moreover, the success of photovoice in encouraging empowerment and engagement depends on the commitment to follow

through with the insights gained and translate them into concrete actions that address the concerns raised by the participants. Without this commitment to action and inclusion, photovoice's potential to bring about change and empower individuals may stay unrealized (Liebenberg, 2018).

The suggestions made by the students include the need to increase cultural awareness, improve public safety, provide better language and communication support, promote collaboration between universities and government institutions, and encourage social and community engagement. These recommendations reflect a general desire for a safer and more inclusive educational environment. However, it is important to assess their feasibility and effectiveness.

Awareness and Cultural Change

Efforts to promote cultural awareness have been implemented in various settings, and have proven to be successful in fostering mutual understanding and respect among different groups. In 2008, Kambutu and Nganga provided evidence of how organized international experiences can be useful in broadening one's knowledge and appreciating of different cultures. Similarly, Baltes, Hernandez, and Collins (2015) found that cultural awareness programs in high schools positively influenced students' attitudes toward multicultural relations. However, adapting these strategies to meet the unique needs of higher education institutions and international students presents a challenge. These programs must promote genuine understanding and respect among students from diverse backgrounds, rather than just shallow engagement.

Public Safety and Nightlife

The recommendations of this study are designed to improve safety and reduce alcohol-related troubles. These suggestions are in line with typical urban safety strategies but may need more personalized solutions when addressing the concerns of international students. Implementing community policing techniques and creating safer nightlife options could be beneficial. However, the effectiveness of these measures depends on their acceptance and integration into the local culture, as well as the dynamics of the student community in Tampere.

Language and Communication Support

Providing English language support and translated materials can improve the experience of international students. This is in line with the findings of McKelvey (2021), which highlight the importance of interpreting and translation services in public sectors to meet the needs of non-English speakers and promote fair service provision. McKelvey (2021) suggests that comprehensive

training programs should be developed for service providers and clear policies established to ensure the constant availability of language services. However, the challenge lies in implementing these services in a way that encourages learning without creating isolation between domestic and international students.

University and Government Collaboration

Integrating additional internships and offering job search support could be beneficial in facilitating the transition of international students into work life in Finland. However, the effectiveness of such collaborations relies on the commitment of both universities and governmental bodies to address the needs of international students. A recent study (Martirosyan, Bustamante & Saxon, 2019) highlights the significance of providing specialized support services to international students. Such services can help them settle into the community.

Bartram (2008) also highlights the changing support priorities of international students, stressing the importance of programs that are tailored to address cultural adaptation and academic support. Stott (2022) reflects on a project aimed at improving the experience of international students by creating a sense of belonging and connectedness. Stott (2022) also emphasizes the need for initiatives that minimize misunderstandings and build relationships between international and domestic students. Programs must be customized to bridge cultural gaps and equip students with the skills required in the local job market, catering to the diverse needs of international students (Martirosyan, Bustamante, & Saxon, 2019; Bartram, 2008; Stott, 2022).

Social and Community Engagement

Encouraging activities that build a sense of community can reduce feelings of isolation among international students. According to Wang (2012), culturally inclusive initiatives can be effective in supporting students' adaptation. It is important to keep in mind that some programs may unintentionally create environments where individuals only interact with others who share the same backgrounds or beliefs. This can be the case if genuine cross-cultural interactions are not promoted. That is why it is crucial to design these programs carefully to encourage authentic cross-cultural connections.

Overall, to create a safer and more inclusive environment in Tampere, it is important to carefully consider the social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Programs designed to address these issues should encourage genuine cultural exchange and be sustainable and inclusive. The effectiveness of

such initiatives depends on their adaptability, monitoring, and the active participation of all stakeholders involved, as supported by existing literature.

6.2 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The limitations of this study can be put into different categories: method, sample, lack of previous research, temporal constraints, and cultural and language barriers.

Method

The research approach chosen for this study was entirely qualitative. While the chosen methods did provide detailed insights into the students' perceptions, qualitative data interpretation may be biased, less organized, and not generalizable (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). Therefore, additional research is necessary to improve the generalizability of the study and validate its outcomes. Future research could include quantitative surveys, providing a more general view of students' experiences, while also reaching more respondents.

Furthermore, when analyzing photovoice data, the conclusions drawn are based on subjective interpretations of images and experiences. The participants' and researcher's interpretations may not fully capture the intended meanings of the images and narratives. This subjectivity means that the analysis may not be entirely reliable.

Possible areas for future research could include looking at specific themes that emerged as important, such as the impact of cultural background. More research is needed to explore these factors and whether they are applicable in other locations. In addition, policymakers could gain valuable insights by examining the effects of university policies and local government initiatives on the sense of security experienced by international students. Overall, this research offers a good basis for future research which can take different directions.

Sample

The results of this study are limited in their applicability and generalizability due to the small sample size. Therefore, it is recommended to repeat the research with a larger sample size to improve the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, since the study focused only on Tampere, it may not apply to other cities or countries. Consequently, similar research should be conducted in an international setting or another country to increase the external validity of the results.

Future studies could include a more extensive and diverse group of international students, possibly comparing different universities or regions. In addition, comparing the experiences of international students in Tampere with those in other cities or countries could highlight the unique challenges and opportunities of different contexts.

Potential sampling bias further limits the research as the photovoice participants were recruited from student associations such as ESN FINT ry and INTO ry. This approach mainly involved individuals linked to these networks, which led to a limited diversity of perspectives in the study. In addition, this means that it is possible that the sample does not fully represent the various experiences of the broader community of international students in Tampere.

Furthermore, the researcher's position as an international degree student may have influenced the research process, particularly in analyzing and interpreting the data. As Nyman (2021) points out, the subjective nature of photo interpretation shows that a researcher's personal biases and perspectives can unconsciously shape their understanding and analysis of the data. The potential for researcher bias highlights the importance of involving an external, less biased party in future research to ensure a more objective interpretation of the data.

Lack of previous research

It is worth noting that there is a lack of prior research on how international students in Tampere, Finland, perceive their safety, mainly through a method such as photovoice. No studies have looked into this specific issue before, making it difficult to place the findings of this study into a broader context or compare them with other research. Since there are no similar studies, it is challenging to determine if the results match other findings or use already established ideas. This lack of prior research implies that this study is exploring new territory. Still, it also suggests that we should be cautious with the drawn conclusions.

Temporal constraints

Another shortcoming of this study is its limited duration. The research was conducted over a short period of time, which may not have fully captured the changing security perceptions among international students. Security concerns and feelings can change significantly over time, especially as students adapt to their new surroundings in Tampere. To gain a deeper understanding of how students' sense of safety changes over time, conducting a more prolonged study would be valuable. This method could provide valuable insights into how students adapt to and engage with their environment. Therefore, this study only presents a snapshot of security perceptions at a specific

point in time. This also means that it does not track these perceptions as they might shift or evolve over a longer period than three months.

Cultural and Language Barriers

It is important to note that this study has certain limitations due to the diverse cultural backgrounds and language barriers among the international student community in Tampere. These differences may have influenced the types of pictures taken and the experiences shared during the interviews. Different cultures can affect how people understand and talk about security and insecurity, leading to different interpretations of these ideas. Also, language barriers may have made it difficult for some participants to share their thoughts and feelings in a non-native language. As a result, the data collected may not accurately reflect the full meaning of what was shared.

By addressing the limitations and suggestions provided, suggested future research can build upon and extend the study's findings.

7. Conclusion

The study on the everyday security perceptions of international degree students in Tampere, Finland, produced insightful findings. It revealed that security means living daily life without fear or mental worry. The students' definitions of security included a range of aspects, including physical safety, emotional well-being, and social inclusion. These perceptions were closely linked to their daily routines and environments in Tampere. However, each definition differed slightly, highlighting the notion that security is a subjective experience.

Various factors were found to affect the sense of security among students. The physical environment, which includes public spaces, transportation, and housing conditions, had a significant impact. Social interactions, such as the level of inclusivity, ease of communication, and cultural adaptation challenges, also played a crucial role. Personal experiences influenced by students' backgrounds and emotional responses also greatly contributed to their perceptions of security. Moreover, economic aspects, including financial stability and job security, were factors affecting students' sense of security.

The study found that using photovoice was an empowering tool for the students. They were able to express their concerns and provide insights into their security experiences. This method effectively highlighted issues such as social exclusion, public safety, and the psychological impact of cultural and environmental challenges. Photovoice also helped the students to identify potential solutions to enhance their security experiences, such as enhancing English language support in public services and increasing the availability of social activities other than drinking. Other recommendations covered community and university-level support such as events to help international students integrate.

These findings highlight the complex interplay of environmental, social, personal, and practical factors that shape the security experiences and perceptions among international degree students in Tampere. Nevertheless, the study had some shortcomings which should be addressed in future research. To improve generalizability, future research should focus on the specific factors that emerged as significant, increase the sample size, and replicate this study in a different location. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to investigate how students' feelings of safety evolve over time. This could help identify what affects their sense of security throughout their studies. Finally, to reduce researcher bias, future research should be conducted by an external researcher who is not part of the population.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Guide

Welcome Participants!

I am excited to have you join my research project on everyday security perceptions. Your unique perspectives are valuable, and I appreciate your participation. Here's what you'll be doing:

1. Photo-taking Phase

Duration: Approximately 2-5 weeks

Your Task:

- Observe your surroundings in Tampere, Finland.
- Take photos of anything that makes you feel **secure** or **insecure** in your daily life.
- Optional: Keep a photo diary with notes describing the context and feelings.

Guidelines:

- Photos should be clear and relevant to your security perceptions.
- Be creative and capture what matters to you – **security means something different to everyone**.

2. Interview Phase

Duration: ~1 hour

Task:

- Please schedule an interview with me via bookings with me (check your email). This date will also serve as your deadline.
- These interviews will be based on the photos you've taken.
- We will discuss the context, emotions, and perceptions behind each photo.

Benefits:

- Your voice and experiences will shape my research.
- Gain insights into your own security perceptions.
- Contribute to academic knowledge.
- Pick up your chocolate or gift card when you come to the interview.

3. Ethical Considerations

- I respect your privacy and consent.
- All information will be kept confidential and anonymous.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.
- Please sign the waiver attached to this email.

4. Questions and Support

- If you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me:
- I am here to support you throughout the project.

5. Thank You!

I appreciate your involvement in this project. Your contributions will help me better understand everyday security perceptions in Tampere.

Together, we can make a difference!

Emma Fuchs

Appendix 2: Interview Guideline

Introduction

- Introduction of myself and study.
- Background questions: Where are you from, what is your international experience, how long have you been in Tampere, and why did you choose Tampere? What are your prior studies, and what you are currently studying (field/degree/discipline)?
- Consent to record.

Question 1: Photo Discussions

- We used the photovoice method to gather data during the research. Could you briefly describe one or two photos you took during this phase? What motivated you to take these specific photos?
- Let's dive into the photos you've taken. Please select one photo that you found particularly meaningful or evoked strong feelings. Can you describe this photo and what it represents to you regarding security or insecurity?
- Probing (Ronzi, Pope, Orton, & Bruce, 2016):
    - Tell me why you took this photograph.
    - Why do you want to share this photograph?
    - Why is it important for you?
    - What does this photograph represent in terms of positive and negative aspects that support or do not support you to feel secure?
    - How do the elements or details within this photo relate to your everyday security perceptions?
- Go through more meaningful pictures.

Question 3: Pictures not taken

- Are there any photos you might have wanted to take but did not? Please tell me more about those.

Question 4: Defining Security

- How would you personally define "security" in your everyday life as an international degree student in Tampere, considering the insights from the photos you've taken?

Question 5: Experiencing Security

- Can you share another photo and describe a recent situation or experience in Tampere where you felt particularly secure, as represented by this photo?
- What specific elements in this photo contributed to your sense of security?

Question 6: Factors Influencing Security

- Reflecting on your photos and experiences in Tampere, what factors—captured in your photos or not—have the most significant impact on your sense of security?
- Conversely, can you discuss any photos representing factors or situations that have made you feel insecure or uneasy in Tampere?

Question 9: Reflecting on the Study

- How has your participation in this study, particularly through the photovoice method, influenced your awareness of security-related issues in Tampere?
- In what ways did the visual representations of your experiences through photos help you communicate your security perceptions more effectively during the interviews?
- Reflecting on the overall experience, do you believe that photovoice has the potential to raise awareness and advocate for security-related changes within the international student community or the broader Tampere community? If so, how?

Conclusion

- Is there anything you would like to add or reflect upon regarding your participation in the research project?
- Thank you.

Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Guideline

Outline for the Focus Group Discussion

1. **Introduction (5 minutes)**
    - Welcome and brief introductions.
    - Overview of the session's purpose and structure.
    - Explanation of the rules for the discussion (e.g., confidentiality, respect for different opinions).
2. **Presentation of Photovoice Themes (10 minutes)**
    - Display a few anonymized photos that exemplify common themes of security and insecurity.
3. **Brainstorming Session Using Flinga (15 minutes)**
    - Participants brainstorm on security issues they have experienced or perceived in Tampere. The researcher already prepared a few of the main issues brought up in the interviews.
4. **Focused Discussion Using Flinga (25 minutes)**
    - Delve deeper into the themes identified in the brainstorming session.
    - Discussion guided by specific questions (see below).
5. **Conclusion (5 minutes)**
    - Summarize key points discussed.
    - Thank them for their participation.

Suggested Focus Group Questions

1. **Identifying Key Concerns**
    - From your perspective, what are the top three security concerns that international students face in Tampere?
2. **Role of Different Stakeholders**
    - What role do you think the university administration should play in addressing these security concerns?
    - How can local authorities or community organizations contribute to making Tampere a safer place for international students?
3. **Recommendations for Improvement**
    - What changes would you suggest to improve the sense of security for international students in Tampere? (per issue identified)

- Are there any specific areas (e.g., university campus, housing, public spaces) where you feel improvements are particularly needed?
- Are there any other specific areas or aspects you believe could benefit from changes or enhancements?

4. Support Networks

- In your opinion, how important are peer support and social networks in contributing to a sense of security?
- What suggestions do you have for strengthening these networks among international students in Tampere?
- How can international students themselves be involved in the process of making these improvements?

5. Feedback on Current Measures

- Are there any existing security measures or support services at the university or in the city that you find particularly effective or ineffective?
- What improvements or changes would you recommend to these existing services?

Appendix 4: Data Protection and Disclaimer Agreement

Data Protection and Disclaimer Agreement

Research Project Title: Everyday Security Perceptions Study

Researcher: Emma Fuchs

Participant Name:

Date:

1. Data Protection and Privacy

I, the undersigned participant in the "Everyday Security Perceptions Study," hereby agree to the following data protection and privacy terms:

1.1. **Data Confidentiality:** I understand that any information, photographs, or personal data I provide for this research will be treated confidentially. Only authorized personnel involved in the research project will have access to this information.

1.2. **Anonymity:** I acknowledge that my participation in this research will be kept anonymous. Any personal identifiers will be removed or pseudonymized to protect my identity.

1.3. **Data Storage:** I understand that my data will be securely stored for the purpose of this research. It will be stored in compliance with data protection regulations and will be kept confidential.

1.4. **Data Retention:** I agree that my data will be retained for the duration of the research project and may be used for analysis, reporting, and academic purposes. After the research is complete, the data will be securely archived and may be kept for a specified period as required by institutional policies and applicable laws.

2. Participation Disclaimer

2.1. **Voluntary Participation:** I confirm that my participation in this research project is voluntary, and I have not been coerced or pressured in any way to participate.

2.2. **Withdrawal:** I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without consequences. If I choose to withdraw, I will inform the researcher as soon as possible.

2.3. **Informed Consent:** I confirm that I have been informed about the research objectives, procedures, and potential risks and benefits.

2.4. **Contact Information:** I have been provided with contact information for the researcher and understand that I can reach out if I have any questions or concerns related to my participation.

I, the undersigned participant, hereby agree to the above terms regarding data protection, privacy, and participation in the "Everyday Security Perceptions Study."

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Coding Table for Definitions and Experiences of Security.

Respondent	Definition of Security	Experience of Security in Tampere	Notable Security Concerns in Tampere
1 (Female, Eastern Europe)	Absence of danger	Feels secure in university settings; insecure in public spaces due to stares	Stares from men; language barriers
2 (Male, Germany)	Feeling at ease even when unexpected events occur	Secure in the university environment; insecurity in nightclubs	Witnessing drink spiking; integration challenges
3 (Female, India)	Safety from harm or threat; feeling comfortable	Secure in university office, apartment; insecurity in crowds	Past trauma; discomfort in police proximity
4 (Female, Italy)	Relates to people's behavior and cleanliness of space	Secure in the city center, remote bus stops; unease with stares	Cleanliness, and people's behavior as indicators of security
5 (Female, Japan)	Absence of anxiety, nervousness, and frustration	Comfort in familiar environments; anxiety in crowded buses, graffiti areas	Language barriers; dependence on public transport
6 (Female, Russia)	Ability to do everyday things without fear	Safe public transport, streets near home; concerns about job security	Job security as a non-EU resident; language barrier
7 (Female, Pakistan)	Ability to express oneself without fear of harm or judgment	Secure with keypad entry to houses; insecurity crossing areas at night	Government changes; xenophobia
8 (Male, Vietnam)	Fulfillment of physical and mental needs	Scholarship and accommodation provide security; uncomfortable outside at night	Economic and mental security; cultural shock

9 (Female, Brazil)	Safety as a feeling, security as a probability of harm	Safe in parks, forests; unsafe in areas with construction	Road safety; pedestrian and cyclist protection
10 (Male, Germany)	Absence of immediate danger	Generally feels secure; unease around drunk people and icy roads	Safety in less populated areas; icy road concerns
11 (Female, Iran)	Not worrying about losing things or personal space violations	Secure in residence and public places; worries about bicycle theft	Community safety; challenges with language
12 (Male, Netherlands)	Carefree daily life without worry	Feels safe in most situations	Trust in community and social services
13 (Female, Thailand)	Not having to deal with fear daily; focus on health and wellbeing	Safe in organized public spaces; concerns about parties and public behavior	Police trust; safe public events
14 (Female, Poland)	Safety in walking home at night	Overall secure feeling, especially in nature and outdoor settings	Health and social security concerns
15 (Female, Italy)	Routine life without interruptions; reliance on public services	Comfort in nature and TOAS buildings; unease on icy roads and in certain neighborhoods	Public transport reliability; discomfort in crowded areas
16 (Male, Bangladesh)	Absence of dangerous situations	Generally feels secure, especially in university settings	Economic security

Appendix 6: Coding Table for Factors Contributing to Security or Insecurity

Respondent	Contributing Factors to Security	Contributing Factors to Insecurity	Additional Notes
1 (Female, Eastern Europe)	Friendly university environment	Stares from men; exclusion due to language barrier	Concerns about being perceived as racist
2 (Male, Germany)	Cheap university food; tight friend group	Insecurity in nightclubs; difficulty integrating	History of witnessing drink spiking
3 (Female, India)	Safety in university office and boyfriend's apartment	Insecurity in crowds; fear close to the police station	Past trauma affects perception of security
4 (Female, Italy)	Cozy city center; feeling safe even in remote areas	Intimidation from stares; language exclusion	Associates cleanliness with security
5 (Female, Japan)	Sense of home; beauty of nature	Anxiety from graffiti; crowded public transport	Language barrier; dependency on public transport
6 (Female, Russia)	Safe public transport; clean city infrastructure	Job security concerns; feeling foreign despite language proficiency	Influence of Finland's safe reputation
7 (Female, Pakistan)	Keypad entry to houses; feeling of freedom of speech	Fear of racism; insecurity crossing areas at night	Impacted by government changes and xenophobia
8 (Male, Vietnam)	Scholarship security; diverse and inclusive environment	Pressure to meet credit requirements; winter's impact on mental well-being	Cultural adaptation challenges
9 (Female, Brazil)	Safety as a pedestrian and cyclist in certain areas	Unsafe construction areas; poor road safety	Catcalling incident; fear of falling in winter

10 (Female, Germany)	Feeling of general safety; quieter environment	Concerns around drunk people; icy roads	Financial and housing stability concerns
11 (Female, Iran)	Safety in public spaces and residence	Fear of bicycle theft; language barrier impacting communication	Community safety compared to home country
12 (Male, Netherlands)	General feeling of safety; good social care	Concerns about long-term access to social services	Positive experiences in biking and pedestrian activities
13 (Female, Thailand)	Safe public protests; thoughtful city traffic management	Concerns about parties, public suicides, and train track suicides	Trust in police and safety in public events
14 (Female, Poland)	Safety in nature; affordable student meals	Concerns about health insurance and social security	Feels safer in Finland compared to Poland
15 (Female, Italy)	Well-preserved nature; reliable public transport	Icy roads; uncomfortable experiences in certain neighborhoods	Dependence on public services as a student
16 (Male, Bangladesh)	Safe university and city environment	Concerns about job security; feeling foreign	Influence of Finland's safe reputation

Appendix 7: Coding Table for factors affecting security using Nyman's (2021) framework.

Respondent	Space (Physical Environment)	Practice (Actions/Behaviors)	Affect (Emotions/Feelings)
1 (Female, Eastern Europe)	Stares at tram/bus stops; night in city	Exclusion due to language barrier	Fear of being perceived as racist; harassment concerns
2 (Male, Germany)	Nightclubs; university food facilities	Struggles with integration; language barriers	Feelings of unease in nightclubs; awareness of surroundings
3 (Female, India)	Safety in university office; unsafe near police station	Moving around Tampere; in crowds	Trauma from past experiences; anxiety in crowds
4 (Female, Italy)	Safe in city center, remote bus stops, and sauna	Perception of people and cleanliness	Comfort in cozy and clean environments; unease with stares
5 (Female, Japan)	Railway station, graffiti areas, crowded buses	Dependency on public transport	Anxiety from graffiti, crowded places; security in nature
6 (Female, Russia)	Safety in public transport; streets near home	Reliance on public transport	Concerns about job security and future as non-EU resident
7 (Female, Pakistan)	Keypads for house entry; unsafe areas at night	Reaction to government changes; xenophobia	Fear of racism and xenophobia; change in government impact
8 (Male, Vietnam)	Scholarship accommodation; safety outside at night	Participation in student events	Sense of belonging; mental security in social inclusion
9 (Female, Brazil)	Safety in parks and forests; unsafe construction areas	Pedestrian and cycling activities	Anxiety about road safety; experience of falling

10 (Female, Germany)	General sense of security	Avoidance of drunk people; icy roads	Safety in less crowded areas; concerns about icy roads
11 (Female, Iran)	Safety in residence and public places	Not feeling threatened at night	Comfort in public spaces; worries about bicycle theft
12 (Male, Netherlands)	General safety in daily life	Biking and pedestrian activities	Feeling safe; concerns about long-term security
13 (Female, Thailand)	Safe in public protests, traffic management	Observing public life and events	Safety in organized and respectful public spaces
14 (Female, Poland)	Safety in forests and northern lights viewings	Attending parties; navigating nightlife	Concerns about health insurance and social security
15 (Female, Italy)	Nature, TOAS buildings, unsafe areas in Hervanta	Reliance on public transport	Comfort in nature and protests; unease in icy and crowded areas
16 (Male, Bangladesh)	Safe in TOAS buildings and university	Language barrier issues	Concerns about longterm security; job security

Appendix 8: Coding Table for Photovoice Empowerment from the Interviews.

Respondent	Identification of Security Issues through Photovoice	Empowerment and Insights
1 (Female, Eastern Europe)	Identified stares and exclusion as big concerns	Photovoice sparked awareness and enabled a platform to express concerns
2 (Male, Germany)	Highlighted the issue of drink spiking, integration challenges	Increased attentiveness to surroundings; awareness of mental health support needs
3 (Female, India)	Identified insecurity in crowds and near police stations	Photovoice aided in the reflection of security in Tampere
4 (Female, Italy)	Captured feelings of safety and unease in various city spaces	Photovoice made her more aware of stereotypical safe/unsafe situations
5 (Female, Japan)	Used photovoice to express anxiety in crowded spaces and graffiti areas	Realized how small components impact her sense of security
6 (Female, Russia)	Highlighted public transport safety and clean city infrastructure	Photovoice enhanced awareness of security as a subjective experience
7 (Female, Pakistan)	Identification of own feelings towards racism	Photovoice helped voice psychological impact of government changes
8 (Male, Vietnam)	Showed reliance on scholarship and accommodation for security	Photovoice enhanced understanding of physical and mental security needs
9 (Female, Brazil)	Captured unsafe construction areas and pedestrian challenges	Photovoice helped identify patterns and places of insecurity
10 (Female, Germany)	Identified unease around drunkenness and crowds	Photovoice increased awareness of not-as-obvious security issues
11 (Female, Iran)	Expressed concern over bicycle theft and language barriers	Photovoice made her conscious of community safety and language challenges
12 (Male, Netherlands)	Identified issues in cycling in the city	Photovoice made him more attentive to situations he did not feel safe
13 (Female, Thailand)	Highlighted safety in public protests and traffic management	Photovoice increased awareness and served as a diary for security concerns

14 (Female, Poland)	Used photovoice to express feelings of safety in nature	Photovoice helped visualize and articulate security feelings
15 (Female, Italy)	Showed dependence on public transport and discomfort in certain areas	Photovoice increased perception of safety elements and raised awareness of issues
16 (Male, Bangladesh)	Highlighted clean city and lack of uncomfortable crowds	Increased attentiveness