

Re- Discovering the International Student Experience of Studying at UCN, Denmark

International Education Association of South Africa IEASA 18

Dr. Tanja Miller, Docent, PdH

tnm@ucn.dk

Anne Lassen Zakaria, PhD fellow

alas@ucn.dk

Responsible Research Program:
Inequality and Disadvantaged people



University College Northern Denmark



Background: UCN

- UCN consists of 4 areas merged in 2011:
 - Paedagogical Studies
 - Health
 - Technology
 - Business
- 1400 international students (Internalization in EU)
- 19 English PA and BA programmes
- Seperate international & Danish classes, a few mixed
- Internationals are mainly based at Technology and Business (such as marketing and Finance programmes)
- UCN is active in international networks like EAIE, SPACE, COHERE & has partners all over the world!
- Research organized in a department – and programs

Background and Challenge

- The project “Breakthrough” is financed by the Ministry of Higher Education and runs from March 2016 to 1st July 2017
- The project is run by International Office, UCN but the attached research part is run by the programme “ Inequality and disadvantaged people” based at UCN research department
- The initiative consists of three areas:
 1. **culture host**
 2. Mentor/Mentee
 3. Pro-active business contact
- The purpose of the overall project covering the 3 initiatives is to increase the number of international students choosing to stay in Denmark after graduation or choose to do their internship in Denmark. Embedded into this objective, the Culture Host program is focusing on supporting the international students to feel at home and welcome via DK/international matches.
- This presentation only concerns the research and data collected in connection to the **Culture Host programme**, as the two other programmes are still ongoing.

The Culture Host programme (initiative 1)

- Initiative 1 is coordinated by the International Office at UCN
- Every group met by IO at least 1 time per month and was supposed to use free tickets they had been given by IO to attend events
- Events covered cinema trips, arts exhibitions, restaurant and bars, sports facilities and trips in the region.
- Furthermore IO arranged one take-off event and finally an excursion for all the mentor groups in the end of the first semester.
- All events were free of charge, as IO sought to accommodate the unequal economic availability for such social events of some students, as most internationals contrary to all Danish, International students are not automatically entitled to student grants (SU).

Methods

- The research design is inspired by the Realistic Evaluation Approach (Pawson & Tilley, 2004)
- Thus the initiatives are investigated through 3 programme theories
- Programme theory **initiative 1**: (our present RQ)

We assume that a steered matching between 1-2 international students and 1 Danish student will create personal and professional relationship as a platform for mutual exchange of cultural understanding that would enhance a more positive experience in daily life

Data Types – Mixed Method

- Base-line Survey (1400 internationals) – response rate 40,6%
- 3 Focus group interviews with international and Danish students partaking in the Culture Host programme
- 1 interview with staff members of IO
- Vox pop interviews with students on bus trip

Data-Matrix and Analysis Strategy

| Data | Program Theory | Theory – themes |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Survey | 1+2+3 | To strengthen the qualitative data and background for observations – interview guides |
| Interview with students | 1+2 | Learning theory |
| Interview with internal staff | 1+2+3 | Social theory |
| Interview with external staff | 2+3 | Communications theory |

Theoretical Frame

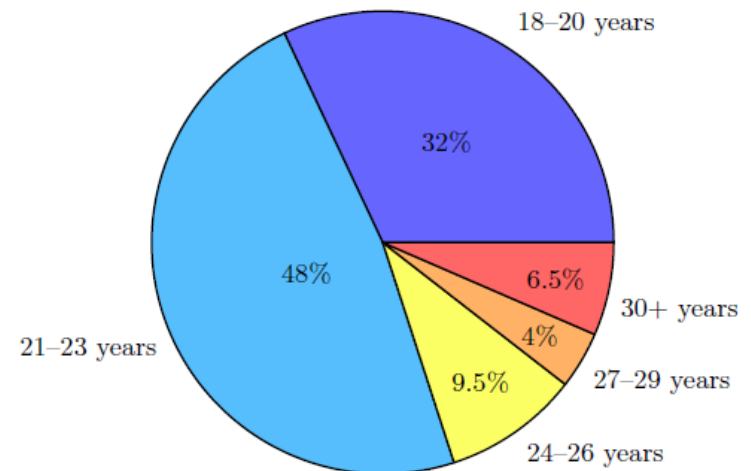
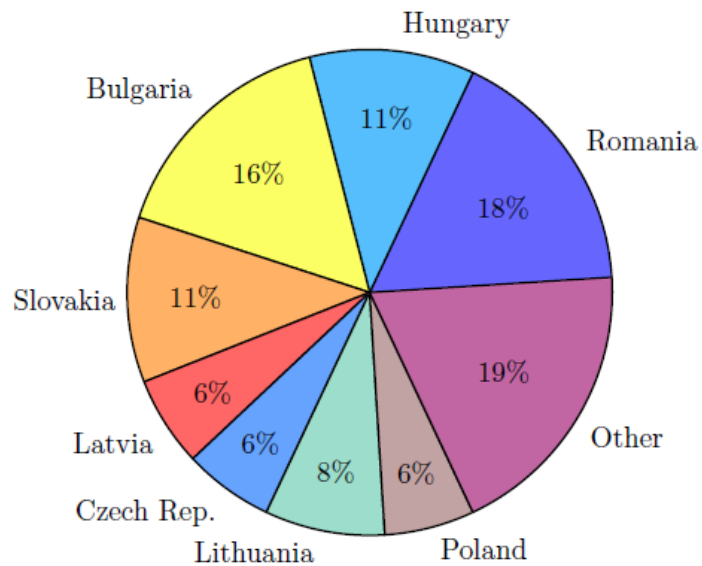
Wenger's learning theory in Communities of Practice



Results and findings – preliminary

- Quantitative
- Qualitative

Result - Background International students



Results – background

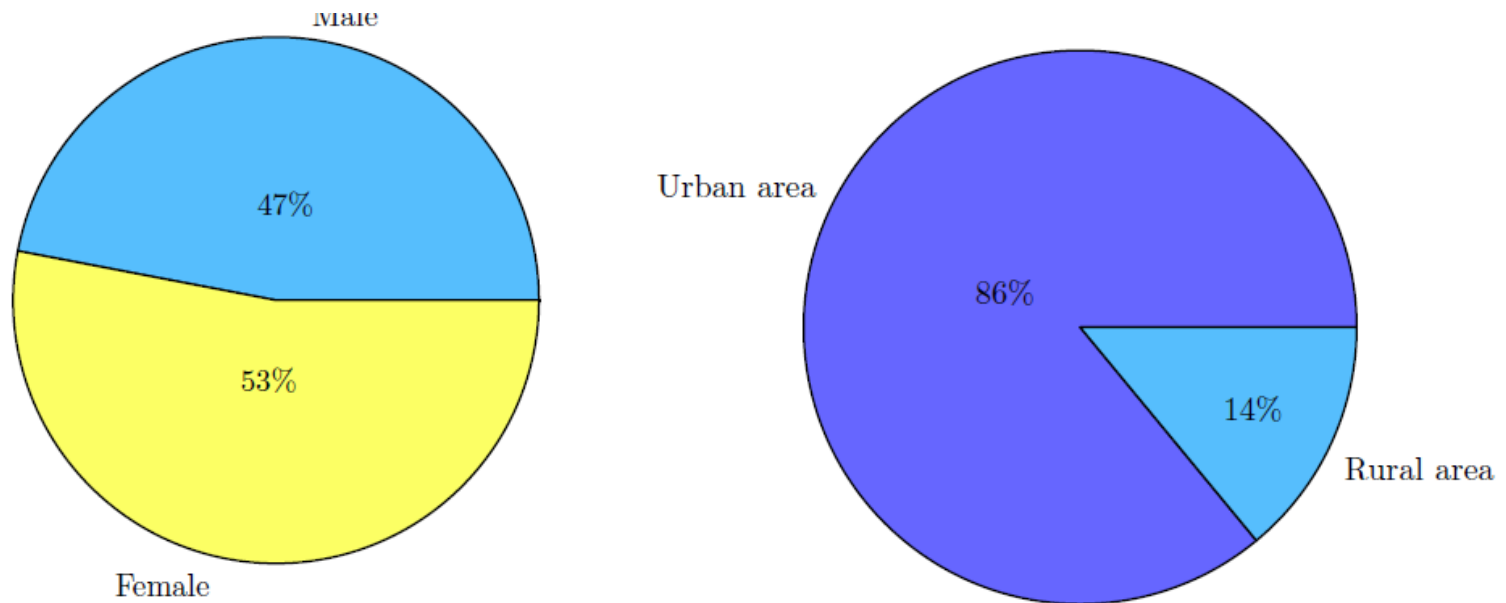
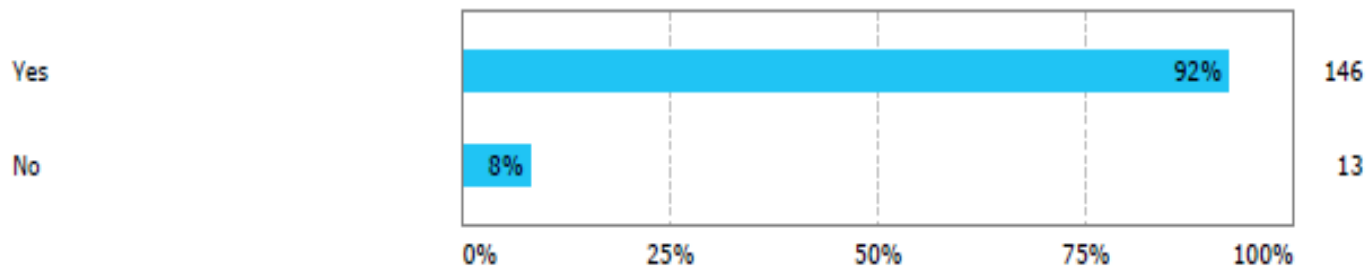


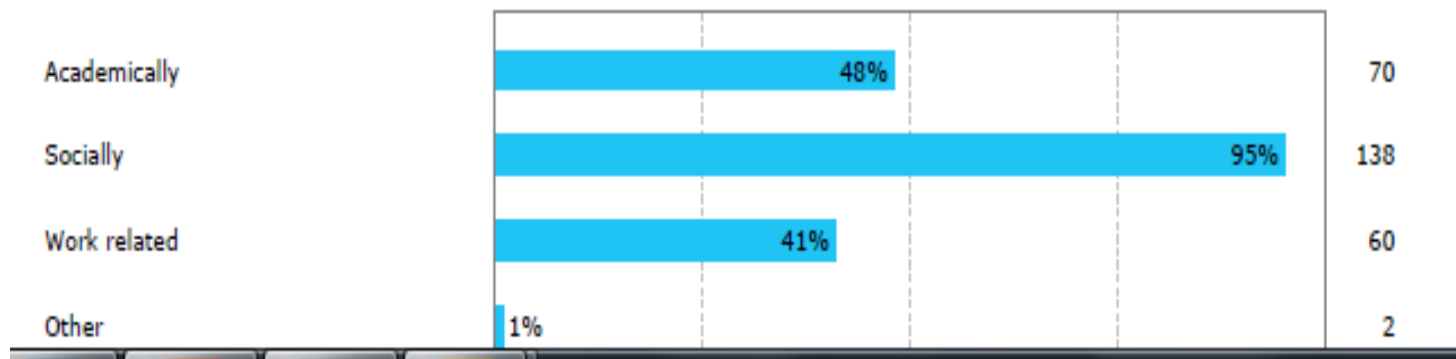
Figure 1: Background of international students at UCN.

Quantitative Results

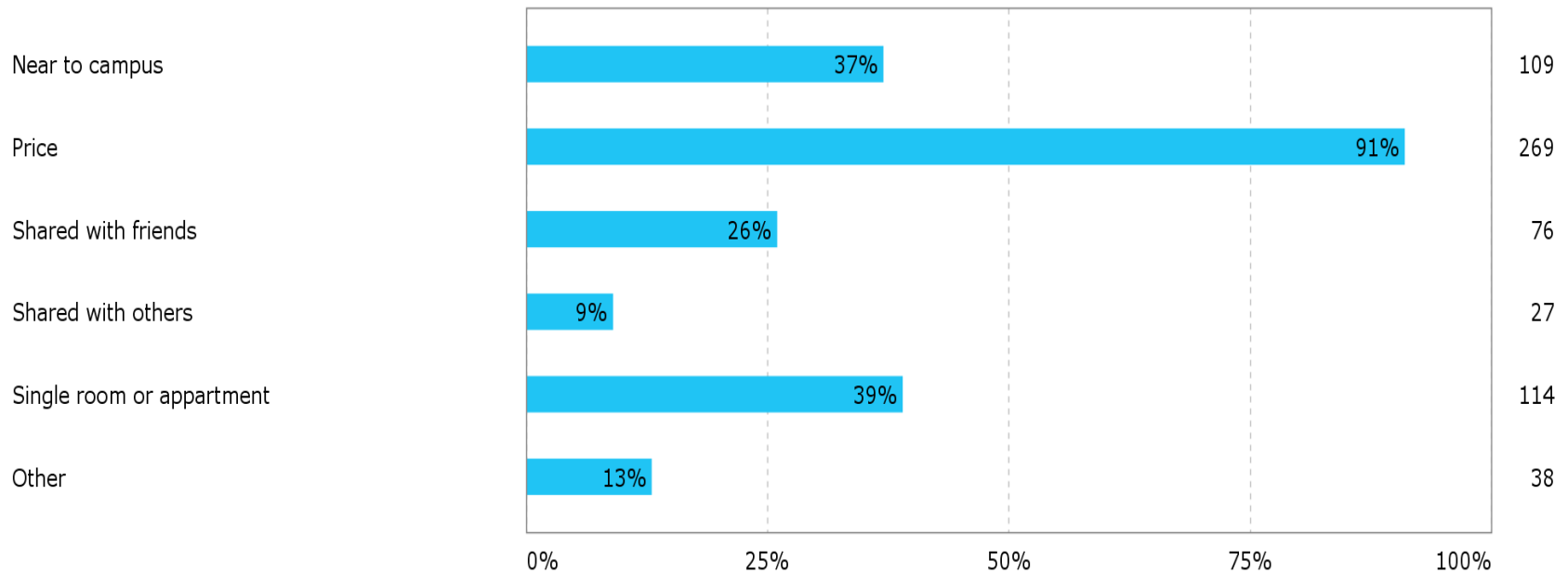
Would you like to have more contact with Danes?



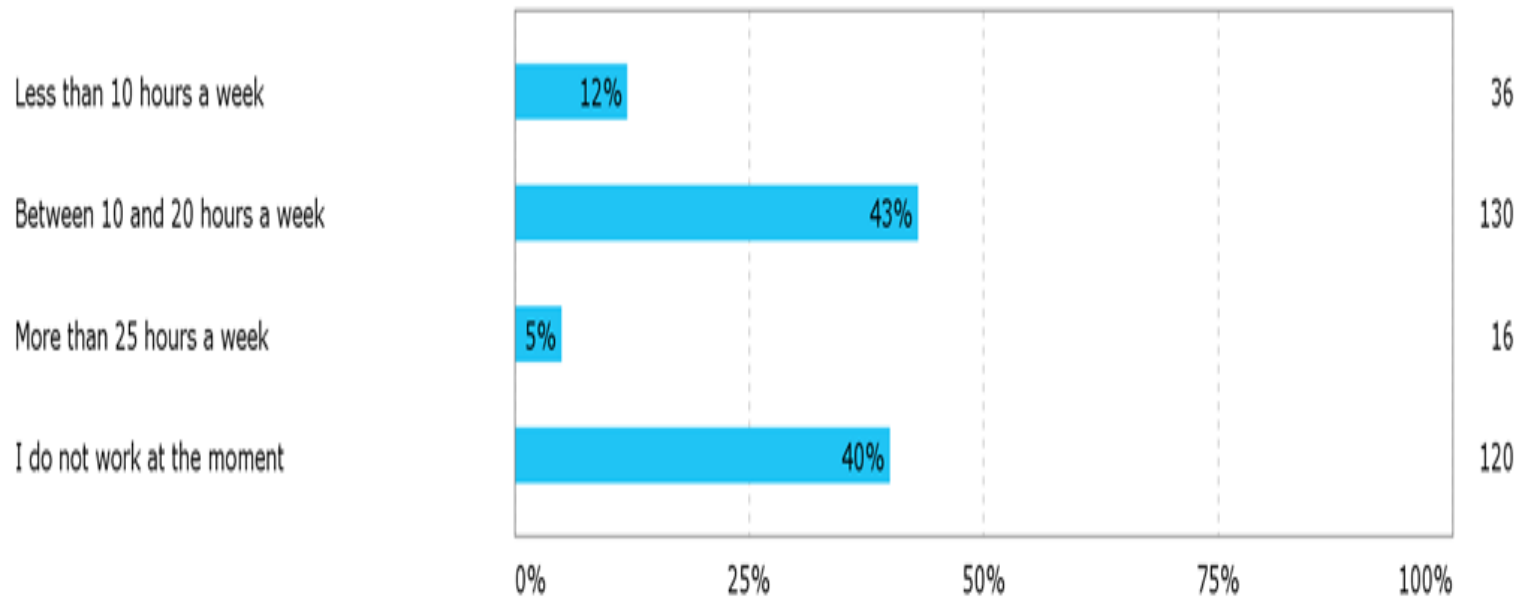
In what way would you like further interaction with Danes?



Results – living conditions- akkomodation



Results – work/study balance



How does your work affect your studies?

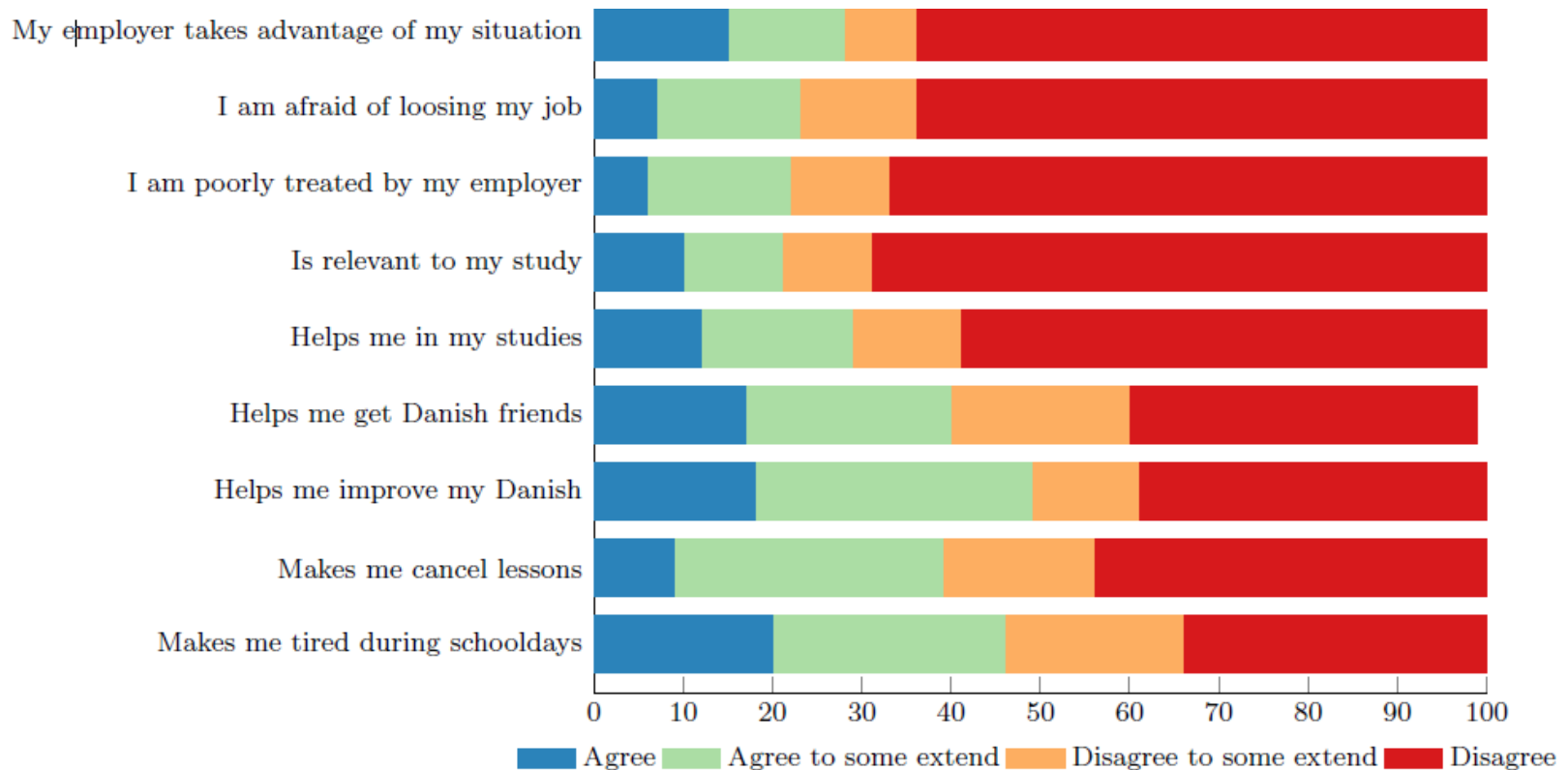


Figure 1: How does your work affect your studies at UCN?

Results

- We can conclude that there is a huge gap between the intentions (UCN) and reality. The challenge is linked to the international students life situation compared to Danish student's life situation. Financial capacity and resources in everyday life play a major role. Never the less the study shows that initiatives like the Culture – Host program does provide some of the international students with better chances for being a part of the learning environment and the Danish society. And support more satisfaction and optimistic views on the future.

Qualitative Results:

• Network – Home vs. International

- *“It’s definitely better to [be] matched with a Dane, rather than an international, because I think people wouldn’t even sign up for that, because we interact with internationals all the time”* (International Student, UCN focus group interview 27th June, 2016)

• Second choice students

- *“The teachers are good, events are perfect BUT there is this huge issue for me that make me feel unwelcome or without value for UCN. I understand that we have chosen to study in Denmark, but we also need to go and see our family, and the change of schedules, etc. does not allow us this (...)I appreciate every event and help from UCN but I cannot stop myself from feeling like a number, non-important student who does not really matter (...)I know for sure that there are others who consider this a problem”* (International Student, survey, June 2016)
- *“I did not receive the needed help when I needed it, so I stopped asking and did everything myself(...)I have been living with almost no money for the past year. Try to imagine it(...) I feel very much disappointed in comparison to my overall expectation to Denmark and UCN”* (int. students - survey, June 2016)

Qualitative Results

■ Chemistry

- *“(….)There wasn’t this chemistry, and we didn’t have natural topics to discuss, and maybe also the English thing too, she wasn’t sure about her English (….)so she was kind of pressured and sometimes say “shit”!, and it’s impossible for me to have deep conversation in Danish” (International student - focus group 21/6/2016)*

■ Trips enhancing a shared experience of belonging together

- *“The best thing I can sort of say about this [culture host programme] is that it’s a bit like being on holiday at home. We are sort of tourist all of us [both international and Danish students], when we go on events in Blokhus, then we are just as much tourists as everybody else”*
- *“during these trips, we could bond so much easier. Because we didn’t have anything on our minds” (Danish student, interview 27/6)*

Discussion – Four Themes

1. The small number of participants joining the initiative despite the clear need for such an intervention

- 95% would like more contact with Danes, but only 14 students joined (60% less than the goal of 10)
- Balancing busy schedules (work & study)

2. The various perceptions of international and home students

- The pro-active vs. the opportunistic international student
- Perceptions of International students vs. Home students
- Initiative 1 aided in wiping out negative stereotypes among students

Discussion – 4 themes

- 3. The learning outcomes of partaking in the initiatives**
 - Learning as belonging
 - Learning as becoming
 - Learning as meaning
 - In relation to initiative 1 the programme accommodates variations within learning thus has potential
- 4. The weak internationalisation taking place at UCN according to some students**
 - The difference between internationalization and international students
 - So far UCN has international students, but suffer from weak internationalization as an organization
 - In relation to initiative 1 this means that the programme offers a platform for mutual reflection that leads to acknowledging the issues of internationalization carried out by IO and within UCN in general

Thank you for your time

We welcome further:

- Capacity Building & North/South Collaboration
- Internships
- Mobility Exchange
- Please get in touch
- Research programs ☺



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