



INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



AND THE

*INTERNATIONAL  
ENVIRONMENT*

# Editor's Note

I see you have found yourself a copy of BAISmag, the student magazine of International Studies. Whether you have just found us or been around for years already, we are glad that you are here! In the first edition of the year we take a deep dive into our program International Studies, and the international environment of our community and campus The Hague. It is easy to forget when you are in the middle of it, but the multinational classroom and multilingual study sessions are not commonplace on all campuses. Therefore we took the chance this time to indulge in what we have right here around us - International Studies. This magazine is the result of many conversations, editing hours, design choices, and brainstorms. We are happy to present the final result to you, dear reader, and hope you will enjoy the magazine!

**Martina Ljungdahl**  
Editor in Chief

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Editor-in-Chief: Martina Ljungdahl

Editors: Martina Ljungdahl, Mariia Ignateva, Diederik Bouwman, Marguerite Martins, Alexandre Arrivé, Biatrice Scali, Elisabeth Schmidt, Vanessa Hecker, Zahra Menguelliati, Beatrice Manicone,

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Copyright: BAISmag, Turfmarkt 99, 2511 DP, The Hague

[baismag@basisthehague.nl](mailto:baismag@basisthehague.nl)

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## **Student Interviews**

Page 3

## **Teacher Interviews**

Page 9

## **Citizen of Confusion**

Page 12

## **Survival 101**

Page 14

## **Diary of an Exchange Student**

Page 17

## **The Hate on Hagelslag**

Page 19

## **The (not so) Multicultural International Community**

Page 22

## **Geography Quiz**

Page 25

## **The Hague: City of Peace and Justice**

Page 27

## **Living in the Region you Studied**

Page 31

## **A 4-Minute Poem on Student Finance**

Page 34

# **Table of Contents**

# Student Interviews

## **Authors' note:**

For this edition of BAISmag we wanted to ask our fellow students to tell our readers their life stories and how they have been experiencing The Hague so far. This article consists of six interviews of random students, who we met at Wijnhaven during our research and who kindly agreed to answer our questions. Wijnhaven is a bubbly place with many different nationalities, (mixed) cultural backgrounds, and languages. How do people studying there experience their international community and what encounters with other cultures do they have? Enjoy the interviews and stay tuned, maybe next time you get a chance to tell your story!

## **Manuela- second-year Latin America student from Niterói, Brazil**

### **What are some cultural shocks that you have experienced so far? I can imagine that lots of things differ from Brazil.**

That is really true. For example, in Brazil, we tend to be really touchy, we smile a lot and always appear kind of, you know, warm. The cultural shock for me here was that people mostly would act this way only if they knew you better.

### **Did some funny situations happen to you because of those cultural differences?**

Yes, for example, last year I used to hug everybody and give kiss on the cheek. So in Brazil, it is usually two kisses but in France, it is three. One time when I and my friend from France were greeting each other, we almost actually kissed by accident and we found it really funny.



**I think it is always nice if you are just able to laugh those awkward situations off with friends. And what do you like the most about studying in such an international environment?**

One of the best parts for me is that when studying with people from so many backgrounds, you constantly learn about the culture and the experiences of your friends in different countries. I personally have not travelled around the world that much yet so I find it really exciting to learn this new information and sometimes it feels like I myself now have been to those places.

**With this enriching experience, would you now consider yourself a 'world citizen'?**

If I am being honest, I don't really know. The Netherlands has been the only country where I lived apart from Brazil. But I am definitely feeling more international right now than before I started my studies. I have learned a lot about the world and I want to continue travelling. So yeah, maybe I am a 'world citizen' in a sense. I am not sure if I would use this term necessarily, but those studies have made me more 'international'.



Greta- first-year student from Berlin

**Berlin is quite an international city. Do you feel that the environment at International Studies is less or even more international in comparison to your previous studies?**

Well, I was born in Berlin, and when I was about three my family moved to Lebanon, we also lived for a bit in Sri Lanka and Cambodia while I was growing up. We came back to Germany eventually but I also lived for half a year in Brussels for an exchange. So in fact I am quite used to the international environment! Still, compared to my school in Berlin, it feels like the environment is much more international here.

**Would you consider yourself a ‘world citizen’ then?**

It sounds really pretentious, but given how many places I have been while growing up I actually do. However, I usually say that I am from Berlin because I feel that I have much more connection to this city rather than to Germany itself. It is really different from other German cities and much more international. Actually, coming back to previous questions, I think that Berlin is more international than the Hague.

**But do you still enjoy the environment here so far? And do you find something surprising about the Netherlands?**

I definitely enjoy being here, but as a first-year student, I am still adapting to certain things. For example, for me, it is hard to get used to Dutch food. Yesterday I spent eight hours making bread because I cannot enjoy the bread from Albert Heijn. Also, the fact that bikes are not just a mode of transportation but a culture here. Everyone is like ‘I will just hop on my bike and come get you’ and it is really unusual. On the other hand, what I enjoy here is the party culture. Gosh, I thought people drink a lot in Germany but you guys drink even more!

Maria- first-year student from Arusha, Tanzania

**What is your background?**

I grew up in Arusha, Tanzania. We moved there from Germany when I was 10 months old, but since then I've spent all my life there. We moved around in Tanzania, but in the same 50-kilometer radius. I only have German citizenship, because a Tanzanian one wouldn't have been good for studying abroad. My mum has a British passport, although she grew up in Zimbabwe.

**Are there any culture shocks you've experienced in different countries?**

Not so much here in the Netherlands. I like Dutch people, they're really liberal and chill. I had my European culture shock last year when I took a gap year and worked in Switzerland. I found people there were very focused on time and they were not as welcoming and open as Tanzanians. It takes a while for them to open up but after that, they're very nice.

**What do you like about studying in an international environment?**

I went to an international school, so I'm finding my experience in Leiden really similar to that. Here there are a lot of different nationalities, but mostly from Europe. There are not so many students from Africa, which I was sad to find out about. In my class back in Tanzania there were 80 different nationalities, but around half of my class was from East- Africa. A lot of students from Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda for example. I'm really liking the environment here, it's very diverse, open-minded and liberal.

**Would you consider yourself a world citizen?**

I have an identity crisis, not going to lie. When people ask me where I'm from my answer is "Great question!". I think I would consider myself a global citizen, because I can't really relate to the general experience of growing up in Tanzania. Because I went to a private international school I kind of grew up in the expat bubble, although I also went out and had many Tanzanian friends. I learned the language which a lot of expats don't do. Like I said I also have different cultural backgrounds, and visited my family in Germany, Zimbabwe and South Africa quite a lot.

**Given you have so many cultural backgrounds, what languages do you speak then?**

I know Swahili, and in international school, I had English and French. The last two years I also took Spanish but I'm not that good at it. My dad speaks German so I also know German from his side. In the area I grew up they also speak Kimeru and Kichaga, which are languages the tribes there speak. The national language or lingua franca is Kiswahili though, and that's what's also taught in schools. That's what most people speak in Tanzania, with English as a second lingua franca.



Chiara- first-year student from Milan, Italy

**I have a friend who also moved from Milan to the Netherlands and for a few months he was really depressed. How was your experience so far?**

I think it is pretty understandable! No, actually, I am kidding. Here everything is really different from Italian culture: people lack spontaneousness and appear to be more reserved. Also, I miss the food and the sunlight. However, overall I was much more prepared to move to the Netherlands after my exchange in Costa Rica because I was prepared to handle difficulties. I do sometimes struggle with people talking to me in Dutch and having to explain to them that I do not speak the language, and especially with my landlord being an old lady sometimes we have some communication problems. For instance, one time she texted me and my roommates not to throw wet wipes in the toilet but to throw them in the bin and we were really confused. But we just asked her to explain what she meant and with a little bit of effort from both sides, we finally understood her point. In general, though, I feel like people here are really accommodating and accepting of non-Dutch speakers, also because most of them speak perfect English.

**But there should be positive aspects that you enjoy about studying at Leiden University?**

What I love most about studying in an international environment such as Leiden University, are the people that I meet. Having friends from all over the world that grew up in different countries from mine, with a different culture, language, and traditions, but still somehow being able to connect with them and find a common ground.

**Would you consider yourself a ‘world citizen’?**

I am not sure I would consider myself a world citizen, but I do aim to become one. Every day, I try to get more informed about the world around me and understand it with all of its nuances and contradictions. I would say that I am a person open to change and confrontation and I believe that every country and culture has something to offer and to teach us.

-Mariia and Zahra

Nikoloz- first-year student from Tbilisi, Georgia

### **Have you experienced any culture shocks?**

This is basically my first experience with moving to another country, which is thrilling. I've been to England for like a month before and met a lot of people from different countries there, so I already got used to different cultures. I've noticed Georgians share a lot of similar cultural things with southern and eastern Europeans. The main culture shock I've had so far is with the majority of northern European culture here.

A big difference I've noticed is how rational Dutchie's are. Everything is punctual, everything is on time, people are direct and don't act on emotions too often. Even with managing money and splitting bills people are rational. In Georgia, it's not really like this. There's a stereotype that we're not really punctual. We also speak and act more emotionally. A typical conversation at a Georgian dinner table would go very differently from one at a Dutch dinner table. And in the end, we don't expect our friends to pay us back and kind of forget about the bill.

### **Do you consider Georgia European?**

Yes, I do. Culturally we're very European, in things like wine making, the architecture in the big cities, the way people act, and also in terms of progressiveness compared to the more traditional countries around us. But let's be fair, geographically we're not. I'd say Georgia is a European country in Asia. I am an advocate of Georgia joining the EU and have been to a few manifestations.

### **What languages do you know?**

Well Georgian and English, as you would expect. I can also speak, read and write Russian quite fluently. I know the basics of German as I've been learning it for a while. I want to learn Arabic or Spanish during my program.

### **Would you ever consider yourself a world citizen?**

I'm still very close to my culture and my home country. It would be hard to give that up for a different identity. To say you're a world citizen would mean you're already part of a broader spectrum. I think I will always be international in a way, I want to travel quite a bit, but I'll always be a Georgian citizen, at least in my heart.

# Teacher Interviews

Not only the student body of IS is multinational but the teaching staff too. We asked some teachers of IS about their experiences of teaching in the program, and how they find the international environment in their workplace and classrooms.

Moving to a new country is always a daunting experience. Living in the Netherlands as international students or teachers can be challenging, especially when it comes to integrating in the culture. Every day you learn new habits, new traditions. Paulina Rabah Ramirez, Cultural studies instructor from Chile, agrees with those assumptions as she experienced a culture shock when coming here. In her words, “the darkness really affected me, first winter here I started staying in my apartment longer and longer, I wasn’t really going outside, making me feel so sad”, indeed, as it is universally known the “zon”/sun goes on a winter break and never

appears for 7 months. As Paulina mentioned, the solution is taking vitamin D every day to survive this period and force yourself to go out during the day, bike a little. Embrace the full Dutch experience by biking in the cold under the rain, and try to dodge seasonal depression.

Another massive shock, which for most people is not surprising, is the very particular eating habits that you encounter in this country. Coming from an eating culture, Paulina says that for her, eating is a social thing, that gathers people together, something that is really important. As students you have very little time to eat a proper lunch, you’re almost forced to take a sandwich each day. (Last but not least), Dutch people are pretty straightforward, during her master’s degree Paulina felt like it was hard to socialize and actually be friends with Dutch people. She explained that, especially when studying for a master degree, they (the dutch) already have their whole life planned, with jobs, friends, everything within hand reach. However, international students,

Paulina Rabah Ramirez



they come in a totally new environment, where they don't know the language and where most of the time they don't know anyone. They would then stay together and the Dutch on another side, the mingling was quite difficult. Not impossible though, everyone has to make an effort to include and mix with everyone!

Vedant who also did a master's in the Netherlands, but originally comes from India, explained that he has more room to discuss with and be critical towards his superior colleagues here in the Netherlands than he would have at a normal workplace in India, something he sees as positive.

### **The international classroom**

Elliot Whiteside, himself a graduate of IS, and who speaks English as a first language noticed his accent has changed slightly from living in the Netherlands and working in a multinational and multilingual environment. Lisa Wolring, also a graduate of IS in its first ever year group, admits that she did not speak much in class as a student of the program. Now that she is

Vedant Mehra



Lisa Wolring



teaching in the program she explains that she does not have the same vocabulary for certain academic subjects in her mother tongue Dutch as she does in English. Dorie Nielsen, a teacher of Russian language, recalls being nervous about having to teach in English when she started teaching at IS, but everything has worked out well. When asked how she likes the international classroom in IS she responded: 'I like it a lot. I think people become more tolerant because it doesn't matter where people are from because they are your friends.'

Paulina Rabah Ramirez describes the feeling of working with students and coworkers from everywhere as "home". It is a unique experience that allows people to meet and live within different cultures, where everyone has a different background, a different history, it is very enriching.

### **Disadvantages**

Where there are advantages, disadvantages come along too! Everyone would agree that being in an international environment is

always beneficial, but in an academic setting it can create some difficulties notably regarding the language barriers and differences. Speaking your second language on a daily basis can be quite challenging. Lisa Wolring agrees that sometimes little things in communication can disturb a conversation, but that overall in this bachelor of International Studies there's always someone to help. In the end we're all here to learn!

Dorie Nielsen, on the other hand has a more practical approach to this question about disadvantages, as she exclaimed that the problem is the housing. There are not enough rooms available for everyone, it is really difficult to find a place. Although it sounds hard to achieve, Dorie argues that the universities should guarantee an accommodation for every student, or at least help them in the search for one. Nowadays as the housing market is expensive, only the luckiest get access to cheap student housing.

However, on the whole there seems to be a positive attitude towards working and teaching in a multinational environment. The diverse experiences and background both colleagues and students bring to the table at IS seems to make up for any occasional misunderstandings or language barriers. Or like Vedant expressed it, 'I only see advantages, there is always someone who can help'.

### **Marguerite Martins & Martina Ljungdahl**



Dorie Nielsen



Elliot Whiteside

# Citizen of Confusion

It's May 2022. I'm standing in a small room at Wijnhaven with a bunch of strangers: all fellow Leiden University students, all patiently waiting for the organizers of the Language Café to come and release us of the responsibility of having to socialize on our own. Minutes feel like eternity when you're standing next to a silent stranger, so I decide to break the ice. I take a deep breath, turn to the guy to my right, and go: "So, where are you from?"

Wrong question. After almost a year surrounded by IS students, I should know better. I should know that if breaking the ice is the goal, that is not the question you ask. You complain about Dutch weather, or Dutch prices, or Dutch anything, for that matter. But you don't ask about nationality. Not unless you're ready for the other person to whip a world map out of their pocket, a long stick, a blackboard and a piece of chalk and start drawing you their family tree with one hand while pointing at different continents with the other. That's what my brain visualizes, at least, every time I make the mistake

of asking that question, and end up having to sit through ten minutes of people listing countries and dates and family members.

His answer was "everywhere", by the way. Just "everywhere". A remarkably short and slightly annoying way of making a very valid point: why are you asking a boring question? We are all from everywhere and nowhere, around here. Why do you need to know the specifics?

I used to be annoyed by these Very International people. And I guess they can be annoying, with their expensive IB certificates and fancy English and assumptions that anyone who is not like them is really just not yet like them, because they are the future: identifying with everyone and no one, with every place and no place, no longer prisoners to imaginary lines on a map.

For a while, the combination of being in a foreign country that I didn't perceive as very welcoming and feeling surrounded by a specific

kind of international students I couldn't relate to, provoked a sort of extreme reaction in me, a surge in Italianness, if you will. I had spent my teenage years feeling like a fish out of water, condemned to live among all these narrow-minded Italians while I was, in fact, not like other Italians. When I enrolled into International Studies, I thought I would finally belong. I would finally be among my fellow cosmopolitans, living my best life as a citizen of the world. Except that the second I found myself amongst this truly international crowd, I realized that I am, in fact, like other Italians. In so many subtle, intangible, minuscule ways which I had never paid attention to, I think and act in remarkably typical ways. I guess I just never knew they were typical, until I got exposed to other types.

**Beatrice Scali**

# Survival 101

Moving abroad can be an intimidating and sometimes quite scary undertaking. In my life, I have moved abroad twice for a longer period. Both times, my planning ahead of time was severely lacking due to my inherent procrastination tendencies, so I had to learn some things the hard way once I arrived at my destinations. Admittedly, my culture shock moving from Germany to the Netherlands was quite limited, yet I was surprised to see how even those two neighboring countries differ. From different holidays to an even more annoying bureaucracy or even curious grocery shopping rituals, it took me some time to adjust to the Dutch way of life. In this article I will give all of you who are new to the Netherlands or who have not quite yet figured your way around here a few tips and tricks that helped me to feel at home quicker.

1

## Accept the bike way of life

Starting with the obvious first: get a bike. While it may be obvious to everyone that bicycles are the No.1 means of transportation here in the Netherlands -after all, it is estimated that there are more bicycles than people in here- I thought I would include some advice on how to survive in this madness for all those that come from parts of the world where bicycles are the third most popular mean of transport at best. My first tip is to always be mindful of where you park your bike. First of all, bicycle theft is a booming business here, so always make sure to lock your bike well, preferably at a bicycle stand. But also keep in mind that there are designated spots to park your bike and if you lock it, for example, at a lamp post, you run the risk of being towed. For surviving the turmoil of cars, bikes, trams, and pedestrians in the morning, I can only tell you to be patient, you'll get used to it eventually. Oh, and one last thing: stay clear of the tram tracks!



## 2

### Don't ever trust the weather

Yes, the Netherlands is known for being a rainy country, yet, no one has warned me about the volatility of the weather. Nothing makes me happier than a sunny day after weeks of rain and wind, and it is oh too tempting to ditch the raincoat and enjoy the sunbeams to the fullest during a nice stroll through the park. Sounds nice, right? No. Within seconds, the weather here in the Netherlands can change, opening the gates of heaven and leaving you soaked before you can even think about finding shelter. My advice: always take an umbrella or raincoat with you, even if your weather app is promising the nicest weather for the rest of the day. There is really no way of ever telling how the rest of the day will go.

## 3

### Master of discounts

One of the things that confused me most after moving to the Netherlands was the supermarket situation. Small, disorganized, and expensive was the best way that I could describe them and I didn't really know how people could survive under these conditions. Conducting a little field research, I soon figured, however, that the Dutch have their own distinct supermarket culture that takes some time to get used to. Discount and bonus campaigns are a student's best friend. Downloading the app of your favorite supermarket chain is, therefore, of utmost importance. After creating a free account, you'll get discount offers tailored to your own needs and can also collect loyalty points that you can exchange for different products. In the app, you will also find your customer card that you can scan at the checkout to get the discounts of the bonus campaigns.

# 4

## Survival of the fittest

Staying on the topic of saving money, despite being one of the most expensive countries that I have ever been to, there are quite a few ways to save money as a student. In my time living here, I noticed that quite a lot of establishments offer student discounts. I could save money on my gym membership and even my hairdresser gave me a 20% discount for being a student. Another discovery that has made me immensely happy is the Studentday at Pathé Cinemas. While going to the cinema is still a rather expensive way to spend your free time, on Mondays, you can actually save some money on the tickets as a student, so you can see a movie and buy some snacks for the price that you would usually only pay for the ticket. Another thing that no one told me is that most students also qualify for a tax waiver, meaning that you don't have to pay the municipal taxes, or at least not completely. The municipality will still send you a tax

assessment though, and you will have to apply for a tax waiver yourself by proving that you have low or no income.

**Vanessa**



# Diary of an Exchange Student

Dear Diary,

I am in the country where they drive on the wrong side of the street and they eat beans on toast. The weather sucks: it is raining, it is cold and I forgot to pack an umbrella with me. I had always wanted to do this, study in the land of Harry Potter (or Harry Styles - choose your own Harry, I prefer the latter), and have the full university experience with student housing. Let me tell you, fire alarms at 3am are not fun; and neither is leaving your warm and cozy bed to go outside the building in the pouring rain. The drenching sound of a fire alarm that goes through your ears at 3am is one thing you will remember forever, and you will quite soon realize how sensitive these things are. I also have not seen all of my flatmates yet, I think we are 8 people, but so far I counted 4. They are all nice, but I haven't talked to them that much, so I could not tell you more about it. I started classes today, the workload seems lighter than what I am used to and I

have quite a lot of free time during the week; this kind of reminds me how much I miss knowing people and being able to hang out often. I don't really know anyone here, I cannot really ask people if they want to do something together, and I hate going to university and getting lost because I still have not figured out the layout of the campus. I miss the text 'hey, is anyone in uni?' and being able to chat between lectures or tutorials, or colonizing the white tables near the library so we had a place to study before exams. Here everything is new, people speak with an incomprehensible accent and I miss my friends.

Dear Diary,

The weather has gotten worse, heaters are on, and the amount of tea I am drinking on a daily basis definitely exceeds the amount of water, but this place is starting to feel like a third home. Believe me, even if at the beginning everything seems harder, it will get much better eventually. I have met all of my flatmates and they are the nicest group of people I could have asked for. We all get along quite well and the atmosphere in the flat is impeccable. Even if we are so different from one another, somehow we click: we mess with each other, we laugh, but we also respect each other. They will probably not be my life-long friends, but they will be my temporarily acquired family until we all scatter around the world again, back to our home countries. Now everything feels like a fever dream, I am actually following courses I like, my routine is kicking in (I really do not recommend gaslighting your body into having breakfast at 12, lunch at 16 and dinner at 22), and homesickness is getting better. Your exchange year

is supposed to feel like going downhill with a bike, it is dangerous, you can fall and hurt yourself, but it is also lots of fun and adrenaline. It is the time you have to push your boundaries, not too much of course, but always try to get out of your cozy comfort zone. I have exposed my bad movie culture to most of my flatmates, but I did receive an excel sheet with an endless list of movies I should watch. I have won a water pong competition (we have carpeted floors so we are not using alcohol) against three guys, which is my greatest accomplishment so far. I have spent hours arguing on the fact that you need to wash your dish and pot with vinegar if you have cooked eggs or fish, otherwise they will smell bad. I am still trying to figure most things out, but having flatmates that are going through the same experience as you is quite reassuring and comforting. You can meet people from all over the world, try dishes and drinks from countries you would not normally do, learn words in languages you had never heard anyone speak, and everything in the span of four months. Just make sure you make the best out of it!

**Bea**

# The Hate on Hagelslag

## The Highs and Lows of the International Environment according to the Dutch and the Internationals

The “international environment” is the term we use to refer to the sociocultural setting and atmosphere at the university generated through the gathering of people from all over the world through international courses. This setting includes for instance multiculturalism and multilingualism. In a survey, we asked international and Dutch students about their experiences with the international environment. Responses were gathered from first, second, and third year students from International Studies, Security Studies, International Relations and Organizations, as well as International Communication Management (ICM). The home countries of our participants were even more diverse, with nearly every continent being represented, except South America and Australia. Most participants were from Europe though, 26.3% being Dutch.

### Culture Shocks

One of the things the survey looked into were culture shocks. Among the sources for culture shocks that were mentioned by internationals, were the university environment in general, multilingualism, diversity, and openness. The latter was for instance expressed by one participant, who explained the following: “I was socialized with fairly different attitudes in the environment where I grew up, and I partially resisted adopting those of the international environment. This sometimes alienates me from the people I meet here, although I nonetheless made friends who share these starkly different attitudes.”

One last point mentioned in relation to culture shocks was the food culture which seems to mostly be experienced by the French. One participant explained that people in France usually eat at more regular times whereas here in the Hague restaurants are open “at any time of the day.”

A food-related culture shock was

also expressed by one of our Dutch participants, who mentioned “the hate on Hagelslag” as their main culture shock. Other than that the views of Dutch students on culture shocks did not offer any major revelations as many said that they did not experience shocks. The main points after Hagelslag mentioned here were big city life and the drinking culture.

### **The Lows**

The majority of people (both, Dutch and internationals) indicated that they felt comfortable in the international environment and felt like they could relate to people well. However, there were certain points that many people said they disliked about the international environment. A reoccurring response was, for instance, the language barrier. For many whose mother tongue isn’t English, it seemingly can be challenging to express themselves properly at times. One participant, for instance, said that “nearly all our native languages aren’t English [which] makes it harder to fully express all our thoughts and feelings.” The other major point mentioned specifically by internationals, was

the difficulty of integrating into the Dutch community. Multiple people mentioned the Dutch language in this context and explained that it can be very hard to learn Dutch, which then again makes it more difficult to properly integrate into the culture. It was also mentioned that we are all somewhat “stuck in a bubble and [...] cannot leave as the natives are already settled in with their own friend groups and it is really hard to really get to know them. This often makes one feel alienated.”

In a broader sense, both Dutch and international students said that they often feel like people with the same origin tend to group together, forming groups that isolate themselves from the rest of the community and tightly “cling” together.

When looking at the polls, 85.7% of international students said that their friends are from somewhere else abroad (meaning not from the Netherlands or their home country). For the Dutch, it was only 50% that claimed this to be the case. The rest of the Dutch participants said that their friends are from the Netherlands. Though this might make it seem like the internationals

are more interactive with other cultures, one must consider that 82% of internationals made most of their friends at university, a student association, or at hop week, while for the Dutch it was only 60%. The rest of them said that they made their friends at school or outside of university.

### **The Highs and Belonging**

Of course, not all is bad about the international environment, and the tendency to isolate certainly is not the norm. Therefore, many people said that what they like most about the international environment is the variety in culture, the open-mindedness, the different backgrounds, perspectives, and stories, and most importantly, the food and the people. One participant eloquently summed this up, saying that there is a “diversity of people, opinions, cultures etc, but you can always find common ground.”

As expected, many people said that they feel like they belong in the international environment, while others said that they feel like they belong in their home country, the Netherlands, or with their friends

and loved ones. However, as belonging has and always will be an ambiguous topic, the majority of people explained that they feel like they belong everywhere or don't feel like they belong at all. As one person put it “I have no fucking idea. I feel like I could belong anywhere but at the same time never fully belong in one place.”

**Lilly**

# The (not so) Multicultural International Community

“A vibrant multicultural student environment, with classmates from the Netherlands and 50 other countries”. The university’s website gives a clear impression of what studying at International Studies is like: People from anywhere, with any cultural background.

Wijnhaven, the Sixtine Chapel of diversity.

When I enrolled for International Studies, I was desperate for such an environment. Before moving out, I spent the first 20 years of my life living in the same house in the Dutch country side. I felt like I had seen nothing of the world. My former classmates came from families that seemed to have lived there for generations, and many of them would probably stay there. Stores were closed on Sundays, the rest of the week they would close at 5. The final years of living there were during a series of lockdowns: My world shrank from a town to a house. My despair driven afternoon runs didn’t help against the feeling that my world was so small that it

could suffocate me: after a month of running past farmlands, I worried that I would start recognizing the cows. I was desperate. Desperate for diversity, desperate to meet people with different life experiences.

In a way, the Wijnhaven environment fulfilled those expectations. Most of us have not yet been in a place with as many people from as many different countries as the student community at Wijnhaven, and finding another place with so many nationalities might be a challenge. However, it wasn’t as multicultural as I thought: while diverse in nationality, most students seem to be a product of the same culture – and the same economic class. No matter whether they were born in Egypt or Brazil, Singapore or Spain: a lot of international students seem to have parents who moved around the world with them as if the globe is a sub-urban neighbourhood. During the winter break, Instagram stories are flooded with photos of trips to warmer places, intercontinental flights seem to be the standard. It

feels surreal at times, interacting with people who all seemed to have had the same childhood, despite growing up in the largest variety of countries. I was once at a house party when our high school exams became the topic of conversation: Everyone had done IB-exams, everyone had attended an international school, everyone had moved from one country to another multiple times.

Although many along with me don't relate to many of such experiences, they sometimes seem to be the standard.

Yes, the current environment seems homogenous, and far from diverse, rather privileged, out of touch with the vast majority of people worldwide who have never left the country they were born in, and the large group of people who simply do not care about world events that do not directly affect them – be it carelessness or the presence of more directly impactful events to worry about.

I don't miss my old environment, but do I sometimes wish my current environment had just a bit more people with different life

experiences? Yes. A campus with hundreds of people with the same interest in the world, with the same level of education, the same age: it should have been obvious that this isn't the recipe for a multicultural experience. Does this community contribute nothing to my experience of 'the international community', whatever it may be? It does contribute. The people around me are different from the people I used to be surrounded by. You don't get a multicultural experience by staying in one community forever, but you can by finding as many different communities as you can. The international community is diverse and multicultural, but maybe it is not one community, maybe it is thousands of communities, and it's best to explore them one by one.

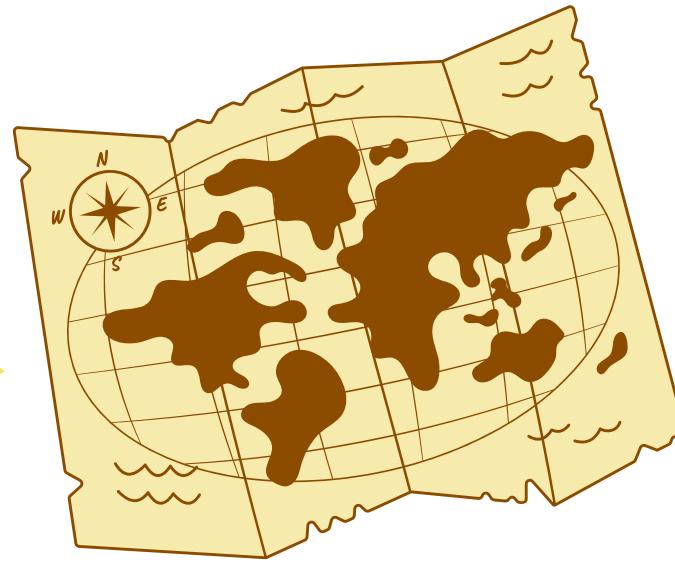
**Diederik**



# Geography Quiz

Which is Indonesia's biggest island?

- a. Java
- b. Sumatra
- c. New-Guinea
- d. Kalimantan



**CONNECT THESE 10 INDIAN CITIES  
WITH MORE THAN 5 MILLION  
INHABITANTS TO THE RIGHT  
NUMBER.**

- 1. CHENNAI
- 2. AHMEDABAD
- 3. SURAT
- 4. MUMBAI
- 5. KOLKATA
- 6. DELHI
- 7. HYDERABAD
- 8. KANPUR
- 9. BANGALORE
- 10. PUNE

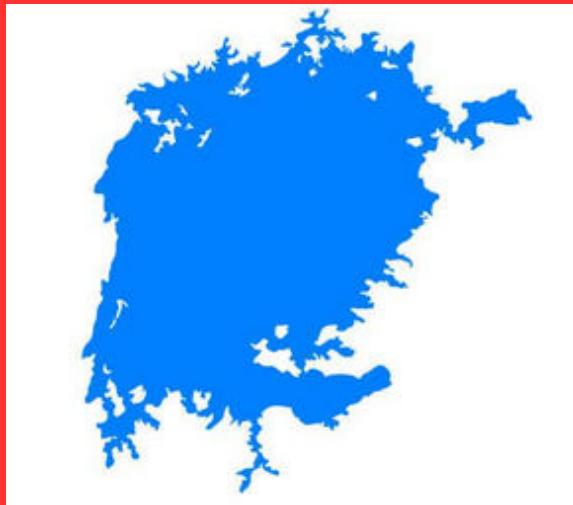


Answers are on the last page

Which one of these shapes is Lake Victoria?



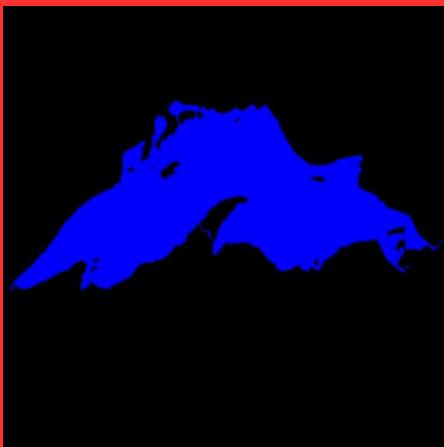
A.



C



B



D

WHAT IS THE SOUTHERNMOST  
CAPITAL CITY?

- A. CAPE TOWN
- B. BUENOS AIRES
- C. CANBERRA
- D. WELLINGTON

-Zahra

# The Hague: City of Peace and Justice

Which international institutions do we actually have and what do they do?

## 1. Europol

Europol is an organisation that combats and tries to prevent organised crime in Europe by gathering intelligence. Not to be confused with Interpol, which is the international policing organisation, although Europol sometimes also acts on a worldwide scale. The organisation is in fact mandated by the Member States of the EU, but doesn't often work on the field alongside national police forces.

## 2. NATO Communications and Information Agency

Technological branch of NATO that develops software and protects against cyber-attacks on air force operation systems, missile detection software. It has locations throughout Europe and North America, of which the Hague is one.

## 3. Embassies and consulates

Since the Hague is the political capital of the Netherlands, almost all foreign embassies and consulates are located here, in the Ambassadewijk. To be precise, 109 embassies, most of them located in stunning old buildings. If you join BASIS you will probably visit quite a few of them!

## 4. International Criminal Court

Yet another international court that most people might have heard of. The ICC was established as a sort of last resort for prosecuting individual war criminals that national courts couldn't handle. The focus is not on states but on individuals, like the Sudanese president Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bassir. Many of these individuals have charges of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The court may imprison and send out warrants for those they find to be guilty.

## 5. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

This building you should have seen before, as it's almost next to our campus. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs handles communication and relations with foreign governments and Dutch nationals abroad. The current Minister of Foreign Affairs is Hanke Bruijns Slot from the CDA, a Christian democratic party. There's also a Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Liesje Schreinemacher. This may well be the future employer of some of our fellow students!



## 6. Peace Palace

### International Court of Justice

Perhaps the most well-known international institution. The 'World Court', as it's also called, is the main judicial organ of the United Nations. Out of all six principal UN organs it is the only one that is not located in New York, but here in our very own city. The Court settles legal disputes that are submitted by the states in accordance with international law. These can be disputes between different countries, like the currently pending war-crime allegations Ukraine filed against the Russian federation. They can also be transnational cases that countries wish to solve together. States can also come to the Court for legal advice.

The Court is made up of 15 judges that are elected by The Security Council and UN General Assembly. The judges are all from different countries, and the Security Council members have so far always been represented. The current president is Joan Donoghue from the USA.

### Permanent Court of Arbitration

This court often gets confused with the ICJ. A big difference is that it's not part of the UN but does act as a UN observer. It's a court that also resolves international disputes in so-called arbitral tribunals. These disputes can be related to anything, from the establishment of maritime boundaries to investment deals, to human rights. The PCA was already established in 1899, making it the oldest settlement for international peace and dispute resolution. One of the presidents is also the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Hague Academy for International Law is also located in the Peace Palace.

*You can visit the Peace Palace Visitors Centre to learn more, or even do a guided tour inside the Palace or through the gardens.*

**Zahra**





# From Theory to Practice: Living in the Region you Studied

In July, I moved to Chile for my semester abroad after having studied Latin America for two years, after having dated a latina for almost 3 years, after having been fascinated by the region my whole life. It was my first time on the continent, my first time in a place I theoretically knew everything about, but practically had never experienced. Leaving the plane in Bogotá, Colombia, at 4:30am in early July, I felt the euphoria and the panic of entering a whole new world. After a week of drinking cheesy hot chocolate at the extreme North of the Andes, I flew South, all the way to Santiago de Chile. It has now been three months that I live in this huge city, traveling here and there when time allows. The theories I've studied are now a reality: poverty has a face; informal work is part of my daily life; political polarization has consequences I see; Spanish is slowly becoming more and more dominant in my language system; pollution fills my lungs; I keep adopting more of the local and regional culture. Every day I discover a bit more of the region

and the country I'm living in; and every day I feel more grateful to be here and have the opportunity to go from theory to practice. I cannot summarize my whole experience in a short Baismag article, and Latin America is vast and my passport only has the stamps of three of its countries, but here I will cover some of the main points I've witnessed moving to the other side of the world.

## **Informal work and poverty**

I'm not starting with the happiest element, but it has to be addressed. It is actually one of the first things that struck me when arriving in the region: the economical survival methods employed by the population are varied and highly informal. From people selling bocadillos (guyava paste) on the Colombian highways to peanut vendors in the streets of Buenos Aires, and not forgetting the men advertising nail clippers and tissues in the Santiago metro, informal work is everywhere. I was not expecting to be able to buy literally anything from the streets, but it is a reality here and it is the norm for the

inhabitants of the region. Despite the illegality of some of these stands, customers remain and informality stays a viable solution for many.

This theme of informality relates to the concept of poverty. For many, selling chocolate in public transportation represents their only source of income. Because of failing social systems and networks of protection, people resort to informal activities. They sell candies to feed their children; they play the piano in the hope of affording a house; they ask for some bread in the packed buses of peak hours. For me, poverty now has the face of this man and his little boy asking for some food every day around 4pm in the line 5 of the Santiago metro; the voice of this woman selling sandwiches every morning at the entrance of the station Fransisco Bilbao of the line 4; the perfume of the burnt peanuts from the city center. High levels of poverty and informality are no longer concepts that belong to economics textbooks, they are realities visibly affecting people I encounter in my daily activities.

## **Political polarization**

I promise, we are soon going to move on to some more positive aspects of Latin America. However, if you've studied the region, you definitely heard Patricio Silva mentioning political polarization in his politics lecture on Chile. I did not expect this to be such a reality, but it is true, the Chilean population is still highly polarized when it comes to the Pinochet dictatorship. For me, viewing these years of violence as a deeply negative event was evident. Nevertheless, it appears to not be the only widespread opinion on the country's recent history. Indeed, on the 11th of September, while some were remembering the 50th anniversary of the coup d'etat with an apparent sadness, others were claiming that Pinochet's regime was actually not that bad. Reflecting on the topic with some other exchange students, we were baffled that a period leading to *Nunca más* movements could be seen as not such a big deal. For me, this is the peak of political polarization in Chile: a situation within which half of the population sees a regime as a violent dictatorship and the other half sees it as a legitimate and positive event.

## People are nice

And I don't mean it in a *they don't have anything but give you everything* kind of way. By that, I actually mean that people are genuinely nice and more open than what I am used to in Northern Europe. And this really feels good. It feels great to be called *hermosa* by the reception lady of my building. It feels great to have people complimenting my mediocre Spanish. It feels great to hear people clap after someone played music in the metro. All the people I've met are happy to share an instant of their life, to give a helping hand, to exchange on various topics.

Of course, before coming here, I knew the clichés of latinos being more physical, being more open, being somewhat nicer. But I assumed that moving to the capital of a country that is culturally more similar to Europe than others, this would not be the case. I also thought that these clichés were essentially rooted in academic discourses and had little to no concrete bases. I was actually super wrong. People are really easier to talk to, friendlier, and overall nicer than what I am used to. This was actually a real culture shock for my very Northern European self.

## Diversity

Latin American diversity has been theorized and studied. I knew these theories, but seeing it actually feels different. We learn early on in IS that we group this whole region despite there being huge distinctions between the countries, and that Latin America is in fact/actually highly diverse. And it is. Not just as the whole region, but also within the countries that form it. Each country has its own linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and economic diversity. Take Chilean Spanish for instance. It differs from let's say Mexican Spanish due to influences from other indigenous languages. Chilean is related to Quechua and Mapudungun, a relation that is visible within the country as, in the North at least, signs are written both in Spanish and Quechua. Diversity also moves beyond languages as the cultures of northern, central, and southern Chile vary a lot. When you realize how big the country is, this all makes sense: if we were to put Chile on top of Europe, it would go from the South of Spain to the North of Finland. This country is huge, of course it is diverse. In that way, the diversity of the country is reflected in the capital where people from all over live together, each with their own customs and languages.

Answers quiz:

C. New-Guinea

### Final words

I feel like for IS students, nothing is as valuable as spending some time in the region you focused on, living there for a few months, seeing the reality of a place you have been studying from afar. All these theories you read about suddenly become concrete. Your knowledge of a foreign language leaves the classroom. You discover things you cannot learn about in a lecture. It is all about experiencing the region, and if you get the opportunity to do it, go for it!

Lu

- 1 Mumbai
- 2 Delhi
- 3 Bangalore
- 4 Kolkata
- 5 Chennai
- 6 Hyderabad
- 7 Ahmedabad
- 8 Pune
- 9 Surat
- 10 Kanpur

C

D Wellington

