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**Expats and the “Wall of Czechness”: An  
Ethnography of Expat Spaces in Prague**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that I have written this thesis myself and on my own. I have duly referenced and quoted all the sources and literature that I used in it. I have not yet submitted this work to obtain another degree. I will sign this declaration and consent by handwritten signature.

In Prague: 29.06.2023

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Klementine', written in a cursive style.

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tento výzkumný projekt zkoumá pojetí prostorů a vytváření míst expatkami žijícími v Praze. Pomocí metafory "wall of Czechness" tato práce zjišťuje, proč je vnímání života v daném prostoru důležité, protože ovlivňuje způsob, jakým člověk interaguje s prostorem kolem sebe. Tato metaforická "zeď" tak identifikuje, proč expatky v Praze nacházejí a vytvářejí vlastní, expatské komunity pro socializaci. Jako takové byly vytvořeny online platformy, jako je Facebook, které byly označeny jako prostory určené pouze pro ženy. To vede k vytváření místního sounáležitosti, zejména pro expatky, které se do Prahy stěhují samy. Tato práce upozorňuje na význam různých prostorů: bezpečných prostorů, soukromých a veřejných prostorů, proti-veřejných prostorů a genderových prostorů. Poukazuje také na význam vytváření komunit a na to, jak mohou být komunity chápány a vytvářeny pro tyto expatriantky žijící v zahraničí. Samotný termín „expat“ má specifické konotace, a přestože spadají do kategorie migrantů a migrantek, mají tyto dva termíny velmi odlišný význam. Tento článek doplňuje dosavadní výzkum expatů jako skupiny migrantů, aby bylo možné lépe pochopit, jakým způsobem vytvářejí místa a místa sounáležitosti v dnešním globalizovaném světě.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research project explores the notion of spaces and place-making of expat women living in Prague. Using the metaphor of a "wall of Czechness", this paper identifies why perceptions of living in a given space matter, as they affect how one interacts with the spaces around them. This metaphorical "wall" thus identifies why expat women find and create their own, expat communities for socialization in Prague. As such, online platforms, such as Facebook, have been created and designated as women-only spaces. This leads to the creation of place-belongingness, especially for expat women who move to Prague on their own account. This work calls attention to the importance of various spaces associated with place-making in this context: safe spaces, private and public spaces, counter-public spaces and gendered spaces. It also highlights the importance of community-creation, and how communities can be understood and created for these expat women living abroad. The term "expat" itself has specific connotations, and whilst they fall under the category of migrants, the two terms hold very different meanings. This paper adds to existing research on expatriates, as a migrant group, to better understand how they create places, and places of belonging, in today's globalized world.

## **KEY WORDS**

expats, migration, spaces, places, place-making, home, community

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## 1. Introduction

Walking around Prague, one notices how and where English is used in various spaces around Prague. On one hand English, along with other international languages, can be widely heard in touristy areas around Old Town Square, Malá Strana, or Prague Castle. But there, either through tour guides or through the manner of speaking, one can see that the majority of these people are just visiting Prague. The basis of this research project was studying expats in Prague, due to my personal background. Whilst originally born in the Czech Republic, growing up, me and my family moved every 3-4 years to various countries, starting in Romania, then Hungary, South Africa, Russia, and the UK. This was primarily due to my dad's job, who, working in finance, was relocated to various regions. My parents always referred to us as "expats", and for a long time I did not make much of it; for me it was normal. It was once I started my bachelor's degree in the UK that I realised that the way I grew up differed vastly from others I was studying with. Moving back to Prague in 2019, I myself felt like a foreigner, and didn't know anyone living in the city, and had no idea how to meet others outside of work. Therefore, for this research project I wanted to focus on expats, specifically women, living in Prague, who have moved to the city on their own, to understand what spaces they use to help them settle down in the city. The three vignettes below act as an introduction to the types of themes that arose in the ethnographic research and sets the context for the research questions for this thesis.

### *a) Living in "expat areas"*

*Here is also another thing, because we are now living here in Žižkov, and Žižkov and Vinohrady is considered the expat place, right, and all expats are here. It's like totally different because everybody speaks English when you go out for a drink, 60-70% of people around you will speak English.*

*Sasha, personal communication, 15.07.2021*

*[V: Why did you decide to live in Žižkov?] Because we had office in, how it's called this, near Želivského, so it was the hřbitovy [cemetery] and then there was this business centre, Olšany, so yeah somewhere there. So I've been checking the flats, because first I was living here, near*



*Resslova, near the Dancing House first few months, and then I thought I need to find some area, closer to the office, and by then we had few expats in the office as well, so I was just checking with them where they live, and they said like actually this area – Flora, Jiřího z Poděbrad, Náměstí Míru, this is like expat golden mine I would say, so there is like a lot of expats live there, so I thought yeah why not, it's pretty, pretty nice area and I really like it*

*Tanja, personal communication, 09.09.2021*

*b) The Globe Café, Travel Quiz event*

*I had been with the girls from the Girl Gone International group, before but was nervous because tonight there were quite a few of girls I didn't know. As all of us arrived one by one, we had to do the usual round of introductions. What our names are, what we do. But we also broached on the topic of how it can be kind of fun, when every time you come to a pub quiz you meet new people that you haven't met before. At our table we had the following nationalities: Czech (me), Russian (Tanja), US (Alena), Greece (Vasiliki), Kazakhstan but grew up in Italy (Diana) and Montenegro (Jelena). It makes me so happy when I am there, just in an English-speaking environment. But the place is very loud. It's so hard to hear each other. Each person also had a different reason for moving to Prague – Alena for school, though now she does school and work, and Diana for work, which she'll be starting soon. There wasn't much time for talking after this, as the quiz was starting.*

*Fieldnotes, 24.01.2023*

*c) Kristina and Gregorio*

*In August 2021, when thinking about how to approach my research project, knowing that I want to study expats in Prague, I asked a former colleague of mine if she could meet me for coffee and share her experiences of living in Prague. She had moved to Prague for university from Russia, around 8 years prior to us having this coffee, and finished both her two bachelor's degrees and master's degrees in Prague, before starting to work for a multinational marketing company here. We met at Národní 38, a café situated in a vnitroblok, or courtyard, close to the Můstek metro station, with Gregorio, who had come with Kristina. Whilst they shared their experiences about the process of settling down in Prague, we touched upon topics such as making friends, culture shocks they faced, and how they understood the idea of a 'home', and*

*whether they felt at home here in Prague. Whilst discussing these ideas, Kristina and Gregorio had the following interaction:*

*V: So, where are most of your friends from?*

*K: Well, I mean my best best friends they are from Russia. Like, I met them here but they are Russians who also emigrated here. Ummm, yeah.. umm...*

*V: So, all foreigners pretty much?*

*K: Yes. From different countries, I also have some friends who live abroad, but basically yeah, I was never able to go through this wall of Czech... Czech people*

*G: Czechness*

*K: Yeah, I wanted to say Czechness.*

*G: This wall of Czechness \*both laugh\* good*

*Kristina and Gregorio, personal communication, 23.08.2021*

The last vignette, depicting the conversation between Kristina and Gregorio, in many ways serve as the primary reason for focusing, in this research, on spaces in Prague. The expression of a “metaphorical wall” made me question what kinds of barriers expats face when living abroad, and how they overcome them, leading to the title of this project. An evident separation is also reflected in Tanja’s and Sasha’s first quote, who state that there are specific neighbourhoods that expats are most likely to live in when living in Prague, though it is also very likely that expats will live outside this area as well (or outside the capital city). The second vignette then depicts the various nationalities that come together at expat events, and the types of conversations that occur when joining new groups. It is important to note, however, that these spaces they may use extend beyond physical spaces, raising the question of the role of online platforms as a space as well. The main research question for this research is therefore: *how do expats, also known as highly skilled migrants, use and construct spaces, leading to place-making in Prague?*

As such, sub questions of this research questions are: which spaces do they use and how do they appropriate these spaces and make them their own (i.e., place-making) in order to settle down in Prague; are these physical spaces (i.e. coffee shops, bars), geographic places (i.e. neighbourhoods), or online spaces? How does this influence understanding of safe spaces, temporary/permanent spaces, online/offline spaces, and public/private spaces? How do these spaces help overcome the problems and challenges of being an expat abroad, as exemplified in the vignette that there is a perceived “wall of Czechness”? To what extent do expats use different spatial tactics and practices as a means of settling down and creating “home away from home” in Czech Republic and Prague? And lastly, how is the term “expat” perceived? These questions are all closely tied to the concepts of spaces and place-making, and therefore the main focus of this study is to demonstrate how specific spaces are used by expat women in Prague, and what conditions these places need to meet to create such spaces.

### 1.1. Context: Foreigners living in the Czech Republic

This section provides a demographic context for the types of foreigners who live in the Czech Republic. The most recent data from the Czech Foreign Police shows that as of December 2021, there were 658, 564 foreigners living in the Czech Republic, with 649, 394 having lived here for more than 12 months (Český Statistický Úřad, 2022). This means that in 2021, foreigners made up approximately 5.8% of the Czech population (ibid.; (*Data o cizincích v ČR: 2021*: n.d). Of these, approximately 436, 396 are from non-EU countries, the rest being EU nationals (ibid.). These numbers take into account solely foreigners, not asylum seekers or illegal immigrants (as emphasized by the data tables as well). The most common countries from which foreigners come from are Ukraine (30%), Slovakia (17%), Vietnam (10%), Russia (7%) and Romania (3%) (ibid.)

Demographically, women make up 43.5% of overall foreigners (*Data o cizincích v ČR: 2021*: n.d). Regarding ages of foreigners: about a fourth of these foreigners (25.2%) are aged between 30-39 years old; 16.6% are aged between 20-29; 14.6% are children aged 0-19; and only 5.5% are aged 65 and above. (ibid.) Additionally, the highest concentration of foreigners is in Prague (35.9%) and Středočeský kraj (14.4%) (ibid.).

Overall, 804,252 of these foreigners are employed, with 701,830 being registered at labour offices (*úřad práce*) and the others holding a valid trade license. Figure 1 below depicts which occupations foreigners occupy, by gender. The majority of foreign men and women work in the manufacturing industry (*zpracovatelský průmysl*) followed by administrative activities (Český statistický úřad (ČSÚ), *Život cizinců v ČR – 2021: 15*).

Taking into account the demographics of foreigners living in the Czech Republic provides context for studying expats in the Czech Republic. This research project focused primarily on expat women living in Prague. From the data above, it is interesting that there are more men living in the city than women, though the majority of foreigners do live in Prague.

**Tabulka 2: Zastoupení cizinců a cizinek v sekcích ekonomických činností (vybraná odvětví k 31. 12. 2020)**

Odvětví	muži	%	ženy	%
Zpracovatelský průmysl	121 302	30,0	63 269	26,4
Administrativní a podpůrné činnosti	68 776	17,0	45 167	18,9
Stavebnictví	53 264	13,2	6 153	2,6
Velkoobchod a maloobchod	31 004	7,6	32 097	13,4
Doprava a skladování	25 797	6,4	9 763	4,1
Profesní, vědecké a technické činnosti	20 026	4,9	14 509	6,1
Informační a komunikační činnosti	19 105	4,7	8 426	3,5
Ubytování, stravování a pohostinství	15 666	3,9	16 038	6,7
Zdravotní a sociální péče	4 542	1,1	10 868	4,6
Ostatní	45 266	11,2	33 126	13,8
<b>Celkem</b>	<b>404 748</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>239 416</b>	<b>100%</b>

Zdroj: MPSV

*Figure 1: Representation of foreigners and foreign women in sections of economic activities (selected sectors as of 31 December 2020) (Český statistický úřad (ČSÚ), Život cizinců v ČR – 2021: 15).*

### 1.1.1. InterNations study, 2021

The “Expats Insider”, a study conducted by InterNations, looked at which countries are the best for Expats to live in, based on factors such as quality of life (leisure options, travel and transportation, safety and security, to name a few), ease of settling in (feeling at home, friendliness, language), personal finance and working abroad to measure the overall ranking of

countries around the world (*The Expat Insider 2021*: 4). InterNations defines expats as “...people who temporarily or permanently live in a different country than the one they were born in or whose nationality they have. Expats usually choose to leave their native country for a career boost, or to fulfil a personal dream or goal, rather than as a result of dire economic necessity.” (What's an expat anyway?, (n.d)).

Based on their 2021 report, the Czech Republic was 15 out of the 59 in the overall world ranking, attributed to expats feeling great job satisfaction, healthcare and good methods of transportation (InterNations, 2021: 86). Whilst it did well in the quality of life and working abroad index, the Czech Republic came 49 out of 59 in the ease of setting index category (*The Expat Insider 2021*: 86). It also ranked as one of the lowest countries in the category of “friendliness towards foreigners” (ibid., 87). Alongside unfriendliness towards foreigners, the study found that expats find it hard living in the country without knowledge of the language, stating:

*Another 35% describe the population as generally unfriendly towards foreign residents (vs. 18% globally). Czechia also ranks in the bottom 10 of the Language subcategory (55<sup>th</sup>): 77% of respondents state that it is difficult to learn the local language (vs. 42% globally) ... In fact, 24% of expats agree that it is not easy to live in a Czech city without speaking Czech (vs. 29% globally) (*The Expat Insider 2021*: 88).*

Given this study, I was curious as to how these points would come across in my research project, and whether the topics, such as language, would come up as an issue in place-making for expat women living in Prague. The next chapter will focus on the theoretical background of spaces and place-making, before presenting the findings of this research.

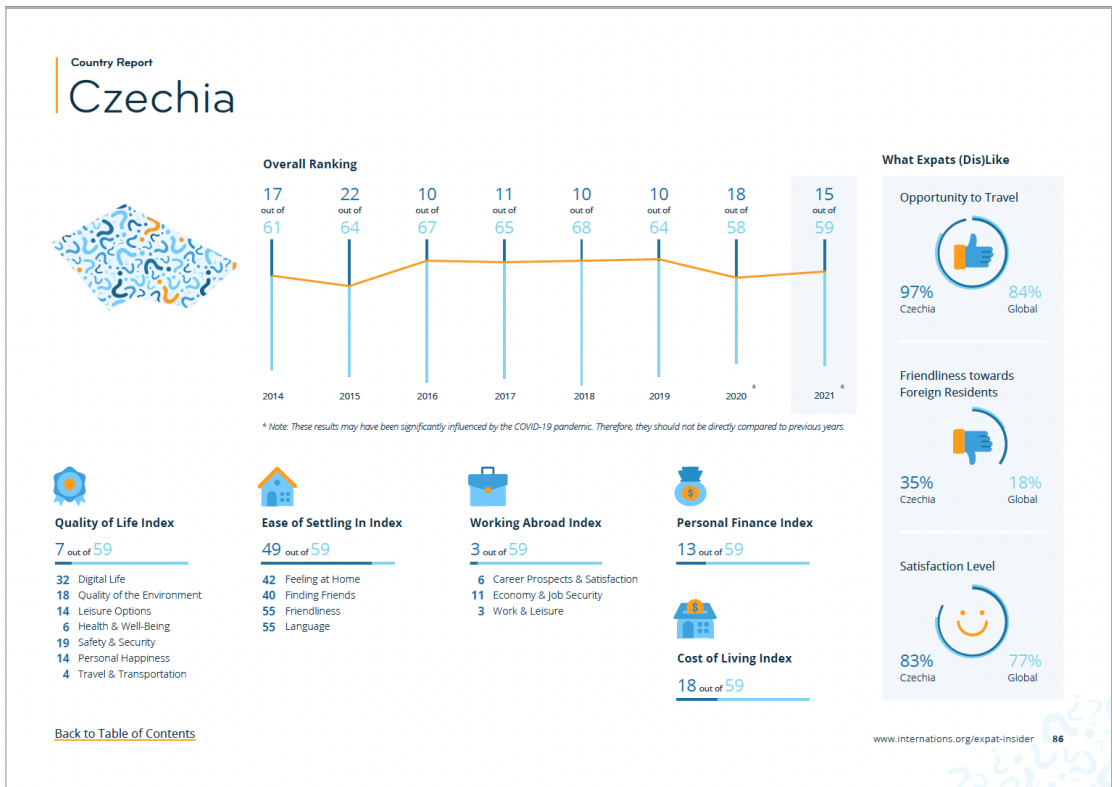


Figure 2: Slide showing the country results of the Czech Republic in the “Expat Insider” (The Expat Insider 2021: 86).

## 2. Theoretical background

As presented in the vignettes as well as in the research questions above, my research project focuses on two main and interrelated theoretical aspects: expat experiences (including challenges of living in the host country) and place-making. Accordingly, the present chapter will provide a brief theoretical understanding of these two themes and their subcategories, in order to then delve into an analysis of how these have been studied in the specific context of expats. The aim is to present the main theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis of ethnographic data in the main chapters, whereby more specific theoretical findings, such as the creation of a second “home”, safe spaces, online and offline spaces and public/private spaces will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters.

### 2.1. Defining expats

When I reached out on the Expat Women in Prague group in April 2022 (a closed Facebook group which shall be discussed in further detail in the work) and I explained that I was looking to talk to expat women willing to share their experiences of moving to and living Prague. As a result, Becka was one of the women who responded to my request, with the following message:

*Hi Veronika, I saw your post in Expat Women. The topic interests me and I would be happy to meet with you for a coffee. I should say though, that while I am not Czech, I don't use the term "expat" to describe myself, in case that matters. Best wishes with your project!*

*personal communication through Facebook Messenger, 25.04.2022*

Considering the fact that the present study, at its very core, focuses on what has been termed as “expat women”, Becka’s words can be considered as very intriguing, raising a number of questions surrounding the “expat” terminology and how this might be perceived by those referred to as “expats”. Why is Becka actively choosing to not refer to herself as an expat? What potential connotations does she attach to this specific term? How might this affect her overall experience as a woman living in a foreign country? To investigate these questions in further detail, the present section aims to briefly outline the history of the term “expat”, in order to subsequently delve into an analysis of how current expats are defined in literature before looking at how respondents in Prague label themselves. Becka’s words, mentioned above,

sparked my curiosity and I was keen to hear more about how she would define herself if not as an “expat”. She explained her stance to me as follows:

*B: I would say I'm an immigrant.*

*V: What's the difference?*

*B: And expat is like so bogged down with white privilege, and economic privilege. And I get super frustrated with it because anyone who's coming from Britain or the United States at this point is subject to immigration procedures in this country. So, by saying I'm an immigrant, I'm saying I'm no different than anyone else who's subject immigration procedures in this country. Expat feels to me like, you know, I've moved abroad because I quite fancy having a foreign salary and a higher standard of life than I could get at home and I'm just here to coast and I'm not remotely interested in contributing to the society. And I'm also fine with the fact that I attach a label to myself that excludes black and brown people and people can global south. So, I think it's a horrible term, like, I think we should actively dissociate.*

*Becka, personal communication, 11.05.2022*

Tying into Becka’s understanding of expats above, this section addresses how this group is defined in academia. Expatriates, also referred to as “expats”, “privileged migrants”, “mobile professionals” or “highly skilled migrants” are still relatively loosely defined in academia (Fechter&Walsh, 2012: 9; Leonard, 2016: 2). Scholars looking at expatriates frequently introduce their studies stating that expats are a group often overlooked in anthropological studies (see for example: Fechter, 2007). From an etymological perspective, is made up of the Latin prefix *ex* – (out), and word *-patria* (native country), therefore describing a person living outside their native country (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.), Merriam-Webster, (n.d.)). Historically, and in the context of European colonialism, the “expatriates” were sent abroad, working for example for Dutch and English East India companies as colonial bureaucratic institutions in jobs such as administrators, governors, missionaries, policemen, merchants, novelists, etc. (Fechter&Walsh, 2012: 2; see also Macleod, 2021). They did very little to engage with the local and indigenous people, thus making them essentially “Westerners occupying non-western spaces” (ibid.).



Anne-Meike Fechter and Katie Walsh (2012) define expats as “European or North American nationals who move abroad, mostly for work-related reasons, including to countries which were former colonies” (10). The term has often been “... associated with privilege in both popular usage and academic discussion. It acts as a common nomenclature for (white) “Western” skilled professionals who live abroad for a temporary period of time” (Leonard&Walsh, 2019: 9; see also: Polson, 2015; Kunz, 2020).

One factor that studies of expats have focused on, is thus the role of race. Pauline Leonard (2016) in her book “Expatriate Identities in Postcolonial Organizations: Working Whiteness” focuses, for instance, on identity creation, whereby race plays a crucial role in being a foreigner abroad. Through an analysis of expats in Hong Kong, the author takes a post-structuralist approach to understand how “white identity”, racism and expat identity are performed in post-colonial countries. Throughout the book, she addresses how whiteness is performed by British expatriates in Hong Kong, such as through language, but also through spaces and places. She argues that “...part of learning to be white is to learn the specific places of whites, as well as how to perform within these in ways which produce and maintain power, distance and authority over other people in other places” (Leonard, 2016: 109; Kothari 2006, Meier 2006, Frankenberg 1993). In another example, edited by Anne-Meike Fechter and Katie Walsh (2012), the book “New Expatriates: Post-colonial Approaches to Mobile Professionals” applies a post-colonial framework to study how the colonial past shapes modern day expatriate experiences, whereby research in the individual chapters focuses primarily on the “Western expatriate” in post-colonial countries (i.e. Namibia, Shanghai, Hong Kong; Fechter&Walsh, 2012: 11). This research project focused primarily on the aspect of gender, and how women living in Prague experience and create place-making whilst living in a foreign country. As such, one limitation of the work is that the majority of respondents interviewed were primarily of white, European or American backgrounds. However, in the context presented by the authors above, the difference of doing research in Prague, as there are not as predominant racial differences between the local and expatriate population (Leonard, 2016; a similar argument was made by Piekut (2013:119), who studied expatriates in Warsaw).

However, temporality and skill level also play a role in living abroad, as often expats are driven to move abroad for work (Fechter&Walsh, 2012:12). Anne-Marie Fechter and Katie Walsh (2012) identify three types of expats based on longevity in a place. First, the long-term expats: people who settle down with their families in the host country, for example setting up

businesses and having long term motivations to stay there; followed by the middle-ground expats: who will be relocated at some point, such as expats who have been transferred within their company. They do not envision staying there for a long period of time. Finally, the “lifestyle migrants”, who, according to the authors, are on the other end of this time spectrum (12). This is exemplified in a study conducted by Mari Korpela (2012), who shows expats who live in Vanasi, India to pursue lifestyle and cultural interests, but return back home to generate income that makes living in India possible, and as such, switch between living in their home-countries and in a foreign destination (in Fechter&Walsh, 2012, chapter 7).

The interest in expats has also been a recurring theme in Human Resource (HR) management studies, with a focus on how expatriates integrate into new jobs when moving abroad. Through the 1980s and the rise of globalization, expats were defined as “employees of business organizations, who are sent overseas on a temporary basis to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organizational goal” (Harrison et al., 2004: 203). Harrison et al. (2004) suggest that given this definition, expats can be defined by three characteristics, namely the type of relocating employee, the purpose / reason for wanting to move abroad, and the duration of the relocation (ibid., 203, 205). Their HR approach however provide a definition of expats that fits in more with business foundation. Namely, they find that a “relocating employee” is associated with a “parent organization”, and regarding the temporality of expats abroad, suggest that an expat “...makes explicit the temporary nature of the relocation” (Harrison et al., 2004: 205). Nevertheless, and considering the growing omnipresence of globalisation in the contemporary world, more people are seeking jobs internationally without being “sponsored” by a company (Fechter&Walsh, 2012: 13). Within this group, various types of expats can be identified. Jobs that can be considered “lesser-skilled”, including non-managerial positions in service industries such as fitness, beauty, spas, or even teaching positions, see expats living on “local pay” abroad (ibid.). Furthermore, more studies have been looking at expatriates who can be considered “middling” skilled migrants. This group differs from the above defined expatriates, as they are “...transnational migrants [...] who often have a middle-class background and a good education, occupying middling status positions in their country of origin and destination” (van Riemsdijk, 2014: 964). Scholars studying this particular group call for more research being done on this specific group, and this research project aims to address this niche (for example van Riemsdijk, 2014: 964; Scott, 2006; Smith&Favell, 2006).

As a result, the word “expat” can hold a broad spectrum of meaning, from the “privileged white Westerner” to the “lesser-skilled” service worker living on a local pay. In this project, the aim was to talk to women living in Prague, so less importance was placed on how long they have lived here, and therefore the length of living in Prague of the respondents (at the time of interview) ranged from 1 year to 12 years. I would therefore classify the majority of the 15 women I interviewed as middle-ground expats, or else “middling expats” as they are not necessarily settled down with families, nor are they certain of how long they will stay in the Czech Republic. In one such example, Sasha and her Greek husband, are contemplating moving to Denmark. This paper therefore aims to study this “middling” group of expats, specifically women, and ways in which Prague creates their place-making practices, and therefore leans on the definition presented by the InterNations study in Chapter 1.1.1, whereby expats are “...people who temporarily or permanently live in a different country than the one they were born in or whose nationality they have. Expats usually choose to leave their native country for a career boost, or to fulfil a personal dream or goal, rather than as a result of dire economic necessity.” (What's an expat anyway?, (n.d)).

Moreover, this research project is interested in analysing women’s experiences of living in Prague. Much of existing literature on expats has focused on male mobile professionals. Males have been seen as the “lead migrant”, and the “breadwinners”, leaving women to take care of the domestic sphere (Yeoh&Willis, 2005; Pratt&Yeoh, 2003). Brenda Yeoh and Katie Willis (2005) thus found that expatriate men and women occupy different spaces due to social gender expectations. Expat women have been portrayed as the “trailing spouses” (Leonard, 2016), “migration tails” (Coles&Fechter, 2007), “tied migrants”, “constrained migrants” or “secondary migrants” (Yeoh&Willis, 2005). All of these terms suggest that expat women are dependent on their male spouses when moving abroad. Associated with these are negative stereotypes, suggesting expat women are “idle” and “lazy” and “jealous” (Fechter, 2012: 94 in Fechter&Walsh, 2012). This suggests a passive role of an “expat woman” based however on the perception that the move was made due to the man, and his job, with his wife and family following him. The findings of the present research contradict these ideas, instead arguing that expat women should be distanced from these stereotypes, as many expat women in my study appear to have more active role in these processes.

Taking into considerations these very different definitions of the term “expats”, as well as the various negative connotations often attached to this concept, the question of why the

term is used throughout this research project inevitably arises. One risk of using this term, throughout not only this research project, but in academia in general, is that it may present expatriates as a “...bounded, homogenous group” (Fechter, 2007: 15). However, here I approach using the term in the same way as Fechter (2007) in her work, in that I use it as an analytical tool that “...avoids shoehorning Western foreigners into a single category, and instead explores the range of their attitudes, practices and experiences of life” (ibid., 6). I thus defend using this term in this project for two reasons. Firstly, throughout the research process and by looking at various Facebook groups and talking to people, it has become apparent that the term expat is still circulated. Whilst, as shown in Becka’s example, she prefers not to use it, a simple Facebook search of “expats in Prague” shows that many groups do use this term, thus raising of the question of why this term is used. Secondly, this research paper is curious as to whether, by studying this group, the term has evolved in any way. Although this was not the primary research question of this study, one of the main findings indicates that there appears be a strong distinction between the connotations of “expat” from a Western and Eastern perspective. On the one hand, namely the American and British respondents had a bigger issue with the term “expat”, and preferred defining themselves as immigrants, as could be seen in the case of Becka, presented above. On the other hand, respondents from southern Europe or Asian countries consider themselves as expats or foreigners, using the terms interchangeably and not necessarily with a negative connotation attached to it. In one case one respondent, Kristy, defined her “level” of expat-ness, considering herself a “not new expat”. After this thorough analysis of various definitions of the term “expat” and the various ways in which it can be interpreted and lived by those who fit the criteria, the following section will briefly position the term “expat” in relation to related concepts of migrants, immigrants, and tourists.

### 2.1.1. Expats vs migrant’s and immigrants

As mentioned above, the term “expat” is, by some, considered to be a contested term; some embrace it, others reject using it, and thus this section briefly addresses the difference in using the terms expat, migrant and immigrant (Kunz, 2020: 2145). One evening, I was sat with Stasia in Bullerbyn (a bar in the Jiřího z Poděbrad area), when two of her friends (one guy, and one girl) walked in and she invited them to join us for a drink. Both friends were not from Europe, the girl was from Kazakhstan, and the guy was originally from Lebanon, but moved to France at the age of 11. The guy and I got talking about what it was like moving around, and he shared that often he felt like he had an identity crisis, feeling like he did not belong anywhere

and consequently moving to Prague to start a new life as a result. The girl joined us in the conversation, and, upon learning about my thesis topic, they described how they label themselves in Prague.

*The girl, who agreed I could write down what she said, stated that for her - “if you’re looking for a better life, you’re an immigrant. If you’re looking for a change of a scene, you’re an expat.” For the two of them, the difference between immigrant and expat was rooted in concepts such as privilege, being white, American or European. If you fit into these categories, you are an expat. If you don’t, you are an immigrant. The guy, when I asked him how he would label himself, said that he was an immigrant and that he didn’t like using the term expat. Another thing they touched upon was the theme of temporality: an expat is there temporarily, an immigrant isn’t. I could however sense that this was going down a route where they - especially the guy - felt a bit defensive, and given the surroundings it wasn’t worth it to press the issue, or ask further, and after that my friend had to leave, so I didn’t get to discuss much more than these points.*

*Field journal, 10.03.2022*

In their study on expats in the Netherlands, Marianne van Bochove and Godfried Engbersen (2015) suggest that expats are an “... extraordinary type of people who have all kinds of qualities or habits that others do not have...”, and therefore, “... studying them as a type of migrants who experience partial inclusion and exclusion in their host society is a more fruitful approach.” (17). I thus argue that expats can, and should, be classified as a type of migrant. However, the above discussion further underlines the issue of using the label of “expat” itself. As this term was already defined and discussed above, I now turn to its connection to migrant groups. Expats, as defined in previous sections, tend to be white Westerners, whereas the immigrant and migrant is most commonly defined as someone who is “...non-white, non-Western, and ‘low-skilled’” (Kunz, 2020: 2150). Thus, whilst falling under the category of a migrant, the perception of the words differ, and appear to be used as hierarchical labels. When studying migration, academic research tends to focus on migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers (Phillips&Robinson, 2015: 409; as an example, Andersson’s book *Illegality Inc.*, 2014). Another factor that differentiates a migrant and expat is temporality, expats are able to differentiate themselves as a “different kind of migrant”, as a migrant is “...expected to stay, while an expatriate is expected to return to their home country”

(Cranston, 2017: 1). This distinction is also reflected in the media, with articles such as “*Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?*” (Koutonin, 2015).

With regards to the expat-migrant terminology, Sarah Kunz (2020) finds that some expats do not self-identify as migrants, suggesting that the definition of the terms “expat” and migrants” are part of more complex political discourses (2145). However, as previously mentioned, one core difference between studying migrant and expat groups is race, and by focusing more academic research on these categories, it can further our understanding of “...how migration categories work in processes of racialization” (Kunz, 2020: 2158). As scholars studying expats as migrant group find the term itself to be difficult to define, arguably the same can be said about defining the term “migrant”. The labels expatriate, immigrant and migrant are not themselves legal categories in many countries. In fact, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines an immigrant as a non-national moving for the purpose of settlement and the migrant as “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.” (Global Issues: Migration, n.d; Kunz, 2020: 2150). This section demonstrated that more research needs to be conducted on expat groups as a part of migration studies, however defining “expat” and “migrants” adds to the complexity of studying such groups.

### 2.1.2. Expats vs tourists

Another way to understand and conceptualize expats is in relation to tourists, as expats have also been defined as “...elite, educated, privileged and very mobile professionals who reside somewhere on the host-guest continuum between native and tourist...” (Norum, 2013: 28; see also Cohen, 1977). An ethnographic study conducted by Roger Norum (2012) in Kathmandu, Nepal, examines how expats create these social boundaries, finding that expats have a need to differentiate themselves from tourists as well as from their local counterparts. According to his research, expats have a strong desire to show that they are assimilated to the country they are living in, thus for example making a point of greeting people in the local language (ibid., 36). Expats often come close to resembling tourists when they want to incorporate some sort of the “exoticism” of the country into their lives (Cohen, 1977: 39). This wish to incorporate the local culture into their home life resembles a sort of tourist perspective,

albeit from a more affluent and rich position, which also allows for a larger variety of leisure activities they can participate in (ibid., 40). A more specific example is provided in the work of Roger Norum (2013), who points to the fact that there is a perceived difference between a tourist and an expat hiking in Nepal. Hiking, for expatriates, is an added benefit to their original mission of living in the country, and as such, tourists who visit Nepal for the hiking are perceived by this group as being less authentic (ibid., 39). Thus, identifying the relationship of expatriates between tourists as well as locals creates a source of tension, as expatriate communities attempt to define themselves against both of these groups, claiming to belong to neither one nor the other.

## 2.2. Spaces and place-making

The primary research question of this project is concerned with how expats use spaces and place-making as methods of adapting to life in Prague. The present section will therefore address how the use of spaces turns them into places, and how this leads to place-making. As Arjun Appadurai (1996) argues, all social phenomena are emplaced and constituted through locations, materiality and meaning. Places are often defined in opposition to spaces: on the one hand, space is more of an abstract concept than place, and is often understood as a without meaning, a “fact of life” (Creswell, 2004: 10). Spaces as related to highly skilled migrants were most notably studied by Anne-Meike Fechter (2007) in her study of expatriate communities in Jakarta. Her chapter focusing specifically on spaces (Chapter 4), she observes how expats create and produce boundaries in their daily lives (Fechter, 2007). She argues that in the case of Jakarta, space-making differs from other contemporary cities as there is the legacy of the “colonial imagination”, which affects how expats conceptualize Indonesian space (ibid., 61). In this case, being white means that expats perceive, and therefore want to escape, being under the gaze of the “other” when in public spaces (ibid., 62). In her work, Anne-Meike Fechter (2007) describes how expats have to carve out their own spaces due to their different race, however this was not seen in Prague. Rather, as will be shown in the data in the following chapters, one way in which spaces are used as tools to build communities through which to interact.

Once a space is given meaning, even for example just a name, it starts becoming a place (Cresswell, 2004: 7). Regarding place, sociologist Thomas Gieryn (2000), defines three features that define a place. Firstly, a place is a geographic location (464). It therefore is a specific spot, that has a finitude with elastic boundaries (ibid.). Secondly, place is a material form, through which “...social differences, inequalities and collective actions are shaped and manifested” (Svašek&Komarova, 2018: 11). And thirdly, places are invested with meaning and value (Gieryn, 2000: 465). This ties back to Tim Cresswell’s (2004) definition, whereby according to the scholar, place, in its most basic definition, is *a meaningful location* (7). A place is therefore “doubly constructed”, one the one hand it has a physical characteristic, but it is also “...interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined” (Gieryn, 2000: 465). As such, places often “...refer to an individual’s ability to develop feelings or attachment to particular settings based on a combination of use, attentiveness, and emotion (Stokowski, 2002: 369). This definition builds upon Tim Cresswell’s (2004) understanding of place, which is defined by its *reiterative social practices, inclusiveness, performativity and dynamic quality* (Chapter 2; see also Friedmann, 2010).

Having a place thus allows for place-making, whereby the emphasis needs to be placed on the *making* of a place (ibid.). John Friedmann (2010), notes that place-making is formed through spaces of encounter or gathering, which he also refers to as “centering”, which he defines as the “...coming together for a purpose” (156). Place-making can therefore be understood through the social encounters, through which “...communication among people who are known to each other, whether repetitive and patterned or purposeful, is at the nub of this process” (ibid.). Similarly, David Conradson and Alan Latham (2007) argue that place-making is based on “emplaced encounters”, which is defined as the actual, physical meeting of people in given places. This builds on the concept presented by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002), in which they define places as “not so much as enduring sites but as moments of encounter, not so much as 'presents', fixed in space and time, but as variable events” (30). The creation of places, and thus place-making, is therefore not fixed, and the sense of place created through such encounters help create the feeling of belonging (Polson, 2015: 632). Place-making is affected by others in the community, and is therefore socially constructed, not an individual task” (Stokowski, 2002: 372). How or what a person feels, knows or does in different places is mediated by others, and meaningful places are therefore created through interaction with others (ibid.). Tim Cresswell (1996) therefore defines place-making as:



*Because we live in place, as part of place, and yet simultaneously view place as something external, place can be thought of as a centre of meaning and an external context for action – as ideal and material... Place, as a phenomenological-experiential entity combines elements of nature (elemental forces), social relations (class, gender, and so on), and meaning (the mind, ideas, symbols). Experience of place, from a phenomenological perspective, is always an experience of all three realms, each of which affects our actions in place. (Cresswell 1996: 156–57)*

Tim Cresswell (1996) further notes that place acts a “fundamental form of classification”, which orders our world into an “us” and “them”, and a “here” and “there” (161). Place therefore “...contributes to the creation and reproduction of action-oriented beliefs and ideologies that naturalize place identifications” (Svašek&Komarova, 2018: 12). Maruška Svašek and Milena Komarova (2018) however also note the multi-layered context associated with place, as places thus create social boundaries. In the authors’ study of Belfast, they find that certain areas of the city are inherently associated with certain identities, ethnicities or communities, such as one area being “Protestant”, and thus “loyalist”, and another being “Catholic” and “nationalist” (Svašek&Komarova, 2018: 12). Similarly, in the opening vignette of this research project (bullet point a), Sasha and Tanja demonstrated that certain areas for living in Prague are tailored towards expats. Therefore, places can be “...make particular identity claims to ‘community’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nation’” (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000 in Svašek&Komarova, 2018: 13). Geographers who have focused on spaces, places and place-making (for example Creswell, 2004), have often taken the approach of looking from the outside in, meaning that they look from an observer’s (etic) perspective onto spaces (Friedmann, 2010: 152). Taking a more anthropological approach in this study (emic perspective), and in agreement with John Friedmann’s idea (2010: 152) that to understand how expats interact with places through place-making, one has to look from the inside out, that is, to understand how expats experience places (ibid.). John Friedmann thus (2010) characterizes place as a “...small, three-dimensional urban space that is cherished by the people who inhabit it” (ibid., 154).

Throughout the course of the research, I followed two groups in the spaces through which expat women interact, either purely online, or through face-to-face interactions. These two groups, the Girl Gone International (GGI) group, and the Expat Women in Prague group,

will demonstrate how these women interact with their respective spaces, and how they turn from being solely a space, to a meaningful place, through the methods described above. The two groups focused on in this research project are both online, virtual platforms. However, one leads to social interactions and events that are hosted face-to-face, whilst the other remains an online platform. Whilst this presents a limitation in this work, as place-making is important to study in concrete, physical places as well, due to the two case-studies focused on in the second half of this research paper, I focus here primarily on literature associated with place-making through online spaces, acknowledging how place-making has been studied through the lens of the relation between offline and online worlds. Groups of people such as expats, who are separated from physical spaces due to their hyper mobility, can use online groups to help connect to geographic places (Polson, 2015: 631; see also Plunkett, 2011). This is not to say they do not need physical spaces. Rather, due to the nature of the globalized world, more and more people find themselves in a “translocality”, as coined by Arjun Appadurai (1996), whereby identity formation transcends boundaries. As such, relations for expats are less contained within one given space, rather, “...what is happening is that the social relations which constitute a locality increasingly stretch beyond its borders; less and less of these relations are contained within the place itself” (Massey, 1994: 162). Reflecting this, Erika Polson (2015) studied how expats in Paris used the meetup.com platform to contribute to place-making and a sense of belonging in a foreign city (629). She argues that the more expats travel and transcend geographical boundaries, along the way expanding their cultural understandings, the more physical places start losing their meaning, as less relations are contained within specific places (ibid., 631). The meetup.com platform, therefore, allows expats to explore cities on a local level, leading to place-making (ibid., 632). The present research shares argument made by Erika Polson (2015) whereby expats, “within this state of transience, [...] must make concerted efforts to access, or create, connections to a local social network” (ibid., 633). Similarly, Doreen Massey (2005) argues that in our globalised world, we need to understand spaces as relational, and through connections (81). Due to the rise of the internet, place-making, therefore, is no longer solely fixed on geographic, leading to interactions between online and offline spaces interact which in turn lead to place-making (Polson, 2015). Therefore, online spaces should not be neglected when studying modern day expats, and this is a focus of this research project.

Related to the notion of space, place and place-making is how these spaces, through the process of place-making, are transformed into a second “home”. Melissa Butcher (2009; 2010)

studies the concept of home in relation to transnationals, arguing that for this group, home is not about a place, nor material objects (Butcher, 2010: 24). Rather, the concept of home “...consists of imagination, routinised everyday practices, relationship networks, and representation imbued with personal and social meaning, cultural ideals, and values” (ibid.) The idea of a home therefore represents a place where people feel like they have created meaning; they have a sense of “rootedness”. It’s a place where one can be themselves (Creswell, 2004: 24; see also Nowicka, 2007). A space, that has become a place, can then become a “home” when “... the landscape and built environment within which it is embedded is considered “sufficient and friendly”, or comfortable, as I will suggest, as opposed to a context that generates uncertainty and threat” (Butcher, 2010: 25). Similarly, Magdalena Nowicka (2007) studies how expats construct home, placing emphasis on the fact that the concept of home is not a stable, physical place, nor a closed territory (70). She finds that for expats, “home is where “space becomes a place”” (ibid., 72). Therefore, she understands “home” not as a closed, fixed space, but rather as an open space, whereby the term should be explored as a space with “...variable and permeable borders, as heterogeneous entities that include elements of their environments” (Nowicka, 2007: 73). Place-making and home are therefore two terms that are closely interlinked (Butcher, 2010: 25-26).

This study differs from other studies focused on expats for several reasons. Firstly, as seen from the literature above, many studies focusing on expatriates are conducted in post-colonial countries, which is not the case here<sup>1</sup>. Aneta Piekut (2013) argues the same in her study of expats in Warsaw, suggesting that “...it is worth investigating how people of different socio-cultural backgrounds and lifestyles – who are racially “in-visible” – spatially situate their lives in Polish society and local communities in Warsaw” (119). The author found on the social adaptation of intra-EU expats in Warsaw, that these highly skilled migrants are spatially selective, choosing to interact with places associated with family socialization, such as international schools. Several studies have paid attention to expats in the Czech Republic, such as Alexandra Szöke’s (2008) research on British expats, who are drawn to living in the Czech Republic based on job opportunities at multinational companies. Focusing more on spaces

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<sup>1</sup> There have been cases made for calling the Czech Republic, as well as other post-communist states, as post-colonial as well. However, for this case I call on the work of Slacalek (2016), who argues that post-colonial theory should not be applied to post-communist countries, due to barriers that obstruct the transferring of these concepts onto post-communist states. As the author concludes, “To fully subordinate Central Europe under the heading of postcolonial experience is not only to “abduct” Central Europe, but also to abduct postcolonial theory.” (Slacalek, 2016: 41).

however, from a geographic point of view, Andrew Cook (2011) employs a spatio-temporal approach to investigate how transnationals' social and cultural capital all affect their social performance in the Czech Republic. He used Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital to analyse how expats (or transnational elites (TNE) as used in his paper) adapt to living in Prague. Mainly, he finds that initially, when arriving in the 1990s and 2000s, expats tended to stay within their "expat bubbles", and only once they have developed, what they consider to be enough social and cultural capital, do they start to build more "authentic" relationships in the Czech Republic (ibid., 426). By having cultural capital, expats feel more comfortable interacting with Czech spaces, that may not necessarily just be expat spaces.

This paper differs from Andrew Cook's (2011) and Alexandra Szöke's (2008) studies in two ways. Firstly, its focus is on expats, more specifically expat women, who have been living in Prague for the past five to ten years, therefore focusing on expats who have been living here relatively recently. Secondly, it takes an anthropological approach by looking at how expats use and perceive spaces of socialization, rather than a geographic or sociological approach using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. It also did not focus on one specific nationality of expats living in Prague. At the start of this research project, I wanted focus on the women's experience of living in a foreign city, as in many ways this was my own experience moving back to the Czech Republic in 2019. By focusing primarily on women's experiences, I want to demonstrate that despite the respondents being from various countries and of various backgrounds, there are certain perceptions and feelings that are felt by the majority of the women, regardless of where they are from. This work then also demonstrates the communities set up in Prague for women, which creates an international, women's community.

This research paper thus addresses a niche in literature, whereby studies on spaces and expats have primarily focused on post-colonial locations. Furthermore, the focus of studying expat women has been on them as spouses to their husbands, as opposed to women who move to a city on their own, and how in such a situation they go through the place-making process. The aim of the following chapters is therefore to outline how expat women in Prague go through the place-making process, primarily by making use of online platforms, to create and build communities in Prague. The present section has addressed the overarching theory around spaces, places and place-making, which will now be followed by inductively looking at and

presenting relevant data that highlight further elements that play into the process of place-making, such as safety and private versus public spaces.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research timeline

Data was collected in several phases. Initially, for the thesis proposal four interviews were conducted in August and September of 2021. The next round of interviews was conducted in May 2022, and the last round between October and March of 2023. The reason for this stretched out timeline was due to the nature of the respondent's I was looking to talk to, as well as my ability to get involved in the field. I also found it difficult to get into the field, in that I only became a part of the Girl Gone International (GGI) in the summer of 2022, and later in October 2022, I was invited by Tanja to join a more stable group within this GGI group for events such as Pub Quizzes and boardgame evenings. At the same time, starting from around January 2022 until February 2023, the Expat Women in Prague Facebook group was observed in detail, though I followed the group for over a year (from January 2022 to around January 2023), making note of important posts.

For short periods of time I also observed two physical spaces in Prague, namely The Globe and the Electric Sheep Book Bar. I did this for a short amount in both places, because, as mentioned above, I wanted to follow women who had moved here on their own account, to see how went around socializing and creating their own spaces in Prague. Both venues run events which people in already established groups attend, but without being a part of the group it made it more difficult to observe the socialization element, and thus little reference is made to these two spaces throughout the work.

### 3.2. Research methods

For this research project, two main methodological approaches were undertaken: semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations. A semi-structured interview done for ethnographic purposes provides insight into how a participant “sees the world in analytical, typological and relational ways, and such information helps to create an insight into the participant’s world-view” (Madden, 2010: 73). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 respondents; 2 respondents wanted to take part, but we could not agree on a time that worked, so they filled in the questions in writing. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in a conversational flow (ibid., 69). All the prepared questions were open-

ended questions, with follow up questions or clarifications asked throughout the interview itself.

As part of the semi-structured interviews, starting in May 2022, I asked the participants to draw “their” map of Prague, in which they depicted important spaces of interactions for them in Prague. The inspiration for asking respondents to draw maps of their cities came from Cohen’s (2012) chapter on musicscapes. In Sara Cohen’s (2012) study, she wanted to “... create a musical map of Liverpool featuring historical and contemporary sites of music-making ...” (124). Similarly, this part of the interview was relatively unstructured, with the premise being to draw “their Prague”, and to add whatever points they believed belonged on the map. After finishing this, I also asked what points they avoid, and asked them to perhaps explain some points that were unclear (ibid., 128). Respondent’s in this project approached the maps differently, as will be seen in Chapter 4. Some were nervous, and unsure what to draw. Others knew exactly where to begin, whilst others decided to draw every point they could think of. In one case, in an online interview with Kristy, she sent me a screenshot of her Google maps. The maps here also differ from Aneta Piekut’s (2013) work, as they were a mind map of Prague, rather than a “concept map”. The concept maps included places of importance both in and outside of Warsaw, to recall overarching experiences of having lived elsewhere as well (Piekut, 2013: 123). The mental map used in this study focused solely on Prague, and how spaces are used and understood by the respondents.

After joining the GGI group in the fall of 2022, I became more immersed in the workings of this group and became an active member of the GGI group. As this group meets outside of working hours, and only certain days of the week, I could not become “fully immersed” into the group (Madden, 2010: 79). As such, I could find a balance between the emic and etic balance (ibid.). This also constitutes what is known as “step-in-step-out” ethnography, whereas I only entered the field for the social events or observations, and then went home to type of notes (ibid., 80).

### 3.3. Interviews and participants

#### 3.3.1. Focusing on women

I wanted the focus of this research to be driven by this concept of a woman, who decides to move to Prague by herself, and to study how these expat women settle down in Prague. Such

a group differs from other groups, such as English teachers or students at university, to name some examples, for several reasons. First, they do not have the support of an institution, such as a school / university, through which they can meet new people. Secondly, the reasons for moving to Prague differ from such groups, and therefore the perceptions and ways of socializing will differ for women who move here by themselves. As a result, the data collection reflected this approach, as I myself at the beginning of this research project was in a similar situation, where I did not know any foreigners in Prague, and had to find my way around by myself.

From the beginning of this research project, upon joining “Expat Women in Prague”, a private Facebook group intended for only women in Prague. Women in general, not just expat women, face inequalities in daily life, and understanding the construction of space through the lens of gender shows the complexity of identity, engagement and the social construction of spaces (Philips&Robinson, 2015: 410). This of course means that in this work there is no comparison with men’s experiences in Prague.

### 3.3.2. Finding respondents

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, respondents were interviewed at various times in the research project. At the beginning of the project, in 2021, I interviewed four people: Sasha (Russian), Tanja (Russian), Kristina (Russian) and Gregorio (Italian) for my diploma proposal. I had previously interacted with both Sasha and Kristina, and therefore asked them if they would be willing to share their experiences with me for this project. Sasha, at the time of the interview had been in Prague for 12 years, and Kristina for 8. On the day of the interview with Kristina, she brought Gregorio, a colleague, along with her, resulting in him being the only man whom I conducted a semi-structured interview, though he left it to Kristina to primarily share her experiences. At the same time, I had posted on the Expat Women in Prague group, looking for recommendations of bars and spaces frequented by women in the group. The only response I received was from Tanja, who offered that if I needed, I could reach out to her and interview her as well.

Due to the group being a closed, safe, online space for women in Prague, I wanted to follow the group discretely, making notes of interesting points that were brought up, but also noting what the group was used for. Any quoted posts used throughout this paper are given an



anonymised name. If the post was made anonymously, this is noted as well. This is to respect the privacy of the women in the group.

From around November 2021 to January 2023, with permission of the admin, Elizabeth (USA), I started to follow the Expat Women in Prague group more closely, saving posts which I found interesting. This was done both intensively, whereby for two months in January and February of 2022 I made a note of every post in the group, noting the type of post it was. Outside of these times, whenever I saw an interesting post of my Facebook feed, I made a note of it as well, but at this time I was not following the posts as intensely. Whilst I did this with the permission of the admin, I wanted to take into account the private aspect of the group, as it is a closed, safe, online space for women in Prague, and thus made note only of the date and the post, but held no account of the identity of the woman. My aim was primarily to find general themes that showed up through the group. After following the group for some time, I asked Elizabeth if I could interview her, to get a better understanding of how the group works from an admin's perspective.

The rest of the semi-structured interviews were then conducted from May 2022, the fall of 2022, and then January and March 2023. In May, I posted on the Expat Women group once again, looking for women to share their experiences of Prague, and to focus more on spaces used. As a result, I talked to Michaela (Polish), Monika (Polish), Tamara (Mexican), Kiera (USA) and Becka (USA). From both semi-structured interviews and field notes, the data was coded and then the data was analysed and then written. In the fall of 2022, I joined the Girl Gone International (GGI) group, which led me meeting new people, and thus interviews were conducted with these girls in the fall, then January and March 2023. In the fall I also did a semi-structured interview with Stasia (USA) over Skype, as she had suddenly moved back to the USA.

The final interviews were conducted with women who are a part of the GGI group, namely: Helen (British), Vasiliki (Greek), Kirsty (British), Alena (USA), Kristy (Hong Kong), as well as follow up interviews with Tanja (Russian). These interviews were conducted in March of 2023, as I had been a part of the group for about half a year at that point and felt comfortable enough to ask about their experiences in Prague. At the same time, being part of the GGI group, I was conducting ethnographic research by being in the field in the form of attending events hosted.

### 3.4. Data creation and analysis

Data from ethnographic observations were collected by writing down field notes in two ways. Primary, raw data was collected at the events themselves. Whenever an interesting point was made, or a statement made, I noted this down immediately in my phone. Doing so did not appear out of the ordinary, as it just looked as if I was texting or searching for something to show the group. These can therefore be considered the “jottings” or “short-hand notes”, which was made at the time of the observation (Madden, 2010: 122). Following this, consolidated fieldnotes would be made after the event, usually upon returning home, and put into my field journal. In the field journal I would often keep the shorthand notes I had made and follow this by the description of the whole event.

Analysis was first conducted by organizing primary data, as “good ethnographic data starts with a successful embodied experience in the field, and the subsequent recording of these experiences as fieldnotes, diagrams and other forms of data is the beginning of all good ethnographic data sets” (Madden, 2010: 136). The primary data was then coded, and these codes were then organised into themes found throughout the data. The semi-structured interviews and filed notes were coded in a word document, whereas posts from the Expat Women in Prague group were collected and coded through excel. These codes then created the codebook, through which the heading of each cluster of codes created the chapters, and sub-chapters, of this research project. It is important to note, especially in the field notes, that observing spaces is not necessarily a “...set of objective facts or observations”, rather, meaning-making starts when writing out the field notes (Madden, 2010: 140).

### 3.5. Ethics

At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was informed about the aim of the interview, who will see the data and what it will be used for. They were told that at any point if they would not like answer questions then we could skip it and move on. They were also asked whether it would be alright to record the interview, for the purposes of transcribing the data. Informed consent from each respondent was given verbally, before the recording started. The use of the maps in this work was also given with consent of the respondents. Any data collected from pure observation was done in public places, and where this data is used then there was never any information about the name or more personal information about the person

/ people involved. Regarding the Expat Women in Prague and Girl Gone International groups, permission was obtained from both admins to follow the group. In places where specific posts or observations are made, in which I did not have direct contact with the women (most notably in the Expat Women in Prague group), I kept their names anonymous throughout the work.

### 3.6. Limitations

Ridgway and Lowe (2022), explore the need for more reflexivity to be conducted when studying expat migrant groups. Their findings will not be discussed in further detail here, but they emphasize that their positionality affects the research conducted (*ibid.*, 1077). For example, they describe how being a member of an expatriate group can be advantageous to research conducted (i.e. Walsh, 2007, in Ridgway and Lowe, 2022: 1079), or the opposite, in which a different socio-economic status differentiates one from the expat group being studied (i.e. Fechter, 2007). This section will therefore address the limitations and reflections of this study.

This research project could have been approached in several ways, and the first limitation I would point out is the fact that I did not follow one specific place throughout the whole research project. As such, the study of the physical places is quite shallow, and had I done so, a more thorough ethnographic account would have been presented. However, I wanted to study the experiences of women, to find patterns and themes that emerge no matter what the given background. Furthermore, I wanted to explore it from the lens of a woman moving to Prague, by herself, and how she goes about finding and discovering Prague. In many of the interviews, both the Expat Women in Prague group, as well as the Girl Gone International group were mentioned, as tools through which to find and meet other women in Prague. Whilst I acknowledge that other groups exist, such as based on hobbies, or ethnicities, amongst others, when I started meeting with and researching the Girl Gone International group, many of the girls met primarily with each other, doing different activities throughout the week. Thus, the method taken for this study, with more focused placed on online platforms, was a direct reflection of this process.

This work also primarily focused on the gendered aspect of being an expat, not taking into account other demographic factors, such as race, age, ethnicity or nationality. As such, the work could be made stronger by addressing these factors. This could be done by having equal

representations from various nationalities, or perhaps ages of the women, or could also be done by length of living in the Czech Republic. The reason it was not is because the respondents interviewed were primarily from Europe or the USA, with one exception. I decided to focus primarily on the gendered process of place-making in Prague, and therefore decided to keep scope of the study on following women's experiences overall. Whilst I do think that focusing on these other elements would have made the work stronger, I cannot change the types of women who attend certain events, or post on certain groups, and doing so would then exclude certain women from the study. I therefore think this approach, to understand the place-making processes of women living in Prague, was appropriate for this study.

Another limitation, which I could not change, was my own personal time. Working full-time meant that much of the observations and interviews had to be done outside working hours. However, as all the women I interviewed were working themselves, I do not believe that having more time would have altered data collected, as all interviews were conducted after working hours.

### 3.7. Reflections

Throughout this project, there were many moments where I reflected on my role as a researcher, as I found myself in a position where I felt in an in-between space of being an expat and a Czech citizen. On the one hand, I am Czech, I speak the language and have no issues living here in terms of any administrative tasks (visa's, foreign police, etc.). However, my family moved out of the Czech Republic when I was 2 years old, and I only returned at the age of 23. As a researcher this put me in a position where I often found myself having a lot of empathy for the respondents, perhaps because I had gone through something similar. On the other hand, I couldn't understand all the practicalities of moving to Prague as a foreigner, because as a Czech citizen I don't have to deal with issues of language or other administrative factors such as visa's or registration at the foreign police. It led to moments in the interview, where the respondent would stop to think about what they want to tell me, for example after asking Kiera about her initial perceptions of Prague, she hesitated before answering, asking where I was from. I thus had to explain my backstory briefly, to ensure that she can share any perceptions or feelings with me, to reassure her that she could not offend me by anything she said. In another instance, me and Kristy bonded over some issues in the Czech language, and she noted that:

*You should interview yourself. You are also expat \*laughs\*.*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

It is important therefore to acknowledge my situation as a researcher, because I was the primary tool research and an active participant in the field (Madden, 2010: 23). My position therefore meant that I could interact with a group of expats easier and meant that their respondents trusted me. This also relates to the examples made at the beginning of this section, whereby my position as a semi-expat, who understand the situation of the women, allowed me to gain their trust and be a part of the groups.

Another point that I feel I need to reflect upon, was my role as a member of the GGI group. As will be seen in later chapters, I became an active member of the group, joining events organized by Kristy, which were created over joint hobbies (card games, pub quizzes, kayaking, etc). I thus became a part of the community, and despite interviewing all the girls, and them being aware of my study, I felt awkward at times being in the position of a researcher, whilst creating friendships and a community that will last past this research project. I am so extremely grateful for all their openness and help, and I did not want to come across as participating solely for the purpose of my research.

## 4. Perceptions of Prague

One of the characteristics of expats, as described in Chapter 2, is their temporality. Their mobility, therefore, means that when moving to new places, they have to adjust to the new location (van Riemsdijk, 2014: 963). How expats get used to these will vary individually, but is all grounded through the local, everyday practices (ibid.). Accordingly, the present chapter examines experiences of expat women, and their initial reflections of Prague, both positive and negative, to analyse how spaces are viewed by expat women in Prague. This is followed by the display of hand-drawn maps of Prague, created by respondents during the semi-structured interviews, to gain a more profound and visual understanding of how respondents interact with the geographical spaces in Prague. The maps contextualise how Prague is perceived, and to understand what creates the “metaphorical wall” between expats and locals, and how these lead to expat women needing to find their own spaces of socialization.

### 4.1. “How Czech breaks you”: positive reflections of the city

The reasons as to why the expat women whom I interviewed moved to the Czech Republic are very versatile. Kiera, for instance, moved here to marry her Czech partner, and Helen returned to Prague with her partner, who is half Czech. Kristy and Tanja came to Prague as a part of job transfers within their companies. Monika did her Erasmus in Prague and decided to move back after completing her studies. During a February 2023 expat event for women, hosted by Girl Gone International, the various reasons for moving to Prague became a topic of discussion, with one girl immediately stating that “*she did not move here for love!*”, implying a certain stereotype that women often move to Prague to be with a (most likely Czech) partner. The one thing that all 15 respondents I talked to had in common was that they were all employed for international companies. When asked about their initial perceptions of Prague, the first thing they mentioned was the beauty of the city: the red roofs, the beautiful architecture, and overall the visual elements of the city, depicted in Alena’s quote below:

*That it was beautiful. Yeah, that's one thing that struck me the first time I visited and that strikes me every day. I love it because of its architecture, and in many areas it's natural beauty. What else stood out to me... I love how well connected the city is by public transport and walkability-wise, when I go for a run, for example, I love that I can leave my house and feel like I'm in a*

*totally different neighbourhood within 15 minutes on foot and then I can be on the other side of town in an hour and it's all still part of Prague*

*Alena, personal correspondence, 07.02.2023*

Overall, there were many things that the expat women appreciate about living in the Czech Republic. In one discussion with Tanja, at The Globe café, she suggested that there are ways in which “*Czech breaks you*”. Her specific example was the relationship Czech’s have to nature. She recounted that when she first moved here, a date had invited her to go on a 20km hike, which at that time to her was unimaginable to her. She didn’t understand how someone could just “*walk there and back*”. She then looked at me in this matter of fact way and said, “*what do you think I do now? For the weekends I go hiking 20km - there and back*” (personal communication, 06.10.2022). The concept of “breaking” could be seen as negative, whereby when something breaks, it isn’t whole anymore. However, Tanja’s use of this term was not meant in a negative sense, but rather the opposite. On one hand it suggests “breaking free” from something, in this case breaking into Czech culture. It also suggests the “breaking” of this metaphorical wall by experiencing more Czech activities, helping an expat woman settle down in Prague. Therefore, from Tanja’s perspective the Czech Republic “breaking her” is seen as a positive experience.

Another positive point that was brought up was the ease of getting around the city, either by foot or by public transport, as depicted by Alena’s quote above. Four respondents stated that they started discovering the city by simply walking around with or without a map, getting lost, and finding where they were in hindsight. They appreciate the ability to walk around and suddenly be in a new neighbourhood. Helen also noted the difference nowadays to when she moved here around 10 years ago, where smart phones and Google maps weren’t common. She therefore had the experience of discovering the city without the help of technology. Monika, on the other hand, used geocaching<sup>2</sup> as a method to get out and about in Prague during COVID. This will also be reflected in the maps, presented in the section below.

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<sup>2</sup> Geocaching is an outdoor activity, where, by using a Geocaching app, one navigates to hidden containers in a given area, called ‘geocaches’. Once you find this hidden container, you leave your name and / or a note in the logbook inside. (Carly, 2018).

Other positive experiences of Prague included the ritual around lunchtime for Czech people, in that they really take their time with lunch. Czech's relationship to beer was also evoked as a prominent theme, where after living here for some time one feels that Czech beer is the best beer and can be had as a casual "refreshment" at lunch. Monika found that having a "proper" lunch, instead of eating a sandwich at her desk, was a culture shock, as here in the Czech Republic she found that "you really go out for lunch, like proper lunch that when you work in a company, especially when I started to work, I noticed that even more. In Poland, when we are in the office, we just bring some sad sandwich from home, you know, and we eat it mostly in front of the desk." (personal communication, 15.03.2022). Similarly, Tanja, confused at first, loves having a beer at lunch now:

*I think I started integration with Pilsner (both laughing), because I wasn't usually drinking any beer, it was like eh, nah, I don't wanna drink that, but I've been also curious because sometimes colleagues had this beer for lunch, and for me it's like nonsense, and they said it's like a refreshment. I was really shocked, like what the hell it's like alcoholic drink, and also when I meet some other Czech people like in the city, like yeah, I drink with the food, I'm like, howww? So I was just like maybe I have to try that, and I tried it and I really love it now...*

*Tanja, personal communication, 09.09.2021*

Along similar lines, another point that was brought up repeatedly was Czech food. Most respondents indicated enjoying eating Czech food, most likely not on a daily basis, considering Czech food to be rather heavy and containing very little vegetables.

Moving to a new country often means adjusting to new ways of doing things. These perceptions point to factors to which expat women feel they have integrated, or gotten accustomed to, while living in the Czech Republic. It also shows reasons for wanting to stay and live here, and, as Tanja stated, shows ways in which "Czech breaks you", suggesting that there are things that make you love living here, and help you settle down. These positive perceptions not only help in settling down in the Czech Republic, but they also contribute to a sense of belonging in the country.

#### 4.1.1. Dog – friendly city



One evening, I met Stasia for drinks at Bullerbyn, a café on Chodská, in Vinohrady, roughly a five-minute walk from Jiřího z Poděbrad. She had just returned from the U.S. about 3 weeks ago, and came back with her dog, Shiloh. Her experiences will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, but overall, she had a very difficult time settling down in Prague and debated whether to come back to Prague. Shiloh, a breed of beagle and 8 years old, is an incredibly adorable dog, and having him with us at the café showed me exactly how dog friendly the Czech Republic is. When taking our order, our waitress asked if she could give him some “piškoty”, and this turned into a conversation between the waitress and Stasia about Shiloh (his breed, age, etc.). Shiloh was then left off the leash, free to roam around the café, and we had many discussions with people around us, whether they could pet him, what his name was, and so on and so forth. The conversations were all centred around the dog, but the atmosphere it created felt very welcoming, and I could see it changed how Stasia was perceiving Prague, because she felt comfortable and accepted. She mentioned how people treat her differently on the street and were no longer always “cold” and “unfriendly”, a point which shall be discussed in further detail below. In 2020, Prague was ranked as the 4th best city in the world for dog owners (Pirodsky, 2020). Through the examples above, as well as talking to other dog owners briefly, it is clear that owning a furry friend seems to break barriers. By owning a dog, people appear more friendly and are willing to talk to you on the street. Having a dog in a bar makes the atmosphere of the space immediately more welcoming. The focus of this study was not on dog culture, however I found it an important fact to mention when focusing on community building in Prague. Having a dog would seem to alter perceptions of Prague, but also affect spaces of socialization, and it would be interesting for further studies to look at this in more detail ethnographically.

#### 4.2. Negative perceptions: “Wall of Czechness”

Following these initial positive factors about Prague, very quickly the conversation turned to issues and barriers faced of living here. As the title of this work suggests, expat women perceive a metaphorical wall that exists between themselves and locals. Two factors particularly stood out in this regard. The first factor one being the language, which echoes the findings in the InterNations report, whereby 24% of their panel stated that not speaking the language makes it difficult to live in a Czech city (*The Expat Insider 2021*: 88). Language is an important factor in understanding how individuals create a sense of place, because the use

of language allows people to understand social, natural and cultural landscapes (Stokowski, 2002: 373). The second is concerned with expats' perception of Czech people as “*unfriendly*”, “*judgemental*”, and “*socially exclusive*”. These two factors, lead to a feeling of a “wall” between expats and locals, were mentioned in interviews, but also came out as a recurring theme on online platforms, such as the Expat Women in Prague group (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

#### 4.2.1. Language

When asking respondents if, and how, they felt integrated into Czech culture, often the answers were based around their knowledge of the Czech language. The present chapter therefore focuses on examples showcasing how the element of language has, at times, presented itself as a barrier for expats living in Prague. Whilst not the most difficult language in the world, according to all 15 respondents Czech is a notoriously difficult to learn, even for those who already speak another Slavic language. At the same time, language is something omnipresent in daily life and can therefore quickly feel like a barrier to integrating in a new country. In observing expats' perceptions on the role of the Czech language and their integration process, various different attitudes came to the fore, ranging from wanting or needing to speak the language.

##### 4.2.1.1. *Not needing the language*

Out of all respondents interviewed, five mentioned not speaking Czech, with two in the process of learning. On the one hand, working for international companies where English is the primary language of communication means that expats do not necessarily need Czech to get by in the Prague. However, not knowing the language is seen as a barrier to truly integrating into Czech society. As Kirsty pointed out in an interview:

*To be honest, I would not say that I have really integrated into Czech culture. I work in a multi-national company where the language spoken is English and most of my friends are also expats. I do not speak Czech also so I guess this makes it harder to integrate.*

*Kirsty, personal communication, 14.03.2023*

Throughout the research project, it has also become apparent – and this will be looked at in further detail later on – that it is easy for expats to get around (“pass through”) Prague

without needing to know the language. Physical spaces, such as cafés around the Jiřího z Poděbrad area, or other expat spaces such as The Globe café and Bookstore, are all places where Czech is not needed to get by to communicate. For example, when entering the Globe café, one walks into a hall, with the bookstore on the right-hand side, and the café at the end of this hall. The books are all in English, and almost every time I have walked in you hear English the moment you step in, because the woman behind the counter is interacting in English (either with someone who is buying a book, or with another worker). It feels in many ways like a quick-trip into an English speaking-world.

I would often ask people, in various contexts, and outside of the present research setting if they were learning Czech, and I would usually receive two types of answers. One was that they were learning the language to some capacity, however often times learning the language came with some kind of motive: a Czech partner (with a Czech speaking family, where they do not speak English is not spoken), the residency language exam<sup>3</sup>, or to stay Prague for a longer period of time, not just as a temporary stay. The other answer, often accompanied with a laugh, was a resounding “no”, or “why would I?”, suggesting that there was no need to learn the language. This second response would usually come from people who did not intend to stay in Prague long, and were non-Slavic. This group therefore reflects a perception that Czech is not needed to live in the city, and that English is enough to get by in daily life.

Kristy however noted that this phase of not needing Czech can be considered a “*phase of denial*”, whereby at first working for an international company means that one doesn’t necessarily need to have an understanding of Czech.

*Yeah, I to be honest there are several phases. At first, is because in my company everybody speaks English. And also like, I have this expat group so everybody's speaking English. So it's like one phase is like, I don't really need that. \*we both laugh\* And then yeah, and then after a while, like I met my boyfriend and he's Czech. And then after two years in the Czech Republic I got a permanent residence. And that because it's a family one, so I don't need any language. And then by the end of this year, if I can get to be B1, and I can apply for the citizenship because I also got a British passport [...]. So I was in this denial phase too, I was like, hey, maybe I'm*

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<sup>2</sup> One has to do the Czech language exam when applying for permanent residence, which is done after 5 years of living in the Czech Republic (Czech language exam, 2022).

*here already, why not give it a shot. So starting from last year 2022 Easter, I start to have the Czech class and in September become more intense. And I have like, one hour one to one every day with my teacher.*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

External circumstances, such as a Czech partner or wanting Czech residency, can lead to a person needing to have at least a basic grasp of the language (though having a Czech partner can also mean foregoing the language exam, as seen above). Therefore, in some ways an expat woman does not need the language to get around and function in the city, as pointed out by Kristy, having foreign friends and working for an international company means staying in an “expat bubble”. However, learning the language can be a useful tool for integrating into Czech society.

#### *4.2.1.2. Language as a barrier to integrating*

The group above presented the perception that language is not necessarily needed to live in the Prague. However, on the other hand, a number of respondents perceived not knowing the language as frustrating and “*not having a voice*”. The level of difficulty of the language makes it hard to learn it, but without learning it, expats can feel excluded from Czech society. This was presented in several ways when talking to respondents.

In one case, the use of the Czech language in the workplace was brought up, where there appears to be a divide between the international and Czech departments. In one conversation I had at an expat women bowling event hosted by the Girl Gone International group, a woman from Bulgaria mentioned that her Czech colleagues are quite “*cold*”, and that whenever they were in the company’s kitchen she would greet them with a typical “hello” without receiving a response. However, when she started saying the Czech “*ahoj*”, she broke through some of that aforementioned metaphorical wall and received a “*ahoj*” back, though not much else. She was surprised that when greeting in English, she was met with no response, but in Czech she would at least have some sort of response, though it did not initiate a deeper interaction with her Czech colleagues.

Kristy also mentioned that most of her interactions with Czech people is within the workplace, where despite the official language being English, some of her Czech co-worker's do not respect this, and speak Czech amongst themselves.

*And yeah, and also like the work I will say in the workplace, that is more culture shock come from because I usually interact with Czech people inside a workspace. [...]. I don't know whether it's just a one extreme example, or just this group of people. But it's quite often they gossip in front of you using Czech. And then you can catch some words, and they're talking about you. And it's super rude. And also I feel like not being respected and not too international here. It is the international standard, you speak in English and it's a workplace guys. So, this thing, I find it super weird.*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

This adds to their feeling that one is excluded in the country they are living in and creates a feel of 'otherness' for expats in Prague.

Another space where the language barrier was seen as an issue in administrative settings, such as visits to the foreign police, the immigration office, a visit to the doctor, the post office, or when attempting to get a driving license. The frustration over these situations was often brought up in the Expat Women in Prague Facebook group (a closed group where women can ask questions or share experiences; discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), whereby women were asking for Czech speakers to accompany them to these official visits. Tanja also depicted the desire to learn the language, so that in situations, like at the post office, she could rely on herself, instead of feeling confused.

*[...] I think it's generally I have a feeling I need to improve really my Czech because I need to do paperwork sometimes, and I'm not comfortable, or, like in the post office they're asking some questions [using a] word which I don't know, and then I'm a bit confused, so, maybe just for my more comfortable life [...]*

*Tanja, personal communication, 09.09.2021*

These situations create a feeling of a divide between Czech locals and expat women, and leading to frustration, and also an increased awareness of the difficulty of learning the language.

*[...] After years, I still can't speak Czech. I have at this point lost the passion. I hate living in a country where I don't have a voice. I can't communicate the way I want/need. And I feel stupid for not being able to learn. Prague now seems like such a 'passing through' place for so many people. [...]*

*An anonymous post on the social media platform Expat Women in Prague, 15.04.2022*

These examples demonstrate that the feeling of needing the language, despite not speaking it, can make expat women feel like outsiders, unable to communicate in the local language, and, as depicted in the above two quotes, leaving expats feeling judged, confused, and unable to communicate their needs clearly. The inability of speaking Cech, among expat women, thus creates a feeling of “being limited” because they do not know the language and therefore cannot communicate clearly.

#### *4.2.1.3. Czech speakers*

Among the respondents interviewed in the context of the research project, a limited number did speak fluent Czech. Becka, from the USA, actually started learning Czech before moving here, whilst living in the UK. Kristina and Sasha studied University courses in the Czech language, and therefore have no problem communicating in the language. Elizabeth has lived in the Czech Republic for over 30 years, and also speaks fluently. Nevertheless, Kristina, for instance, felt that despite speaking the language fluently, it was still pointed out to her that she isn't Czech, namely whenever people noticed her accent. This, for her, created the feeling of being different, and despite living here for 10 years and holding citizenship, still being seen as an outsider.

*I speak fluently Czech, I have like no problem speaking it, but still, doesn't matter how good my Czech is, people still would ask oh, “I think I can hear an accent, so you are actually not from here, where are you coming from?”. This is, especially when I was studying this was like an ongoing discussion, with every new person I met...*

*Kristina, personal communication, 23.08.2021*

Speaking the language can also help overcome this barrier of “Czechness”, as one woman posted in a comment in the Expat Women Group on Facebook, mentioning the decision

to “*push herself*” to learn Czech at a B2 level, if she wanted to “*integrate and be a part of society*”. She found that by learning enough Czech “*to say the things I want to say and to be able to reply to any assaults by the locals if they come my way. Worked miracles, really...*”. She also stated that it helped her understand the “*Czech people and their mentality better, I have joined multiple Czech groups and Czech creative clubs and found many wonderful friends there. After 10 years I finally don't feel like a "foreigner/victim" and can fight back or stand my ground if I need to*” (Emily, Expat Women in Prague Facebook post, 20.02.2022)

In this Facebook comment, the woman’s choice of “foreigner/victim” presents an interesting choice of words, as it appears that she views the two terms synonymously. Usually, a foreigner could be perceived as an outsider, or perhaps as an enemy, as they are somehow different than locals. Here, this woman associates a foreigner with being the victim, suggesting that foreigners are treated differently due to being from a different country. Furthermore, this woman’s feeling that she needs to “defend herself” is quite interesting. It ties in with the notion that not speaking the language makes you feel excluded from the society, but also being set apart means an expat needs to defend their position living in a foreign country. In previously mentioned situations, where you are not sure if co-workers are speaking behind your back, or in situations where you are dealing with bureaucracy and need the ability to communicate, this woman showed how learning the language can help overcome this barrier to “*not feel like a victim*”. As this is a comment on a Facebook group, I did not get the chance to talk to this lady, and therefore do not know what factors led her to learn Czech. She seems, however, to have found that it changed her perceptions and integration into the city.

Similarly, Becka pointed out her frustrations with posts on Facebook groups in which women share that they feel Czech people to be *unfriendly* and *rude*, linking it specifically to the complaints on Czech customer service. When I asked her what she meant more specifically, she sounded rather frustrated, and suggested that learning the language will make the people nicer.

*I mean, like the thing that I always get super frustrated with people like on Expat Women in Prague about this, because there'll be people who don't speak the language and complain constantly about Czech customer service, but if you speak Czech people are always saying “mějte se hezky”, and people are always being nice to you. And, you know, if you had to kind of do customer service, in your second language, would you translate all the pleasantries? And*

*I think, you know, once I started sort of transacting and living, do my daily life in Czech, like, I didn't feel that it was lacking pleasantries*

*Becka, personal communication, 11.05.2022*

Becka shows that by learning the language and showing that you are trying to communicate, can help overcome this feeling of this metaphorical wall. She mentioned that language should be seen as a “conduit”. This to her means that the language spoken in a given situation is based on the circumstances of the situation – if most people in the group speak English, then they will speak in English. Becka points out that people should be drawn together because of their interests, and the language should play a secondary factor. In her case, as a dancer, her primary interests are dancing venues and events, as will be shown in her map of Prague in the following chapter.

This section has therefore addressed the group whereby they do speak Czech, and how contributes to the perceived “wall” between Czechs and locals. Returning to Kristina’s point, speaking the language doesn’t necessarily need to make you feel like you are integrated into society. However, speaking Czech is beneficial, as it can help understand the local people better, as well as communicate and stand up for oneself, when needed.

#### 4.2.2. Expat perceptions of Czech people

Alongside the language barrier, a topic that came up was an issue of what some woman referred to as a “Czech mentality”. In the following example, a woman was responding to a Facebook post made about the Expat Women in Prague group, where someone asked if other women in Prague find people “*extremely mean and aggressive for no reason*”:

*Absolutely agree and I speak fluent Czech. As if they were thinking that the louder and meaner they get the more right they are! I live here for 20+ years and I just can't stand Czechs anymore. I know they are not all the same but it's their mentality in general. Sorry if I will hurt someone with my comment.*

*Jitka, Expat Women in Prague, 05.11.2022*

This refers to the feeling women have that Czech people keep foreigners at an arm’s distance, and treat them differently due to them not being Czech. From a combination of



interviews, but also from the online Facebook groups, there is the perception that Czech people are “cold”, “rude”, “don’t smile” and aren’t always helpful.

At one Girl Gone International picnic event in the summer of 2022, there was about 15 of us, sat in a circle, in the middle of the Pankrác park, having a picnic. It was the first time everyone had met, with the exception of the host (Taylor) and one of the girls, who was a close friend of the host. One woman (whose name I cannot unfortunately remember) at this event was sharing a story about being yelled at in Billa (local grocery store) at the check-out counter. The cashier behind the counter kept pointing to some fruits / vegetables she was trying to pay for, and “yelling” at her in Czech. It was the lady’s first or second day in Prague, and she couldn’t understand anything this cashier was yelling at her. At one point the cashier took the food from her, and brought it to the weighing machine, and that is how this woman found out that one has to weigh their fruits and vegetables in Billa. When sharing this story, the other women in the group empathized with her situation, either saying they’ve been through the same, or suggesting they knew others who have. This example demonstrates the perceptions that many expat women often have of Czech people, where in situations like this, they do not receive help or an explanation, but are yelled at in a foreign language, not knowing why or what is happening.

Another situation in which this was felt was in relation to experiences with bureaucratic institutions. In one example, despite having a driver’s licence from Hong Kong, Kristy had to go through the process of having lessons and her driving test in the Czech Republic, to be able to drive in Europe. Her situation involved more than just a language barrier, but also the discrimination of the driving instructor towards Kristy. In her situation, the driving instructor spoke English to her perfectly, but made a point of insulting her in Czech once learning she was from Hong Kong:

*And then and then he asked us, there are three expats in the classroom and [he] asked us fluently in English like where are you from? How long have you been here? So I say Oh, I'm from Hong Kong, I don't know two three years here. And then he switched back to Czech Republic very angrily I can catch some words like “Česky”, or something like Germany or Russia or China, or something like this very angrily and then people laugh and then and then he go out and call for the first student go out for the for the examination. So I was a little bit like really? Seriously? but I want to confirm my feeling is correct. So I talked to a person who*

*can is also a student and say hey, excuse me can you speak in English to yeah, and then he's a guy and I said excuse me I just want to cross check with you is the examiner insulting foreigners? And then the student said yeah, probably.*

*Kristy, personal correspondence, 15.01. 2023*

Kristy's situation points to a level of discrimination that she felt based on her nationality and being a foreigner. Having this experience in a situation, where you have no other choice because despite having a license, she has to legally go through the examination again, can be incredibly frustrating. Overall, she had to take driving lessons, and do the examination five times before getting her license. She shared with me that this happened to more people she knew. Stasia summarizes her experience in the Czech Republic was directly related to how she felt treated by Czech people:

*So yeah, I don't I don't want this to sound like I'm shitting on Prague or anything, because I do love like so much about it. [...] But the [Czech] people like really just suck the life out of me. I found myself almost getting like pre angry before I went out because I knew what I was going to have to deal with.*

*Stasia, personal communication, 25.11.2022*

Stasia moved back to Prague three times over the course of 5 years, but this time around her interactions with the people made her leave, most likely, for good. Her feeling of getting “pre-angry” before going out was linked to her interactions with people in various locations, such as shops, where they were rude and cold. It affected the way she perceived, and interacted within the city, such as keeping a social group that was made up primarily of other American expats.

The issues of language and the perceived mentality of the local people thus create this feeling of “otherness” for expats in Prague. This “otherness” therefore creates this view of there being a “them” and “us” and affects the identity one feels in a certain situation (Staszak, 2008: 2). It almost creates this feeling of expats being in a space where they are in an “out-group”, whereas local, Czech people are in the “in-group”, and are not willing to let foreigners in (ibid., 1). This is enhanced in situations such as getting one's driver's license, or needing to get

paperwork done, as well as in situations where one just feels they cannot stand up for themselves.

#### 4.3. Building a community: making friends

This section will address the want, and need, for women living in Prague to have friends, and build a community. This plays an important factor in place-making, as the creation of place, and place-belongingness, is socially constructed (Stokowski, 2002: 372). Additionally, much of academic literature on expat women has focused on them being “trailing spouses” or “migration tails” (Yeoh&Willis, 2005). Studies focused on this have however shown that moving abroad is determined by the man’s career, and by doing so, in families with children, the women withdraw from the workplace to focus on the household (Yeoh&Willis, 2005). In these situations, a study conducted by Brenda Yeoh and Louisa-May Khoo (1998) found that women feel isolated in the host country at first, and dependent on the husband for social interactions (173). However, this was not the case for the women interviewed as a part of this project. The 15 women interviewed made the conscious decision of moving to Prague on their own account. Furthermore, none of these women had children, or moved to support a husband such as in the studies presented above. As a result, factors such as international schools were not at all an important space for socialization, which Aneta Piekut (2013) found an important space of socialization of expat women in Warsaw (see also Primecz, 2022).

##### 4.3.1. Difficulty making Czech friends

I met Michaela, a Polish woman in her 30s, after seeing her Facebook post about not feeling “at home” in Prague, a point to which I will return to in Chapter 5. When asking her about her experiences of making friends in Prague, she noted the difficulty of making Czech friends.

*Because what I know for sure is that it's really hard to have Czech friends, even “friends” is too much, but just colleagues... just to know some Czech people for me as a foreigner*

*Michaela, personal communication, 09.03.2022*

Not being able to make local, Czech, friends is another way in which the aforementioned “wall” between Czech people and expats is created. One of the reasons

mentioned by expats in the previous chapter is language. However, another reason could be due to the Czech people's attitude towards foreigners, as described by Kristina below. Even though Kristina finished two bachelor's and one master's program in the Czech Republic (in the Czech language), she stated that she doesn't really have any Czech friends.

*I don't have Czech friends. That's for example one thing that is very challenging I guess, that you've been to some place for many years and you, like, still I wasn't able to develop any long-lasting connections with people from here, like, Czech people (V: do you think there is a reason for that?) Yes, \*laughs\*, yes. Like, first of all what I noticed is that, in the Czech Republic the people are very connected to their high school friends. Or like, people from their region or their hometown, like they are super attached to those people. So, I think only, yeah, even if they move to Prague, they still stay in touch with people from their hometown, their high school, this kind of stuff. I feel like the space is already taken, people already have friends, and that's what, like, we were trying to go out when I was a student and stuff, but I feel like Czech people, like I don't want to say they're not interested in new friends, but, that's how I felt. I was just like; I couldn't get their attention. I was just a foreigner, and they already have like real friends.*

*Kristina, personal communication, 23.08.2021*

Kristina's description suggests that it is perhaps Czech people who stay within a "bubble", and do not necessarily make the effort to befriend foreigners because they have already established friend groups. This research project did not focus on the experience from the perspective of locals, so a conclusion about the perspectives of Czech people cannot be made. However, Kristina's perception that locals have their own established friendship groups suggests the need for other ways of socializing among expats in Prague.

As highlighted by Henriett Primecz (2022), even when locals are welcoming in a given city, they "...are rarely active in developing new relationships" (8). Expats, "who are all in the same boat, are more open to building new relationships, not least because they need social support" (ibid.). The author suggests that locals might be helpful with specific help, but this rarely developed into relationships (ibid.).

#### 4.3.2. Making friends with other expats

Therefore, due to this perceived “wall” between expats and locals, expat women thus need turn to other foreigners in the city to build friendships. Building friendships, as building a community, is an important aspect of place-making (Cohen, 1985: 118; Stokowski, 2002: 373). Anthony Cohen (1985), stated that “construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity” (118). This section therefore addresses how the difficulty in making connections, both Czech as well as expat, can affect the feeling of belonging when living in a foreign city. This section will address the need, but also the difficulty, of making other expat friends. Moving to an unknown city, as presented in the quote below, means that it can be difficult to make friends.

*Dear ladies, how do you look for new friends and places to socialize here? Please share your experience. I've been in Prague for 4 years and hardly made any friends so far... My old friends live in different countries (and continents) and I'm craving to socialize in Prague.*

*Jane, Expat Women in Prague Facebook group, 24.01.2023*

This woman has been in the country for four years and reached out to the Expat Women in Prague Facebook group to ask for advice on how to make friends in the city. As this is on the basis of a Facebook post, and I did not get the opportunity to speak to the woman, I cannot say what factors led her to reach out to ask after four years of living in the Czech Republic. The use of the group will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, but here it is important to note that she is “craving” to meet with other people. Marian van Bakel *et. al* (2017) point out that expatriates, living away from their home countries, need to build social relationships in the new country. This is because when moving to a new place, expat “...inevitably leave behind a great part of their existing network, and consequently, their sources of different types of social support” (ibid., 217). As such, they seek out support from other women, who are in a similar situation.

However, there is also the question of who foreigners are friends within the expat group itself. Expats are not part of a homogenous group, and therefore the communities are built up of various nationalities and backgrounds. I noticed this phenomenon often at the Girl Gone International (GGI) events (which will be discussed in further detail below), where at one quiz evening there were women from the USA, the UK, Hong Kong, Greece and Russia present. Kiera, an American living in Prague for a year at the time of the interview, moved to Prague as a result of marrying her Czech husband. She made an interesting point in that she wanted

to meet people outside the American community in Prague, to get the opportunity to know more people from various cultures.

*Yeah, it's definitely difficult. But I don't know if it's necessarily because it's simply not for a lack of like, people, umm, I'm gonna think go to a cinco-de-mayo thing tomorrow that I'm really excited about with some girls', but, [...] you have to really make that extra effort going out [...] I know there's a large American community. But I also wanted to try to avoid, only like, leaning in towards that community because I knew I could, and it was comfortable. Yeah, so it's definitely hard... and working remotely, I have to really make the effort like, okay, today, I'm going to reach out to someone, I'm ready to go get a coffee, and I have to try and do this.*

*Kiera, personal communication, 04.05.2022*

In Kiera's case, the difficulty in making friends is not only because of her foreigner status, but also due to her situation of working from home, therefore she needed to make an effort to go out and meet new people. Stasia, had a similar view in that she didn't only want to have American friends, however she also realized that having these friends meant that she didn't always have to explain certain phrases and idioms because “*we do have a lot of weird phrases or even just like terms that are like, trendy right now*” (Stasia, personal communication, 23.11.2022). By hanging out with people of the same nationality, she didn't feel the need to have to explain these references as they were immediately understood. In this way, it felt comfortable and included in a community that shared the same cultural background. Whilst cultural elements can be important, similarly the length of stay of expats is important to take into account.

One characteristic that defines expats is their temporality. Anne-Meike Fechter and Katie Walsh (2012) identified three types of expats based on their longevity in a place, separating them into long-term, middle-ground and lifestyle expats. As these have been discussed in Chapter 2.1, the distinctions will not be made here again. When asking Tanja about how she makes friends in Prague, she differentiated two types of expats, whereby their length of stay in the Czech Republic makes it difficult for expats to make long-term friends here, as many people only “pass through” Prague.

*It's really hard, I would say, because I think it's when you're an adult, there is a bit less options, and I think another thing for expats specifically – so there is probably like two types of people:*

*so there is like people who are sure that they are here just for a few years, and they're sure they will leave. And, there is some people who live here and they are sure they will live here quite long time, so, and, I had some friends who are like this first [expat] group, and it was just a bit weird, because you sort of invest time in the friendship, and then the person goes, so now I'm starting to make friends with those who want to live here longer, because I want to live here, not to go somewhere, but to stay here for at least 5-10 years.*

*Tanja, personal communication, 09.09.2021*

The feeling of inclusion thus creates a sense of belonging, through interactions with others (van Riemsijk, 2014: 966). This thus creates the feeling of place-belongingness, which is linked both to a feeling of being “at home” (Antonisch, 2010), but also an attachment to place, rooted in symbolic spaces of familiarity, comfort, and security” (van Riemsijk, 2014: 966). However, as shown in the quotes above, it can be difficult to make friends as an expat woman abroad. On the one hand, it is perceived to be difficult to become friends with local, Czech people. This perceived “wall” between the locals and expats can therefore leads to the creation of expat communities. Two such communities are the Expat Women in Prague group, as well as the Girl Gone International (GGI) group, which are the subject of the following chapter. It was through my interviews however, that I learnt that these spaces allow for the creation of the feeling of being a part of the community.

*I would say... [thinking] I mean it kind of changes and has changed over time. Right now, I would say my primary friend group consists of my best friend from the university, who is not from my home country and does not live in my neighbourhood. A couple of friends from GGI, who live in my neighbourhood, Yeah, yeah, that's it. So some friends are people from my country, some who are not, some who live in my neighbourhood and only one that does not. The neighbourhood is huge.*

*Alena, personal communication, 07.03.2023*

Alena here also draws on an important point, namely that of location. She stated that some of her closest friends she did meet through the GGI group, however, live in her neighbourhood. By living in the same area, it makes it, as Alena claims, “easier to get together”, whereby it is easier to make last-minute plans with other women. For example, “if I don't have plans for the evening, it's much more likely that I will get some plans if I text a friend who lives three blocks away than if I text someone who lives on the other side of town

or, you know, out in the suburbs, and they would have to make a whole journey, to get somewhere” (Alena, personal communication, 07.03.2023). This alludes to the fact that making friends could also be driven by spaces in which one lives in.

*My primary friendship group are the girls I met through GGI Facebook group*

*Kirsty, personal communication, 14.03.2023*

Similarly, Kirsty noted the importance of the GGI group for the creation of friendships, and this will be addressed in the following chapter.

#### 4.4. Not feeling safe in Prague

This section briefly looks to the concept of safety living in a foreign city, shedding light on experiences women face in their daily lives. I would argue that a sense of safety within a city is tied to place-making, as not feeling safe in a given environment hinders the feeling of belonging in the city. Stasia presents such an example. Despite having many positive experiences, the negative experiences outweighed these, leading her to return back to the USA in the fall of 2022 after living in Prague for only a year, but having lived in Prague for short periods of time in 2018 and 2019 as well. When I asked her why she had left, Prague, she described that:

*Just like, like the sexual assault was a big reason I left. Like it happened to me on numerous occasions in the street people like, I remember this guy like coming up and just grabbing me by my vagina. And like I'd never experienced that in the States. And like that was a reason I wanted to move there [Prague] because I always hear like oh the U.S. is so dangerous and like this and that and it is, but like those are extreme cases I think like shootings and stuff are obviously not the thing in Prague, but like shootings aren't they have been like big ones like a couple times a year whereas like, in Prague, I was on the street a lot because you don't have a car so you have to walk to places and like the men there just... I don't think, to be honest, I could ever move back because of that. It was just like even in daytime it happened majority of the time I think it happened in daylight; people were around. I wasn't you know, dressed any... not that that matters, but I was I wasn't dressed in any type of way. And just the man just like came up and grabbed me and I would hit them and yell at them and they just like laugh it off.*



*And they were like always with people and the people around them just like laugh at it or just don't even care. (V: Was it in a specific area? Was it like by where you lived? Or was it like, all over the city?) Everywhere. It happened in Smíchov, it happened at I.P. Pavlova, where else... just like random streets I'd be walking on. One time when I got out of a tram. Like the amount of times it just it like really crushed me. I just couldn't. Yeah, it just sucked.*

*Stasia, person communication, 23.11.2022*

I was never with Stasia when these events happened, and I didn't ask the other respondents about their experiences of sexual assault in Prague. One respondent did share her experiences she had heard about other women who had dealt with sexual harassment in Prague. However, as this was heard through someone, as opposed to the women who had gone through the situation, I do not deem it ethically correct to share those stories here. Stasia's experiences makes an important point about being a woman alone in a foreign city. Despite Prague being considered a relatively safe city, her experiences of sexual assault show how women have to consciously think about their safety. She also compared how the sexual assault she experienced was not in places she would expect them to happen.

*Yeah, and never once did anything like this ever happened in a club. Like, that's what like really hurt me is like people put in Oh, don't dress like this. Don't be alone. Don't be out this time of night, you know, like, and the sketchy situations I put myself in, and nothing bad ever happened. It was just always like, in daytime, a lot of the time when I was getting groceries like this would happen. Or one time when I was with Shiloh [her dog], that one hurt me the most because I remember hitting the guy and being like, so scared he's gonna hurt Shiloh. And yeah, just so many random situations.*

*Stasia, person communication, 23.11.2022*

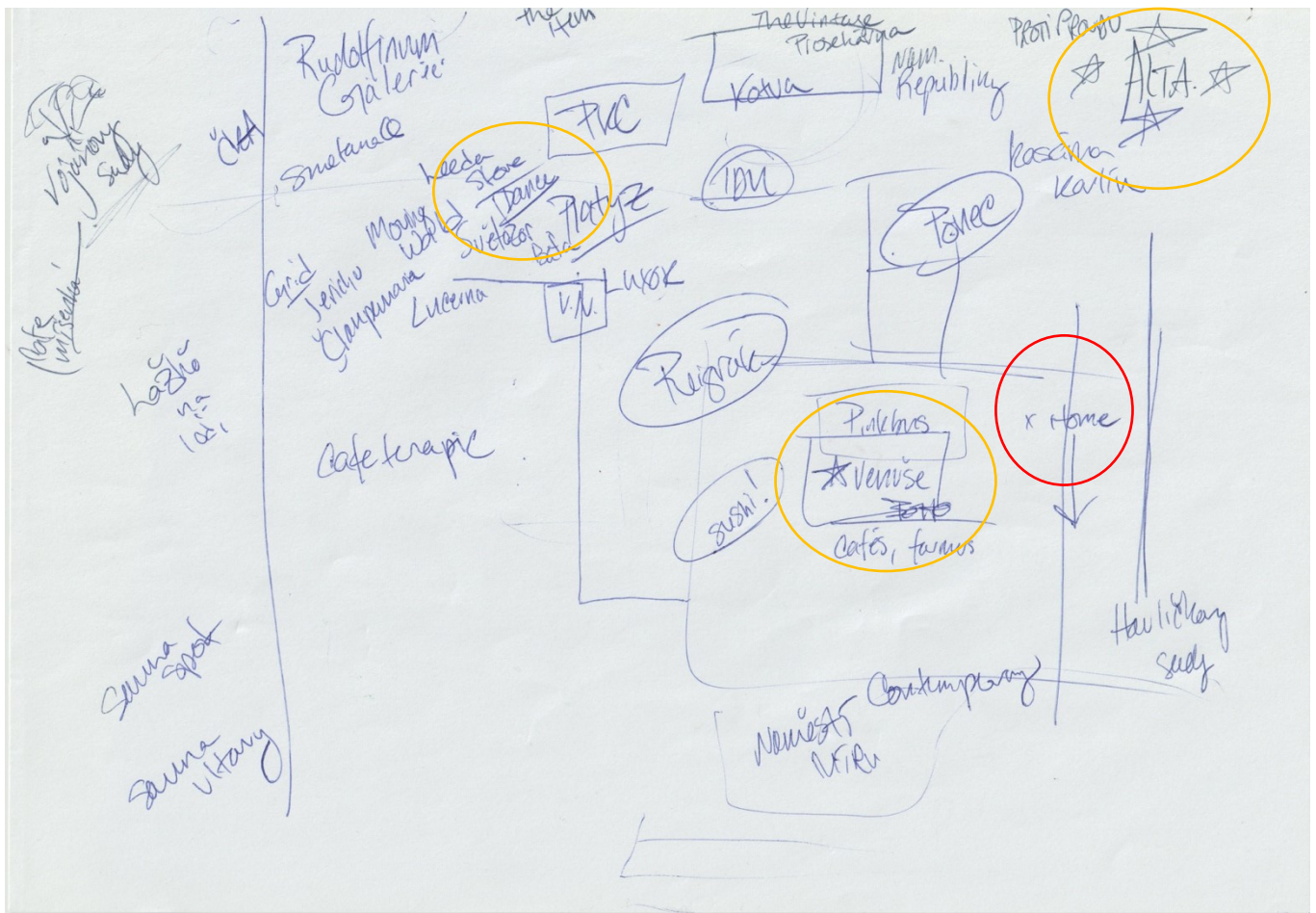
It is important to link this understanding of private and public spaces more specifically to gender, notably because this study followed and studied primarily the experiences of expat women in Prague. Nancy Duncan (1996) states that it is "...clear that the public-private distinction is gendered" (128). Western distinctions between public and private spaces, are "...historically, socially, and spatially constructed to organize social categories such as race, class, and gender into spatially demarcated hierarchical relations that often segregated these groups of people away from the "public" spaces, the latter being hegemonically defined as white, middle class, hetero-sexual, and male" (Verbuč, 2022: 86; see also Fraser 1990; Leppert

1993; Hill 1998; Gal 2002; Warner, 2002: 49). The notions of public and private spaces are thus gendered, whereby often private spaces are associated with the domestic sphere and the home, and considered a feminine space, whilst the public sphere is perceived as a more “male” space (Duncan, 1996: 131). As such, the public sphere can be seen as alienating or discriminating towards women. According to the Nancy Duncan (1996), the distinction exists because this binary opposition between the public and private is based on legitimate oppression, regulate dependence based on gender, and also as a method to regulate sexuality (ibid., 128). Sexual harassment as well as other forms of sexual violence is something women and girls face in public spaces all over the world (Ceccato&Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022: 26). From the interviews I conducted, Prague was perceived as a safe city, in which a woman shouldn't be scared to use public transport for example, to get around the city (though I did not focus on this specific topic whilst conducting interviews). However, Stasia's experiences show how Prague can also be viewed as an unsafe city. Vania Ceccato and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris (2022) studied women's perception of safety in public places such as transit environments, finding that women are often more fearful than men in transit environments (29). Hille Koskela and Rachel Pain (2006) found that women created “mental maps” of environments around them, noting places that are unsafe based on prior experience, and thus avoid these spaces when moving around a city. Stasia's experienced exemplify how public spaces are gendered, and how she had to deal with living in Prague after having such experiences. The aim of this research was not to study in detail safety in public spaces (and I believe this could, and should, be a study on its own), but it is an important point to share when studying how and why women feel the need to create their own spaces of socialization to build their own, safe, communities in Prague.

On the other hand, public spaces such as the city of Prague itself, is an open space, in which means that, unfortunately, stories similar to Stasia's can, and do, take place. This example demonstrates perhaps the exact opposite of what the Expat Women in Prague group demonstrates. If place-making is understood as through the “perceived”, “conceived” and “lived” experiences (Svašek&Komarova, 2018:12), Stasia's story demonstrates the difficulty in place-making in Prague. It also takes it a step further than just a perceived metaphorical “wall of Czechness”, as the feeling of not being safe, and not being able to leave one's apartment, stops one from place-making in a foreign city. As such, this can lead to someone moving back to their home country, such as in Stasia's case.

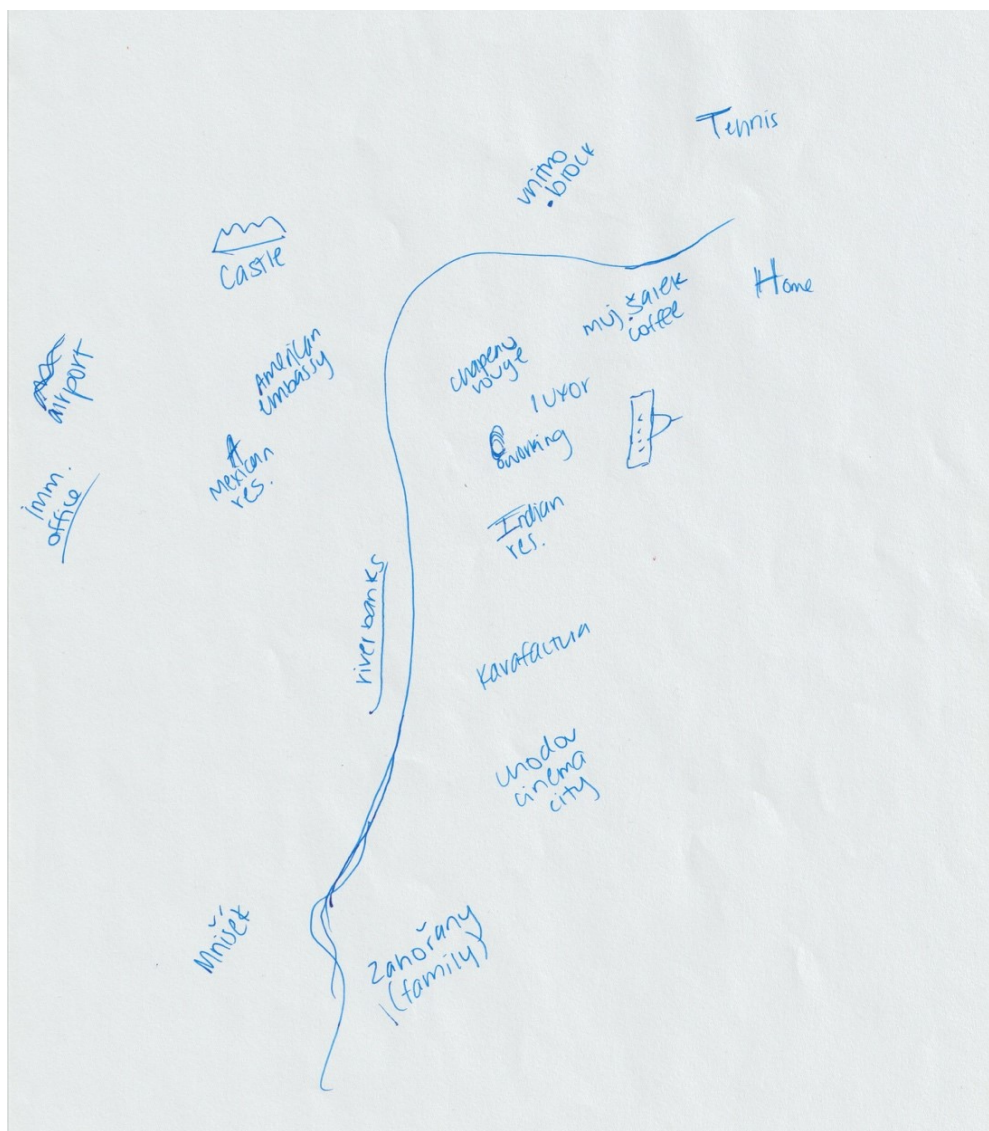
#### 4.5. "My Prague"

The previous section showed that language and perceptions of Czech people lead to the idea of there being a metaphorical "wall" between expats and locals. This section, however, aims to see if the same "wall" is perceived on a geographical level. As mentioned in the methodology section, when doing the semi-structured interviews, I asked the respondents if they could draw their map of "their Prague". The following seven maps show emic reflections of how expat women perceive physical spaces in Prague, such as what places they interact and engage with, or perhaps what places they avoid. These were accompanied by verbal descriptions of why these points are important to them, and why they should be put on the map. The findings are presented below, with the first two points echo the findings of Aneta Piekut (2013) in Warsaw.



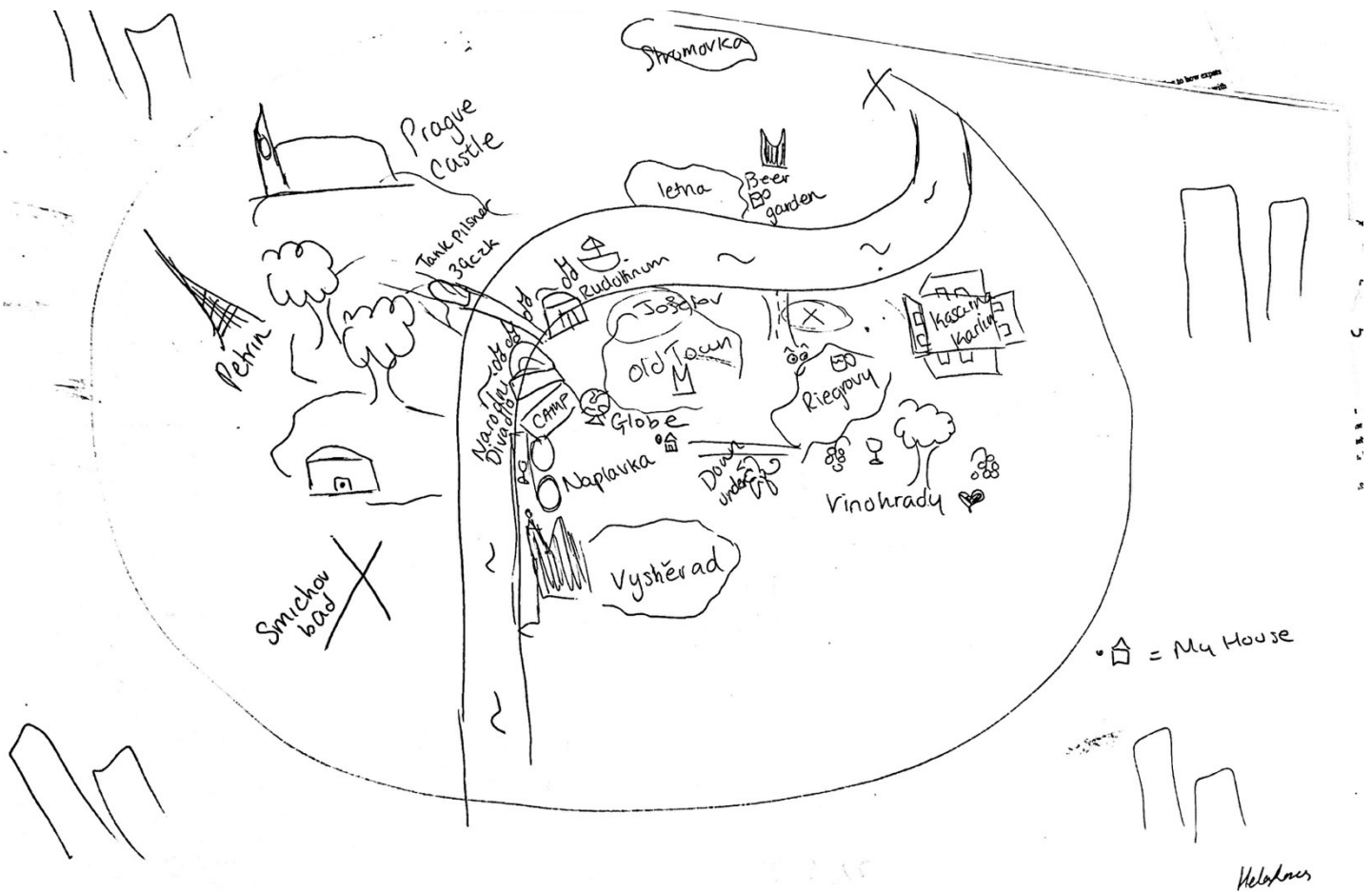
Map 1: Becka's map

Centrality of the river, home and work. The first point drawn on the map of every respondent was the river, by which they then oriented themselves in the city, followed by home and work (with the exception of those who work from home). When doing the interview with Becka, she took out her phone to check where the river was, to then locate the other spaces. As a dancer, most of the spaces she interacts with are places where she either dances, or where dancers socialise (shown on the map most notably by the stars and orange circles, like Alta, Venuše, and dance). She also mentioned one bar, *Bafezda*, is “only fun to go to with people who speak Czech because they're rude if you speak too much English” (personal communication, 11.05.2022). Becka’s map shows how the city to her is determined by her job and hobbies, which leads to the next point.



Map 2: Kiera’s map

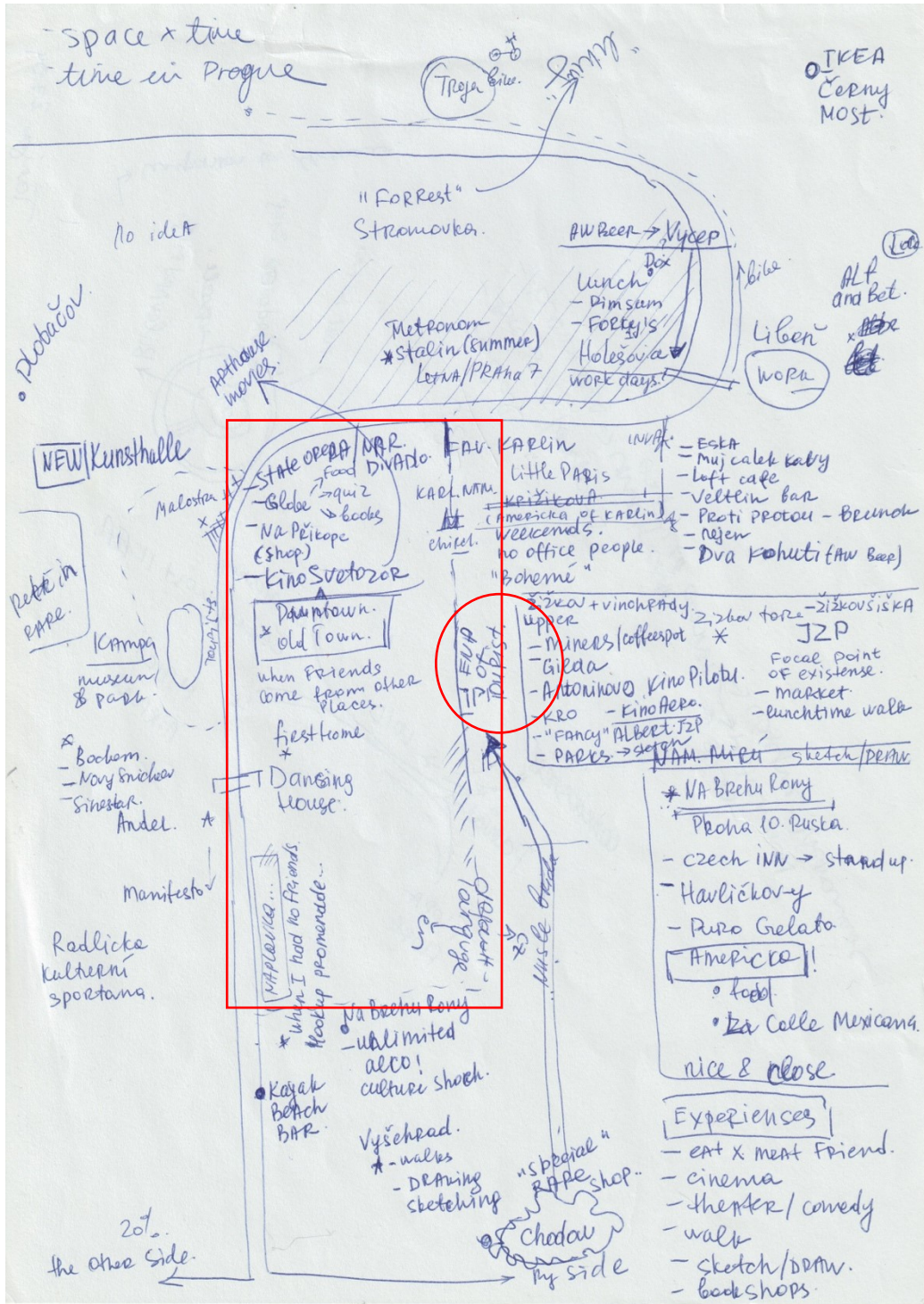
Embeddedness in locality. Becka's map showed how her interest in dance meant that her Prague was determined by spaces related to dancing, both in terms of the sport as well as social groups. Kiera's map below demonstrates how her Prague is determined by places near her home, but also places near her Czech husband's family, like Mníšek and Zahořany. The embeddedness in the locality can be seen across all the maps, however. They showed that most of the spaces visited and used were around their area of home, in which another interesting point is that all the maps included JZP or Riegrovy Sady. Embeddedness in specific parts of town are also shown in Monika's map (map 7), where the biggest areas on her map were the Karlín and Holešovice neighbourhoods.



Map 3: Helen's map

Prague within a certain radius. As demonstrated by Helen's map above, most of Prague, as perceived by expat women, was within a certain radius of the city. This reiterated the point

about Prague being easy to get around by public transport, mentioned in Chapter 4.1, as everything therefore appears close and easy to get to.



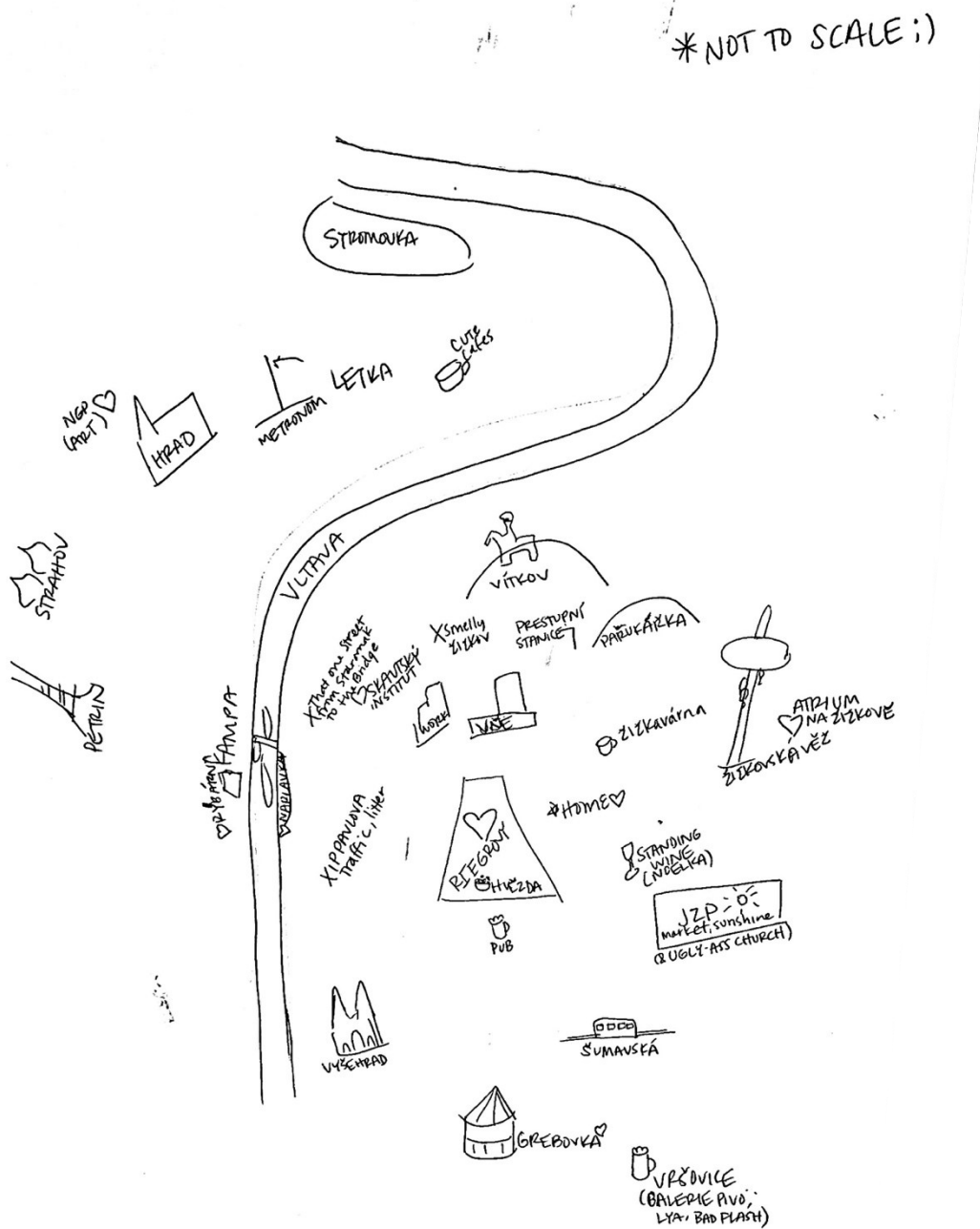
Map 4: Tanja's map

Tourist vs local spaces. Another point of dichotomy was that of tourist areas vs areas expat women live in. This is best seen in for example Tanja's map, where she divided the tourist area by its geographical location, the red box depicts the area she considered 'touristy'. This is also shown by her label "*when friends come from other places*", that's where she would take them. She also viewed it as a language dichotomy, in the touristy areas you primarily hear English, but once you leave you primarily hear Czech. Kiera, however, made a clear distinction of what she views as a "tourist" versus "her" Prague:

*So many people say that Prague is like Old Town Square, then you have the old city, like the Staré Město, right and Charles Bridge and Malá Strana...For me this is not really Prague, because for me this is a touristy Prague, I go there I go there often because I live in Karlín so it's not far so I often walk to the centre and I cross all those streets, so you it's not that I'm not the one who never goes to centre like some people I know that they are like avoiding it... but for me this is like this Prague, like this show off Prague...like this beautiful, perfect beauty Prague, but, my Prague is more like Karlín, because I live there for last three years, so like...*

*Kiera, personal communication, 15.03.2022*

For Kiera, the "postcard" Prague is the Prague one shows visitors when they arrive, but it is not the lived Prague that she experiences. Helen also noted her dislike on that "*little path between Charles Bridge and Old Town Square*" which she finds extremely frustrating because of the number of tourists using this street. Therefore, these maps also reinforced the notion that expats differentiate themselves from tourists through the spaces they use in the city.



Map 5: Alena's map

Areas to avoid. Most respondents also agreed on areas they avoid within Prague, namely certain areas of Žižkov or the general Andel area, as can be seen in Alena's map, marked by an X as

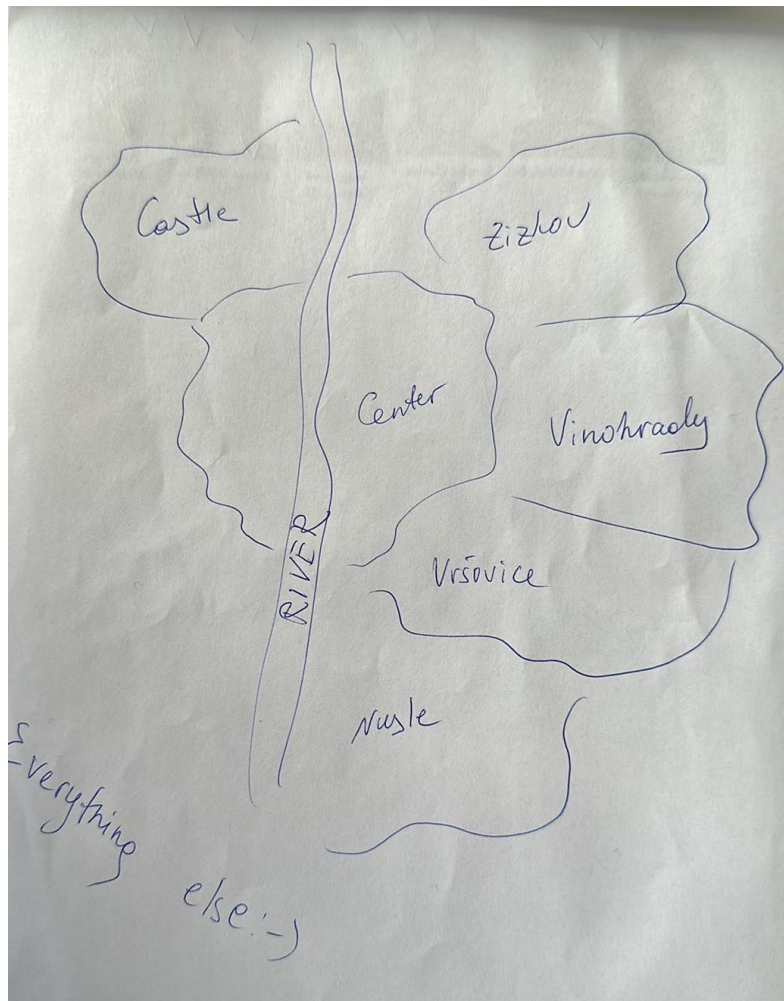


“smelly Žižkov“, or in Helen’s map where there is an X and “Smíchov bad“. Becka also noted her dislike of I.P. Pavlova, having had quite bad experiences:

*Yeah, it has like the worst energy in Prague I feel like, and I've complained about it. [...] But I'm like, God we're in IP, I hate IP so much. And we get off the tram. And we watched like a couple, and the women like punched the man in the face. And then somebody ran by with something like they were trying to get a make away with stolen goods. It was just like, see! you can't defend it. It's insane. Yeah. So I tend to avoid a IP. And then like other places, I guess, like I just tend not to go much, but I don't actually avoid...*

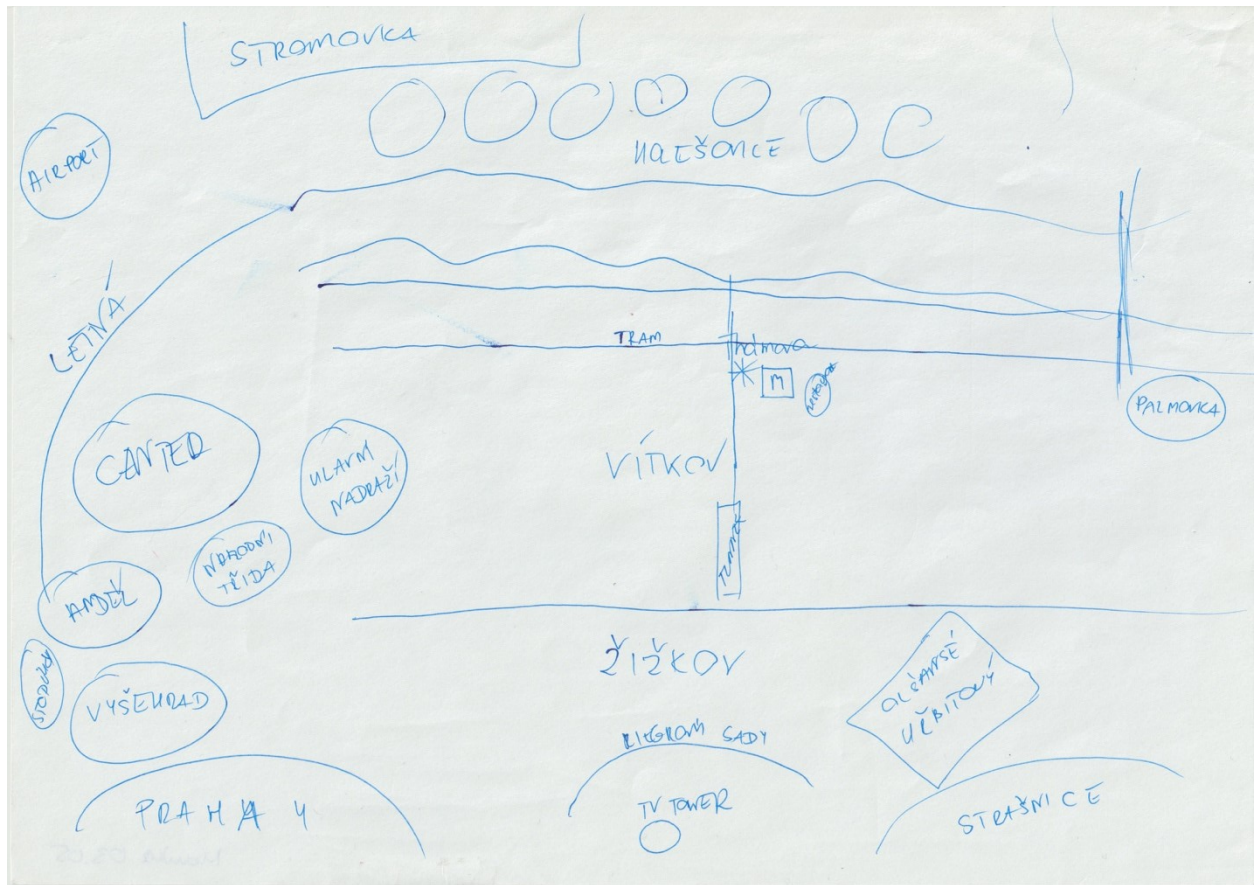
*Becka, personal communication, 11.05.2022*

Overall, while Prague was viewed as safe, many times when I asked what places respondents avoid, the first answer was more places they don't go because they a) have no reason to or b) they're too far.



Map 6: Sasha's map

The importance of neighbourhoods. One thing I started noticing throughout was the reference to specific neighbourhoods as opposed to specific places. Alena for example noted the “JZP” area (Jiřího z Poděbrad), and this is also shown in Sasha's map, where she drew only the most important neighbourhoods for her. Most notably, the most common ‘expat’ neighbourhoods were considered to be Karlín, Žižkov, Vinohrady and Jiřího z Poděbrad.



Map 7: Monika's map

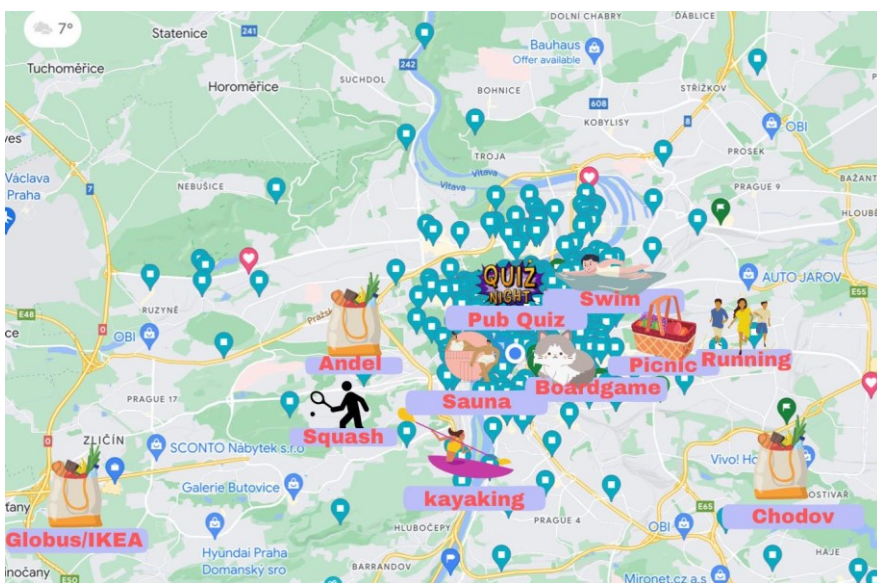
Safety in coffee shops. In the bottom right corner of Tanja's map (map 4), there is a list of her favourite places to eat and drink, and she decided to write the most important spaces in this box. All the other maps (apart from Sasha's, map 7, and Monika's, map 6) featured at least one café which the respondents visit, and which constitute an important part of their Prague. Kiera made a very interesting point about feeling safe, which echoes the Stasia's experience of living in Prague.

*Okay, so because coffee shops feel safe. Like, I feel like you can go anywhere in the world, and especially in big cities, and like, coffee shops don't change much. Like they always have the same type of environment or vibe.*

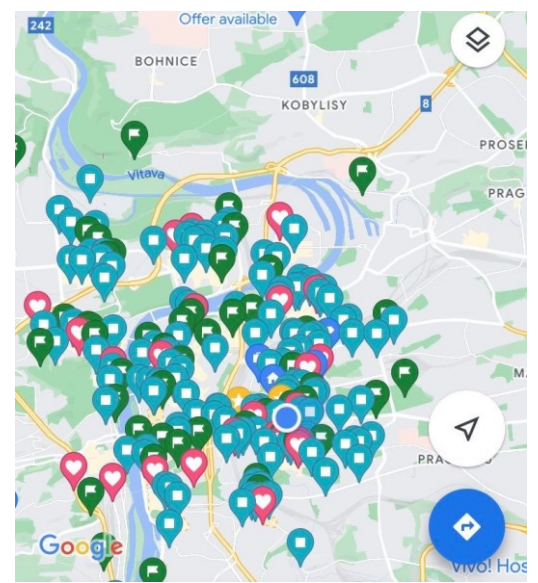
*Kiera, personal communication, 04.05.2022*

These mental maps provide an overall picture of how expat women view and interact with physical spaces in the city, and how the respondents have made these places “their Prague”. Often times, someone mentioned a place they visited once in a while in Prague and decided that it does not belong on the map, because it didn’t leave a personal and memorable impact on them, therefore not being a part of “their Prague”. Whilst it does not reflect how one creates spaces of socialization, it provides context to how the city itself is perceived.

It is also important to note the role of technology. There was one example of a map that I had from Kristy, as we talked online, where she sent me her spaces through a Google Maps picture, where she highlighted her important places, but in the background one can see places she has pinned (map 8). After drawing her map, Alena shared with me her very similar system using Google Maps, where she assigned various symbols to places that she has been to and loves (heart), places she would like to go (blue square), and places she would like to go (green flag) (map 9).



Map 8: Kristy's Google map



Map 9: Alena's Google map

#### 4.6. Feeling of “otherness” and liminality

This chapter has focused primarily on how Prague is perceived in two ways. Firstly, in how the metaphorical “wall of Czechness” is constructed, namely through the language and perceptions of the Czech people, but also through lived experiences that altered the perception of Prague being a safe city. Secondly, it has looked at how spaces in the city are perceived,

from a geographical point of view through the maps. Perceptions of a place matter, because the way one views and understands a space affects how one interacts with the space around them (Piekut, 2013: 123). In Anne-Meike Fechter's (2007) study of expats in Jakarta, she found that expats perceive the cityscape to be divided into two kinds of areas: a "dirty" and "chaotic" Outside, but a "clean" and "safe space" Inside (62). She outlines how expats make this distinction through their experiences of materiality of the built environment, traffic and climate, and how these expats learn to use the spaces in the city as a response (ibid.). In another study, Aneta Piekut (2013) argues that the same distinction cannot be made of Warsaw, and the same applies to Prague. From the research I conducted, no dichotomy of a "clean" Inside and "dirty" and "chaotic" Outside. Prague does not hold this same differentiation, whereby there are no geographic spaces that separate the locals from expats. Some of the respondents noted places they would not go and noted these by drawing an "X", for example, on the map, but further research would need to be conducted to draw a deeper understanding of whether all expats feel this way. Rather, factors like language and perceptions of Czech people appear to create this divide, and thus expats find their own ways to use spaces within the city. However, learning the language can help in learning more about the culture the people. One can argue that this "metaphorical wall" means expat women need other ways to build communities between themselves.

Related to these perceptions, is how the respondents view "their Prague". The maps constituted an important method for studying expat women in Prague. In a way, it represents Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of "being there", as it shows how the respondents are integrated within the city. It therefore represents how expats view their interactions with the city in their mind. The maps here differ from Aneta Piekut's (2013) work, as they were a mind map of Prague, rather than a "concept map". The concept maps included places of importance both in and outside of Warsaw, to recall overarching experiences of having lived elsewhere as well (123). The mental map used in this study focused solely on Prague, and how spaces are used and understood by the respondents. The advantage of doing a mental map is that in her study in Warsaw, she focused on how expats viewed their perceptions of Warsaw in comparison to other localities around the globe, and thus incorporated more macro-level factors, such as the where respondents have lived before, where their families are, etc. However, as a result, Aneta Piekut's (2013) maps did not focus on specific locations within the Warsaw. The maps in this project show how spatially selective expats are, and how these meaningful locations constitute a social space (Piekut, 2013: 129). This also ties into the

concept of place making. Through the maps, one can see how spaces have become meaningful locations for expats, and thus transformed from just a physical space in the city, to a place with meaning (Creswell, 2004: 7). This will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters.

One last point that can be made, is that in the section of expat perceptions of Czechs, the concept of a “them” versus “us” was brought up, making expats feel like they are an Outside group. This ‘othering’ can lead to expats feeling like they are in a liminal space. This feeling of in-betweenness, or liminality, is where a person finds themselves “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1969: 95). Liminality as a lens of space allows anthropologists to understand how borders enable the creation of new cultures, and how new, hybrid spaces are created that are linked to transnational practices (Beichelt&Valentin, 2020: 8). Kristina identified this feeling of not belonging to being Czech, but also no longer being Russian after living here for so long. She found herself in a position where she feels in this “in-between” space.

*Well, I'm still not, I'm still not, but I don't feel like being an expat in CZ specifically, but this is the thing, I am in between of everything, you know. I'm European resident, but not citizen. You know, I'm Russian citizen but I don't live there anymore, I live in CZ but I don't have a Czech passport, so I actually cannot, I don't belong to any of those two groups, you know. I'm not Czech, I'm not Russian, fully, I'm not European. You know, I'm somewhere in between those.*

*Kristina, personal communication, 23.08.2021*

On the one hand, expats find themselves in-between locals and other groups (such as tourists or migrants) within the city, as was depicted in the maps. In another way, they also find themselves in an in-between situation, as they are often in the middle of living between various countries. In Aneta Piekut's (2013) study of highly skilled migrants in Poland, she shows how her respondents relate to the latter point, in that they often feel “between” places, through the comparison of Poland with other countries, such as where their family is, or where they have lived previously (124). Kristina's perspective shows that by living here for a longer period of time, speaking the language, but not yet having citizenship, gives her the feeling of being ‘in-between’ places. This was also noted in the chapter about language (section 4.2.1) where even though she speaks the language, it is pointed out to her that she is not from the Czech Republic.

This leads to the notion that an “in-between” space is created between the locals and expats. This space has often been referred to as an “expat bubble”.

This chapter explored the perceptions of Prague that foreigners had, both the positive and the negative, which contribute to this notion that there is a metaphorical wall separating local Czech people and foreigners, providing context for why expats find other ways in which to create a sense of place-belongingness. The next chapter will therefore focus on how expat women create spaces for socialization, and how these interactions contribute to place-making and a feeling of “home”.

## 5. Spaces and place-making strategies in Prague

The following chapter will examine two case studies, through which it was observed, throughout this research project, that place-making occurs. Throughout the below-presented case studies, I suggest that both help create a sense of “community” for expat women living in Prague, and as such, it is important to define how this word is used in this work. On the one hand, anthropologists have defined communities to be living face-to-face, creating a tight knit group, and thus sharing, or based on, the same shared values (see for example: Frankenberg, 1966; Minar and Greer, 1969; Warner, 1941; or, for overall summary: Rapport&Overing, 2000: 60-65). A community can be understood in terms of its material and social formation, created through intimate social relations (Verbuč, 2022: 179; Thornton, 1996: 110; Amit, 2002). However, I focus here on the definition of “community” as a discursive concept (Cohen, 1985). One way in which to define communities is through Benedict Anderson’s (1989) concept of “imagined communities”. Though his argument pertains to nation states, Benedict Anderson (1989) understands communities to be socially constructed, as people imagine themselves to be part of a group. A community thus acts in a two-fold manner, on the one hand, it can be inclusionary, and instigate strong social bonds (Baumann, 2001; Verbuč, 2022: 179). On the other hand, it can be exclusionary, and create social divisions (an “us” vs “them” situation) (ibid.). In the groups presented below, the requirements required to join either group are the same: they are created as women-only groups, aimed specifically for expats, and primarily for people in Prague (though people outside of Prague join as well, or, as seen in some instances, people looking to move to Prague as well). As such, they are both inclusionary, and create social bonds based on these common identities. At the same time, however, they are exclusionary, as people who do not fit all of these criteria, i.e. being a woman, being an expat, or living in Prague, cannot join these groups. As such, sharing these identities, the women create an “imagined community” (within the city of Prague, opposed to a country, as argued by Benedict Anderson (1989)), driven primarily by their common identity as foreigners as well as women. I argue, therefore, that the sense of being a part of the “expat”, or “international” community is therefore produced through the concept of “emplaced encounters” (Conderson&Latham, 2007; Amin&Thrift, 2002), as the meet-ups and online interactions allow women to feel that they are a part of an international community, that is “imagined” based on specific identity markers (women, expats, living in Prague) (Polson, 2015: 635). How these two groups do so will be discussed in more detail in the sections below.



Furthermore, the concept of “emplaced encounters” (Conderson&Latham, 2007; Amin&Thrift, 2002) is an important way through which women create a sense of place, by focusing on two groups directed at expat women in Prague: the Expat Women in Prague Facebook group and the Girl Gone International community. This section will show how these two online groups act as tools in the process of place-making and community-making for expat women in Prague. The third section will then link more specifically to the creation of a second “home” away from home in its relation to place-making. In her study of expatriates in Oslo, Micheline van Riemsdijk (2014) found that expats moving to the city saw the city initially as an anonymous space (972). As such, the women I spoke to explained that they needed to find ways in which to transform Prague, an anonymous city, into a city they know, outside of work. The reason for focusing particularly on the Expat Women in Prague and Girl Gone International group is because they came up in interviews as being two key platforms for expat women interactions in Prague. As described by Alena:

*Hmm, \*thinking\* when I moved here, or maybe just before I definitely joined several Facebook groups. And probably the order of events was: join a general Prague expat Facebook group, then see that someone had recommended for Prague Women Expats. And seeing on there that someone recommended GGI.*

*Alena, personal communication, 07.03.2023*

Regarding place-making, expats are sometimes described in a stereotypical way as living in a kind of “expat bubble”. Media, for example, has used this term in headlines of news articles, such in news headlines such as: “Why do expats live in bubbles?”, as well as being the subject of blog posts, one example being: “How to Avoid the Expat Bubble When Moving Abroad” (Mayberry, 2022; Brown, 2021). However, the Expat Insider (2017) (the most recent issue which dealt with the topic of expat bubbles), suggests that “expat bubbles” are things of the past, showing that 48% of expats have a mix of local and expat friends (*The Expat Insider 2017*). In Anne-Meike Fechter’s (2007) study of expats in Jakarta, she found that respondents referred to living in the city as a “bubble”, “bunker”, “ghetto”, “hothouse” or “Disneyland” (41). No such metaphor was used when describing friendships or community creation in Prague. In fact, the term “expat bubble” did not come up in interviews I conducted. When I asked respondents about how they view expat bubbles, they said that it was not about the

creation of their own spaces. Rather, they noted how platforms such as the GGI group and the Expat Women in Prague group work as platforms through which place-making occurs.

*... in a way GGI is a bubble but for me, it's more a "tool" to get to know people and it happens that it's [usually] expat people. I do not know any place where I can hang out with locals except of Lokál <sup>4</sup>.*

*Tanja, personal communication, 29.04.2023*

When placing this question to respondents, and primarily the women who form part of the GGI group, they do not appear to view these groups as the creation of “expat bubbles”, but rather as methods through which to find a build a community and a sense of place-belonging in Prague. Factors that create the “wall of Czechness” as was described in Chapter 4, such as language, or the difficulty of making friends with locals, therefore contribute to the creation of various groups aimed particularly at women living in Prague. Whilst not viewed necessarily as living in a bubble, it does create a separation in communities between foreigners living here and the Czech locals, as expats try to find other ways in which to build their communities in the Czech Republic. The two groups below further exemplify this point. Throughout the following sections, themes such as safety, the use of online and offline platforms, as well as the public vs private discourses will be discussed in relation to how these tools are used in the place-making process.

### 5.1. Case study: Prague | Girl Gone International

This section aims to analyse the Girl Gone International (GGI) group, and its function as a platform through which women create a sense of belonging, and therefore place-making, in Prague (Prague | Girl Gone International, n.d.). It is therefore first important to provide context of the GGI community. GGI is a global online community, with locations in over 200 cities across the globe. The founder, Anne Scott, originally from Scotland, started the group in 2010, after moving to her 10<sup>th</sup> city in 10 years, and wanted to set up a community in which women moving around the world can find friends in new cities (GGI, 2023). The Prague community was founded up in 2014, and as of 18.06.2023, the group has 4,200 members

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<sup>4</sup> A local, Czech chain of restaurants, serving Czech beer on tap as well as Czech cuisine.

(Prague | Girl Gone International, n.d.). It is a private group, in which women have to request to join the Facebook group.

The GGI group is specific in that it intertwines both online and offline platforms to create a sense of place in Prague. The interactions in this group start online, and then facilitate offline, face-to-face meetings with other expat women. In this way, the GGI online platform leads to offline interactions, and can therefore be viewed as “...platform for mobile place-making” (Polson, 2015: 642). How it does so shall now be discussed in further detail.

#### 5.1.1. How the group works

This section addresses how the group works, by first addressing the online element of the platform, and then providing an example of an event I attended in the course of my research project. Interactions within the GGI group start online, on the Facebook group, where the community leaders focus on creating a community in several ways. Firstly, at the beginning of the month one of the GGI community leaders will create a post, welcoming the new members who have recently joined the online group. An example of such a post can be seen below, with the newest members being tagged by the community leader, in this case 20 new members (this was cut out of the screenshot here for ethical reasons).

Welcome to the Girl Gone International Prague community 🍷

Here at GGI we're all about friendships and connections - this community is a fantastic space to reach out, make new friends, and connect with other women living in Prague!

💬 Please introduce yourself and tell us your story, we'd love to get to know you!

- ◆ Where did you move from?
- ◆ What (or who) brought you to Prague?
- ◆ What do you do here and what do you enjoy?
- ◆ Why are you a GGI?

Also don't forget to check out our EVENTS section for our monthly events to meet new friends!

It is with happiness and honour that we would like to welcome you to our awesome community and hope you'll find a home here!

Let's all welcome our newest members:

*Image 3: An example of a post from the GGI group, that is welcoming girls and encouraging women to introduce themselves within the group. (07.06.2023).*

At the beginning of every month, the community leaders will post a question in the group, aiming to facilitate a conversation in the comments, whereby women can share and explore their ideas. In my understanding, these posts are determined on a more global level of the GGI group, and then posted in the individual communities, in this case the Prague GGI group. Many of these posts start with “What is”, for example, “*What is your favourite thing to do on your day off? 😊*” (29.05.2023), “*What is your favourite book and why?*” (05.03.2023), or “*What is your favourite thing to take visitors to see or do here?*” (12.06.2023). The community members take turns creating these posts, on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, thus facilitating conversations within the comments section, primarily between the community. The questions posed, and the answers given, are made to facilitate conversations about what women like to do in their free time, their hobbies, and once in a while about life in Prague (such as in the last example). Overall, the questions are very “surface” level, wanting to create the sense of a community and being welcoming, as opposed to asking for questions about serious problems and receiving serious answers (this differs from the Expat Women in Prague group, which shall be discussed in further detail in the following section).

*It does give a sense of community and shared experience which I think is really important. Because it is international and in other cities, I think it also gives expats a sense of belonging to a global community as well which is really cool.*

*Helen, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

Tanja further adds to this point of the group being in more cities around the world, building on this sense of being part of a larger, global community.

*Based on Prague experience with the group I recommend it to my friends who moved to Dubai and Budapest- they also joined and found it helpful to build a social circle and when I planned my vacation I also joined temporarily GGI in Vancouver as I feel girls will be open to meet or I can join any local event*

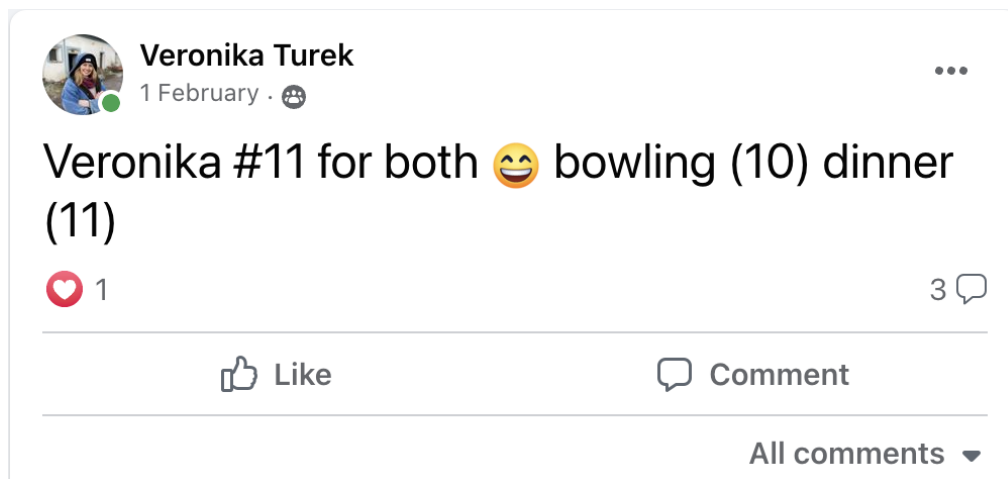
*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

The concept of a building a community is therefore pertinent when discussing this group. Erika Polson (2015) studied expats in Paris who met using the platform meetup.com, and concluded that through this platform, professional migrants create a sense-of-belonging within the city, through being a part of an “international community” (635). Unlike a meetup.com group, or any mixed-gender online group, the GGI group is not aimed for any expat living in Prague, but only for women. However, the function of the meetup.com group and the GGI group can be seen as quite similar. The online platform of the GGI group facilitates interaction between women in Prague, and these interactions are primarily driven by the community leaders. These are three women, who are a part of the global group, and have taken it upon themselves to organize and facilitate events for women in Prague.

As was mentioned above, much of the feed of this group is filled with events, hosted by the community leaders. The women in the GGI group therefore see the events, and upon clicking on it, can see who else will be attending as they posted their name in the event, and decide to join the event as well. In the winter months, when I was conducting my research, as most of the events are held indoors, there is a limit to the number of women who can take part, and the organizer therefore asks for women to post their name in the event if they would like to attend, along with their placement number. The place is determined on a first-come first-

serve basis, where women who want to attend post what number they are based on previous posts.

This section will provide an example of a woman who wants to attend an event hosted by GGI. Throughout the course of my research, I attended three events hosted by the GGI group, one in the summer of 2022, one in the fall of 2022, and then in January of 2023. This seems like a rather small amount, and it is. But the difficulty of the events in the winter months is that there is limited capacity for each event, usually up to 12 people per event. As one can see in the post below, I was relatively close to being on the waitlist for the event, as it was set up for a maximum of 12 people.



*Image 4: An example of me posting in the event, confirming my attendance for the GGI bowling event, 01.02.2023. I originally posted that I was the 11<sup>th</sup> person to sign up for both events, until it was pointed out to me by Deanna that I was in fact 10<sup>th</sup> for bowling, and 11<sup>th</sup> for dinner. The option at this event was to select if you wanted to attend one or both events.*

If one does not see the event on Facebook in time, they can get onto a waitlist and hope someone might cancel their participation. For one event, I saw a waitlist of over 30 people waiting for a “Girls Drinks” event, and this shows the overall popularity of the group, as well as the want for women to meet up. There are four community leaders who run the group in Prague, and my primary interactions were with Kristy, who also created a “core” GGI group, that will be discussed in further detail below. The community leaders organize events and post questions in the group to encourage conversations between women. This is not to say that other

women in the group cannot create their own events, once in a while someone out of town posts they are visiting for the weekend and are a part of another GGI community so would like to meet some people. Other times women themselves post if anyone would like to meet, but it is not very often this happened throughout the course of the research project but could have also been given the time of year (winter).

In February of 2023, Deanna organized a “Galentines<sup>5</sup> day – bowling and dinner” event for 12 ladies. The event was created and shared as a part of the GGI Facebook group, so. To attend, a woman had to post in the group placement number, shown in Imagine 1, to confirm their attendance of the event. The place is determined on a first-come first-serve basis, where women who want to attend post what number they are based on previous posts. As one can see, I was relatively close to being on the waitlist for the event, as it was set up for a maximum of 12 people.

This event, held at the Bowling Smíchov and Garage Billiard in the Anděl, in the same fashion as the previous two events I attended, followed the same format when arriving. At all three events I attended, none of the women who were attending knew each other. This was clear to see upon arriving at the event, where everyone was looking for the group. At this event, I was the second to arrive. I saw a girl sitting by the entrance and waiting, and hesitantly asked if she was there for the GGI event, feeling relieved when she said she was. We introduced ourselves and had some small talk about difficulties of finding the bowling alley. More girls started arriving shortly after, and they also tentatively asked if we’re with GGI. Deanna, the host, then arrived and went to deal with the man behind the bar. Whenever someone new arrived, the conversation tended to ‘reset’ to introductions. This meant that once again, everyone introduced themselves, this tended to include information about where one is from, what you do, how long you’ve been in Prague, and what brought you to Prague. Here there were always various answers, such as a job, wanting to try something new, or moving to be with a partner, to name a few. As this was a two-part event, following the bowling some of the women went for the dinner. Everyone at our table was from a different country: I was from the Czech Republic, and the others were from Bulgaria, the USA, Chile and Azerbaijan.

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<sup>5</sup> *Galentines day* being like Valentine’s day, but with your girl (“gal”) friends. It is often “celebrated” on February 13<sup>th</sup>, the day before Valentine’s day (Bowlby, K., 2023)

*First, we introduced ourselves to the 2 girls we didn't know – turns out there were two Jane's at the table which was pretty funny. Did rounds of who works where, what they do, where they're from, how they got to Prague (one girl said right off the bat: "I didn't move for love") – took up most of the dinner actually, it was really nice to hear their stories.*

*Field journal, 26.01.2023*

The description of the event above raises several interesting points in this group's role as a place-making community. Firstly, these introductions and re-introductions were an important element of the evening, as by introducing ourselves and where we were from facilitated conversation, but also built a sense of inclusivity within the group. The feeling of inclusion is facilitated in two ways. Firstly, there is the sense of a socially constructed community. In one way, the fact that we did not know each other prior to the event, laughing at the comment that she didn't move to Prague for love shows that there are shared stereotypes women share about moving and living in Prague. Community creation is therefore constructed "...symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity" (Cohen, 1985: 118). Secondly, there is the factor of a common language used at these events. In Chapter 4, not knowing the Czech language was discussed in detail, looking at how this contributes to the creation of a "wall of Czechness". In that scenario, language created a feeling of there being an "we" versus "them" (Antonisch, 2010: 648). On the other hand, language can create a sense of community, whereby there is a "... 'warm sensation' to be among people who not merely understand what you say, but also what you mean" (ibid.). In a group such as the GGI group, the common language of English provides the feeling of being a "member" of the group, and thus create the feeling of belonging to a place. Of all three events I attended, I did not meet the women at an event again, in fact, at every event I always met new women. Despite this, the meeting in the physical place is based solely on the one event, and, despite having some identity markers in common (being expats, women, living in Prague), the event itself is short-lived, transient and fleeting (Baumann, 2001: 71). Zygmunt Baumann (2001) refers to such communities as "aesthetic" or "peg" communities, defining these as "*whatever their focal point, the common feature of aesthetic communities is the superficial and perfunctory, as well as transient, nature of the bonds emerging between their participants. The bonds are friable and short-lived. Since it is understood and has been agreed beforehand that they can be shaken off on demand, such bonds also cause little inconvenience and arouse little or no fear*" (71). The author goes so far as to compare the experience to being like in a theme park, whereby the creation of the community is "experienced on the spot – not taken home"



(ibid., 71-72). Whilst only one example was presented above, the two other events I attended followed a similar approach, in that the women in the group did not know each other. As such, the GGI events held for the whole community can, to some extent, be considered “peg” communities. At the same time, the community leaders are key in creating and setting up these events continuously, so whilst women might meet new people when they come to events, they are aware that the events are happening, and are free to join any event. As such, the online platform facilitates the feeling of being a part of a community.

This therefore ties into the concept of “emplaced encounters” (Conradson&Latham, 2007; Amin&Thrift, 2002) and “centering” (Friedmann, 2010), as the events bring expat women together, in a given place. Whilst in this particular case, the locations, and the people at the events vary, there is a purpose to the events in the creation of a community for women living in Prague. This builds onto the concept that places can be fluid, and not based simply on physical locations, as the interactions of this group are facilitated both online and offline (Stokowski, 2002). As was described in the theoretical part of this research paper, an important element of place-making is that of social interactions (see for example: Stokowski, 2002). As we see on the example of GGI platform virtual environments are full of such interactions. Therefore, in the ways described above, the virtual GGI platform not only facilitates and encourages social interactions between members but also fosters an inclusive atmosphere between its members creating a feeling of belonging to some place.

Furthermore, as seen through the description above, these offline events are created to make women feel included, and so one does not feel nervous, or awkward, attending an event by themselves. This is further reinforced by the women attending the event themselves, because they want to socialize and meet others of a similar mindset in Prague. In fact, according to Manuel Castells (2011), expats identify with being a part of the global cosmopolitan culture. Of the events I attended, I was the only Czech person, and therefore the GGI group appears to function as a local expat women’s community, though it is difficult to assess how many Czech women make up this group.

### 5.1.2. “Core” GGI group

The section above addressed how the GGI events work for all members of the group, who are a part of the online Facebook group. This section however looks at a group that I became a part of, when one afternoon in around October, I got a message from Tanja wondering if I wanted to join a pub quiz group on a girls' team. I hadn't been to a quiz for some time, because the group we used to go with hadn't been very active (for unknown reasons), and so I found myself joining this new group. I was excited, going with a team of only girls, and honestly, I was excited to be in an English-speaking space. This section will therefore address a "sub-group" of the GGI community, in which Kristy, one of the community leaders, wanted to start a group of closer friends, women who meet regularly and can get to know each other better, rather than a one-off at some of the other events. Whilst Kristy invites people from the wider GGI group to join, the group is not at all associated with the online platform for the creation of events, such as in the case above. As such, it functions quite separately from the larger group. The reason for creating the group, as described by Kristy, was:

*And also, it is the standard group. You know, for GGI event, you don't know who is coming, you sometimes become friends, but you cannot have deep dialogue or like you never meet them again. But with this pub quiz, I tried to like really prioritize us, because so many people actually want to join the group, but it will become another GGI event. I want to like for us to build a relationship and you know, core things to do*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

Kristy notes one of the issues highlighted in the previous section, with the GGI group at times functions as a "peg" community, in which women will often meet just once at an event and not see each other again, or for some time (Baumann, 2001: 71). At one event, myself and Kristy joked that there is this "inner GGI group" that Kristy has created. The aim of this section is to therefore focus in more detail on how this group facilitates these "emplaced encounters" which, according to David Conradson and Alan Latham (2007), lie at the heart of place-making.

There are multiple events that Kristy organizes, that lie at the core of the "inner" group, which are all based on activities, or hobbies, which expat women do together after work. When I first joined, as described above, I was invited by Tanja to join the Wednesday Pub Quiz group, held at The Globe. Slowly, I learnt about the other groups Kristy organizes – the Monday board game night, held at Gossip Bar, Thursday billiards evening at JZP, an online "Exploding

Kittens<sup>6</sup> group, in which throughout the day we can join to play the online version of this game through the app, and in the summer instead of the pub quizzes, kayaking at the Kayak Beach bar on Náplavka. She organizes these groups through private messenger groups, with each messenger group aimed for one activity. This way, women can join which groups they would like to be part of, and which they are not interested in (and leave the group). On top of this, as the community leader she organizes events which she posts on the group for anyone in the GGI group to attend as well, in which she informs us about the upcoming events she is planning.

*I first met Kristy at a witch burning event last year which I saw on GGI. We have a lot of similar interests, so we started to do many different activities together and have a number of other girls who we are close to and do things regularly with. It means a lot to me as we all enjoy spending time together and doing a wide range of activities together which makes me happy.*

*Kirsty, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

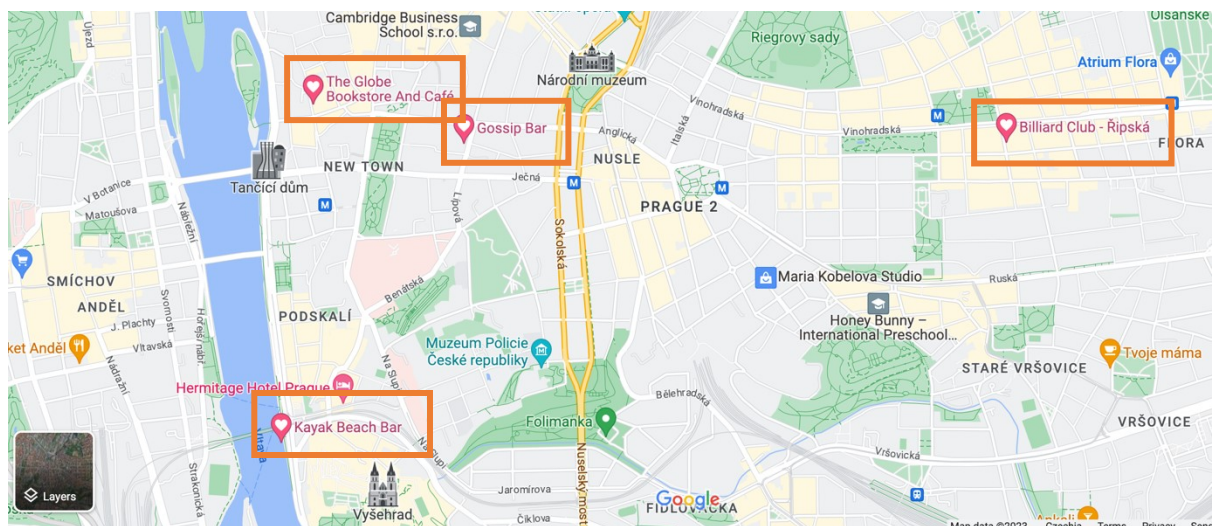
Most girls who are a part of one group are a part of all of them, though this does not mean that everyone attends the activity each week. For the board games nights, Kristy will ask on the relevant messenger group on the day who is attending, to make sure that there is a group going. For the pub quizzes, she makes reservations for several weeks in advance, and the group members sign up for which quiz they would like to join. Usually there are always around 8 people at the events. Each of the above-mentioned activities (quizzes, board game nights, etc.) have their own Facebook messenger group, facilitated by Kristy, organizing each activity. From the events I attended, and my observations, there tends to be a steady 5-6 people who show up on a regular basis. It also means that the girls that one sees at a Wednesday quiz will be the same as the Monday boardgame evening, and it creates a friendly and trustful atmosphere. By seeing each other often, it is easier to have a light-hearted atmosphere, and to joke around or explain something that happened when one member wasn't there one week. It overall makes a person feel welcome and included within a group in Prague. When asking the

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<sup>6</sup> The game is described as follows: “*Exploding Kittens is a highly-strategic, kitty powered version of Russian Roulette. Players draw cards until somebody draws an Exploding Kitten, at which point they explode and are out of the game. To avoid exploding, they can defuse the kitten with a laser pointer or catnip sandwich OR use powerful action cards to move or avoid the Exploding Kitten. Betray your friends. Try not to explode. The last player left alive wins.*” (Exploding Kittens: Original Edition, n.d)

girls who I am close to in this group, how they joined, as well as how they view the group, they described it in the following ways.

As per the description above, all the events happen at various, almost pre-determined locations throughout the week. Throughout the time spent with this group, only once did we change location for one of these events (in April we tried to do the board game nights outside in the park in Karlovo Naměstí; we quickly got cold, and felt weird being the only ones sitting there and playing cards). For clarity, I would like to reemphasize that Kristy organizes events for both this group, as well as the GGI group as she is a community leader, but this section focuses primarily on the events she organizes solely for this “core” group. The locations of the events are shown on the map below, depicted by hearts.



*Image 5: Main sites of events for the “core” GGI group (Google Maps, 2023).*

With the exception of one member and myself, most of the women live within the vicinity of The Globe Café and Gossip Bar, with both being located in a rather similar area. The Globe is widely known for being an expat place, namely due to it being the first and largest English bookstore in Prague (Globe Bookstore and Café, n.d.). Often when we are at a pub quiz however, as a group, we would note how small the space was, and loud, given the music. There was often a discussion of where the best seat is – whilst decidedly not in the upstairs / mezzanine level (as almost nothing could be heard), downstairs meant barely being able to get up, because the chair of the person behind you was already touching yours. When attending a quiz in February, I made the following notes in my field journal:

*There's not very much to add here, because at the end of the day the pub quizzes always have the same format, and the loudness of the place means that it is incredibly hard to have a conversation on the side. We even mentioned the fact that you can literally only hear the person you're sitting next to, but definitely not the person on the other end of the table – which means that when we're 8 you really don't get to talk to the others that much.*

*We were also playing a card game in the breaks, which made it that much more chaotic and messier! We all left when they were announcing the results, we knew that we didn't even get top 7. The girls did mention that the other quiz, the one "Down Under" is a lot quieter and there's more space – so it makes the experience more fun, I'm excited to go when/if they plan a quiz there.*

*What I am starting to get from this group is a feeling of belongingness, and I definitely felt it tonight. When you know more than half the table going into the quiz, it feels like you're starting to go to these quizzes with your friends. You arrive and everyone is like oh hey!, they know your name, you're not an outsider any more but slowly starting to be a part of the group. You can talk about your day,*

*Field journal, 15.02.2023*

The pre-determined physical space, in many ways, seemed less relevant than who we were with. As noted in my notes, and several times after, the feeling of going somewhere and knowing the group, gave a sense of belongingness. Tanja echoed this feeling, when being asked how she joined Kristy's group.

*It sort of happened by itself I guess. I've been joining [GGI] events consistently and we become more informal in a way, I joined first the kayak chat through my friend, then boardgames popped up and quizzes. I see it as many our hobbies match so it was easy. I'm grateful I met Kristy as she is a nice person and have energy to organize things and it's great that after some time, we had got sort of "core" group who goes places consistently and there's time to build connections*

*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

Tanja makes several interesting points regarding the consistency, the basis of similar hobbies, as well as the importance of Kristy for creating and organizing such events. She also mentions the want and need to build connections. In a similar way, Helen described how she joined this “core” group:

*I ended up going to a lot of Kristy's events last summer. She held a lot of wine picnics and other events which I really enjoyed [for the larger GGI group]. I guess I just showed up enough that I got invited into the private chat groups, I made the cut haha! The group is really important to me as the reason I started going to GGI was to make friends that I would then want to meet outside of the group, so it's nice to have a smaller group of people that I see regularly, it builds more solid friendships. Although GGI is great, often when you go to events you might meet different people each time so it's hard to build strong friendships.*

*Helen, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

There are several important points to make here about the description of this group. The organization of these activities, driven by Kristy, provides a feeling of women being a “member” of the group and suggests a common identity (Polson, 2015: 637). Unlike in the section above, with the overall GGI groups, I would not describe this community as being an “imagined” (Anderson, 1989) or a “peg” (Baumann, 2001) community. The organization of the events mean that the women in this group see each other often and are always inviting and creating activities to invite each other after work. As Kirsty exclaimed, whilst looking to Kristy, one evening at a board game night in June, the two of them were seeing each other almost every day that week. As such, there is the creation of a tight-knit community due to the frequency of meeting, but also on the common interest in the activities described above (Frankenberg, 1966). Furthermore, returning back to the definition of place-making, is the emphasis on how it is socially constructed, and how a person feels, knows or does is mediated by others within the community” (Stokowski, 2002: 372). As such, this inner GGI group, as a stable group, allows for women to create a space, joined by the same interests (board games, pub quizzes), and thus created a community that meets outside of work. This inner-GGI group further explores the concept of place-belonging, whereby the members feel like one belongs to a particular place (Antonisch, 2010: 646). The “place” here is not necessarily a physical place, but rather a social group itself. It functions as a place through which women feel as a part of a specific community, regardless of where in Prague the event is held. Despite this being seen as an “insider” or “core” group, Kristy by no means allows it to be closed off, and often posts in

various channels that if anyone is interested that they should message her, and she will invite them to the respective Facebook messenger groups. She also mentioned that she would like to ask some guys to join in the future, so that there is more balance within the group. However, at the time of conducting this research inviting men to join the group was not acted upon.

Another interesting point about the “inner GGI” group is that though it is a stable group, not all women attend every week. Therefore, it can often happen that one meets someone new at an event, though they’ve attended many times. One evening at a Pub Quiz at The Globe, a new, American girl, joined us for the evening quiz. As she was introducing herself to us, she mentioned that she is in Prague for only a couple of days. This prompted one of the girls at the table to exclaim “Oh! You’re a tourist!”. Norum (2013) claimed that expats exist somewhere on the continuum between a native and a tourist (28). This remark made by one of the women at the table showed the surprise in that expats view themselves as being more local and set themselves apart from tourists.

### 5.1.3. Importance of GGI

The above sections looked at how the GGI group functions overall, and then the created “core” group, directed at creating a more stable group of women who regularly hang out. Over wine after kayaking one Saturday afternoon in May, I asked Kirsty how she came to Prague, and how she came across the GGI group. At this point in time, I’d been a part of the “internal GGI” group (which will be addressed in more detail in the following section) for over half a year, and so had met Kirsty many times at the various events Kristy organizes. Kirsty said she moved to Prague with her ex-boyfriend and spent the first couple of years living in Prague spending only time with him. As she described: “*we were like literally, like super close. We didn't have any other friends. We did everything together. So, we didn't, like, need any other friends. Literally our whole life was together. And it was always like that in Prague. I didn't have like have any friends here and he didn't have any friends here either*” (Kirsty, personal communication, 20.05.2023). Following their break-up, she said she joined GGI, but didn’t attend any events for some time, and only about a year ago she started going to events. However, the importance of making friends, and building a community, resonated with the women I talked to throughout this research project.

*I also had few friends with whom we initially moved to Prague, so I didn't really feel a need to make more friends. But when my friends left, I realized I have a gap and searched for some group with girls only. Vs Expat group I see GGI as a place to connect & make friends. At the first events I was curious to see what kind of people join and whether I will manage to find any like-minded girls. It's not easy to make friends outside work in a new city as an adult.*

*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

*But then after two years, I feel like oh my God, I feel I have some friends. But then after COVID, or during COVID, they go back to their country, they move away because of job, whatever. So I tried to look for groups, and I found GGI in the summer of 2020*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

Tanja and Kristy make an interesting point regarding the fragility of expat friendships. Expats, as was defined in the introduction, can be defined by their temporality. In Tanja's case, whilst arriving and having friends in Prague, when they left, she needed to find a way in which to rebuild her community, noting that it is harder as a working adult. Tanja further notes the importance of the group in providing stability:

*I like about group that they have these "ambassadors" who organize things so in any case GGI group itself will not disperse at some point. If ambassadors will live there will be a replacement. Overall it is always a chance someone will leave and it's good to have this in mind*

*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

The group therefore acts a community that can deal with the temporality of expats, both of the members as well as the community leaders. In fact, Kristy (one of the community leaders) stated she started hosting events when one of the other community leaders left for the summer. Tanja also notes that in her situation, she was looking for groups that were for aimed for women. Helen reflected on when she started joining events, noting the welcoming atmosphere, which she didn't experience at other events.

*I saw it as a place where women could meet other like-minded women to form friendships while living abroad. I wasn't sure how active it would be or how willing the other girls would be to make friends as some of the GGI groups are less active than others. After going to a few events.*



*I was really surprised at how active and welcoming people were and people really did seem like they wanted to make friends, which isn't always the case at expat events. It felt like a really positive and welcoming group which was great*

Helen, personal communication, 11.06.2023

Therefore, the GGI group most prominently works as a type of social companionship, through which one also receives emotional support. This is because by being a group through which expat women meet up and socialize, it takes away the feeling of being lonely in the city and creates a sense of belonging among a social group (van Bakel *et. al.*, 2017: 218). Tanja further articulates the sense of inclusivity, the willingness of women to make friends, meet new people, and thus build a community. Furthermore, the positive feelings of this group, in comparison to other expat events she joined, contributed to these feelings. Some of the other respondents noted to the distinction they perceived between this women-only group and mixed-gendered group.

*I have had experiences in the past with mixed gender groups with men looking for more than friendships, and although that wasn't an issue for me in the past now, I was looking really just for female friends and couldn't be bothered with the potential of men making me feel uncomfortable! I think GGI is important for women who want to make friendships in a safe space.*

Helen, personal communication, 11.06.2023

*I am part of Internations and other meetups and GGI fills a gap of women only connections to build social circle & friendships vs other groups. It was important to have female only group as on mixed events I found only on-the-surface connections and men they're usually not interested in friendships.*

Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023

*First joined: it was during covid, I was already in many other expat group, but most of time are mix gender and deems guys just wanna hook up, and I was determined to expand my social life in Prague, so I searched on Facebook what other group does Prague have, to be honest I scrolled a couple of time of search bar then I found GGI, it was not that easy to search.*

Kristy, personal communication, 11.06.2023

Two interesting points can be made about the above experiences of Helen, Tanja and Kristy. On the one hand, they point to the fact that men appear to not want to have friendships; something these women were looking for, to build a community of friends outside the workplace. However, these reflections also demonstrate that these women, none of whom have kids, are simply accompanying their husband as expats in foreign countries, as was outlined in the theoretical section of this paper. There is an importance placed on creating a feeling of place-belongingness through the creation of a social circle. In our interview, however, Kristy (community leaders), did mention that in the future she would like to extend the group to include some men.

*Yeah, but then he's also have drawbacks is like, you know, but then I would say, that it's good at least, like, I feel safe that majority are girls, but at the same time, I feel like I need a little bit like balanced community. So I am also trying to I don't know whether you know, vision boards, like at the beginning of the year that you create vision for the year. So you create a vision board. And then yesterday was this GGI global has a digital event to have a one hour there's somebody kind of hosting event and everybody do the vision board for next year. And one of the things I put it there, so to have a balance, gender community, so I'm working hard on it this year*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

At the time of research, the group was still aimed at women only, however I felt it makes an interesting point about the gender relations of the GGI community. As the group is primarily aimed at creating social gatherings, through which women can meet face-to-face, the online element of the platform serves primarily as a tool through that a) facilitates social interactions, through which women can find ways to meet other women living in Prague and b) sets the mood and tone of the group – it's welcoming nature means that women are more likely to join.

This section has looked specifically at the various elements that make up the GGI group, it's role as a virtual platform, the offline events, as well as a created "core group" that creates a greater sense of a stable community. This section argues that this created community is therefore a meaningful place for women in Prague, and thus is one tool through which women create a feeling of belonging in the city, leading to place-making. As such, the concept of "emplaced encounters", whereby, in a globalised world where people often move around, the

GGI group creates face-to-face meetings which allow for the creation of place-making within Prague (Conradson&Latham, 2007; Amin&Thrift, 2002). As such, based on the data presented above, this study agrees that with Polson (2015) argues that the “encounter” has to be placed at the core of the definition when studying place, as places, especially for groups such as expats, “...may be ad hoc and ephemeral without losing their meaning” (632). Furthermore, while “... such encounters may be fleeting, the sense of place created is no less real to the subjects who rely on them for a feeling of belonging” (ibid.). This was demonstrated through the GGI group.

## 5.2. Women-only online space: Expat Women in Prague (closed Facebook group)

The “Expat Women in Prague” group has been referenced numerous times throughout this research paper, and this section will address how the social interactions of its members create a meaningful place on a virtual platform for expat women in Prague. It is a private Facebook group, set up in 2015, is a group made specifically for women in Prague with 13.5k members, (as of 30.04.2023). It is important to firstly define the aims of the group, and how it is used amongst expat women in Prague. The group is:

*[...] designed to help women in Prague ask and discuss the important questions regarding women’s life, health, child rearing, fashion and beauty, legal help, and so many other issues in a 100% women’s forum. Venting is fine, too. Attention: no advertisements allowed (Expat Women in Prague. (n.d)).*

Like the GGI group, the most crucial element of being a private Facebook group is that non-members cannot see posts made within the group. Furthermore, this group differs from other Facebook expat groups, in that other groups are open to both genders. To join the Expat Women in Prague group, future members have to answer questions made by the admins to be accepted. At the time of conducting the research, the main admin for the group was Elizabeth (USA), with three moderators helping her manage the group: Riffi (Madagascar), Sumita (India) and Veronika. The main difference between these two roles is that the admin is the creator of the group, and has control over the group, whilst the moderators only help keep the admin, such as by approving posts.

The Expat Women in Prague group is one of many Facebook groups created for expats in Prague. As I did not study any other groups themselves, based solely on a Facebook search, there appear to be groups based on various identities such as: general expats groups (for example: Prague Expats; Expats World in Prague; EXPATS in PRAGUE, to name a few); ethnic (based on nationalities); there are many parent / mom groups (for example: English speaking mums in Prague; Bumps, Babies and Tots – Prague); as well as ones aimed for conversation classes, I know of one called Queer Expats in Prague, and my search also showed many expat meetup groups. Therefore, many groups exist based on various identities. The focus of this study has been expat women, living in Prague. Having been a part of the Expat Women in Prague group since moving back to the Czech Republic in 2019, I was curious as to how this group differs is perceived to be different from other groups. Michaela described it as a platform which allows for more emotional posts. She is a part of a Polish group in Prague (though she did not share the official name of the group with me), as well as the Expat Women in Prague group, clarified how she decides what to post in which group:

*Yeah, I think that would be exactly as this post<sup>7</sup> which I had there, which was more emotional, and where I was rather, I wanted to get some support, not concrete information. That's why I selected this group [Expat Women in Prague]. But in the case where I need some very specific information, like where to buy this, or where's the best doctor, or something like that, then I will select the other group [Polish Facebook group].*

*Michaela, personal communication, 09.03.2022*

Michaela's draws attention to the fact that Facebook groups can be created based on various criteria, in this case either a women's group, or a group created for a specific nationality. According to Michaela, this group differs as it offers a platform for emotional support. Other women I talked to tended to describe how this group differs from the above-mentioned GGI group, such as the examples below from both Helen and Tanja:

*I think GGI is much more about events and meeting friends, and Expat Women in Prague is more for information and helping with integration in the city*

*Helen, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

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<sup>7</sup> This references the post about feeling at home, which has been discussed in detail in Chapter 5.3.

*For me Expat women is more Q&A place to get information when you don't know things and it's very helpful, GGI is more to build community and make friends, spend time together. They complement each other really well for me.*

*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

As described by Tanja and Helen, the Expat Women in Prague group is an online space which allows women to ask questions, perhaps even outside their direct friend groups. They can do so openly, by sharing their name, but can also make posts anonymously. This shall be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Unlike the afore-mentioned GGI community, the Expat Women in Prague group is not used for organizing offline meetings or for creating social events. The primary purpose of this group, as seen by the description of the group, is to be a space for interaction on a virtual platform through which one can share experiences, ask questions or seek advice, and, as pointed out by Helen, about integration, and inclusiveness in the city. In her research, Urszula Pruchniewska (2019), studied how Facebook groups for professional women are used as spaces to build a community and share experiences from the workplace, leading to feminist actions. She makes an important point in that these spaces are “*online consciousness-raising spaces*” (1375). The author highlights four core features of such a space: “(1) groups without men with (2) non-hierarchical membership (3) where women could discuss everyday experiences and build communities that (4) laid the foundation for actions that challenged the gendered status quo, both in their personal lives and collectively” (ibid., 1366). Whilst the author’s focus was on women in the workplace, the Expat Women in Prague group is aimed for all expat women living in the Czech Republic but is based on a very similar premise.

#### 5.2.1. A group for women only

This section will explore the most frequent themes for using this particular group. For all posts from the group used and analysed in this section, names and identities will remain anonymous, as I have permission to follow the group solely from the admin. Only the date of the post, as well as whether the woman posted with her name or anonymously will be disclosed. Following the group for over a year, it became clear as to why, and how, this group functions as place where women can ask questions without being met by judgement from others in the

group. It also showed why it is aimed for expat women, not only because the group functions in English, but also due to the nature of the posts. Two key themes will be discussed below. The first will focus on why it is an intended space for women, followed by reasons for which it was created for expat use.

The most important factor of this group is that it is a space for “women only”. When interviewing Elizabeth, she discussed the process of letting women into the group. To ensure it is a space only for women, she goes through a very rigorous screening process, to ensure (to the best of her ability), that there are no men in the group. In instances where women like to keep their Facebook private, with, for example a cartoon picture and/or a fake name, Elizabeth will message the woman, asking to share a photo of herself to prove that she is real. Women can have personal reasons for not having their real name or photo on Facebook, and Elizabeth takes this into account:

*They have to answer questions. And we do look at their profiles and look at when they started the profile. And like, we're always quite forgiving we know, like some people use fake names because they don't want to be tracked or they have some like crazy ex-boyfriend or whatever, but we need to see. Or if there's someone who, like, explains that they feel uncomfortable for whatever reason, then we ask them to send us a short video in which they say I, like, they have to send it through messenger - I wanna join this expat women in Prague group, and then we're like okay you're real. But this all takes time... Like, I am, even with this, I am certain that there are men in the group. I am absolutely certain that there are men in the group.*

*Elizabeth, personal communication, 23.09.2022*

The Expat Women in Prague group functions as a place-making platform for women in Prague, in that it is both an online community that asserts a collective identity as well as being an expat, living in Prague (Castillo, 2014: 244; Gill, 2010: 1157). I will argue, throughout this chapter, that this group transforms an unfamiliar place, namely the city of Prague and how it functions, to a place where women can help each other out to navigate their lives in Prague. As this is a women’s only group, determined both in the name of the group, as well as in the description presented above, Elizabeth shared her experience with a man who believed he should be part of the group:

*One of the funniest application request I ever received was from a man and he wrote in the like in the little text box, it's like I'm a man, but I'm a single father so I feel... and I need like I do all of the cooking and cleaning, so I feel like this group is for me. It's just like doing all of the cooking and cleaning and taking care of kids is not what defines being a woman \*laughing\*, like... (V: maybe he does need help finding a gynaecologist) \*laughs\* Yeah, or dealing with his street harassment or like, yeah, you know. (V: Did you let him in?) No, no, no. I wrote him and suggested several other groups to him, which he didn't know about. So, there is like a kids in Prague group, and there's some other, like, about parenting and stuff, so...*

*Elizabeth, personal communication, 23.09.2022*

This post sheds a light on the public and private space discourse, as the man here made an assumption about the group's function, solely based on the fact that it is a woman's group. Scholars acknowledge various types of distinctions between private and public spaces, such as political, social and economic (Fraser, 1990; Weintraub, 1997; Verbuč 2022: 86). The focus here will remain on the social understandings of public and private spaces. In social terms, the private and public spaces distinction refers to the "...access and control of private versus public information, and the notion of space: private as hidden versus public as open and accessible space" (Verbuč 2022: 86). The Expat Women group is a private space, in which only women who have been approved by the admins can get into the group. Furthermore, the post above shows the gendered notions of public and private spaces, where often private spaces are associated with the domestic sphere and the home, and considered a feminine space (Duncan, 1996: 131). The above situation demonstrated how the man associated a women's group with womanly stereotypes, thinking that a woman's group must be focused on help in the domestic sphere (i.e. the claims of cooking and cleaning). Yet, he did not take into account that perhaps women need their own spaces, to discuss sensitive or perhaps "taboo" topics (i.e. the above-mentioned gynaecologist, or more extreme situations, like street harassment) (Younas et al., 2020: 2).

This expat group serves as an online support system for expat women living in Prague, helping each other out by providing answers to questions posted in the group. On the one hand, and as mentioned by Tanja and Helen in previous citations, the group is used to ask for general advice or recommendations about living in Prague, whether these are café recommendations, or advice about finding doctors, holidays, or cosmetics or hairstylist recommendations, to name just a few areas.

Hi penguins! 🐧🐧🐧

Any coffee place to recommend with a nice backyard close to JZP, Riegrovy Sady, IP Pavlova?? (It could be also anywhere in the city center) I have to study 📖 during the weekend and I don't wanna stay at home. Wish u all a great weekend! 🌞🌞🌞

Carmen, Expat Women in Prague, 14.05.2023

For this specific post, there were 5 main comments from women suggesting specific places where one can go work, such as Monolok, La Forme, Kavarna Prazirna, Super Tramp Coffee and Truhlarna. The original poster took time to thank the women, and in one instance, responded to one comment, that she went there and enjoyed the place. This example shows how broad the topics can be, in that it can refer to simply asking about places to go in Prague, as a foreigner. As was mentioned in Tanja's quote, this reflects the group being a "Q&A" platform, where expat women can rely on other women, in a similar position, to share their experience. Apart from more general questions about living in Prague, some of the questions are more female-oriented questions, reflecting what Elizabeth stated in her interview, in that women ask about doctors, namely gynaecologists, and other related women-health related issues.

Hi girls, could you advise me a place in which to do laser for hair removal here in Prague? Preferably around Prague 2 or 10

Thank you 😊

Anna, Expat Women in Prague, 06.01.2022

Dear all,

Can you recommend a good gynecologist who might see me rather quickly? Thank you!

Abby, Expat Women in Prague, 07.01.2022

Hello!

I would like to get a general std test in Prague, preferably close to Prague 1 or 2. Can someone please recommend a clinic?

Anonymous post, Expat Women in Prague, 08.01.2022



These posts, and whether women post these anonymously, or with their name, show the types of information that can be asked within the group. None of the responses in the comments are mean, or judgemental, rather, they provide concrete places where the woman can find what she is looking for. Younas *et al.* (2020) identify how women-only Facebook groups create safe spaces in Pakistan. They argue that due to the patriarchal context of the country, whereby topics such as abortion, sexual harassment, rape and domestic abuse are considered “taboo”, private Facebook groups allow women to discuss such topics in safe, non-judgemental spaces. Similarly, Michaela’s post addresses why women need their own spaces. The above examples demonstrate how this group poses as a non-patriarchal space, where different norms of communication apply. Women can ask about topics that are perhaps more sensitive, such as specific doctors, cosmetics, hair salons, etc. The lack of judgement in the comments adds to the feeling of community, which in turns makes this a meaningful place for social interactions. How it does so will be explored further below.

When asked about how helpful they find the group, Monika and Tamara in the respective interviews, reflected:

*Yeah, this is for specific things. So, this group is when I really need something specific, like some specific, maybe some doctor [...] ... For example, I found my gynaecologist, both of them like previous one and this one based on the reviews from girls there. So, when I wanted to change my doctor, I went there and I started to search and then I found this doctor and it yeah, works.*

*Monika, personal communication, 15.03.2022*

*So some of the discussions are very interesting just by that. Sometimes I have posted in the past because I was looking for a co-working space. So I have posted maybe once or twice. Because I think it's a good source of information in that sense. So if you're looking for something, you know, there might be people that might be relevant.*

*Tamara, personal communication, 06.05.2022*

Furthermore, there is a sense of helping the expat women community, by giving information back to those looking for it. One such example is presented in the post below,

concentrating specifically about COVID vaccinations, depicting how the flow of information goes in two directions. The “*edit*” above shows the update of the post, and the part below (“*hello boosters*”), shows the initial post. The format below therefore represents how the community see’s it on Facebook as well.

*Edit: just got my booster. Hlavní nádraží. Very nice, helpful, speak English. Open on weekends too until 7pm. Helped me transfer original US vaccines to a European Czech certificate that is in the government system now. Plus of course the 3rd. It is moderna, which is a half dose of the original vaccine of Moderna. 400kč for self-payers for the service. May be a fee for putting it into the Czech system if you are a foreigner, which she said was 200kč, but I didn’t need to pay it for some reason. Not really sure why. Anyway, thank you all for the recommendations and hopefully this information will help others too! (Ps, as one who has a stupid irrational big fear of needles, the lady who stabbed me was very nice, friendly, and patient)*

*Hello boosters. 😊*

*Anyone have experience with hlavní nádraží for booster shots? Is it walk in? Open to anyone now? Foreigners? Any experiences/complications there, or is it good to go? Open weekends? Thank you*

*Mariana, Expat Women in Prague, 21.01.2022*

Having gone through the process getting the vaccination (her original question to the group), she felt that she did not want to keep the information to herself, and therefore shared her experiences (in the Edit:) section, which creates the first half of the post. There is therefore a reciprocation of information, whereby by sharing experiences they had, they contribute to the wider community.

Another purpose of the group, as is stated in the description of the group as well, is venting frustrations.

*[It’s a] very supportive, very friendly space. So even if many posts are not really about Prague itself, but if someone wants to just vent, that everything is terrible, you can do it there. And no one will judge. [...]*

*Monika, personal communication, 15.03.2022*

*The Expat Women in Prague Group seems more like a place for people to vent about their problems.*

*Kirsty, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

This can be about living in the Czech Republic, as in the example below, but I also identified many posts that were specifically made about living in the Czech Republic, including frustrations (in general), bad experiences with Czech companies, cashiers or Czech people in general; being met with locals saying “expats should go home” and being told “expats are horrible”. This was also combined with feelings of loneliness or hopelessness; of having the feeling of not having a community / friend group in Prague, of language barriers and in one instance not wanting to leave the house. As a result, venting frustrations to other foreigners living in the city provides a sense of a common identity within the group. The shared value of the group are the identities of being women as well as foreigners, living in Prague, and needing information. This woman needed to vent her frustrations about Czech people, and shared the following anonymously:

*I know this is harsh but does anyone else find many Czech people extremely mean and aggressive for no reason? So many people have tried to pick a fight with me for asking a normal question or just speaking English. I feel like a lot of them are very defensive and so willing to start yelling at people. I've lived all over the world and this is the worst I've ever seen.*

*Anonymous post, Expat Women in Prague, 05.11.2022*

This post echoes the findings presented in Chapter 4, whereby the perceptions of locals affect one’s experience of living in Prague. Having a space to be able to vent these frustrations, and perhaps find that other women, who are foreigners in the country, feel the same exemplifies that this virtual platform creates a feeling of a community. What is interesting about such a post, is the reactions from the women in the comments. It is through their responses, that the feeling of a community, as well as sense of connection, is built. This also demonstrates how this group becomes a place of a “emplaced encounter”, as whilst these women do not meet face-to-face, their encounters happen on the virtual platform.

This specific post received 74 comments, with women sharing their different experiences they have had in Prague. The majority of the responses (34), empathized with the

original poster's situation, claiming that even after living here for quite time, they still feel the same. In one example, a woman shared:

*I actually find them to be quite passive aggressive. Like they go complain to someone about you or send you a negative email/ text within 5 minutes after seeing you in person. But yeah they can be rude (as everywhere) and I would say a bit defensive, usually I think it has something to do with jealousy and feeling insecure about themselves. They probably feel bad they don't know the answer or are bad at foreign languages. They seem to project insecurities on strangers, especially foreigners but also towards other Czech people too*

*Kamilla, Expat Women in Prague, 05.11.2022*

18 comments pointed out that they have only had positive experiences living in Prague, and offer advice on how to look at the situation differently (“*Maybe you had some bad experiences at the beginning and now you're projecting anxiety/defensiveness in your tone of voice when you speak to Czech people and they're mirroring it? Just a thought*”). None of the comments, however, were rude, or judgemental, rather they tried to offer their own perspectives at how to look at the situation, both when positive or negative experiences, and in some cases adding stories about their similar experiences, or replying with a simple “*I feel you, girl*” to express sympathy in the situation. This therefore creates a space in which one is able to express feelings and vent frustrations about their expat experience, whilst receiving or expressing support; reflecting Chapter 4 in the perception of there being a wall of Czechness. One function of the group is therefore as a support group, in which women are allowed to share their frustrations without the fear of being judged.

Despite all the ways in which the members in this group help each other out, Sasha, in our interview, noted a feeling of responding to women to look for professional, legal advice when dealing with administrative / official topics. Having herself experience with the Prague Integration Centre; she has knowledge that she can share with women asking in the group.

*Yeah, but it's also like people are helping each other a lot to understand things and I'm feeling like I know some things which might help people, because of all these, my integrational experience, so when people start sharing all these, their legal things oh I heard that my friend did that and, I just say guys go to integrational centre they're professionals don't listen to whose friend did something, I'm getting so mad with all these things, like God there are these*

*courses and there are these centres who will help you for free, like don't ask this like whose friend got married in Slovakia and now... you know.*

*Sasha, personal communication, 15.07.2021*

Despite her presented frustration, even just by commenting under posts to go seek official advice from a verified authority, this demonstrates how she contributes to the community by sharing where women can get help in such circumstances.

One other interesting thing that contributes to the sense of a virtual community of expat women is the greeting, “*hi / hello penguins*”, used in the majority of posts made in this group. In the May of 2020, one woman made a poll on the group, asking why women in this group address themselves “penguins”. From this poll, which had 505 votes, 51% of women stated that they’re not sure why the term is used and 11% stated that it doesn’t matter, “*it’s funny*”. However, 21% of women agreed that by using the term “ladies” could be offensive (though no explanation was given), so therefore the term “penguin” is used as to not offend anyone in the group (Facebook post, 25.05.2020). The fact that some women use this term points to the creation of an inclusive environment, though, as seen in some of the examples above, not all women use it. I cannot say why they do not use it, and nobody mentioned this in my interviews.

This group is named the Expat Women in Prague group, and yet, in certain instances, women posted or answered admitting that in fact, they are Czech. For example, in the post above about venting frustrations, three women admitted to being Czech. In one interview, Tanja mentioned that:

*Again, one of my Czech friends is also in this group, because she said that sometimes she has the questions, and she don't know where to find the answers, but because we are kind of expats really helpful, and we also don't know stuff, so this is some group of people who can help, so if your Czech friends don't know..*

*Tanja, personal correspondence, 09.09.2021*

Though every post is made in English, Czech women are also a part of the group. It is difficult how many women are native Czech, as one has to take into account that foreigners could marry a Czech partner, thus having a Czech name. It therefore raises the question about the common identity of foreigners in the group. Furthermore, this once again returns to the

notion of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1989). In this particular case, as women do not meet up face-to-face, and it serves primarily as a platform to ask questions, the “imagined community” is created based on the common identity markers of being an expat, a woman, and a foreigner living in the Czech Republic. This is further reinforced by Elizabeth’s meticulous screening of who enters the group (despite her awareness that men might still be in the group). As such, the community is created by the feeling of belonging to a specific group based on the same identity, whilst excluding others who do not fall into this category.

This section has addressed the primary functions of the group, and how it contributes to an online, virtual community which helps expat women ask questions about living in Prague. This group, unlike the GGI group, presents place-making in a slightly different light. Whilst Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002) argue that place-making through “emplaced encounters” happen face-to-face, this section has demonstrated how these encounters can be done on an online platform. Through social media, commenting and posting reactions *create* a place, in which expat women living in Prague can turn to, to ask questions, receive advice, or share experiences or feelings about living here. The created community, based on the common identities of being both women, as well as foreigners, helps create this place as a perceived meaningful place (Stokowski, 2002:372). In this instance, the place is not a tangible, physical space, but rather a non-physical social media platform. As seen in the above examples, the creation of a place is not an individual task, but a collective task, and is created through conversations and interactions with others (Stokowski, 2002: 372).

### 5.2.2. Safe space for women

As place-making is a collective task (Stokowski, 2002: 372), another theme that arises through this chapter is that the group being viewed as a safe space, which I will briefly define here. This is important when looking at place-making through this group, as the sense of safety is created through the collective perception of its safety by users. Whilst it is rather hard to find a concrete definition of the concept “safe space”, one way in which to understand this term is as “... places that strive to create supportive and nonthreatening environments, especially for people from marginalized backgrounds” (Dlugatch, no date). In fact, studies have focused specifically on the creation of online safe spaces, which allow for the creation of a *safe shared space* (Miño-Puigcercós *et al.*, 2019: 124). These online groups, despite not meeting

physically, allow for women to share common interests in a virtual world (ibid.). One example is the study conducted by Raquel Miño-Puigcercós *et al.* (2019), who, using a digital ethnography approach, studied specifically a Spanish, online community *Feminismes*: a private Facebook group where women can discuss their views on feminism. Open to anyone, even men (as long as they are respectful), rules are put in place to ensure the safe environment of the group (128 – 129). The authors also specify that rules were created on the way, as situations arose in which members did not feel as safe (ibid.). Similarly, the Expat Women in Prague group is led by strict rules and moderation, and thus creates the environment of being a safe shared space for expat women in Prague. When new women join the group and see the types of posts and comments, they can feel the sense of safety to the group, as demonstrated below:

*Thank you for much for adding me into the group. I have been reading your posts and have come to the conclusion that this is a safe space for my request. Hello Expat women in Prague.  
[...]*

*Amanda, Expat Women in Prague 15.09.2022*

Elizabeth, alongside the other moderators, supervise the space, making sure that posts are appropriate and are allowed to be in the group before approving them. In December of 2021, a journalist wrote in the group, asking for women to share their stories, sharing as a part of her post that *“It’s a great safe space and a uniquely successful page that I would like to share the story of as an image of female solidarity and exemplification of modern social media development.”* (06.12.2021). Her post was therefore looking for women to share their stories, either by commenting, or messaging her privately. Her post received 15 comments, and three are presented here.

*I must say what I love about this page is the fact that it feels like a safe space where trolling does not happen. Sometimes mixed pages where men are also feel unsafe because you just ask a question or you post about anything and some guys will just slide into your private messages and try to hit on you. And I hate to generalise but honestly I left the mixed expat groups a while ago because every time someone asked a question there’s a guy that comes and make a sarcasm a bad joke or plain mean comments. The sense of entitlement is not present on this page we all are equal despite our differences and different point of use but we get along and we are here for each other no matter what the question is you will find an answer a genuine answer. I guess women are more on the generous friendly side of things and we know what it is to move to*

*Prague not speak Czech and struggle to find doctors or any other things and having direct advice from people feels like asking advice from a friend here.*

*Camille, Expat Women in Prague, 06.12.2021*

This woman's response highlights several important factors. Firstly, the concept of this community being a safe space, without judgement, which is not felt in other expat groups. This is also tied to women's safety and being online, in that by posting on a public page, anyone can reach out to message you, and in this case she highlights the fact that men could be reaching out, which in her case is not wanted. This therefore ties back to this being a private space, in which women's privacy is protected. It also contributes to the feeling of safety, and women in the group being "safe from" unwanted messages from men, and thus "safe to" ask, share and vent on an online platform. Furthermore, the last sentence reinforces the feeling of it being a virtual community *of friends*. Following in the feeling of a community:

*Just to add a community like this one feels like a safe place because we all are far away from what we were familiar with and I am here for eight years but I know that sometimes having this common language and this common experience of being a foreigner here makes us close together*

*Ines, Expat Women in Prague, 06.12.2021*

This post highlights a topic discussed in Chapter X, the factor of language. Having a group in which the common language is English, adds to the feeling of safety, especially being far away from home. The common language is thus tied to the feeling of having a common identity with other women in the group. Lastly, a point that was made both in my reflective chapter and which I would like to add here, is that the group is a private group.

*\*PLEASE\* \_do not use any names\_ in your 'working piece' if you have not asked for permission. "... It's a great safe space..." to quote you. Let's keep it so.*

*Beatrice, Expat Women in Prague, 06.12.2021*

Despite having permission from the admin, I still have an ethical sense of wanting to protect the group, and thus have chosen posts which I find would least likely offend. However, it also demonstrates the importance of this being a private space, in which women can feel free



to discuss any topics without it being exposed to the public. Her post demonstrated a certain fear of having any of names shared outside of the group.

As demonstrated above, the Expat Women in Prague creates an online community for women living in Prague, and some women I interviewed compared this group to other, mixed-gender expat groups that exist.

*If I have a specific question, I will type that on the search bar on the women, expat women in Prague group. Because that is much more used to ask and answer questions than GGI. Which is more social... Or the general expats in Prague Facebook groups, which are just for nonsense in my opinion... Sometimes, sometimes I'll search there as well. Like, I don't know... how much time I should expect to spend in Ministerstvo vnitra? Usually administrative things. I'll search both. But I expect to find a better answer and expat women in Prague.*

*Alena, personal communication, 07.03.2023*

Alena shared that she expects to find “better” answers in the Expat Women Group, though she checks more groups to see where she can find a helpful answer. More often, the other groups are perceived by women to be more judgmental.

The use of this group also provides the feeling of it being a virtual community, whereby all the women in this group are living in Prague and looking for ways to integrate and find their way around the city. Returning back to the gendered element of this group, in my interview with Elizabeth, she highlighted the need for women to have their own space, to discuss more “sensitive” topics that could, in a more public space, be subject to scrutiny from wider audiences.

*You know if you were asking where can I buy, kale, that was a popular thing for a while, then you can ask in one of the larger groups and you'll get some, like, some normal answers, some snarky answers and some normal answers. But if you ask anything like female related, like where can I get a good manicure? Or like, yeah, does anyone know a good gynaecologist or like, you know, the advantages of using the menstrual cup over like... then, just forget it. So, it was really to just be like, I'm here to ask your [...] female, female questions. And, then it really just came to be known as the friendly and helpful group. So, people slowly started to ask, like, where can I buy kale and like these other more general, very general things and, yeah.*

*Elizabeth, personal communication, 23.09.2022*

The perception of comments in other groups being unhelpful is further emphasized by Tanja.

*I like it so much better than this Prague Expat group, because the, I'm not sexist or something, but sometimes you read, reading the comments, and you're like guys, it's a simple question, why do you have to be so mean*

*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

Additionally, Tanja mentioned her gratefulness for specifically women groups existing, stating that:

*I'm just grateful for people who organize groups for expat women as they make life easier and usually it's more of a safe space vs mixed groups with loads of @holes who aren't helpful*

*Tanja, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

This section demonstrated the concept of how this group is perceived as a safe space, both in what women are safe to, as well as what (and who) they are safe from (Lewis et al., 2015: 2.9). Ruth Lewis et al. (2015), in their study of feminist, women only spaces, focus on a concept of “safe to” and “safe from”. They suggest, through their work, that women refer to spaces in which they feel “safe to”: safe to “... engage in dialogue, to debate, to disagree, challenge, learn; safe to express, to emote; safe to develop one’s consciousness, to demonstrate one’s creative talent, to fulfil one’s protentional” (2.9). The above posts show that this group is used as a way for women to feel safe in asking for advice, looking for recommendations, or venting their frustrations. It allows women to do so in a closed space, moderated space, and they are safe to discuss a range of topics. This group therefore exemplifies a space in which women are “safe from” being judged for asking questions. As a result, they create a space which have different norms of communication. It was noted by the group, respondents and my own observations, some other expat groups which include both genders can be very judgmental, “snarky”, unhelpful, and often sexist. As I did not study the other groups, I do not want to make statements about how the other groups function. However, from the interviews conducted with women, there were allusions made to other, mixed-gender groups being unsupportive and judgemental. Similar to the findings of Ruth Lewis et al. (2015), a women-

only space gives women the “cognitive and emotional freedom” (5.1). Through creating a space which is directed at women, they are “*safe from*” comments and judgements from men, through Elizabeth’s careful and reinforced moderation.

Elizabeth described the Expat Women in Prague group as being “*like the double whammy of vulnerability that we are that we're not just women, but also foreigners*” (Elizabeth, *personal communication*, 23.09.2022). Both the GGI group, as well as the Expat Women in Prague group, create a *safe shared space*, which allow women to share common interests in both the virtual and physical world (Miño-Puigcercós *et al.*, 2019: 124).

Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003) define gendered spaces “...to include particular locales that cultures invest with gendered meanings, sites in which sex-differentiated practices occur, or setting that are used strategically to inform identity and produce and reproduce asymmetrical gender relations of power and authority” (7). The Expat Women in Prague group therefore shows how these gender relations are asymmetrical, in comparison with other expat groups that exist on Facebook. By needing a space which is not subject to men’s comments, one could argue that the need for such groups are a part of a larger ideological scheme, through which women are confined or restricted in sharing their behaviour (*ibid.*, 9). Not being able to discuss sensitive topics in a more public group, women have to create their own spaces hidden in private spaces such as closed Facebook groups.

One can also argue that based on the identity of this group, being aimed at both women and expats, this serves as a counter-public space, which are defined as spaces which are public, but, on “... some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one.” (Warner, 2002: 86). Nancy Fraser (1990) observed this counter-public phenomenon whereby “members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians - have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.” (67). I argue in this section that the creation of a separate group, aimed at expat women, serves as a counter-public space through which women can share and discuss topics in a separate, closed, Facebook group, hidden from the public.

As such, the collective aims, and perceptions of safety within the group, demonstrate the collective effort by the Expat Women in Prague community to create a place that is meaningful for women living in Prague (Stokowski, 2002; Cresswell, 2004). As discussed through the concepts of safety, gender and counter-public spaces, the group “...contributes to the creation and reproduction of action-oriented beliefs and ideologies that naturalize place identifications” (Svašek&Komarova, 2018: 12). The group is therefore a meaningful place where women can, with a feeling of safety, pose questions or answer posts within a specific, closed community.

#### 5.2.2.1. *Anonymous posts*

Despite the above sectioned focusing on the creation of a safe space for expat women, this section briefly shows how this feeling of a created community can be tarnished, thus affecting the importance of the group for some women. As a result, this can have an effect on how the place is perceived, and therefore interacted with by its members. As described above, this women-only group creates a space that is perceived as safe, helpful, non-judgemental and respectful. However, the feeling of safety was questioned in the group in the spring of 2022, when Facebook introduced an “anonymous post” feature, in which Facebook users now have the option to post in groups without their name being shown (Jerrard, 2020). During the course of this research project, there became a huge discussion on Expat Women in Prague group about the use and frequency of anonymous posts, which was a feature introduced by Facebook in 2021, however I saw the first post about this topic in the Expat Women in Prague group in April of 2022. The discussion more or less continued into the fall of 2022.

*I wonder why so many posts are suddenly anonymous. Even the ones that do not feel too sensitive? I somehow feel less of a connection and trust*

*Bridgit, Expat Women in Prague, 17.04.2022*

Through the posts, women started complaining that by the option to post anonymously, it changed how the group is perceived. For example:

*Question for the group admins: shouldn't there be a rule for when the anonymous functionality can be used? While I understand the utility of having the option to post anonymously, I cannot understand for the life of me, why some actually abuse this functionality and they're "getting*

away” with it. Anonymous posts about “what to do in vacation when visiting X place” 🤖, “where to buy Chanel foundation” or “where to get flowers”, “where to buy a bracelet from?”.... 🤖 It’s mind blowing and maybe I’m the only one who sees a problem with this. Being able to post anonymously is needed for particular situations and questions – no doubt about it, but in the past week, all this absurd “anonymous post” like I mentioned above, are creating an environment that can hardly be taken seriously. This is not a rant, but an observation as I found this group extremely useful for the past year. It would be a shame to take away the safe space we’ve got here, just because common sense is lacking in some.

*Irina, Expat Women in Prague group, 09.06.2022*

The post questioned the types of posts that were being made anonymously, whereby when asking a question that seemed to be on a topic that was “not sensitive” there was a feeling that these posts do not have to be made anonymously. By doing so, some women commented that it made them feel that the group is not as trustworthy anymore. This specific post had 50 comments, and of these, only six comments suggested that anonymous posts should not be allowed. The remaining comments argued that it should not matter that posts are anonymous. The woman wanted the administrators to take more responsibility by enforcing a new rule, but other women in the group did not agree that this was necessary, such as:

*I don't think anonymous posts specifically create an "unsafe" feeling, why? You can choose to ignore those if they annoy you. We aren't going to do censorship about when and how a person can post anonymously or not. If the topic is group related, anonymous or not really doesn't matter, if you can help you can just comment, why to absolutely have to know the identity of the person? And if you cannot help or doesn't want then just ignore*

*Ella, Expat Women in Prague group, 09.06.2022*

The ongoing debate between a perceived safe space affects the role the group has in place-making, as it questions the space being a meaningful place. Even though the original poster acknowledged that there are certain situations where it is deemed “more acceptable” to post anonymously, they did not specify what situations this would include. One woman pointed out that just “the fact that people keep complaining about anonymous posts is what is making this no longer a safe space.” (Expat Women in Prague group, 09.06.2022). The previous section highlighted the need for a space where women are “safe to”. The rigorous screening

process to join the group, suggests that women should feel safe to post without judgement. Following these kinds of remarks, women in the group started adding explanations to their posts for why they are posting anonymously, as if it justify that the use of this function in their case was legitimate (i.e.: *“Hello lovelies, I’ll be revealing my address and hence the anonymous post.”* (09.05.2022).

Thus, the anonymous posts can also affect how the group is viewed. When comparing the GGI and Expat Women in Prague group, Kirsty shared the following view:

*I see a huge difference between the 2 groups. GGI is more for meeting in person and enjoying events together and building real friendships. The Expat Women in Prague Group seems more like a place for people to vent about their problems. Almost all of the posts are anonymous, so it does not seem at all geared to making real life friendships, but just an online space to vent/ask questions. My overall impression is that GGI is a group about positivity and Expat Women in Prague focuses much more on negativity. I am not a fan of the Expat Women in Prague Group for these reasons.*

*Kirsty, personal communication, 11.06.2023*

Furthermore, when I asked Elizabeth on her stance towards this “anonymous posts” debate, she shed light on the role of cultural diversity within the group, with members being from all over the world. As admin, she can see the original poster, but once she approves the post, it’s posted anonymously.

*It is a new function, but before that I would always volunteer. I think I even had a pinned post that said like if you have a question for the group that you feel uncomfortable about asking or I think it was especially about like warning about creeps. Creepy people. And yeah that’s happened. If you have a creep alert, just send me the information, I will post it on your behalf. I’m not afraid.*

*Elizabeth, personal communication, 23.09.2022*

Elizabeth demonstrates her desire to enable Expat Women in Prague to be a safe space and talks about efforts she puts into ensuring the group as a safe space for women to be able to ask, share or vent in a welcoming, safe group. Whilst this space is an important tool through which women create a sense of place in Prague, and does so primarily through its social

interactions on the online platform, and so factors such as anonymous posts can take away from this feeling for some of its members (Stokowski, 2002; Plunkett, 2011; Polson, 2015). This then questions to what extent this place is important, and for whom, if women are not necessarily comfortable with this option being available. Further research would have to be conducted to talk to women from varying parts of the world, with different cultural backgrounds, to understand how this affects place-making and a sense of belonging to this virtual community.

Returning back to the public / private discourse, communication technologies, such as Facebook, public space boundaries have been challenged (Keating, 2015: 248). It has reframed the understanding of what is public, because now, intimate and private topics can be discussed on more public platforms. Tying this into the Expat Women in Prague group, a private group that is tightly moderated, there is a sense of privacy and trust within the group. However, one still needs to be aware that the information posted can get out into the public, thus compromising the feeling of it being a private, and thus safe, space. Furthermore, the discussions in the group can on occasion be personal and intimate, therefore taking the private, “domestic” issues onto an online shared group. Despite this, the Expat Women in Prague group therefore represents a private space, which is hidden from members who have not been accepted to be in the group. The posts shared are therefore private in nature, nobody has access to them. However, the private function of the group shows that women, living in Prague, use this online space in a way in which women come together, for the purpose of helping each other out, living in a foreign city (Friedmann, 2010: 156). Whilst the meetings of the group may not be face-to-face, they still present an example in which the building of a community, and the repeated uses of the group between women, make this an important place.

### 5.3. Creating a second “home” away from home

For some, thinking of “home” is not linked with questions of “who?” or “when”, but rather “*where?*”, making home a localised space of its own (Douglas, 1991: 289). Creating a “nice place to live” is thus a central concept to place-making (Cresswell, 2004: 93). However, for transnational migrants, “home” isn’t necessarily about a place. The concept of home “...consists of imagination, routinised everyday practices, relationship networks, and representation imbued with personal and social meaning, cultural ideals, and values” (Butcher,

2010: 24). Chapter 4 demonstrated, through the use of the maps as well as the creation of a “wall of Czechness”, how respondents interact with physical spaces in Prague, as well as their perceptions and feelings about living in the city. Thus far, chapter 5 then took this a step further, in demonstrating two specific case studies which serve as tools for community building and place-making in Prague. Both chapters thus show how respondents have created a home here in Prague. A place can therefore appear to be a home, if the environment that a person builds is “sufficient and friendly, or comfortable” (Butcher, 2010: 25). Therefore, how “home away from home” is created will be discussed in further detail in this section. The topic spurred my interest, when I came across the following post on the Expat Women in Prague group in February 2022:

*Hello Ladies. Have you ever experienced this weird feeling of not belonging anywhere? I had some not very nice situation today with Czech lady where I couldn't express myself as I would like to (partially because my Czech is not well, partially because of the stress) and somehow it opened in me this door behind which there is an ocean of frustration and sadness related to the fact that I'm living in foreign country. When I almost feel like home here, then these things happen and then I feel lost again. How do you cope with it? I know someone could say I can always go back to my country, but the problem is that after living almost 7 years abroad, "my country" is not my country or home anymore. I feel strange and alienated there as well. I hate it and it makes me so depressed... What is your experience?*

*Michaela, Facebook post, 20.02.2022*

Altogether, Michaela’s post got around 65 comments from women sharing their experiences of feeling “at home” in the Czech Republic. Experiences that were mentioned in the comments were that by being away from their home countries for some time, returning back home no longer felt like “home”. Others mentioned a concept of being “Third Culture citizens”, whereby moving around often means for them that they have incorporated various cultural traditions into their everyday lives, that no one place can be deemed as home anymore. To demonstrate the types of comments this Facebook post received, I have chosen three of them to analyse.

*Dear Michaela, I am totally with you, but usually looking at this from the angle that helps me to stay positive on this. I say that I live “in between “, none of new places became my new*



*home yet (being now 44 and having a kid even)... but don't feel in my home country like at home at all, moreover the gap between my family members and me even grown more and more year by year. That's the fact and I call myself a "world" citizen... don't let local individual to frustrate you, there are good and bad people everywhere... (could replace good and bad for other expressions). I take it as advantage and also, living in other country makes you stronger. What helps a lot is to be surrounded by the same "type" of crowd, but you know that, I am sure! Keeping fingers crossed for you, you are doing better than that lady for sure!*

*Bella, Expat Women in Prague group, 20.02.2022*

This response aligns with the afore mentioned feeling of Turner's (1969) liminality by living "in-between" places. By being abroad for so long, she no longer feels at home in her place of origin, creating a distance between her and her family. At the same time, she suggests that it isn't about the physical place, but about the people one surrounds themselves by. This is also tied in with the fact that returning back to one's home country isn't necessarily going back "home". This feeling of not-belonging is also demonstrated in the next comment.

*Oh Michaela! This is the story of my life! I could have wrote this post! I feel the same... I'm originally from Italy, lived 12 years in the USA and now moved here. I don't know anymore which is my country or where I belong most! I like to picture my family and I as citizens of the world but sometimes it's sad and depressing! I can't feel we don't have roots anywhere and roots everywhere!! We need to get a coffee together ❤️❤️❤️*

*Alice, Expat Women in Prague group, 20.02.2022*

One way in which "home" is defined, is as an "an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a centre of meaning and a field of care. Home is where you can be yourself. In this sense home acts as a kind of metaphor for place in general." (Creswell, 2004: 24). It is a place where people feel like they have created meaning and where they have a sense of "rootedness" (ibid.; see also Nowicka, 2007). However, this post demonstrates the complexity in how expats understand "home", whereby due to moving around and living in many places, they have lost the feeling of having "roots" that are tied to a certain place. One label which has been allocated to this feeling is that of *contemporary dislocation*, which refers to the feeling of "being neither here

nor there yet also here and there” (Usher, 2002: 50). This therefore supports the idea that “conceptions of home are not static, but dynamic processes, involving acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving “homes” (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002: 6). As an expat, being constantly on the move can create feelings of “...uneasiness, a sense of fragmentation, tension, and even pain” (ibid., 7). The latter points were demonstrated in the data presented above. Through the example of Michaela’s post, one can see the inner struggle to understand where she feels at home. Furthermore, the absence of place-belongingness is not *exclusion*, but rather the feeling of loneliness, isolation, alienation and displacement (Antonisch, 2010: 649). This is reflected in the comments of this post, women felt that they do not have “*roots*” and live in an “*in-between*” state.

One reason in which this term is deemed so important, however is because “...a sense of self, of one’s “identity”, [also] corresponds to various conceptualisations of home” (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002: 7). By moving to new places, expats can feel like they have “...multiple allegiances to places”, showing that for this specific group, conceptualising home is complex, and often multi-dimensional (ibid., 8). Steven Vertovec (1999) links the concept of “home away from home” as a type of consciousness, whereby global diasporic groups are constituted by dual or multiple identifications (450). These dual (or multiple) identifications depict that expats are aware of their “...decentred attachments, of being simultaneously ‘home away from home’, ‘here and there’, or, for instance, British and something else” (Vertovec, 1999: 450). As a result, networks and social groups can therefore be built around this same consciousness (ibid.). As presented by Steven Vertovec (1999), and shown in the case studies of the GGI group and the Expat Women in Prague group, it is this “common consciousness” that connects people who have the same experiences of multi-locality, leading to a “...desire to connect oneself with others [...] who share the same ‘routes’ and ‘roots’” (ibid.). This is presented in the “core” group created as a part of the GGI group, in which all the women who are a part of this group are of various nationalities. In my interviews with these women, they all mentioned wanting to find a group of “like-minded people”. This is not to say that these women, especially in the case of the GGI groups, do not hold allegiances to other groups. In Tanja’s case, she described that when moving here, she joined other expat groups, such as InterNations, a Book Club, to name a few.

Thus, as demonstrated in the citations above, there is a feeling for expat women to feel like they belong somewhere, that they are attached and rooted to a place, even if just temporality (Fortier, 2000:2 in Antonisch, 2010: 652). As such, living in a hyper-mobile world,

it can be difficult for women to conceptualize what home means. As such, the next section will address how the women I interviewed understand, and construct, the concept of a home.

### 5.3.1. Home as a physical place

The first approach to conceptualising home is to understand this term as being a physical place. When I asked Michaela how she defines home, she brought up the issue of her understanding home as a physical place:

*Well, I think this is my big problem, that I have really big problem now to define this home. Umm, and this is why I feel a little bit homeless. I'm quite curious how it will be for me because I decided to buy a flat here. So somehow, in my mind, was like the concept of home was really related to the concept of having something, which is your own? Umm, and let's see.*

*Michaela, personal communication, 20.02.2022*

Michaela's understanding of home is connected directly with the physical space, and because she wants to buy a flat here, this could be a "home". Yet this definition presents to herself a dilemma, whereby even though she would buy a flat here, there is a question how this will address her feeling of being "homeless". "Homelessness" implies that one does not have a home, and nowhere feels like a place where she belongs. As such, this resonates with the concept of expats experiencing this "contemporary dislocation" (Usher, 2002: 50). The concept of home is therefore not linked necessarily to the attachment to a physical place (Butcher, 2010: 25). Similarly, Alena felt that home is the physical space where one sleeps:

*I define home as wherever I am sleeping long term. So even if I am staying somewhere for a week, and I say, I want to go home. I mean, I want to go to where I'm sleeping and get in bed. In a more philosophical way, I would define home as a place where I feel comfortable, and established and welcome. And where I have my closest, where I've established my daily life. So for me, now Prague is home, before Spain was home, before the US was home. And, um, even though I wasn't in Spain forever, even though I was only in for example, a specific part of Spain for one year, that was home. It's no longer home, but I still have a connection, and it definitely was home.*

*Alena, personal communication, 07.03.2023*

Alena's quote also reinforces the point made in the previous chapter, in that the sense of community is an important factor in creating second "home". She finds home to be an emotional connection, where there is a feeling of "comfort" and "establishment". A place therefore becomes a home, if the environment is perceived to be "sufficient and friendly" (Nowicka, 2007: 82). Both respondents allude to the fact the concept of home is more than just a physical "home" where one for example sleeps and lives. Home has most often been associated with being stable and unmoving (ibid., 72). However, skilled migrants, a highly mobile group, challenge this classical notion of home being a fixed location (ibid., 69, 70).

### 5.3.2. Home as a constructed space through personal connections

Place-making and home are two concepts that are closely interlinked, and this shall be discussed in this section. Rather than conceptualising home as a physical place, Monika, Kristy and Sasha noted the importance of knowledge and connections to people in the city, portraying that "home" isn't a physical space, but it can be constructed through social relationships and being a part of communities.

*Hmm, what makes Prague the home? I think is that it's both sides. Like one is that Prague make this as my home. The other one is, like how I interact with this home, and I know how to how to how to navigate the city. Okay, I will love to buy a covid test. Where can I go - immediately know where it is. The other one is like a I, how can I say, I don't know, finding the things that I need. The other thing is like, you can create things, how can I say that? You can have, when you go traveling, like for example now I go to London, for example. I cannot create event there; I cannot do something as my wish. Usually you just follow you know, when a shop is there you can go inside and buy stuff, but here you can create things like say, I create events. I talk to the owners can I come to your place and hold a party so this kind of make me feel like I have the authority to do things, is not like a bypassing person here.*

*Kristy, personal communication, 15.01.2023*

The concept of home therefore created through "routinised everyday practices" (Butcher, 2010: 24). Kristy found that there are two elements to making Prague feel like home. In Kristy's case, her routines are centred around the creation of the "core" GGI events, as well creating other events outside of these over the weekends, for example. Her routine is also seen in that she knows where to go when she needs something specific, in her example a covid test.

There is no longer the feeling of being lost; she is able to navigate the city independently. Stokowski (2002) argues that places refer to how an individual develops feelings or attachments to particular settings, through its use, attentiveness and emotion (369). Kristy shows how this is the case for her. Here, Kristy shows that for her, creating events in Prague is a way in which she creates a feeling of being at home. Sasha about described how she would feel, if she had to potentially move abroad with her Greek husband after living in Prague for 12 years.

*Like I, we have, really nice friends, colleagues. It will be very sad. It is rather about just people. Like in general I'm not attached to places. I'm very much attached to people, but not to places. [...]*

*Sasha, personal communication, 15.07.2021*

Scholars who have focused on studying how, have shown that often for transnational migrants, the concept of home is synonymous with identity (Wiles, 2008: 123). Sasha' quote demonstrates how meaningful places are created through interactions with others (Stokowski, 2002: 372). For her, home does not need to be a physical place, but is rather to do with the people and sense of community she has built around her, making her feel at home.

The previous section has looked at how expat women create their sense of "home" abroad through socialization, whereby the feeling of "home" is conceptualised through having friends and connections. This also ties in to the first section of this chapter, in that it is important for expat women to create their own social circles when moving abroad. Kiera's example below however demonstrates that even though she often feels at home in the Czech Republic, there are specific times in which she feels like a foreigner, especially when having to deal with bureaucratic institutions.

*For me, I've definitely always been a person, like, home is, it's so cliché, but like, home, it's definitely like, the people that are around, like the feeling that you get, and umm, I, almost every place that I've lived, maybe with the exception of like, some of my time in DC, it's always felt very like, homey. Like the people that I've ended up surrounding myself with are like, really great, and comfortable. Prague is really interesting, because in some ways, I'm like, sometimes I feel so foreign, especially like, there was a period when we were going to the immigration office a lot and like doing all these things and I told my husband, I was like, I kind of feel like,*

*I'm watching my life happen in front of me because I can't always communicate. Like there's all these things like that you have to do for me. And I feel like I'm just like watching my life happen. And I'm just kind of like sitting back and I guess whatever happens, happens. (V: It's not the nicest feeling I guess?) No. I mean, thankfully, like, he's a very good partner. So, it's, it's fine. And that period has slowed down [...] But then I go, like, more out of Prague, like where his parents live. And it's like, we can go play tennis, we can go like trail riding. Like we're with the dogs. We're like, you know, and it's just a little bit slower. And it feels very, like... it feels very homey.*

*Kiera, personal communication, , 04.05.2022*

Kiera's description turns back to the perceptions of the Czech Republic discussed in Chapter 4, especially regarding language and working with bureaucratic institutions. In her case, having a Czech husband means that she has someone close who can help her, but it leaves her feeling without any control over the situation. Despite the Czech Republic therefore feeling like a home, for example when spending time with her husband's family, certain situations make her feel that she is not a foreigner. Furthermore, Kiera uses an interesting term "homey". This suggests not quite being at home but having the sense of it being like a home. A place that is comfortable. She alludes this to the point mentioned in the previous section, where this homey feeling is created through socialization. In another example, Monika noted that she has truly become settled into the city once she learnt her way around Prague, making her feel at home.

*[V: What makes it your home?] I don't know I think it's like everything... Like friends, work, the city itself because it's really beautiful in my opinion and there's so many places that, that are just amazing here and you have so many cinemas like the small cinema's, and parks. Yeah, like it's just everything I guess I feel here really like at home. Maybe it's the job and the freedom, independence that my family is far they cannot comment on anything. Even if they wanted, they are very far. I guess it's like really everything together.*

*Monika, personal communication, 15.03.2022*

It is therefore not one, single element that creates the feeling of home, but rather several factors that are brought together to create this feeling of being at home. Butcher (2010) notes that creating a second "home" can become an expression of a sense of self, in which relocating can allow an expat to embrace new opportunities (34). This ties into Monika's feeling

“freedom” and “independence” by being away from home, whereby she can create her own place. Furthermore, in Monika’s example, the combination of having one’s own friends, own job, knowing the city, and feeling a certain independence from her original home, creates a feeling of it being a “decentred attachment” (Vertovec, 1999: 450). Monika depicts how her identity, and her feeling of home, is linked to several places, in that she juxtaposes her feelings of living in Prague, to the feelings she had living back in her home county. As such, expats “...maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Schiller et al., 1992: 11). A similar sense of a “decentred attachment” was shared by Helen in our interview.

*[V: How do you define home?] I think it's changed. The years before, like I used to just feel like home was absolutely England. And it was, you know, where I'm from, I actually still when I say I want to go home or I'm, you know, I am actually talking about my parents' house, even though I'm 32. So, and I haven't lived there since I was 18. But for me that is still, it does still feel like home because it's like where I feel safe and secure and a lot of my stuff is still there because I've been traveling so much like. But on the other hand, I think home is sort of where I am right now and like where the people that I want to be around are. I guess. So yeah, it's a bit different, but it's weird. I think it is strange that I still feel like home is in my parents house in England, even though obviously it's not like it has here and it hasn't been for a long time and I think that's probably because I don't have any like real roots anywhere else*

*Helen, personal communication, 09.03.2023*

This quote further demonstrates the decentred attachment an expat can have. Helen, having lived in many places including South Korea, New Zealand, and the Czech Republic, demonstrates that throughout her moving, she still considers her “home” to be at her parents place, for its safety and security, but also, as a result of her moving around, the fact she didn’t have any real roots. She thus still feels that home is where her parents are, and presents a side of her identity, whilst having a partner and living in the Czech Republic also acts as a type of home.

The examples above show how the concept of home is constructed. On the one hand it is about being able to get around the city, therefore the more material, geographical locations within Prague. The other has to do with the social element, and the creation of a home through

making friends. In this way, home is not necessarily only a physical place, though this is an important element to understanding home as well. Furthermore, this section highlighted how the notion of home differs for expats, due to their conception of home being, perhaps, in several places at once.

Place-making and home are therefore two terms that are closely interlinked (Butcher, 2010: 25-26). A space, that has become a place, can then become a home “...if the landscape and built environment within which it is embedded is considered “sufficient and friendly”, or comfortable, as opposed to a context that generates uncertainty and threat” (Butcher, 2010: 25). Expat women, who move and have lived abroad, can struggle to define what “home” means to them, as was seen in the Facebook group post. The idea of a home should therefore be understood not as a closed, fixed space, but rather as an open space, which can change and adapt, especially for a migrant group like expats (Nowicka, 2007: 73). Therefore, the need for a community and the creation of “home” therefore contribute to the concept of place-making for expat women in Prague.



## 6. Conclusion

This main research question this research project was looking to answer was how expat women, living in Prague, use and construct spaces and places of socialization in Prague. The sub-questions then addressed more specifically the process of place-making, the use of online/offline and public/private spaces, and overall how these place-making strategies help overcome being an expat woman in a foreign country. The ethnographic data presented in this work thus indicate the complexity of place-making for expat women living in Prague.

The need for separate spaces was explored in Chapter 4, with the discussion of the existence of the metaphorical “wall of Czechness” that expat women perceive to exist between themselves and locals living in Prague. Specifically, the factors of language and perceived interactions with local Czechs are factors which affect these feelings. As an important point, I would like to emphasize that not to say all interactions are perceived to be negative, as highlighted at the beginning of the chapter. However, the perception of there being a degree of separation between expats and their local counterparts thus creates a feeling of there being a “them” versus “us”, leading to the feeling of expats being in a liminal space (Turner, 1969). It thus demonstrates why expat women search, and create, their own ways of making friends and creating communities when living abroad. Furthermore, the hand-drawn maps of the respondents demonstrated how the women interact with the city, finding that there is no strict “expat only” space, but rather, women interact with spaces all over the city. I argue that the perceptions of living in Prague matter, because one’s views and perceptions of a place results in how one interacts with the space around them (Piekut, 2013: 123). The notion of there being a metaphorical wall between expats and locals means that expat women find other ways in which to build communities that are primarily created with other foreigners living in the city.

Chapter 5 found that the concept of an “embedded encounters” (Conradson&Latham, 2007) allow for place-making to take place. This was demonstrated in both the Girl Gone International group, as well as the Expat Women in Prague group. Whilst on the one hand, the socialization of women in the GGI group is initiated online, and leads to face-to-face meetings, the Expat Women in Prague group has these encounters solely on an online platform. I argue that studying place-making facilitated through online platforms is important to take into consideration when studying a hyper-mobile group such as expats, as given their temporality in a given city, or country, these platforms prove important to facilitating connections, and thus

building communities. These communities, as explored in this paper, can be viewed both as “imagined” (Anderson, 1989), as they are created on common identity markers (in this case being a woman, expat, living in Prague). At the same time, these can be also considered “peg” communities (Baumann, 2001), such as in the overarching GGI group, as the meetings are fleeting, but with a specific purpose. Furthermore, with the groups being created directly for women, the added feeling of it being a safe space, as well as a private, online space, add to the complexity of how the place is constructed. However, if the feeling of safety within a city is not there, this can make it difficult to create a sense of place and can lead to one moving back to their home country, as demonstrated by Stasia’s experience. Tied to this concept of place-belonging was also the creation of “home away from home”, where I found that whilst in a few cases home was seen as a physical place, more often it was viewed as a socially constructed place, whereby the feeling of home was created through social ties in a given city. In this way, it also demonstrated the concept of “decentred attachment”, whereby expats, as a migrant group, have dual (or multiple) identities between several countries. This is an important point to make when studying expat place-making processes, as their temporality in a given country means that the feeling of home is having to be constantly reconstructed in every new country.

The focus throughout this work was on the experiences of single, expat women. Studying different types of expats, perhaps students or expats with Czech spouses, might find different results. This chapter however emphasized why women need to create their own spaces in a foreign city. In the introduction, it was stated that often when studying expat women, most academic literature has focused on expat women as “trailing spouses” (Leonard, 2016), “migration tails” (Coles&Fechter, 2008) or “secondary migrants” (Yeah&Willis, 2005). This work has shown, however, that in our modern-day world, this is not necessarily the case. None of the women had moved here following a husband / partner. This paper would therefore suggest that more research needs to be conducted with expat women who move on their own account, and how the use of spaces and place-making help them in adapting to a new city.

This work addressed one way in which expats can be studied, namely through the lens of independent women, who work and live in Prague for several years, and who are not dependent on a husband / family for their relocation. However, defining the term “expats” in the theoretical chapter shed some light onto the complexity of using the term. Even as a theoretical tool, it creates a distinction within a migrant group, suggesting that expats are in some way more privileged, well-educated and most likely white (Leonard, 2016;

Fechter&Walsh, 2012; Polson, 2015; Kunz, 2020). Not only is this complexity represented in academia, but it is also something that the respondents themselves noted in the interviews. Despite this, many of the Facebook groups are still labelled “expats”, and this thus raises the question of how the term should be used and applied. As a result, I argue that more research is needed around expats, perhaps in countries where expats have not yet been studied. There are several ways in which this could be done, such as by following a certain group of expats (for example, English teachers, job-based, international students). However, this could be taken further by studying expats from one nationality, or perhaps based on temporality, namely studying or conducting interviews with expats who have lived in the host country for only a certain amount of years. This of course means that not only women should be the focus, but also focusing on men’s experiences, or mixed-group experiences, might add to the complexities of how they create place-making in the host country. There are many different approaches academics can take in studying this particular migrant group in more detail, and thus this work aimed to contribute to the existing literature by focusing primarily on the experiences of expat women living in Prague, Czech Republic.

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