

Investigating international student transition to Higher Education using Rich Pictures

Background and Context

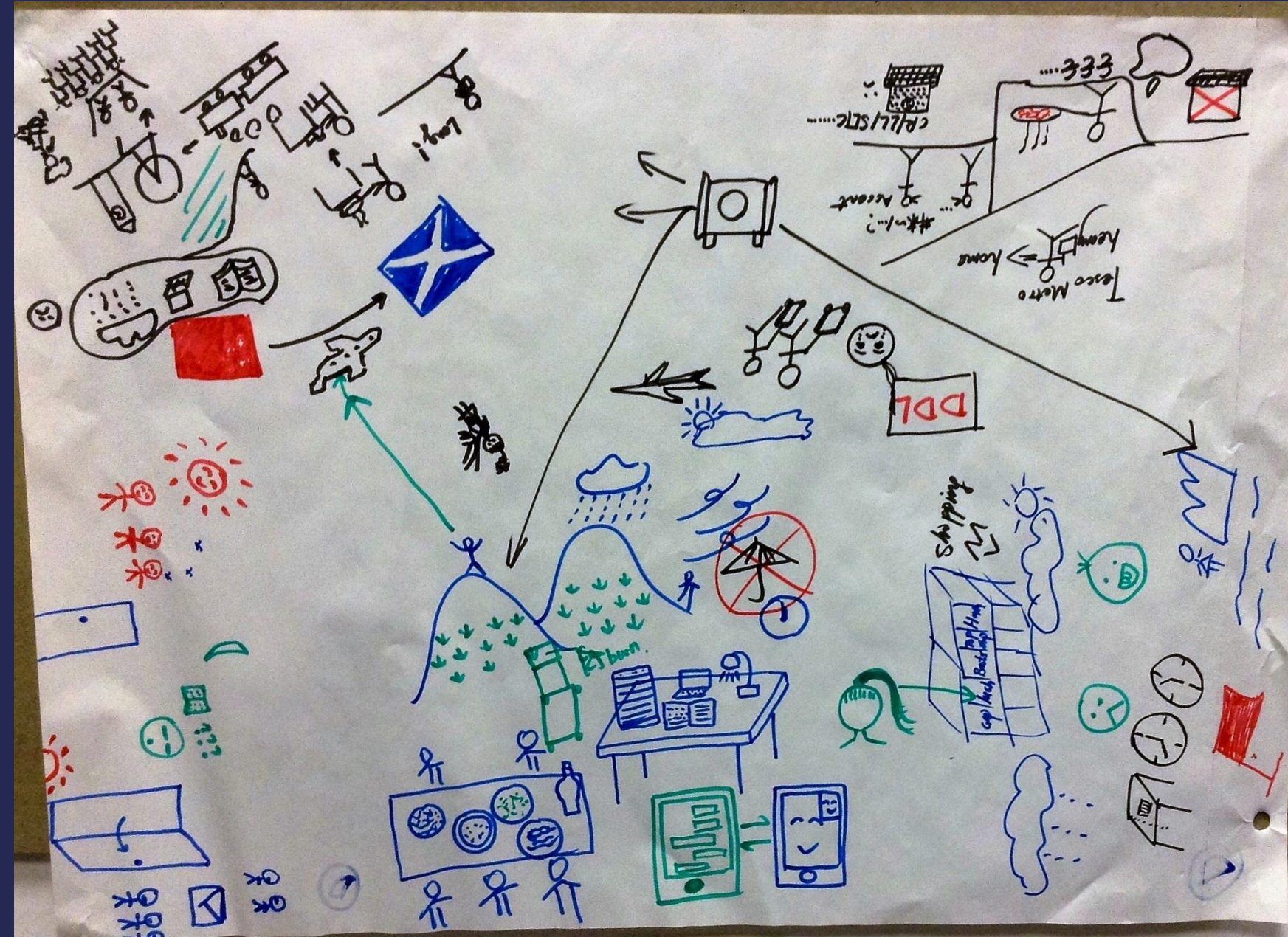
On arrival at a new campus in new country, international students are at a crucial stage in their academic careers, transitioning from study or work in their home countries to study in an unfamiliar environment in a different country. The transition time can be relatively smooth and uncomplicated but for many it can be stressful and difficult.

Our research involved using collaborative group work techniques to gather information with focus groups discussions. A collaborative drawing technique known as a rich picture (RP) was employed in order to gather insight into transition because visuals have the vast capacity to communicate irrespective of possible language, culture and education barriers. The RP is a familiar tool used in information systems (Bell, Berg & Morse, 2016) to gather understanding about human activity for system design to assist the exploration of different worldviews within a complex situation.

Seventy-one students at three different universities in Scotland took part in this research. A student-led analysis of 16 RPs provided a nuanced understanding of social, cultural, economic and academic issues that are of concern to many international students. This analysis sought to identify areas that could be further investigated in order to improve the international student experience.

References

Bell, S., Berg, T., & Morse, S. (2016). *Rich pictures: encouraging resilient communities*. Routledge.



An example of a rich picture, created by five international students

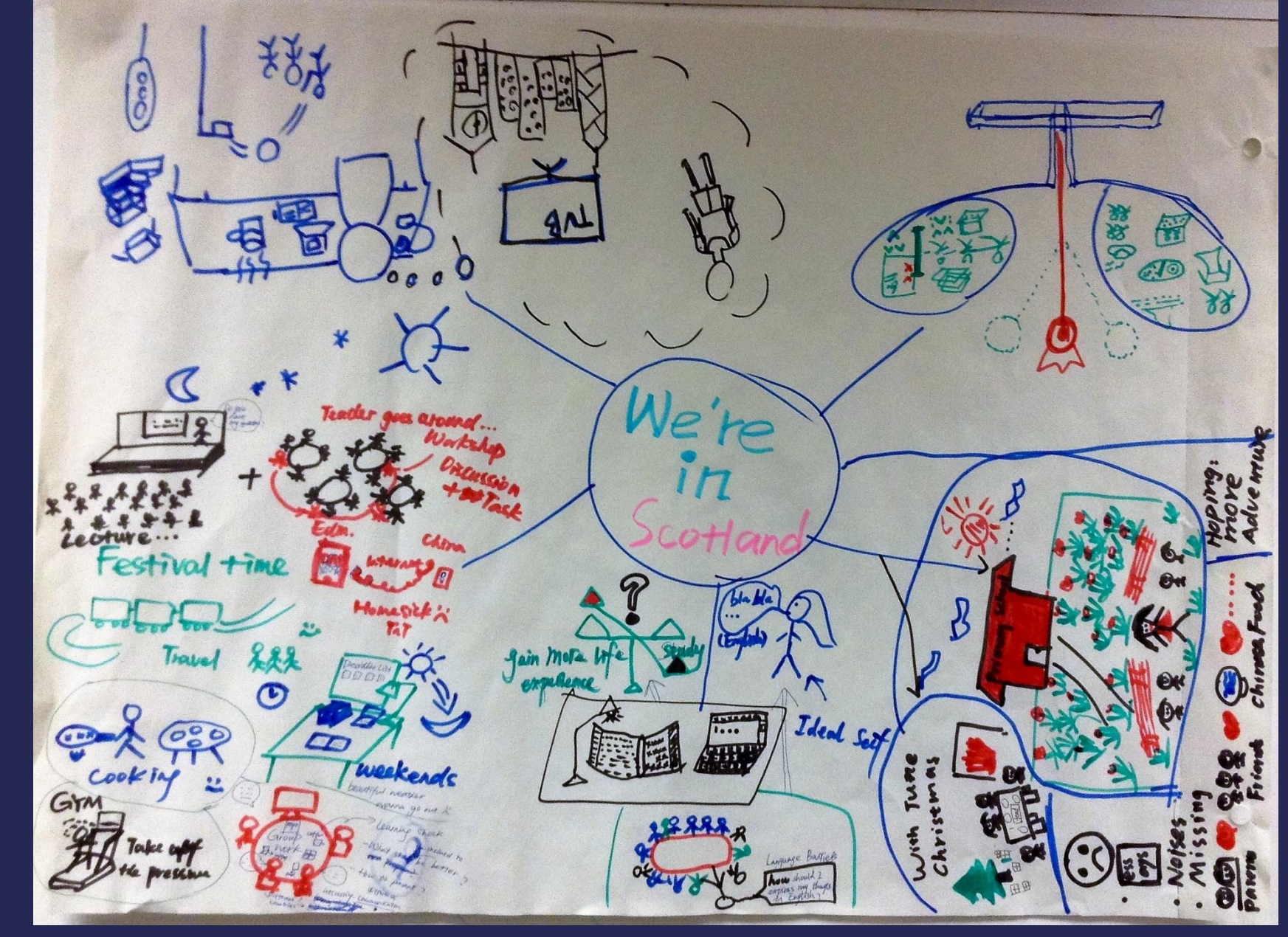
No rules for drawing

- Cabaret style tables with participants in groups of three to five
- Coloured pens
- Large flipchart paper
- No artistic ability required
- Instructions: 'Tell us all about your experiences on your course of study and what it is like being an international student in Scotland'



An example of a coded rich picture:

Red tag = social
Blue tag = academic
Yellow tag = cultural
Green tag = economic



An example of a rich picture, created by five international students

Content Analysis

- We employed five Computer Science students to work as analysts on this project.
- The performed 'crowd inquiry' content analysis based upon the rich pictures and audio-tape recording.
- Every picture was scrutinized and every icon was coded. The transcripts, if possible, were coded to match each icon.
- They categorised each icon into four separate themes (social, cultural, academic and economic) and noted if the image was positive, negative or neutral.
- If there were any parts of the picture that were not described through the transcription, the students made assumptions based on the iconography. These assumptions were documented separately.

Results



Repetition of common themes:

Here are a few examples:

- WEATHER: usually negative in correlation and occurred in 9 out of the 16 RPs.



Repetition of common themes (2):

- SIGHTSEEING: visiting popular landmarks in Scotland and the UK.



Repetition of common themes (3):

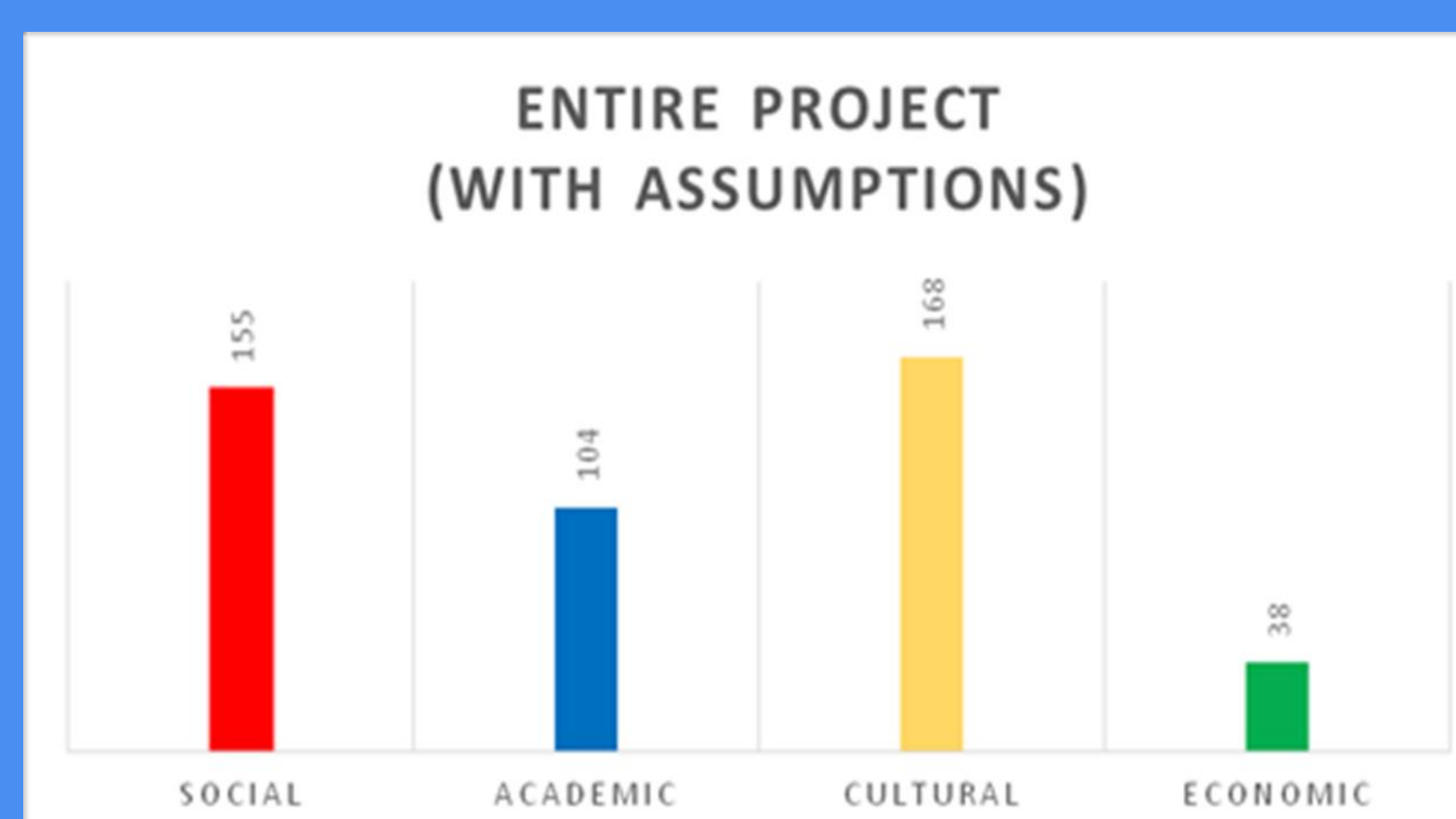
Others included:

- Missing People
- Nature
- Travelling
- Haggis
- Studying / High Workload
- Shopping
- Cooking / Food
- Loneliness
- Accents / Language Barriers
- Socialising with Friends
- Daily living expenses
- Study-life balance
- Exercising

Individual Workshop Core Themes:



Combined Core Themes:



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