

# Transnational Experiences of Food Cultures in Laos and Germany: A Possible Approach for Nutrition and Consumer Education

Master's Thesis  
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## 1. Introduction

Food and drink is basis of all human life. However, the academic study of it has only flourished in recent decades and found wider professional acclaim. In a rapidly changing and globalized world the academic advancement of food studies has become more important than ever, as it helps to support and further our understanding of food studies and its myriad of disciplines.

The focus of this paper is the transnational experiences of food cultures as well as the communication of food cultures, specifically in the Lao-German context, and how they can be used to give further insight into nutrition and consumer education. This paper therefore poses the research question how students present their everyday eating habits in video form and which elements of their eating culture they address in virtual exchanges. This is executed with a focus on the understanding of food culture by Barlösius and the observance of methods of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Specifically, the goal of this master thesis is to examine, based on the background of social studies of food studies and the definition of food culture by Barlösius, the study of how teacher students<sup>1</sup> from the Federal Republic of Germany<sup>2</sup> and the Lao People's Democratic Republic<sup>3</sup> present their everyday eating habits in video form. The focus will be on the elements of food culture that were used for explanation and which topics of food culture the students communicate under the criterion of verbal and non-verbal communication e.g. visual and auditory. The problem statement arises from the academic socio-cultural exchange between students in relation to food cultures as well as the understanding of individual food management in everyday life and how research can be used to shape this exchange and understanding in a positive way and to use knowledge for social and educational purposes. This is subject to the question of how the students want to present their video and what they want to communicate with it, directly and indirectly, or what social identity they want to represent. In particular, the differences and similarities between the two student groups are of focus. The conclusion on the video analysis of the students should also provide information or contribute to the insight into the

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<sup>1</sup> This term refers to both genders; Only gender-neutral terms are used throughout the paper which correlate to German or Lao terms that tend to specify both genders

<sup>2</sup> For convenience from now on referred to as Germany

<sup>3</sup> For convenience from now on referred to as Laos

communication of student experiences in everyday eating or eating culture and their social background in relation to educational experiences in nutrition and consumer education. Furthermore, conclusions can be drawn for the design of digital and intercultural exchange.

To answer the research question, a literature research was carried out, which serves as the basis for the knowledge about the social sciences in food studies, in particular food culture, food communication and intercultural competence. Building on this, a qualitative analysis was carried out of self-produced videos produced by Laotian and German teacher students, who were part of a digital exchange between *Technische Universität Berlin* in Germany and *Savannakhet University* in Laos, to see how students reflect their own everyday food habits and how they communicate food culture through the medium of video.

Therefore, the paper has been structured into two parts, a theoretical and empirical portion. In the theoretical part, a short excursion into the Lao-German relationship specifically in higher education is given to develop understanding of the academic background of these two countries. Then the role of food studies and social sciences in a continuously globalized world and particularly in the Lao-German context will be examined. Following this, the position of nutrition and consumer education, the academic discourse of food communication, the concept of sustainability and its growing importance as well as the influence of intercultural competence will be looked at. In the last part, the academic definition of food culture by Barlösius and how Lao and German food culture can be defined will be explored. This academic research will pose the base for the empirical understanding later. In the second part of the thesis, the empirical study will be introduced with its research methodology. The execution of the study will be documented, and evaluation and research results presented. Furthermore, a discussion about the empirical research with a discursive examination of the results and a methodological reflection will be made. Finally, in the conclusion the summarization of the paper and an outlook into future research is given.

The research in this field will give insight not just for Germany and Laos but on a global scale for the academic field of food studies and in the teaching field of food and consumer education. This paper elaborates the issue in English to reach a vast audience and give due to English as *lingua franca* and its use in international exchange.

## 2. Lao-German Relations to Food Studies and Food Culture in a Globalized World

The theoretical basis for the paper will be conducted through literature research. First, an introduction of Lao-German relationships with a focus on higher education is made, to establish a background for further research. Following this, the definition of what food studies are, especially in the context of social sciences, and where the Lao-German position can be situated, particularly on issues such as nutrition and consumer education, food communication, sustainability and intercultural competence will be of focus. Following this, the academic definition of food culture is researched using Barlösius *Soziologie des Essens* (Eng.: sociology of food), and Lao and German food culture conceptualized.

Various research in the field of food studies has been conducted, especially in the field of food culture and social sciences. However, the current state of research still has plenty of opportunity for research specifically in the context of globalization and intercultural exchange which bring with it new phenomena. Germany and other Western countries have conducted extensive research on food studies in relation to social sciences. This Western-centric research has however, only taken small steps in the study of non-Western food studies. On the other hand, Laos historically put great emphasis on oral tradition or lore. Lao academic writing developed later in the country's history. This can be one explanation, coupled with the countries historical background, why on the Lao side there is almost no to few research available in the field of food studies in relation to social science. The current focus of Lao researchers is in scientific and not social research as it benefits them more directly e.g. in the field of agriculture and food security. This is an additional factor why empirical qualitative study in this field can be of interest in the Lao-German context.

### 2.1. Lao-German Relationship in the Educational Context

In this excursion the relationship formation of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Lao People's Democratic Republic's will be looked at to give greater insight into the basis of this paper. The official relationship of Germany and Laos is a rather young one that traces back to 1958 with the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries (Federal Foreign Office, 2020). Of course, even before this establishment of diplomatic ties contact between the countries existed but was

insignificant in the greater scope. One reason for the late development of political relations might be the geographical distance, with Laos being situated in Southeast Asia and Germany in Western-Central Europe, as well as the non-existent need for trade or other exchange between the two countries before major globalization. Laos is a socialist state since 1975, while Germany is a democratic republic since its official reunification of East and West Germany in 1990. While West Germany suspended bilateral development cooperation with Laos until 1990, socialist East Germany formed close relations with the communist country (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). Student exchanges became established between the two – now in current Laos many higher-educated men and women might speak German, as they have been trained and educated in East Germany. “Many of whom continue to cultivate the German language and culture within the framework of the German-Lao Friendship Society” (Federal Foreign Office, 2020). The relations did not falter after Germany's reunification and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany reports continuous development cooperation, bilateral trade and scholarships that keep Lao-German relations prospering (Federal Foreign Office, 2020).

As established beforehand, many scholarships have enabled Lao students to study and learn in Germany. Likewise, the development of scholarships and intercultural exchange programmes for German students have begun to unfold as well. The focus of most exchange programs and scholarships between Laos and Germany such as ones from the DAAD lie in higher education and industry fields like engineering or agriculture (German Academic Exchange Service, 2020). However, in the field of education and food studies first contacts and programs have been established as well. Programs like Erasmus+ established by the European Union foster exchange programs between the two countries with some focusing on issues of nutrition and public health in combination with the fields of agriculture and medicine (Wagenfeld, 2016). However, while Germany has not engaged to a significant degree with Laos in the field of food studies, specifically in cooperation with other countries, some Lao institutions of higher education, like the National University of Laos (NUOL) or the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH), have contributed to the field of research on food studies particularly in the field of agriculture, social studies and tourism. In conclusion, social aspects of food studies are not of focus in Lao-German exchange yet. Honourable mention in

the field of education would be the University of Education Karlsruhe and the project *Bi-directional Tandem-Teaching and Learning in Laos*<sup>4</sup> established by Prof. Dr. Isabel Martin. The program aims to support and improve teacher education in Laos and develop transcultural competencies in German students (Weinmann, Neilsen, & Martin, 2020). As well as the Technische Universität Berlin in Germany and Savannakhet University in Laos which established one of the first educational exchanges between teacher students with a focus on social sciences and food culture in a digital class<sup>5</sup>. The continuation of such programs aimed at educational and social aspects of food studies will foster greater opportunity for research as well as the enablement of intercultural development in teacher students on a personal and societal level.

Weinmann et al. point out that in the field of education it is of importance to prepare teachers for their role as “global educators” (Weinmann et al., 2020). Teachers aid in student’s development of intercultural skills and prepare them for their position in a globalized world. Programs of international exchange can support teacher students in their development of skills to later on support students adequately. The promotion of programs specifically in the sector of teacher education as well as for students themselves can be seen as vital tool in advancing intercultural awareness and skills for future generations. “Global mobility programs are embedded within discourses of postcolonialism. [...] The enterprise of teaching and learning as a cornerstone of social transformation is central to these discussions.” (Weinmann et al., 2020). When teachers are sufficiently prepared to observe their worlds critically, they are in a better position to support their students and to teach their students to advocate for themselves (Motha, 2014). While there are limitations and the process of self-reflection can be difficult to individuals as it leaves them vulnerable, the theme of making *sense* – of the unfamiliar, the overall experience and the sense of self – can tremendously support such developments (Weinmann et al., 2020). This paper aims to contribute to future discussion and research in the field. Therefore, a look at food studies and its connection to social sciences in an increasingly globalized world will be of focus in the next part, to lay the basis of the research field.

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<sup>4</sup> The author of this thesis has taken part in this project and was able to develop interest and research opportunity for the thesis through the project

<sup>5</sup> The data for this research paper was generated through this virtual exchange

## 2.2. Food Studies and Social Sciences in a Globalized World

Humans have consumed food and drink daily in a variety of different settings for all their existence. Yet the interest in food studies as an academic field has only flourished in recent decades. Maybe the mundanity of the daily practice of food preparation and consumption has made the field unattractive for serious academic thought. This is despite the immense importance food and drink hold for us. The food choices an individual makes can have influence on personal health, the environment, social situations and so on. On a bigger societal level food can influence beliefs and cultures, technology, economy and many more factors and vice versa. In turn food studies can be separated into many different disciplines. Interdisciplinary food studies, for example, might concern food in relation to race, law, popular culture, and economy. However, the discipline that poses as one of the most important aspects of this vast academic field is social sciences and humanities because “sociologists study groups and food is produced, processed and consumed by groups” (McIntosh, 2014). Food is therefore not only a biological function, but it has been established that humans greatly influence the social aspects of food. Therefore, the focus of this paper lies in the social science of food studies and how eating and drinking can be understood in the social human context.

As has been established, food studies are closely linked to anthropology. Dirks and Hunter list in their understanding of eating and drinking as social and cultural experiences various major topics such as: “foodways of particular peoples and regions; the dynamics of various food systems; the cultural effects of ancient foodways; the ethnohistory of specific commodities; food-habit formation and change; the sociocultural effects of food-shortage; food-related beliefs, rituals and symbols; eating habits and etiquettes; and systems of food classification and meal structure” (Dirks & Hunter, 2014). The sociology of culture consists of a variety of concepts. One of them is based in the understanding of cultural capital. This cultural capital represents the environmental constraints as well as the cultural abilities by which people behave and distinguish themselves from others (McIntosh, 2014). Consumption and in particular food is one of the cultural capitals by which we create constraints and abilities. Ultimately, how we cook and eat in the social settings surrounding us and the issues that come with it pose as the key questions of social



sciences in food studies. This paper therefore examines the issue in the framework of social and cultural experiences.

Ultimately, what differentiates human foodways from animals is not the variety in food they consume but in the ability to determine eating styles for themselves, in other words to culturally select and evaluate (Barlösius, 2016). It can be concluded that eating is a social action that has been constructed through humans and follows social rules. This ties food closely to sociology. On the other hand, nature, so the necessary nutritional intake and biological aspect of food carry equal importance in food studies. The symbiose of nature and sociology is the basis for understanding food studies and its societal aspects.

Another important factor in the field of social science and food studies is globalization. Globalization can be defined as the increased interconnectedness and interdependence of peoples and countries, according to the WHO (World Health Organization, 2020). Conclusively, through the rise of globalization, starting in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a change in the way humans understand, buy, prepare, and consume food was also facilitated. Of course, even before globalization migration transformed foodways and re-shaped food culture. However, with globalization the shift in human perception of food was transformed within a considerably short timeframe and with drastic changes. This shifted the focus from a local or regional approach to a globalized understanding of food and everything it entails. The shift led for example to increased interest in foreign restaurants and ingredients. Food trends and food tourism as some new phenomena of such an interconnected world emerged. With globalization and industrialization new innovations and social developments shaped food culture. Schmauderer points out that the industrialization of food production broke with the tradition of private home economics and crafts (Schmauderer, 1974). New technology might make steps in the harvesting and preparation of food easier but can on the other hand lead to a decrease in personal skills. Barlösius criticizes the rise of convenience food, the decrease in food quality and dependence on economy as partially negative developments of food culture in relation to globalization (Barlösius, 2016). Fischler points out that consumers have been put in a very conflicting role with the seemingly endless amount of choices they face and disquieted with modern food as it is without “origin or history [...] without identity” (Fischler, 1988). Especially in developed countries learning to deal with such conflicts becomes of importance. It can be said

that the role of globalization in contemporary food reconfigurations is a substantial one and has played a considerable part in setting up both new ethnic and universal food codes.

“The discussion points out a dual questioning: today, with the transformations of our foodways and the importance taken by new actors within the food chains, it has become necessary to wonder what eating means, but also how these new social configurations can be studied. While food never stops becoming more complex and geographical scales being intertwined, the established disciplinary divisions are giving way to a more reflexive and global approach” (Fumey, Jackson, & Raffard, 2016). How such a complex field can be taught through education will be of attention in the next section.

### 2.2.1. Nutrition and Consumer Education

Nutrition and consumer education describes an academic subject that focuses on basic competencies in the area of food and nutrition (nutrition literacy and health promotion) and dealing with resources and consumption (consumer citizenship) as they are becoming more and more urgent in an increasingly globalized world (REVIS, 2005). Food studies can be taught from the viewpoint of many disciplines. The first documentation of food studies as a subject itself has been around since the ancient Greeks with their musings on diet and well-being (Black, 2014). But the academic rise of food studies started in the early nineteenth century with the publishing of Brillat-Savarin's 'The Physiology of Taste' which focused on a holistic approach to food studies, where food comes from, how it is prepared, consumed and disposed of (Black, 2014). This sets food studies apart from the focus on nutrition and biology. “Nutrition education is application-oriented with a few exceptions such as basic physiological knowledge, whereby the goals and directions of improvement differ even sometimes partially exclude each other. [...] Behind each approach to nutrition education is a certain idea of individual and societal well-being - a model of society” (Barlösius, 2016). It is therefore important to not forget the social aspect of food studies and include it in the educational field. The rising need for consumer and nutrition education came with practical problems of food and health (Black, 2014). With the increase in industrialization and later on globalization developed Western countries started developing new food

consumption patterns and health problems in these countries shifted from undernourishment to those related to overeating (Black, 2014). Food policies aimed at educating citizens on the 'right' diet stemmed from the efforts of nutritional scientists. Through their effort in food studies food safety rules and standards of production were achieved as well. However, social sciences continued to play an important role as they helped to support food and nutrition education and aid people that may have understood rules but had difficulty putting them into action. Likewise, in education, nutritional science alongside cookery classes and ultimately the establishment of schools for home economics, targeted mostly at females, became the norm (Mennell, van Otterloo, & Murcott, 1992). These establishments were first to integrate nutrition and consumer education into a structured curriculum – albeit with the major target of educating future homemakers and servants (Mennell et al., 1992). This is reflected in modern society, as contemporarily women still are responsible for most tasks related to home management and food (Mennell et al., 1992).

Since then one mainstream of scholarly activity which has established itself in relation to food studies is nutrition and consumer education. Just as food studies exist in various shapes and forms in the academic field there are many fields of study in the educational field. Especially in higher education studies of the field can be found. Recently, in the lower school level various forms of education on nutrition and consumer education can also be found. Skills in the field are considered more necessary than ever, at the same time, however, these skills are less and less taught in families and schools and less and less future-oriented (REVIS, 2005).

In Germany for example the federal ministry of food and agriculture, formerly also responsible for consumer protection, supported the development and restructuring of nutrition and consumer education in German schools by REVIS (Ger.: Reform der Ernährungs- und Verbraucherbildung in allgemein bildenden Schulen). Goals of REVIS include the correct preparation of food, the nutritional value of food, management of resources, reflection on consumption and sustainability. It is implemented in subjects pertaining to the issue depending on the federal state regulations. In Baden-Württemberg for example the subject is called *Everyday Life, Nutrition and Social Issues*<sup>6</sup>. Here it is only taught in secondary education,

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<sup>6</sup> In German: *Alltag, Ernährung, Soziales*, short AES

specifically not upper secondary level, as an elective subject from grade 7 to 10. Related topics might be included in class throughout elementary school or in the form of projects, but a formal curriculum is only available for this level. One major part of *Everyday Life, Nutrition and Social Issues* is nutrition and consumer education, and importance is put on the symbiosis of scientific and social aspects. Apart from lower school levels, food education in the tertiary level is also available. It can be determined that nutrition and consumer education is part of the German curriculum though not for all levels and continuous efforts are made to ascertain the importance of the subject in the educational field. Outside of education, the stance of the German government is to give incentives to consumers in making individual and informed choices through education and information but not directly interfere through specific consumer laws (Brunner, 2011).

In Laos there is no formal subject of curriculum in Elementary or Secondary school that focuses on the topic of nutrition and consumer education. In tertiary education such education is available usually with a strong focus in agriculture or tourism. Skills in nutrition are predominantly taught within families and communities. Regarding nutrition and consumer education it is the stance of the Lao government to prioritize food security especially for rural areas and continue to expand economic resources. Mennell et al. point out that “food policies in the less privileged parts of the globe, often initiated by the FAO and WHO [...] aim, the improvement of diet, is pursued for instance by the initiation of nutrition programmes or by the introduction of new crops, to raise the income position of the small farmers” (Mennell et al., 1992). Such programs support local communities but usually do not focus on school education besides establishing measurements for food security.

This showcases the importance of nutrition and consumer education in a developed country in contrast to a developing country. Nutrition and consumer education is viewed as important in developed countries to educate especially younger citizens on their role as consumers in a highly industrialized world. For developing countries, the establishment and securing of food security takes priority above all else. However, nutrition and consumer education can still be valuable to them as they educate on safe preparation of food, nutritional education, and efficient management of resources. The establishment of educational frames in nutrition and consumer education would be supportive of developing food security. Another prospect that would support such educational measurements could be exchange

with different countries e.g. implementing and exchanging tools and cooperation. With quickly developing technological opportunities transnational mobility can support the establishment of nutrition and consumer education. Limitations especially in developing countries exist e.g. inadequate technical support or insufficient language skills. However, this can be partially overcome with funding and the sharing of resources. To adequately teach students about nutrition and consumerism, activities must be relevant to them and the items they consume (Bartsch & Methfessel, 2016). It should be intrinsic and motivational. One very important part of nutrition and consumer education is sustainability. A growing number of young people are interested in this subject and participate in activities to support a sustainable future. Therefore, the next part will look at the role of sustainability, particularly in the field of food studies.

### 2.2.2. Sustainability

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). A continuously growing issue as part of nutrition and consumer education is sustainability. Sustainability topics that relate to nutrition and consumer education range from the production of food to discarding it. With the globalization of the markets, additional options for individual action arise (Bartsch & Methfessel, 2016). The previous depredation of the earth's resources, often combined with the exploitation of people (usually in or from poorer countries), ultimately endangers everyone's livelihood (Bartsch & Methfessel, 2016). Education on sustainable development, nutrition and consumership is therefore becoming increasingly important. Ploeger et al. point out that, the global problems of future food supply, resulting from the industrial depletion of natural resources, make it necessary to take ethical aspects into account, especially since one can hardly avoid the gloomy reports on the nutritional problems of the advancing 21st century (Ploeger, Hirschfelder, & Schönberger, 2011).

Bartsch and Methfessel point out that nutritional education should not intensify possible feelings of powerlessness, but rather work with young people in an understandable, meaningful and action-oriented way by transmitting sufficient

knowledge of the need for a sustainable development and giving knowledge of possible alternative courses of action (Bartsch & Methfessel, 2016). A possible model of sustainable nutrition was designed by Koerber et al. They point out that sustainable nutrition, in the current international discussion, means considering the current and future global consequences of actions in terms of the following five dimensions: ecological dimension, economic dimension, social dimension, health dimension and cultural dimension (Koerber, Männle, & Leitzmann, 2012). Through the conscious inclusion of all these dimensions into education and everyday action a sustainable mindset can be fostered.

The German government has taken action by including Education for Sustainable Development (Ger.: Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung (BNE)) into the formal curriculum. They point out that humans have different material and immaterial resources. In everyday life, decisions are continuously made that have an impact on the human-human relationship and the human-environment relationship (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport, 2016). By dealing with selected and life-world-related issues, these relationships are reflected and thus responsible everyday behaviour is promoted (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport, 2016). This can also be implemented in nutrition and consumer education. Outside of the educational context, the German government has devised a National Sustainable Development Strategy aligned with the UN's 17 sustainable development goals, to further push for sustainable development in Germany (The Federal Government, 2016). However, as a highly developed country Germany still receives criticism for taking precedence of industrial and economic advancement over sustainability. The negative influence of a highly industrialized country on issues of sustainability remains high.

The Lao stance on sustainability particularly in relation to food studies takes a different approach. Laos, as a developing country<sup>7</sup>, focuses its political efforts into food security and economic development in the agricultural field rather than education on sustainable consumership. There is no formal curriculum on the topic of sustainability for the educational context except for higher education. The improvement of curriculum development, access to school material and improvement of teacher education take focus in the Lao education reform though

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<sup>7</sup> Lao PDR is recognized as an LDC – Least Developed Country – by the United Nations

they do acknowledge the Millennium Development Goals which include the assurance of environmental sustainability (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015). Laos however actively participates in the UN's sustainable development goals and has added SDG18, 'Lives Safe from UXO' (unexploded ordnance), into their goals as well (United Nations, 2020). The UN also reports that 42.44% of resources have been allocated to the goal 'Zero Hunger' with a focus to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (United Nations, 2020). The need for education on sustainability is currently not given in Laos as countrywide food stability as well as access to nutritional diet need to be available first before further development in the educational field is possible. Lao diet itself can be considered sustainable as local, seasonal and often times self-cultivated products take priority in the Lao diet which is largely in accordance with a sustainable diet formulated by Koerber et al. Uitto points out that Laos encounters challenges in regards to environmentally sustainable development in the face of rapid change and where economy is still overwhelmingly based on the exploitation of natural resources (Uitto, 2011). One such example would be a continuous shift from sustainable agriculture to an industrial approach and the destruction of natural resources especially in relation to forestry and fishery<sup>8</sup>. A few years ago the Government of Lao PDR adopted a comprehensive National Strategy on Environment to ensure sustainable social economic development as means to combat such issues (The Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, 2016). Uitto argues that constructive engagement even in cases where the government may not be responsive to its citizens in a democratic manner is preferable to isolation as it helps both the people and sustainable development (Uitto, 2011).

In conclusion, sustainability has come into focus with increasing industrialization and the negative developments that go with it. In Germany, sustainability is implemented into the educational curriculum and an important topic in media and politics though governmental action has been criticized on occasion. Though already practiced by many Lao through their lifestyle, sustainability is endangered by economical development in Laos. Development planned in accordance with sustainable goals will contribute to Lao goals on sustainability. One important factor to support Laos

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<sup>8</sup> Foreign investors in particular have received criticism for investment in industry that negatively affected Laos natural resources

in its goals on sustainability is engagement of the international community. How to successfully navigate intercultural exchange and contribute to food studies will therefore be of interest in the next part.

### 2.2.3. Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is defined by Deardorff as “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions” (Deardorff, 2006). As already established globalization has led to interconnectedness of the world. Intercultural competence supports humans in their role of global citizenship and navigating themselves outside of their individual cultural experience. Thaler states: „The modern world is inconceivable without global contacts and consequently the need for a respectful, undisturbed approach to foreign cultures grows.“ (Thaler, 2012). In relation to education it has also become vital in successfully teaching and learning from and with students from different backgrounds.

Intercultural competence is of great importance in the German educational curriculum, particularly in the subject *foreign languages*. It focuses on the three goal competences knowledge, skill and attitude (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport, 2016). This means that students need to have knowledge of the target culture, possess skills to identify differences, compare them to oneself and reevaluate their own perspective, as well as contain a open attitude towards unknown and the ability and willingness to change their point of view for productive and successful communication (Thaler, 2012). This is a dynamic process in the educational field and teachers thrive to reach these goals with their students through creating authentic lessons of the target culture. Thaler points out that one of the most obvious methods to facilitate intercultural competence is contact with the target culture such as student exchanges, inviting representatives of the target culture to the class or participating in virtual exchange such as video conferences, e-mail exchange and tandem programs (Thaler, 2012). Other valuable methods include roleplay, as students learn to think and act from a different perspective, and the use of authentic media such as literature, movies or music from the target culture (Thaler, 2012). Nevertheless, foreign languages are not the only subject in which such competences can be strived for. The subject of *Everyday Life, Nutrition and Social*



*Issues* offers great possibilities for the inclusion of intercultural competence through the involvement of a variety of topics for example by exploring cultural and material heritage in textiles and food studies. Many German students also have a migrant background so intercultural competence in the classroom plays an important role in inclusion.

In Laos the focus of education lies in supporting children to become patriotic, acknowledge and preserve the national multicultural setting, train a skilled labour force and become good citizens (UNESCO IBE, 2011). Boase also points out that: “a key learning objective is to be able to state information and theories or quote authoritative texts, rather than think critically about a subject.” (Boase, 2003). Learning tends to be more of a ceremony than an activity directed toward achieving a result. The curriculum is Lao-centric; however, it acknowledges and supports ethnic minorities<sup>9</sup> living within Laos (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015). With exclusion of tertiary education, specifically in the tourism field, intercultural competence is not part of the Lao curriculum. Though intercultural competence is not explicitly included in compulsory education through subjects such as *Foreign Languages* or *Around the World* teachers aim to teach students about different cultures and to respect them (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015). In the context of culture only the term *local culture* is used in the curriculum (UNESCO IBE, 2011). The development of Lao education specifically in terms of quality, access and equality is still in progress and conducted under difficult circumstances (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2000). In conclusion, intercultural competence has yet to become of focus in the Lao curriculum, however first steps towards its inclusion have been taken and with further growth and development in the education sector intercultural competence will also continue to take more importance. Currently, due to the inclusion of ethnic minorities in education, Lao students experience intercultural settings in school. In urban areas contact with foreigners due to tourism is also high. Additionally, new media also contributes to continuous exposure of young Lao to different cultures. Fostering intercultural exchange poses great opportunity to continue to develop intercultural competences in the Lao education sector.

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<sup>9</sup> Lao PDR is the most ethnically diverse country in Southeast Asia with up to 200 different ethnic subgroups

In relation to food studies, intercultural competence is also of importance. Food is present wherever humans are, such as on travel for leisure or business or whenever people of different cultural backgrounds live together. When confronted with unfamiliar foodways humans must use intercultural skills to communicate effectively. Therefore, food is a relevant form of communication. Parasecoli describes this communication as being “based in a variety of edible substances, practices, beliefs, and norms that form a network of interconnected systems” (Parasecoli, 2011). When different culinary spheres interact, it forces individuals to engage with otherness through embodied communication (Parasecoli, 2011). It is however important to separate intercultural competence in food studies from food tourism. Tourism is considered a stark difference from enabling intercultural competence though it can aid in the cultivation of competences. Parasecoli points out that tourists often seek to eat authentic foods of the cultures they visit or even try to learn how to recreate food in an attempt to “impress their friends with their newly enhanced cultural capital” (Parasecoli, 2008). This shows willingness to engage in the foreign food culture out of personal gain in their own culture not for a genuine interest in understanding and engaging with the foreign culture. An educational setting or component can support the development of intercultural competence through food. In conclusion, one of the most important factors of intercultural competence can be considered as communication, just like Deardorff’s definition states. Therefore, in the next part, communication in relation to food will be of focus.

#### 2.2.4. Food Communication

Communication, just like food, is part of our everyday life. May it be through speech, body language or even silence – the academic study of communication has concerned itself with understanding the ways, meanings and consequences in which humans share verbal and nonverbal symbols (Lizie, 2014). Food and the process of eating is part of the study of communication. Through food social and cultural values can be communicated as well as identities constructed. Different perspectives such as interpersonal, media and popular culture, environmental or intercultural to name a few, can be used to structure different discourses of food communication. Media for example have used the science of food communication to its advantages. Advertisements or films related to food can also create messages

and communicate to humans – though usually with the intention of stimulating message receivers to buy products. Lizie identifies four intellectual fields that are linked to food communication studies: rhetoric, public relations, media effects and advertising and cultural studies (Lizie, 2014). Rhetoric explores how messages are created, by whom and the effectiveness of what is being conveyed. Public relations is concerned with the application of communication within the public sphere, or more specifically from an entity to the public. Media effects and advertising seeks to discover the mediated messages of media to people and its effects, particularly in children's ads. Lastly, cultural studies explores how symbols are shared to create meaning within groups, media, or industries. While all approaches to food communication are relevant, the cultural study perspective will be of priority in this paper as it is related to sociology, research is mostly conducted qualitatively and it seeks to understand humans in their role as communicators of food identity.

Greene and Cramer point out that the main reason we should view food as a form of communication is because it is directly linked to both ritual and culture (Greene & Cramer, 2011). "Ritual is defined as the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life" (Rothenbuhler, 1998). Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in rituals involving food. For example, at the center of important events in our lives, such as birthdays, weddings, holidays and funerals (Greene & Cramer, 2011). Within ritual contexts, food often even stands in for expressions of life, love, happiness or grief (Greene & Cramer, 2011). "For example, roast turkey, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie can be simply classified as meat, vegetables and dessert; however once these foods are put together on a list, they have cultural implications for people who have experienced a typical Thanksgiving dinner in the United States" (Koike, 2014). This means that categories of food are related to life experiences and culturally and socially embedded in interactions where they are dynamically negotiated, created and modified (Koike, 2014). In relation to culture, because food is being used ritually, it also represents our everyday life with its culturally dictated rituals. The need for studies in food communication is described as follows: "If food has become increasingly important within our processes of communication as a means of expression, manifestation of identities, form of discourse and ritual, hallmark of social relationships, and if food is ubiquitous, then it is for these very reasons that we need to more closely consider how food and its practices operate

as a means of communication. [...] Communication studies can offer new insights into how food provides much more than nourishment, or mere sustenance, because food demonstrates a whole host of social, cultural, and political phenomena.” (Greene & Cramer, 2011)

Understanding food from a cultural study perspective requires tools as food functions as a sign and code for social situations and rituals as established beforehand. The exploration of meaning therefore engages theory to explore new ideas. Many different scholars have contributed to the issue and some concepts will be presented accordingly. Parasecoli links food to semiotics and describes: “ingredients, dishes, and practices can be interpreted as carrying meaning and used to infer information about their makers, their cultures, and their environments. At the same time, they can be produced to carry meaning, becoming effective tools of intentional communication” (Parasecoli, 2011). This means that through processes of semiosis, or the production of meaning, through interaction with living organic “things” they become culinary “objects,” and in turn these objects interact with the context of the situation, or semiosphere, into which they are “translated” (Parasecoli, 2011). Thus, meaning and function within a specific cultural system can be acquired. This relates to what Eder formulates: food is an elementary form of transition from nature to culture which can be used to exemplify the natural and constructed position of humans (Eder, 1988). Understanding such concepts and implementing them in personal understanding can aid in successfully communicating with foreign food cultures.

Roland Barthes has also provided theoretical tools to understand and analyse how food is communicated, how food communicates and how we communicate about food. Barthes also uses semiotics to put the role and function of food into context. He claims that food functions as a sign, a sign communicating something in addition to itself, perhaps something other than itself (Barthes, 2019). With food, we are not just buying or consuming a product but a whole system or chain of meanings. “Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification, and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food” (Barthes, 2019). In *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption* he also discusses how psychosociology influences indirectly on eating habits, and thus culture plays a considerable amount of influence (Barthes, 2019). He classifies significations of food into three groups of themes: memorative,

which permits to partake in national past; anthropological, which relates to the human state e.g. some food is supposed to be masculine and some feminine, certain food have feelings of inferiority attached to it and so on; and somatic and psychic nature, clustering around the concept of health e.g. coffee “dissolves fatigue” (Barthes, 2019). He points out that especially through new media “activity, work, sports, effort, leisure, celebration- every one of these situations is expressed through food [...] food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situations.” (Barthes, 2019). If we can understand influence of constructed culture and learned behaviour on our foodways, we ultimately will improve our ability to reflect and understand foreign cultural concepts as well. During communication processes the recognition of the tie of food to certain significations and its variation depending on the cultural context, such as Barthes describes, can foster communicative ability in foodways.

Another perspective to the association of food with certain values as basis for communication – verbal and nonverbal – is posed by Teuteberg. According to him food contains a ‘code’ that depending on the context symbolizes values and ideas that need to be deciphered to the observer. Teuteberg classifies five categories of products that communicate symbolism: products of prestige (to showcase elite positions), products of status (to demonstrate group association and conformity), fetish- and security products (to attain emotional security), hedonistic products (to achieve pleasure through taste, aesthetics etc.) and functional-only products (symbol-neutral and solely used to attain calorie-intake) (Teuteberg, 1988). Through the consumption of food, we form individual identity and signal societal belonging or refusal of it. “In other words, we often use food to communicate with others and as a means of demonstrating personal identity, group affiliation and disassociation, and other social categories, such as socioeconomic class” (Greene & Cramer, 2011). Other attributes can be assigned to food through myths. Those can be myths of origin, magical beliefs or myths about the connection between ethnic, class or gender characteristics (Methfessel, 2005).

Lastly, Buccini points out that most commonly there are two connections between food and linguistics, one is structural and focuses on how cuisine is constructed as a semiotic or symbolic system and the second is historical and serves as practical tool for the study of food history (Buccini, 2014). With the linguistic approach the focus can then be deepened, for example to examine how conceptual and structural

differences between cuisines can be structured by assessing the semiotics and symbols used in communication. Linguistics on the historical level specifically have helped to study and reconstruct for example what foodstuffs certain language communities consumed and how they prepared it if there was textual evidence. Linguistics have therefore also contributed to the study of food.

From this, it can be concluded that academics have brought many different theoretical approaches to the sociology of food and its capability to communicate. These showcase the significance of food communication in sociology and the various different perspectives brought to the field. However, just as much as food communicates culture, the way a person carries itself is also a form of cultural communication. It is therefore of importance to look at how culture is communicated through behaviour in Laos and Germany as this will also aid in the communication of food studies. Lao and German styles of communication are distinctively different. This not only applies to language but the manner and behaviour – nonverbal cues – that are used to communicate. Being aware of such vast differences in communication style can aid in effective exchange. *In Working with a Lao partner* Boase points out that Lao society, highly collectivistic, values to keep face, “the accumulated personal capital or indebtedness between individuals”, therefore being non-confrontational, always polite and accommodating to their partner is of utmost importance to most Lao to not lose face (Boase, 2003). “In Asia words are used as indicators or direction signals and not much more. It is up to the listener to determine what response to make to the signal. Truth is not in the words but behind the words - and in silence. It is much more complex and sophisticated than communication in the West.” (Boase, 2003). This contrasts with the German style of communication, which is considered very straightforward. Being direct and straight to the point signals honesty and is generally preferred, as it is thought of as more efficient when problem-solving. This is reflective of the highly individualistic nature of German society (Hofstede, 2020). This can also be seen in the differences in the perception of time and space. While Lao are not particularly preoccupied with the most efficient use of their time but rather focus on the preservation of communal harmony, Westerners are highly focused on productivity and time management (Boase, 2003). Being aware of differences in style of communication can give better insight when talking about food communication, as cultural views are reflected in how we present ourselves and therefore in how we communicate food.

In conclusion, one of the most common ways we use food is in the construction of our individual or societal identity. However, before we can conduct empirical research on food communication a look at food culture from an academic point of view – particularly Germany and Laos – must be taken, to understand the construction of cultural belonging and identity in food studies.

### 2.3. Food Culture from an Academic Point of View

Food made society. This statement can not be considered an exaggeration as food is the basis of human coexistence. The common meal is an expression of overcoming food envy in favour of the community, overcoming the spontaneous individual versus the regulated common satisfaction of needs (Simmel, 1989). This community helped individuals survive even when they were sick or old. What, with whom and how people eat was (and still is) evaluated and reflected on people. At the same time food can serve as distinction from other communities and assign individual as well as social belonging. In this way different food cultures developed. In the public understanding of food culture, specific types of food or ingredients might be understood as representation of a country. This folkloristic approach is however not academically supported and therefore not of focus in this paper. While there is no distinctive food culture of a singular country that can be spoken of in the academic sense, it is clear, as Dirks and Hunter point out, that food preparation and consumption create a sense of place and cultivate specific tastes (Dirks & Hunter, 2014). A possible way to academically define food culture in food studies was created by Eva Barlösius. Structured after Barlösius, people regulated their relationship to food, its preparation and consumption via three institutions.

The first institution is the cultural definition of *edible* and *inedible* (Barlösius, 2016). Humans are omnivores, which means that except for a few exceptions like toxic substances all food can be used for consumption. “On the one hand, needing variety, the omnivore is inclined towards diversification, innovation, exploration and change, which can be vital to its survival; but, on the other hand, it has to be careful, mistrustful, ‘conservative’ in its eating: any new, unknown food is a potential danger” (Fischler, 1988). Consuming certain foods might be acceptable to some while it is taboo to other. One clear example of this phenomenon would be insects. Their consumption in some culinary traditions is widely appreciated, while in other cultures

a clear dislike towards them is shown, not considering them part of the realm of what is edible (Parasecoli, 2011). Therefore, Barlösius claims that what is regarded as food is not a natural concept but a culturally generated difference (Barlösius, 2016). "The choice of food is an expression of norms and values: food is a cultural and social symbol, taboos reveal myths of origin and worldview; Smell and taste serve for social distinction." (Methfessel, 2005). This means, what is considered as edible or inedible is subject to different cultural standards. Parasecoli supports this definition: "As living beings, we constantly engage in the process of interpreting the reality that surrounds us and communicating about it. This practice of sense-making also includes determining what is edible, not only via cognition, but also via affective (emotional and irrational) mental activities." (Parasecoli, 2011). Barlösius classifies inedible food as belonging to either *religious taboos* e.g. beef in Hinduism, *cultural taboos* e.g. eating animals considered as pets in Western countries, *legal requirements* e.g. prohibition of certain drugs, *traditions* of considering or ignoring existing edible foods e.g. crickets in Germany, the *assessment of what you eat or not eat in certain situations* e.g. attribution of characteristics (exotic, organic), effects (strengthening, soothing), social status (fine dining vs. poor man's meal) or relation to everyday or special occasions (Barlösius, 2016).

The second institution is the *kitchen as a cultural set of rules*. Kitchens are both rooms with specific technological equipment and methods of preparation that are typical and also contain messages (language of the kitchen) (Methfessel, 2005). In every respect they are socio-cultural phenomena with corresponding characteristics and serve the cultural and social identity. The selection, processing, and combination of ingredients for meals is subject to a complicated and differentiated set of rules. Although many foods are similar or the same in many countries (e.g. beans, lentils, grains), the dishes prepared from them can taste completely different due to the different cuisines (Barlösius, 2016). The term "kitchen" includes, among other things, the technological requirements and practices e.g. open-fire, stove or microwave and rules of preparation e.g. handling and processing, combinations of individual foods to dishes and also seasoning (Barlösius, 2016). The value of a food also includes how it is processed in a dish. Processing with expensive ingredients and with a lot of effort can lead to upgrading (Barlösius, 2016). Therefore, the kitchen also determines the appreciation and depreciation of food through the associated dishes, methods of preparation and technologies.



The third institution is the *meal as a social institution*. Meals serve to create and maintain community and belonging. Simmel ascribes meals a “tremendous socializing power” (Simmel, 1989). In their different elements (table groups, table manners, table conversations), their characteristics in everyday life and festive days, their domestic and external appearance they have a socio-cultural structuring meaning (Barlösius, 2016). The meal, it is said, was the beginning of the cultivation of food, among other things through fixed times, a common beginning, hierarchy of eating, table manners, etc (Simmel, 1989). The right to participate served the formation of human communities or in case of conditions not met its exclusion from it. Simmel mentions that religious influence had particularly strong influence on the structuring of the meal, he points out that for example Hindus occasionally have their meal by themselves to be sure that they do not accidentally eat with somebody outside of their caste (Simmel, 1989). Communication is part of the structure of the meal. While eating, from daily mundane experiences to important life decisions, everything is being discussed and community performance takes place. This contributes to the importance of communication as part of food studies. Table manners also have an integrating or excluding function. Every culture knows rules for eating. The importance of common rules is so strong that many people today still associate eating culture with behaviour at the table. These rules depend on the respective social context and have the task of social position. Today, for example, the traditional bourgeois rules apply if one does not want to embarrass oneself in a restaurant or offend other people to whom they are important (Barlösius, 2016).

The combination of these institutions forms a shared cultural food system by which we define the so-called food culture. Of course, within a food culture many different social groups exist as well e.g. social class, age, and gender. This means that while food culture is community shared individual factors can influence the participation in it. Therefore, food culture is also performed at the individual level and can never be solely community-based or that every member of a community partakes in all forms in the community shaped food culture. However, in conclusion “we can understand cuisines as the set of classifications of this type performed by a given culture and the rules associated with them, both those which regulate the combination of the elements thus defined and, more generally, those which govern the whole set of practices and representations connected with the production, gathering, preparation, attribution and consumption of food.” (Fischler, 1988).

Food culture is also not stagnant but continuously experiences changes as it is a social construct and therefore prone to change with social development. Such as the influence of migration, innovations that change how we grow and prepare food or societal and natural changes. The ethnology of food documents traditional elements of popular culture such as practices, habits and material objects (Mennell et al., 1992). Wiegmann, one of the most prominent German ethnologists, detailed the change of German food and meal patterns through food innovations in his book 'Everyday and Festive Dishes: Change and Contemporary Position'. He documents the spread of the potato from a poor mans food to the bourgeois kitchen and the consumption of coffee from the upper social class to the lower in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Wiegmann, 1967). These changes in how Germans have changed their food patterns can be traced back to industrialization. This small example showcases how food patterns can change and in which intricate detail such as the change of acceptance in a social class.

Fumey et al. point out that while "'food culture' has become a key notion in the European social sciences since the beginning of the 2000s. While anthropologists and sociologists consider food as a "total social fact" (Mauss), historians have broadened the term by connecting it to an accumulation of layers and ruptures in history and geographers have insisted that food is a system of identity distinction based on distances and interconnections. Although these approaches have enabled the field of food studies to be structured, it is now necessary to discuss them no longer from inherited disciplinary frameworks, but rather through global themes which have appeared in public debates about food including such notions as safety, abundance generating new pathologies (obesity, degenerative illnesses), the spread of the industrial model, new kinds of social protest, discourse and practice about food quality, identity assertions and heritage, transmissions... the list is almost unlimited." (Fumey et al., 2016). This statement showcases that some scholars advocate for the necessity of changing the academic viewpoint towards food culture to a global perspective.

One way to do this would be the inclusion of the issue of food culture and globalization in the educational context. As established beforehand, the tendency of many to take individual products or dishes without further analysis as typical for a respective country is false. Haupt et al. point out that profound reflections on food culture are seldom the case for many adolescents and adults (Haupt, Bayer, &

Methfessel). They suggest incorporating recipes, e.g. comparing Greek and Turkish recipes, in nutrition and consumer education as means to introduce elements of food culture to students and help them to reflect on it (Haupt et al.). This approach could also be made possible for the Lao-German context though finding suitable recipes will be more difficult due to stark cultural differences. The preparation of sausage or stew could for example showcase similarities and differences. Similarly, production and reflection of videos about food culture and incorporating recipes, adapted to the academic level of the students, can support to understand characteristics of eating culture and to promote understanding of their development. In this way, a deeper understanding of food culture can be fostered, and generalizations counteracted.

Another important factor of food culture is, as previously mentioned, the movement of people. Migration, colonialism, and de-colonisation have contributed greatly to the development of an exchange of foods such as potato, maize, sugar-cane, and salt. Goody describes this process as having formed a 'world cuisine' (Goody, 1982). The collective result of many people traveling and their exposure to unfamiliar food highlights the social and political dynamics that determine the acceptance and the evaluation of different ingredients, dishes, and even whole traditions. These processes reveal issues of authority and power, change and resistance (Parasecoli, 2011). Sutton adds that food conveys memories and therefore aids in the generating and maintaining of historical consciousness (Sutton, 2001). Food can give identity and is sometimes considered a sensitive topic as it touches upon deeply personal opinions. For citizens of developed and developing countries alike, the task of coming to terms with the complex heterogenous and pluralistic societies remains urgent nonetheless and this paper argues that intercultural exchange aids best in negotiating these issues.

In conclusion, food culture is a flexible, ever-changing social construct that describes how humans structure their relationship towards food and its consumption within their communities. Barlösius three institutions of food culture structure how food culture can be understood academically. Though it would be fatal to reduce a country to one singular food culture – common traits and attributes can be described and give guidance in how food culture is shaped by communities and societies. Therefore, the structure of food culture in Laos and Germany will be explored with

the understanding that only generalizations can be made as the issue of food culture is a complex and layered one.

### 2.3.1. Lao Food Culture

Laos has a diverse ethnic population and therefore a rich mix of cultures. There is no singular Lao food culture. However, Laos is still a developing country and access to a variety of non-local food is not available to regular citizens. The use of local food, particularly self-grown in the countryside, and preparation within traditional means such as open fire and with the use of bamboo cooking utensils, such as the sticky rice steamer, is still widely practiced. Though the influence of industrialization can be seen for example in the culture of gifting. “Items acquired on markets, like industrial products, have gained increasing prominence in ceremonial gift-giving, in contrast to local and household products” (Sprenger, 2017). In everyday life however, a local and ethnic approach to food is still commonly practiced.

First, ingredients used in Lao cuisine and what is classified as *edible* and *inedible* will be looked at. The staple food of Laos is sticky rice, so called *khao niao*, along with other varieties of rice such as black or long-grain rice (Sisane, 2007). The popularity of rice is reflected in the Lao language, the Lao meaning for the word ‘eat’ (*kin khao*) verbatim is ‘to eat rice’ (Düker, 2017). Rice can be harvested when ripe or unripe. Commonly, rice is served along meat, fish, or seasonal vegetables such as bamboo shoots, mushrooms, or water spinach and accompanied by fresh herbs and spices<sup>10</sup>. The selection of which spice to use can also be tied to the significance they hold in medical terms. The Lao separate plants into three categories: fiery hot, refreshingly cool or neutral (Sing et al., 2013). Thus, ritual significance in their use is also of consideration in preparation of food. *Laap*, a meat salad which can be made with various forms of regional meat such as beef, buffalo, pork, duck, chicken, fish, or venison is by many considered as the most symbolic dish of Laos. If possible, the whole animal is used as to not create waste. Insects such as grasshoppers, crickets and larvae are also consumed (Düker, 2017). Certain meats such as elephant, tiger, dog, or snake, while certainly available in the region, are considered to be religiously taboo as Lao people believe that consumption of them will make

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<sup>10</sup> Coriander, Thai-basil, garlic, galangal, ginger, lime leaves and chillies are particularly popular in Laos and spicy food is eaten by the majority of Lao

them unable to meet Buddha upon reincarnation and hinders monk's connection to their inner power (Sisane, 2007). Meat in general carries a strong function as religious symbol in Laos. Sacrifices, particularly buffalo, hold a long tradition in the Buddhist and animist ideologies of some Lao but a complicated relationship between religious beliefs and state governance in relation to such symbolic practices has started to arise (Sprenger, 2017). Dairy products are apart from water buffalo milk traditionally not common. Desserts made from local ingredients such as rice, beans, coconut, sugar cane and palm sugar are also popular. Fresh fruit such as banana, melon, pineapple, jackfruit, or dragon fruit is also regularly consumed. Stews such as *Ohlam*<sup>11</sup>, likely originating from ancient Lao living in the forests and hunters who used whatever they had at hand such as mushrooms and wild vegetables and bamboo to cook and serve their food, is another commonly consumed Lao dish (Sisane, 2007). Drinks commonly used to be distilled in Laos such as the *Laodet*<sup>12</sup>, a rice whisky or *Laosatho*, rice wine (Sisane, 2007). Nowadays, alcohol based on fruit sugar has also become popular. Medicinal ingredients such as mushrooms or roots are also commonly added in alcohol as they are accredited with healing powers (Sisane, 2007). Besides stronger alcohols beer, tea, fresh fruit juices and coffee are also popular modern beverages. Beer is consumed commonly in most social settings. The only relevant brewery in Laos producing *Beerlao* was established with influence of French businessmen and uses, among other things, German ingredients. Other French influence from the period of colonization can also still be seen in Lao cuisine today. Baguette, crêpes or coffee are popular street food (Düker, 2017). The French are also responsible for establishing coffee plantations which led to the famous Lao coffee (Culloty & Sprengers, 2010). In bigger cities and areas frequented by tourists' restaurants that offer western food such as pizza, pasta or burgers are also available. A clear distinction between restaurants catering to tourists and restaurants catering to Lao natives (most Lao prefer to prepare food at home or buy street food to consume at home) is also noticeable.

Secondly, the *kitchen as a set of cultural rules* in Laos will be looked at. The Lao kitchen is traditionally either outside next to the home or in a separate small room or corner adjacent to the living quarters. Fridges are not common everywhere except

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<sup>11</sup> *Or lam* is a more commonly known name for this dish

<sup>12</sup> *Lao* is a more commonly known name for this whisky

for urban areas so ingredients used will often be fresh or made durable. The typical stove is the *tao-lo*, which commonly uses charcoal (Sing et al., 2013). Most dishes will be prepared on it either in a wok or steamer<sup>13</sup>. A German teacher student from the *Bi-directional Tandem-Teaching and Learning program* recounted that Laos was “so opposite, very culturally distant, the food, the people, the coffee... nobody could imagine a family sitting outside of the house cooking on an open fire” (Weinmann et al., 2020). Such comments showcase the importance of contact and reflection in relation to food customs from unfamiliar cultures. The most frequently used forms of preparation include boiling (soups or bouillon), grilling (on a stick or in amber), stewing (in earthen vessel on an open fire), frying and fermenting (such as *padaek*, fish sauce) (Sisane, 2007). Sing et al. point out that particularly chopping and pounding are of importance in preparing food. Chopping, in the Lao sense, often refers to holding the knife in one hand and the thing to be chopped in the other, such as when preparing green papaya for *tam mak hoong*<sup>14</sup>. Pounding is done with a mortar and pestle, such as when ingredients for the sauce of *tam mak hoong* are pounded into one mass. Who prepares the food, depends largely on the ethnic group and gender roles. Culloty et al. points out that other than Khmhm, where men will cook for guests, women do most of the cooking in Laos, but many men can cook and know a tremendous amount of food (Culloty & Sprengers, 2010). During preparation measurements are rarely used but ingredients added proportionally according to the cooks knowledge (Culloty & Sprengers, 2010).

Lastly, the *meal as a social institution* in Laos becomes of focus. Food is served usually on a low round table made out of bamboo or rattan with people sitting comfortably around it on the floor (Sing et al., 2013). In more modern homes, sitting at a high table with chairs is now more customary. Few Lao recipes can be strictly sorted into breakfast, lunch or dinner dishes (Culloty & Sprengers, 2010). The meal is a very communal matter in the highly collectivistic Lao culture. The dishes are put out all at once and everybody helps themselves to what they want. Sticky rice is usually the only dish served separately for each person in a small bamboo basket. Interestingly, sticky rice can be considered as part of the tableware itself. While cutlery is used in Western cultures or chopsticks in most Asian countries, the Lao

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<sup>13</sup> *Houad* is the bamboo steamer traditionally used to prepare sticky rice, it is the most commonly used apparatus to prepare sticky rice in Laos

<sup>14</sup> Green Papaya Salad

use sticky rice, kneaded into small balls with one hand, as a 'pusher' for taking pieces of food or mopping up liquids (Sing et al., 2013). Raw greens and wild herbs are also commonly served, and also used to pick up food without the need for other cutlery. For soups or other liquids, spoons will be used, for noodle soups chopsticks are used, but mostly hands are employed. To unassuming observers, the Lao meal can be described as having a relaxed and informal atmosphere. However, even in these hospitable circumstances unspoken rules apply to the joint consumption of food. Particularly the issue of seniority is of importance. The highest ranked members of the family or group start the meal by taking the first mouthfuls, only then can other members follow (Sing et al., 2013). During the meal helping yourself to more should also not be done in front of a higher ranked person as to not make that person lose face (Sing et al., 2013). Eating should always be done together, if one person is not finished, others must continue eating as well, especially if guests are around as to demonstrate proper hospitality. Gender also plays a role, while men usually sit with their legs crossed, women will gracefully bend their legs to the side (Culloty & Sprengers, 2010). Another important custom as guest is to leave a little food behind to signal that the host has provided enough food and not skimmed on anything. "Leaving food on your plate is not impolite. Instead, it indicates you have eaten your fill." (Boase, 2003). In contrast to Western culture where multiple courses might be served to guests, the Lao achieve this satisfaction through preparing a multitude of dishes to be served at once. This ensures that as much food as possible can be enjoyed by the group as not everybody might enjoy the same food.

### 2.3.2. German Food Culture

"To capture all of Germany's extremely complex, multi-layered dinner culture in a single representative picture and meal is by definition impossible. So many differences and facets have been moulded by geography, climate, and the infinite cultural influences from all sides in the course of history" (Heinzelmann, 2016). Due to the historic political fragmentation of German-speaking lands it is difficult to define a single German national culinary culture (Mennell et al., 1992). "Quite apart from Austria and Switzerland where French influences penetrated more deeply, in Germany [...] the best-known dishes are regional rather than national specialities" (Mennell et al., 1992). This stems amongst other things from the different noble

courts that were either open or opposed to French influence in their cookery (Mennell et al., 1992). However, in middle-class domestic preparation of food Germany developed a more simplistic and thrifty approach much like England (Mennell et al., 1992). Migration shaped and continues to shape German food culture. The vast influence of different ethnicities that brought different ingredients, kitchens and social manners to the German cuisine shape the way German food culture is experienced. The influence of modernization has led Germany to rely largely on “modern” food industries (Heinzelmann, 2008). While there is no singular German food culture, much like Laos, using the three institutions of food culture by Barlösius a broad conceptualization of what influences are present in current German cuisine can be visualized.

First, the ingredients used in German cuisine and what is considered *edible* and *inedible* will be explored. While Germany does not have a very distinctive staple food like Laos’s sticky rice, starchy products in various forms such as potatoes and bread are considered to be very popular. Heinzelmann points out that meals usually consist of a type of starch such as pasta, potatoes or dumplings and a meat served with vegetables (Heinzelmann, 2016). Bread comes in a vast variety of shapes, made with different grains and methods of baking. The importance of bread, which is arguably the most significant German food, is reflected in the German language with terms such *Abendbrot* (Ger.: cold evening meal) or *Brotzeit* (Ger.: a light snack in the morning or afternoon). Unlike Laos, bread is however not considered to be a food that can be eaten at every meal – it is usually associated with breakfast or a cold dinner. Potatoes and various forms on how to prepare them are also popular but depending on their usage they can take on the role of main starch or side dish. Different forms of dumplings and noodles (especially in the south with dishes like *Spätzle*, *Knödel* or *Dampfnudeln*) pose as another staple food as they are usually made out of flour or potato (Heinzelmann, 2008). Meat, by some considered another staple food in Germany due to its high popularity and consumption proportion<sup>15</sup>, is either eaten by preparing fresh<sup>16</sup> meat or processed for example by curing in the form of ham and sausage. The variety of cured meat was developed as means of preserving when modern refrigeration was not available yet (Heinzelmann, 2008).

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<sup>15</sup> Germans ate almost 60kg of meat per person in the year 2019 according to the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture though tendencies are sinking

<sup>16</sup> Raw meat is also consumed usually in the form of *Schweinehackfleisch* which is called *Mett*



Pork is the most popular meat, followed by poultry and beef. Offal which used to be regularly used now has an ambiguous role of either being considered undesirable or highly regarded (Heinzelmann, 2008). Meat, is particularly associated to taboos in Germany when they are associated with undesirability or cheapness such as offal, tripe, brains, tongue or belonging to undesirable animals such as horse meat (Henderson, 2011). Henderson points out that Germans for example showcase disgust in the supposed lack of taboos concerning the edibility of animals by quoting a travel article criticizing "In China [...] everything living is considered edible." (Henderson, 2011). This quote showcases ignorance to other cultural food customs and the necessity for fostering positive exchange between different food practices. Fish is consumed, especially in the north, but not frequently and often associated with religious holidays as a symbol for Christianity. Dairy products, driven through urbanization and industrialization range from milk, cream, yogurt, *quark*, cheese, and butter. They are usually eaten in combination with a staple product such as bread (*Butter-, Käsebrötchen*) or potatoes (*Pellkartoffeln und Kräuterquark*) or in combination with fruit and sweeteners as snack or dessert (*Fruchtjoghurt*). Frequently consumed vegetables include many forms of cabbage (in its pickled form known as *Sauerkraut*), root vegetables such as carrots, onions and radish, asparagus, beans and legumes, fruit vegetables<sup>17</sup> like cucumber, tomatoes, pumpkin and squash, as well as various types of lettuce and mushrooms<sup>18</sup> (Teuteberg, 1988). Seasoning is achieved through herbs such as parsley and chives, spices like salt, pepper, nutmeg and so on and condiments like vinegar or mustard. Fruits are dominated by apples, pears, cherries, plum and berries in Germany though a wide range of imported exotic fruit is available in supermarkets (Heinzelmann, 2008). Drinks include besides water, carbonated and uncarbonated, coffee, tea, beer, wine, spirits and liquors, juices, and soft drinks. Influence on food culture, especially from neighbouring countries, migrant communities like Italian and Turkish and popular German vacation destinations such as Thailand can be observed, particularly in urban regions. While traditional food is enjoyed, foreign food particularly from visited countries or migrant influence, is also regularly served,

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<sup>17</sup> Botanically considered a fruit but culturally considered a vegetable - the author has chosen to use the cultural definition of all vegetables and fruits in this paper

<sup>18</sup> A type of fungi that is technically not classified as either fruit or vegetable

or bought in most families. *Spaghetti Bolognese*, *Pizza* and *Döner Kebab* regularly top the list of German favourites.

Secondly, the *kitchen as a set of cultural rules* in Germany becomes of focus. Kitchens in Germany traditionally and in modern times usually are a separate room in the house. Sometimes they are connected to the dining and living area. Heinzelmann describes the kitchen as being the center of social life (Heinzelmann, 2008). Most kitchens are so-called fitted kitchens which offer built-in storage and electrical appliances. Apart from a wide range of cooking utensils<sup>19</sup> like knives, lemon squeezer, cheese graters, cake pans or pepper mills (some rarely or never used) modern electrical appliances such as a coffee machine, microwave or food processors are regularly used as well (Heinzelmann, 2016). Meal planning is usually done ahead of the week as ingredients can be stored in the fridge or freezer. Commonly used techniques include boiling, steaming, stewing, roasting, braising, deep-frying and baking (Heinzelmann, 2008). Similarly to the Lao understanding of the influence of spices many old German cookbooks explain about "tempering" the food e.g. vinegar was considered harmful to the melancholic, but valuable to the choleric. [...] Sorrel was recommended for complaints and stomach ailments, cabbage should prevent drunkenness (Teuteberg, 1988). Such believes are not common anymore in modern Germany but still practiced to some degree e.g. consuming certain herbal teas to cure specific ailments. Work will be shared between family members and partners, though not equal, as women are reported to still do the majority of nutrition-related household tasks (Heinzelmann, 2008). Especially in rural areas produce is still regionally grown, sold, and consumed, however most shopping for food is done in discounters and supermarket chains which offer reliable industrial quality. Food law is heavily regulated but some scandals particularly in relation to meat have emerged. A steady rise in interest in organic, regional food is also noticeable. Food is usually plentiful and issues such as health (obesity, diabetes) and sustainability (food waste, influence of eating habits on the environment etc.) in relation to diet are regularly discussed in the media.

The third institution, the *meal as a social institution* in Germany is the final element to be explored. The model of three meals per day – breakfast, lunch, and dinner –

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<sup>19</sup> Some which only serve one specific purpose, for example a *Spätzlepresse*, which is a device used to make 'Spätzle', a type of egg pasta

persists though it is not uncommon to break this structure either by having brunch, coffee breaks or snacks throughout the day. Heinzelmann describes in her observation of German family lunch or dinner that families usually use one meal of the day, mostly dinner, as means of exchanging news and spending time together, however other meals are often eaten at school or work (Heinzelmann, 2016). Strong societal changes have led to a reconstruction of everyday food habits as well. With a growing number of single households in Germany eating alone and constructing lives individually has also become more frequent. Though this is often reported not to be enjoyed as much as communal eating (Brunner, 2011). The choice of food consumed e.g. self-cooked, convenience or take-out will depend on individual circumstances, however the joint consumption is still seen as important part of social life. Food is usually served in the middle of a raised table and everybody takes their own portion to an individual plate, the use of dishes and cutlery is common and finer china might be served on weekends (Heinzelmann, 2016). Table manners exist though they are not as rigid as they used to be. Beginning the meal with a phrase such as *Guten Appetit* (Eng.: Enjoy your meal) to signal the start, the avoidance of making noise while eating especially chewing loudly or with the mouth open and the correct use of cutlery are expected rules (Heinzelmann, 2008).

### 3. Empirical Research: Lao-German Presentation of Food Culture

To reiterate, the research question intended to investigate how teacher students present their everyday eating habits in video form and which elements of their eating culture they address in virtual exchanges. This is executed with a focus on the understanding of food culture by Barlösius and the observance of methods of verbal and non-verbal communication.

The research is embedded in an exchange established in 2019 between *Technische Universität Berlin*<sup>20</sup>, Germany and *Savannakhet University*<sup>21</sup>, Lao PDR. Prior to this virtual exchange, an exchange program, started in 2016 at *Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe*<sup>22</sup> to, among other things, build the „Teaching English in Laos“ project, and which has since grown to encompass an

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<sup>20</sup> Henceforth referred to as TUB; Situated in Berlin, the capital of Germany

<sup>21</sup> Henceforth referred to as SKULAO; Situated in Savannakhet, the second largest city in Laos

<sup>22</sup> Henceforth referred to as KUE (Karlsruhe University of Education)

extensive exchange program<sup>23</sup>, was established. This project focused on English language teaching, however the Department of Daily Culture and Health at KUE also wished to establish cooperation. After a fact finding mission to Laos where first contacts were established, Prof. Dr. Silke Bartsch and Heike Müller started to develop a virtual exchange between their University and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sitha Khemmarath and Chandokkham Youyabouth from SKULAO. The first contact in the winter term 2017/2018 took place through an experimental video exchange with the two parties, the Department of Daily Culture and Health in KUE and the Food-Science-Department of SKULAO (Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe, 2018). Based on this first attempt on cooperation a concrete plan was established that would result in a virtual exchange with a focus on digital storytelling between SKULAO and TUB, where Prof. Dr. Silke Bartsch and Heike Müller had since moved, in the summer term 2020. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic certain adjustments had to be made, such as students not being able to meet prior to presentation, but the project was able to be successfully carried out. During the exchange both seminars that took part in this exchange conducted, among other things, an introduction into the concept of digital storytelling and received the same task, which was to create a video presenting their daily eating habits with a focus on a specific research issue of their interest. On this note it is important to specify that „digital storytelling is the practice of creating a short movie by combining digital artifacts such as images, text, video clips, animation, and music using a computer-based program.“ (Robin & McNeil, 2019). Both seminars were presented with this task in English as well as the language of instruction (German and Lao) to ensure that they had understood the task to the best of their abilities.

The empirical part of this paper will introduce the research methodology, document the execution of the study and evaluation, and present the research results. Following this, a discussion about the empirical research with a discursive examination of the results and a methodological reflection will be made and the conclusion given.

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<sup>23</sup> More information about this program can be accessed through the project website <http://www.thelaosexperience.com/>

### 3.1. Research Methodology

Goal of the empiric research was to investigate how students present their everyday eating habits in video form and which elements of their eating culture they address in virtual exchanges. Therefore, to structure the thoughts and verbal and non-verbal communication presented in the selected videos the model of qualitative content analysis by Philipp Mayring was used. The object of qualitative content analysis is all form of recorded communication, in this case video records. The basic process is the regulated assignment of categories to concrete text passages with either a deductive or inductive approach (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). In other words, the aim of qualitative content analysis is to systematically categorize text material usually within in the field of social science. Content analysis analyses not only the themes and main ideas of the material but concerns itself with the context information as well and can be interpretative and show latent and subjective meaning (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). This is expressed by Krippendorff, who defines "content analysis as the use of replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source" (Krippendorff, 1998). Therefore, content analysis is suitable for the research question which concerns itself with the direct content communicated by the students as well as the possible background to it. It seeks to embed the research into a model of communication (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). Additionally, the choice for this method lies in the fact that qualitative content of the video is of focus and the analyzation on what the material communicates. Instead of methods that focus on videography e.g. a hermeneutic approach, a method that focuses on structuring content of various documents was chosen instead. The method is also highly regulated and therefore intersubjectively verifiable (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). The computer program that was used to support the process of analyzation is MAXQDA. The approach is inductive-deductive, meaning that during the qualitative content analysis codes have been set prior to categorization but that during the categorization additional codes will be formed through the research process and theory created from observations as well. The advantage of this approach is that first deductive categories are derived from the theory by performing a theoretical analysis of the research problem and deriving the categories from this (Gläser & Laudel, 2012). These categories give indicators, i.e. rules that enable a clear assignment to the category. During the coding of the

material, the categories can be adjusted and new categories can be generated inductively (Gläser & Laudel, 2012). In addition, there is constant adaptation of the characteristics. After the qualitative content analysis, the presentation of results as well as interpretation of results based on theoretical findings will be made.

### 3.2. Execution of the Empirical Study

During the course of the virtual exchange seminar the Lao and German students created videos in small groups usually of two to five participants to present their daily eating habits in combination with a research question of their choice. These videos served the purpose of being presented during a joint online-seminar. The main intent of this task was for the students to reflect on their eating habits and connect them in relation to questions of globalized food culture. One concern was that students brought different conditions with them. The German students are Master students with a focus on social aspects and the Lao students are Bachelor students with a focus on nutrition and science. These different pre-conditions must be considered when the results are presented. Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic all teaching in Laos had to be halted for a short period of time while in Germany teaching was conducted online. This led to limitations in the ability of Lao students to produce videos as they had to meet in private and could not fully access the universities resources. However, some Lao students also produced videos with the same guidelines prior to the pandemic in expectation for an earlier cooperation that then only took place later on. As the task was very similar these videos were also taken into consideration in the study. In total, three videos of the Lao students during COVID-19 and two videos pre-COVID19 were analysed. The German students produced seven videos in total but two were eliminated from the analysis as they were produced in German and could not be used for the intercultural exchange. As one of the factors in the research question is to analyse how students want to present themselves this makes the videos using German language not utilizable for the research. In total ten videos were used for qualitative analyzation, five German and five Lao.

After the selection of which videos were relevant for the research, they were input into MAXQDA, a program that aids in qualitative analysis. Then coding proceeded. As the category development was deductive-inductive, five codes were already

decided beforehand and other elements that manifested during coding were added. The categories that were deductive and therefore decided before analyzation were the three institutions of food culture by Barlösius *edible or inedible*, *kitchen* and *meal* as well as the type of communication, *verbal* or *nonverbal*, which aligned with the aspects of analysis already established in the theoretical part, and therefore bringing them in connection with the video contents. The definition of which video elements belonged to which category was made by defining each code with a statement that must be fulfilled for the code to be assigned e.g. for the code *edible and inedible* the definition was: this code is given when students make mentions – verbal or nonverbal - that include the ingredients or their cultural assignment as edible and inedible. If possible, anchor examples were given as well e.g. for edible and inedible the anchor example could be statements like: “I love to use chilies when I cook” or in nonverbal cases using them in the cooking process. It is important to record the approach in a coding guide to achieve the most precise formulation of the categories possible and to avoid unnecessary overlaps. During the first coding, other elements that the students communicated were assigned codes as well, the inductive categories. These categories were particularly in relation to daily eating habits of the students such as procurement of food or lifestyle which were not easily identifiable before categorization. After approximately 40% of the videos were coded, the category system was structured, and the final coding guide decided upon with which the rest of the material was then coded by. Following this the interpretation of the results was undertaken. During all steps, the step model of deductive and inductive category development by Mayring was used as example and guideline for the research process<sup>24</sup>. A check of reliability as recommended by the model was also conducted by a suitable second evaluator. This helped to ensure that subjectivity could be excluded as much as possible during categorization and a more reliable research established. The thorough process of the check of reliability will be illustrated in the methodological reflection of the research.

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<sup>24</sup> For further reference figures were included

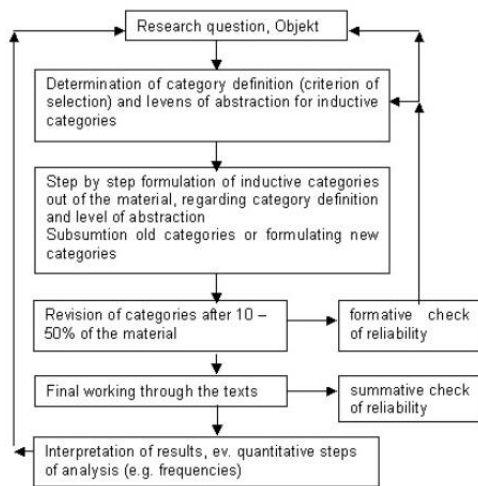


Figure 1: Step model of inductive category application (Mayring, 2000)

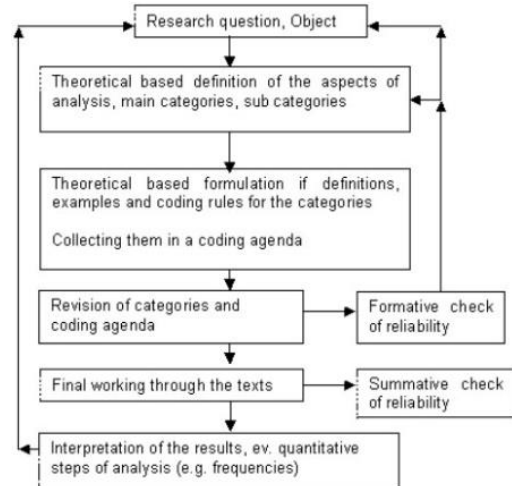


Figure 2: Step model of deductive category application (Mayring, 2000)

### 3.3. Evaluation and Research Results

To investigate how students present their everyday eating habits in video form and which elements of their eating culture they address in virtual exchanges ten videos were analysed using the qualitative content analysis by Mayring with an inductive-deductive approach. After going through the steps of the qualitative content analysis the results can be condensed into three main categories, which then can be divided into subcategories. These categories provide information regarding the research question. In the following part the three main categories that have been analysed the *three institutions of food culture*, *daily food habits* and *communication* along with their subcategories will be presented.

#### 3.3.1. Three Institutions of Food Culture

The three institutions of food culture are the social definition of edible and inedible food, the kitchen and the meal. These categories were decided upon before the categorization and therefore their application was deductive. Codes and their definition were – as much as possible established before coding and new aspects added inductively. The result showed the elements of food culture that German and Lao students presented in their videos. The Lao and German videos showed distinctively different elements of food culture.

Regarding the first institution *edible and inedible*, German and Lao students both present what they consider socially accepted and therefore edible food only. This is



understandable as students seek to showcase their daily eating habits and culture and therefore will not incorporate elements that they deem socially inedible. The students do not question ingredients and dishes they eat and incorporate them in their presentation of daily eating habits without much further explanation – often nonverbal by showing pictures. Both Lao and German students showcased a variety of what they considered edible ingredients and a variety of dishes in which they are used. Types of food shown can be categorized into the subcategories *fish, meat, fruits, vegetables, dairy and eggs, starch* e.g. rice, pasta or bread and *fast food, snacks, and sweets*. All categories were present in both countries' videos except for the category dairy and eggs on the Lao side.

Ingredients and dishes that German students deemed representative of their daily food habits and food culture included in particular the categories vegetables, starch products and fast food, snacks and sweets, as they had most mentions. The category starch was presented most often with five different mentions, with various forms of bread being the most addressed type. Bread (often mentioned in connection with different toppings such as cheese or jam), bread rolls, grains and lentils, potatoes as well as pasta (*Spätzle*) and white rice were shown to be included in the student's daily food habits. In regard to food besides warm meals one student accounted: "The other meals are all about bread with different toppings". This showcased the favour of bread by German students over other types of starch. The second most popular category was vegetables. Mentions of vegetables consumed or chosen for representation included cucumber, carrots, cabbage, pumpkin, salad greens, avocado, mushrooms, radish, asparagus, broccoli, paprika, tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant and cauliflower. They were often presented being eaten raw e.g. as a salad, or when possible, as a side dish. Most vegetables shown were regional or seasonal with some exceptions such as avocado. Shown or mentioned food in the category fast food, snacks and sweets depicted sweets such as chocolate, candy or jelly and snacks such as potato chips, as well as fast food like hamburgers and fries. This is amongst other things reflective of the highly industrial nature of the German food market. One student in a video group reported: "From time to time I like to eat fast food.". Food in this category seem to be a common factor for German student's daily food habits though they are often mentioned in connection to stress and time pressure. Dairy and eggs depicted included cheese, quark, boiled eggs, butter, and fruit yogurt. They were mentioned most often in connection with

breakfast with one student reporting: “for breakfast I like to eat cheese, sausage, jam, ...”, shown with a picture of cheese, a slice of brown bread and cold cuts. Meat included meatballs made from minced meat, fried pork (*Schnitzel*), cold cuts and sausage. Fruit mentioned by the students were lemons & lime, berries, apples, and banana. This is a mixture of regional as well as imported fruits. Fish was only mentioned twice - in combination with the Japanese dish sushi, and as a dinner option. It seems to be least representative of the students eating habits.

Ingredients and dishes that Lao students deemed representative of their daily food habits and food culture included in particular the category vegetables. Unlike the German students’ vegetables received the most mentions with Lao students. Chilies, eggplant, onion, carrots, various wild greens, and green papaya<sup>25</sup> were the vegetables depicted. No non-regional vegetables were used by the Lao students. Raw vegetables, in particularly various wild greens, as well as grilled vegetables and dips, were presented. Green papaya especially was a favourite by the students with it being mentioned in different forms of preparation such as papaya salad or raw with assorted dips. Two groups reported separately from each other their particular favour of green papaya. Fruit included lemon, coconut (scrapes) and, though not the fruit part, the banana leaf as tool were also used in cooking. All fruits were also regional. Starch was mentioned only in the form of sticky rice and sago, no other forms such as pasta or bread were brought up. Fish, particularly in the form of fermented fish sauce *padaek*, or grilled and steamed, was depicted as well. One student group reported: “fish is a main food for Lao people since past to present”. This can be linked to the Mekong river which has been a food source in Laos for a long time. Lao students also did not report on eating fast food, sweets, or snacks except for sweet sago dough pyramids, which is usually considered a ceremonial food in Laos. Meat was only mentioned once in form of beef jerky. This is again contrary to the German students, which included a wider variety of meat. No Lao student reported eating dairy or eggs or presented it in their videos so it can be considered least representative of the students’ food habits.

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<sup>25</sup> Green papaya is botanically considered a fruit but because of its cultural usage in savoury recipes and treatment similar to a vegetable in Laos the author has chosen to include it in the category of vegetables

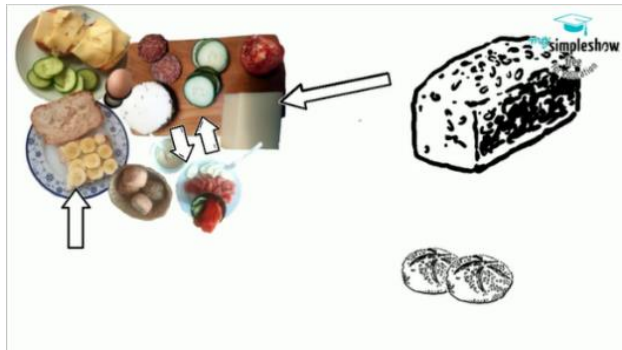


Figure 3: Food depicted as edible by a German student group

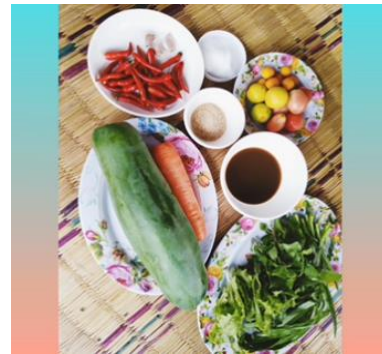


Figure 4: Food depicted as edible by a Lao student group

In regard to the second institution *the kitchen as a cultural set of rules*, German and Lao students' presentation of what they consider a room with specific technological equipment and methods of preparation that are typical to them is being looked at. Further subcategories that formalized during the coding process are *type of kitchen*, *type of preparation*, and *type of equipment*. Both Lao and German students presented kitchen spaces, the equipment they use and forms of preparation for food they consume. Lao students showcased a lot more in these categories in comparison to the German students as they focused more on food preparation in their presentation.

German students presented in the category type of kitchen in two videos a fitted kitchen without further explanation as place for preparation of food. In the category of equipment, a fridge and two times an electric stove were shown in the videos, again without comment. The German students presented nothing in the category of type of preparation.

The Lao students presented five different methods of preparation techniques, namely preserving, steaming, chopping, pounding, and grilling. These were often verbally explained and demonstrated. Particularly the use of pounding (with a mortar and pestle) was shown in three different videos. The Lao students commented also on the use of preserving food in relation to food history when fridges were not available: "The most of Lao people would like to store it for several days [...] by bring it to the sun for remove moisture". The Lao students related through the demonstration of preparation techniques directly to their food culture. The type of kitchen was identified in two videos as open-air kitchen e.g. using space outdoors with several equipment set up. The equipment used by the Lao students was also extensive. Hands being used as a tool, for example while chopping with knife in one

hand and ingredient in other or to fold wrapping, and mortar and pestle were the most common tools that the students demonstrated. This was also often done with explanation of steps in the process. Another tool was a Lao coal grill used for cooking and a modern dehydrator to be used for preservation. In conclusion, the Lao students used a more specific and extensive approach when demonstrating elements of Lao kitchen in comparison to German students which preferred not to include such elements or if they did, did not comment on them.



Figure 5: Example of a kitchen setting shown by a Lao student group



Figure 6: Example of a kitchen setting shown by a German student group

The third institution of food culture the *meal as a social institution* was the last major category in food culture and investigated how students depicted meals as social situations. Several subcategories could be identified for this category. First, the use of *individual dishes*, meaning everybody has an individual plate to which they transport food from shared vessels, or *communal dishes*, meaning the dishes on which food is served are also used as communal plate to eat from. Then whether food was served on a high table with chairs, so a *table setting*, or food was served on the ground or a ground-level table in a low sitting scenario, so a *floor setting*. Another category whether *eating with friends and family* was mentioned as part of the meal, so in a community rather than a single setting, was included as well. Then the *structure of mealtimes* e.g. how meals are organized and the *importance of taking time*, were codes that manifested during categorization. Lastly, mentions of the use of *convenience* such as eating out, take-out and online-delivery as part of the meal were also looked at.

German students did not use communal dishes, and in only two videos the use of individual dishes during the meal was portrayed. A floor setting was also not present in relation to the meal. A table setting was shown once. In relation to friends and family, only one video expressively mentioned: "It's fun to go out for dinner with friends and family.". With whom or how the meal was consumed was otherwise not

shown. However, the German students expressed in three different videos the structure of their mealtime. This was often in relation to when certain foods can be consumed e.g. bread for breakfast or meat for dinner and how often food is consumed. For example one student reported: "I would like to eat three meals [but] during these [learning] phases I eat two proper meals a day [...]" and another group that looked at meal times and structured them into three meals a day found out: "On average all of them eat one warm meal a day.". When and how often food is consumed can therefore be considered as issue of importance to these students. One group especially pointed out that: "We should take more time for our lunch break because it decreases stress factors and makes us more content as a result." which was categorized as the importance of taking time. Two student groups also pointed out the use of convenience for meals e.g. one group stated: "If we have little time to cook fresh at home [...] we order online" and another mentioned eating out for meals and in regards to the variety available when eating out mentions "you can find food from all nations on one street. Mexican, Asian, Arabic, Indian [...]".

The Lao students also portrayed the institution of the meal in their videos in various ways. Regarding the use of communal and individual dishes the Lao students portrayed only the use of communal dishes in three separate videos. This shows a preference of communal dishes for the Lao students. The students also depicted a floor setting two times and a table setting one time for the preferred type of meal positioning. Eating together with family or friends was also mentioned two times. One group described in relation to fish "eating in family by cooking plenty of menu" and another student remarked: "let to be eaten papaya salad with my friends" .

Regarding the structure of mealtimes or the importance of taking time, the Lao students did not separately mention anything. However, in regards to convenience Lao students mentioned favouring food that was convenient to prepare or eat e.g. "everyone can eat in different places such as at home, restaurants in lots of food styles" and in relation to beef jerky "[it] is a good menu that the most people like to consume, because it can preserve for a long days and have a simple method to cook and easy to take it everywhere". This suggests that the Lao students also prefer food that is convenient for their lifestyle.



Figure 7: Example of a communal dish setting shown by a Lao student group



Figure 8: Example of an individual dish setting shown by a German student group

### 3.3.2. Daily Food Management

The category daily food management encompasses all categories that relate to the student's presentation of the structure and design of daily food habits, that do not fall under any specific category in the three institutions of food culture. The subcategories developed include *sustainability, health, lifestyle and time management, influence of COVID-19, importance of taste and enjoyment and procurement of food*. Here, the German students showed more extensive results, as they focused more on the academic research question, they could choose in relation to their daily food habits, rather than presentation of food culture.

The first category sustainability focused on all issues relating to sustainable foodways. Here, the two student groups displayed differing results. The German student's presentation encompassed a variety of ways in which they thought about the influence of their food habits in relation to sustainability. However, due to the highly industrialized foodways they reported occasionally struggling with the issue of sustainability. One German student group, which had looked at sustainability in particular displayed reflection on their daily food habits in regards to sustainability by stating: "Due to the climate changes, we are facing a challenge that we can solve only if we are united. Everyday we decide how we spend our money and how we can change our world to a better one. A first step is done by reflecting our own daily behaviour.". In relation to sustainable foodways, categories that were brought up by the students included the *transport of food* e.g. the use of a shopping bag or the vehicle to get to a supermarket, *type of diet*, for example vegan or vegetarian and the influence of such on sustainability, *food packaging* e.g. avoidance of plastic packaging and *product seals* e.g. Demeter. This showcased the various possible opportunities the German students saw in possible influence on sustainable

foodways. The Lao students also had mentions of sustainability in their video portrayal. However, they reflected differently on certain issues or displayed nonverbal practice of sustainable foodways. Overall, two explicit instances of sustainability in relation Lao student's food habits were displayed. The category *sustainable agriculture* and its importance was highlighted with: "The Mekong river is very important to the subsistence of Lao people and it is origins of ethical food site and wisdom to live.", showing that natural resources and the importance of sustainable use of them is of importance to the Lao students. Another example included student's reflection on *food packaging*: "The past are popular putting in jar or [bamboo] cylinder but now for distribution [of food] people use plastic [...] and there are packages is beautiful. In addition, it can protect the dirty in one level.". This shows that the students are aware of different possibilities to package food but prefer plastic as it is more convenient and hygienic for them.

Regarding the category health German students reported in two videos to relate it to their construct of food habits. One group connected health to a lack of time and pointed out that this "could be responsible for an unhealthy diet [...] because of a lack of time there are fewer options for a balanced diet". Another student of a group reported: "I try to eat healthy - lots of fresh vegetables, fruit and meat". The Lao students also raised the issue of health in two videos. Here the nutritional value of certain food items was pointed out as means of signifying the importance of consuming them: "fish sauce has a lot of nutritional value" and "beef jerky is a [...] protein snack". The Lao students related nutritional facts of food to the personal health of the consumer.

The next category, lifestyle and time management, was concerned with the influence of students' time management and lifestyle on their food habits. The German students reported especially strong in this category, showing that the issue of time seems to be of major concern to their foodways. One student group reported in their findings "they are all under time pressure, the reasons for the time pressure are different but the influence on eating behaviour was similar". Another group pointed out in regard to online ordering at the supermarket that "this option is extremely useful because people with little time can order fresh ingredients for themselves", showing that services that provide help in efficient time management are popular. Another group concluded: "the way I eat is strongly depending on my lifestyle [...] Examination phase means a lot of stress. I eat a lot of sweets during

those [stressful learning] phases.”. This means that many German students find time management to be of concern in their student life and that it mostly affects them negatively. Most report they wish to improve the relation of time management to daily food habits. Lao students did not explicitly thematize the issue of time management in their food ways but one group pointed out that they preferred food that offered convenience in regards to time such as: “a good menu that the most people like to consume, because [...] everyone can eat it and it's easy to take everywhere especially if when you go camping or bush walking or fishing”.

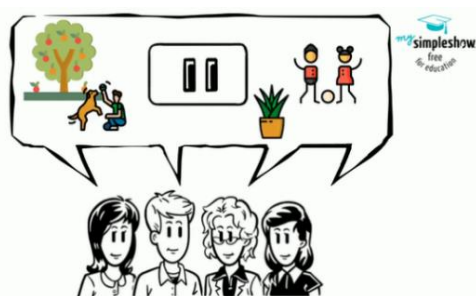


Figure 9: Example of a German groups relation of food to time management



Figure 10: Example of a Lao groups relation of food to time management

The next category concerned itself with the influence of COVID-19 on the students foodways. Three of the German students’ videos make mention of this issue. The Lao students did not thematize it though it needs to be pointed out that two videos were produced pre-COVID19 and during the production phase of the other videos, Laos was on lockdown in major public institutes but did not report on high case numbers<sup>26</sup> unlike Germany, making the assumption possible that Lao students were not as heavily impacted in their foodways as German students. For the German students, they reported on different influences of the pandemic on their food habits. One group points out the COVID-19 pandemic as likely influence on food habits e.g. by cooking more at home. Another group affirms this with: “Since the corona pandemic [...] I have three meals a day and eat much healthier.”. Another group reports on the influence of the digital semester on student’s life due to increased stress and therefore effecting foodways negatively. This illustrates the corona pandemic as source of consideration for the German students in their foodways. The category importance of taste and enjoyment seeked to investigate how students valued the factor of taste and enjoyment in their daily eating. German students displayed in three videos the importance of taste and enjoyment regarding food. In

<sup>26</sup> As of October 2020 Laos has reported 24 cases of COVID-19 and no casualties



relation to online-ordering food one group pointed out that the “offer is varied and delicious, there is always something for every taste, for example if we feel like something culinary this wish can be fulfilled quickly”. Showcasing that taste plays a role in the choice of food eaten. Another group reported “for me nutrition should not only be healthy but also fun. I love to cook.”, linking the enjoyment of food directly with the process of preparation and consumption. Lao students equally showed in three videos the importance of taste and enjoyment regarding food. One group exclaimed: “It's very, very good if we eat them [sticky rice, papaya salad, beef jerky] together”. This statement exemplifies the importance of taste and enjoyment of food in the Lao students foodways. Another student pointed out: “I like spicy papaya salad.”, to illustrate why this menu was chosen to be presented. German and Lao students seem to factor taste and enjoyment of food equally into their considerations of food they consume.

The last category, the procurement of food, concerns itself with where students obtain food from. Four subcategories could be generated for this point, *open-market*, *self-sustained*, *supermarket* and *online-delivery*. Most German students used the supermarket as source of obtaining food and depicted it in various ways in their videos. One other source mentioned was online-delivery of food with the students explaining “we all know that online delivery services are a practical option to order fresh food”. Some Lao students depicted open-markets as common source of food procurement in their videos. One student group also pointed out that self-sustained procurement was common for them. “The majority of Lao people's occupation is engaged in farming in many centuries such as plantation, raising animals, fisheries. [...] Most people in this area fish and make income for their family.”. In conclusion, in regard to procurement of food, the distinctive differences between a highly industrialized and developing country can be seen.



Figure 11: Procurement of food depicted by a Lao student group (self-sustained, open-market)



Figure 12: Procurement of food depicted by a German student group (supermarket, online-delivery)

### 3.3.3. Communication

This part serves as a small excursion by shifting the focus from looking at what the students are communicating to instead investigate *how* the students communicate. Further research in this area could lead to greater insight in food communication, which could also help to structure future exchange in a positive way. The type of communication – verbal and nonverbal – was therefore another focus of the analysis and the categories decided beforehand, so categorization was deductive. The focus here was how the students communicated food in their videos. Is the content explained verbally or through writing this was considered verbal communication. Is something shown – for example through pictures, drawings or actions in video form without further explicit explanation – this was considered nonverbal communication and potentially assumed to be able to be interpreted or associated with prior knowledge by the communicator. Though it is not possible to identify all communication by the students as some can not be distinctively identified but through categorization a general trend towards the preference of type of communication in relation to which topics can be seen. Therefore, the type of communication chosen in relation to food culture and habits, that was identifiable was compared in the Lao and German videos. Segments that pertained to one

category but contained mentioning of several subcategories were identified as one segment.

The German students had eleven segments clearly identifiable as verbal and eight as nonverbal communication. Out of the verbal segments most communication contained related to daily food habits such as sustainability, health and time management. The students verbally explained in detail how issues of daily food habits related to themselves. The nonverbal communication pertained all to issues of food culture e.g. types of food, kitchen or meal, and were shown through a variety of media such as video, photo, or drawings. This means that the German students preferred to verbally express themselves about issues of daily food habits but preferred to nonverbally communicate issues of food culture. The Lao students had eight verbal segments of communication and six nonverbal. The verbal segments included six in relation to food culture and two in relation to food habits. The Lao students would for example explicitly explain the tools and ingredients used in Lao cuisine. The nonverbal segments all pertained to food culture. This shows that the Lao students preferred to communicate about food culture rather than daily habits and used about the same mixture of verbal and nonverbal communication as their German counterparts. In relation to the amount of communication it can be said that both German and Lao students communicated about the same amount verbally and nonverbally with the German students expressing slightly more in relation to food issues. This is a rough outline of communication trends of the Lao and German students; other methods might be more suitable for analysing the communication patterns, but a trend is already visible from this short observation.

#### 4. Discussion

In this part a discussion about the empirical research with a discursive examination of the results will be made. Therefore, the results of the empirical part will be set in relation to the theoretical findings and possible points of discussion identified and theories formulated, as well as opportunities for future research explored. Following this, a methodological reflection of the empirical research will be made. This serves to ensure the quality of the empirical research and examine the suitability of the chosen research design.

#### 4.1. Discursive Examination of the Results

The qualitative content analysis by Mayring offered insight into the students structure of video presentation in relation to their food culture and daily food habits. In this part the link between the results of the empirical research and the theoretical part will be drawn to examine the result from a discursive approach. To ensure this, the results of the empirical research will be set in relation to the theoretical findings to identify possible points of discussion and formulate theories or questions, as well as explore opportunities for future research. To reiterate, the theoretical part looked specifically at the Lao-German relationship in the educational context, food studies and social sciences in a globalized world, nutrition and consumer education, sustainability, intercultural competence, food communication and food culture from an academic point of view with a focus on Lao and German food culture. These points will be set in relation to the findings of the empirical research in the points food culture, daily food management and communication. In regards to the students motivation for their presentation the content analysis can offer clues and show latent meaning in combination with prior knowledge. However, to fully comprehend all issues raised in the videos and interpret them into detail is not possible as extensive background knowledge is not available and not part of the research method. Therefore, the following part attempts to investigate why students created videos in the way they did but can only offer presumptions. In order to formulate possible approaches for future research and the design of student exchange, questions have been formulated to guide leading thoughts.

##### 4.1.1. Food Culture

First, food culture has been identified as a complex social construct that is not generalizable. However, distinct different elements of food culture, as well as common factors were identifiable in the presentation of students presentation of food culture – may it be verbal or nonverbal.

Regarding edible and inedible food, German and Lao students both present what they consider socially accepted edible food only. This is due to the fact that students seek to showcase their daily eating habits and culture and therefore will not incorporate elements that they deem socially inedible. Another reason is that they want to present a positive image and do not wish to include negative opinions about

the choice of ingredients especially when cooperating with members of a foreign food culture. In other words, students wish to distinguish themselves as part of a certain collective food culture but do not wish to exclude themselves from others either and express openness to 'foreign' food. Discussing differences can be difficult but would be of interest when reflecting on the first institution of food culture. Both Lao and German students showcased what they considered edible ingredients and a variety of dishes in which they are used. The food presented by the students in the category edible or inedible aligned with the findings of German and Lao food culture. German students consumed a wider variety of food than Lao students and consumed a lot more food that was imported or considered "convenience food". Also, the food with most mentions by them were starch products. Lao students diet in contrast was heavily reliant on regional products with a focus on vegetables and to some part fish and starch. This is reflective of the industrial vs non-industrial structures the two countries offer. The industrialization of food and the heavy influence on what type of food is consumed can be seen through this example. The lesser the influence of high industrialization is the more sustainable and healthier a diet also becomes. As has been established, many mentions of the German and Lao students were identical to what has been classified as 'typical' Lao and German dishes e.g. papaya salad and fish sauce for Lao and bread with different topping for German students. Considering that these rather typical dishes were chosen for presentation by the students could be out of a motivation to present identifiable and popular dishes, but most students claimed these to be reflective of their daily eating habits, making the understanding of food culture one not to be underestimated in the exchange. If a symbolic perspective were to be applied, such as Teuteberg's classification of products, it can be presumed that Lao students showcased mostly products of status e.g. sticky rice and papaya salad and German students a mixture of status products and hedonistic products, so products for personal pleasure like Avocado or dishes considered aesthetic like foreign dishes. This showcases how food can communicate personal identity and group affiliation with others. The food Lao students chose were highly representative of Lao food culture though in some cases might have been chosen for representation purposes rather than as a reflection of student eating habits. This is particularly the case for ceremonial food such as sago dough pyramids and the exclusion of fast food and snacks in face of the great street food culture in Laos. This is in correlation with Lao attitude towards

face, representing an amicable side to identify as part of a collective. In comparison, though they include edible food only, ingredients used and dishes in which they are combined differ greatly and might lead to confusion for students when presented without further explanation when they are unfamiliar with ingredients e.g. sticky rice or fermented fish sauce for German students and dairy products such as cheese for Lao students. Further insight into ingredients deemed edible or inedible by the students prior or during the exchange might make communication easier and foster greater reflection. The questions posed in regard to the institution of edible and inedible food are: *Does the inclusion of the institution add to the improvement of the exchange? Is the discussion about the category of food considered inedible by students helpful or hindering to the discourse? Can dialogue about what is considered edible and inedible by students showcase cultural and individual values and therefore contribute to the student's reflection of their food culture?*

The second institution, the kitchen, offered insight into the students' different perceptions of the space and manner of food preparation. German students, in relation to food culture, liked to show the results e.g. dishes or ingredients used to demonstrate daily food habits but not the process of making or consuming it. Therefore, the categories kitchen and meal in food culture did not show significant results. It can be assumed that German students heavily reflect academic issues in relation to their daily food habits such as sustainability but not on the processes of food culture. Lao students showcased a lot more in these categories in comparison to the German students as they focused more on food preparation in their presentation. The Lao students explicitly demonstrated how to prepare dishes, the space and the tools used. In conclusion, the Lao students used a more specific and extensive approach when demonstrating elements of Lao kitchen in comparison to German students which preferred not to include such elements or if they did, usually did not comment on them. This raises possible hindrances for the Lao students as they seem to show a preference for presenting issues of food culture themselves but in return not much is reciprocated. If the institution kitchen is thematized as part of the German videos further explanations are usually not given. Considering vast differences in the institution kitchen between the two countries this might make understanding harder for both sides. The questions established for the second institution of food culture, the kitchen, are: *Is it necessary or not to think about it in terms of inclusion in discourse as it is a topic not thought about by some student*

*groups or does its disregard speak even more so for it being included in discussion? How can its inclusion in the discourse be designed to be made understandable to exchange partners and how does it serve to foster reflection in the students?*

Lastly, the meal as social setting becomes of focus. Here, the students also showcased distinct traits. German students did not use communal dishes, and in only two videos the use of individual dishes during the meal was portrayed. This could be linked to individualistic traits of German cultural structures as has been discussed beforehand in the theoretical part. A floor setting was also not present in relation to the meal. Once a table setting was shown. In relation to friends and family, only one video expressively mentioned: "It's fun to go out for dinner with friends and family.". With whom or how the meal was consumed was otherwise not shown. However, the German students expressed in three different videos the structure of their mealtime. This was often in relation to when certain foods can be consumed e.g. bread for breakfast, meat for dinner and how often food is consumed. For example, one student reported: "I would like to eat three meals [but] during these [learning] phases I eat two proper meals a day [...]". The structure of mealtime can therefore be considered as issue of importance to the German students. Two student groups also pointed out the use of convenience for meals e.g. one group stated: "If we have little time to cook fresh at home [...] we order online". The Lao students also portrayed the institution of meal in their videos in various ways. Regarding the use of communal and individual dishes the Lao students portrayed only the use of communal dishes in three separate videos. This shows a preference of communal dishes for the Lao students and might be linked to highly collectivistic structures established in Lao society. The students also depicted a floor setting two times and a table setting one time for the preferred type of meal positioning. Eating together with family or friends was also mentioned two times. Regarding the structure of mealtimes or the importance of taking time, the Lao students did not separately mention anything. This could be linked to the majority of Lao not considering time or regular schedules as urgent matter for their daily life. However, regarding convenience Lao students mentioned favouring food that was convenient to prepare or eat e.g. "everyone can eat in different places such as at home, restaurants in lots of food styles". This suggests that the Lao students also prefer food that is convenient for their lifestyle. This means for the institution meal that while the customs familiar to the students in relation to how the meal is conducted

differ considerably, the social construct and intention of the meal stays of importance to both. Issues as how to conveniently integrate meals into the daily schedule or who to eat with is of concern to both German and Lao students. The questions posed for the third institution of food culture, the meal, are thus following: *Does the inclusion of the meal as part of food culture hold importance to the students? Should the issues of importance to the students be given priority in discussion? What do differences and similarities suggest to students and how can possible pre-assumptions be counteracted? Can the construction of the meal be linked to individual and collectivistic social structures and therefore aid in understanding the meal as social construct?*

In conclusion, Lao students tend to present food culture not in relation to the individual but their society and shared collective values and distinctive features. They do not engage too much on the individual level of daily food habits. This correlates with education principles established for the Lao students to focus on shared points of representation and not on individual reflection. German students are more inclined to present food culture and daily food habits in the individual context of their singular experiences and prefer to reflect on what they have learned. This is also in connection to their societal values and education system. However, they consider many factors of what they present in relation to their food culture self-explanatory or general knowledge and fail to reflect on how members of different food cultures might not be able to relate to their experiences without further insight. Both approaches need to be considered and respected in the design of exchange. It is therefore important to foster reflection not only on personal food habits but also elements of shared food culture as this leads to reflection on a greater scale and can be used as new thought for global nutrition and consumer education. Establishing appreciation of both points of view by including exercises for collective and individual reflection might aid this process. Ultimately, learning about other cultures socially constructed food habits can also lead to 'widen the horizon' of perspective in relation to nutrition and consumer education. However, prior engagement with the exchange partners is of importance to avoid talking at cross purposes but instead create authentic content that is suitable for the level of the partner by including information and explanation where possibly necessary. Even when tasks are connected to higher academic research questions it is of importance to foster awareness that students need to construct their presentation in a form



understandable to their target culture partners. Regarding how exchange can be improved in this way, preliminary discussions, input from experts with prior experiences and reflection exercises before the first contact might be helpful. Conditions are often different and both parties must be informed about this, adjust expectations, and most importantly adjust the task culturally. This will also aid students in being less nervous about the exchange, especially if they do not have many prior experiences with intercultural exchange and create a positive environment. The incorporation of cultural elements identified as being similar or differing can support such a construction of exchange.

#### 4.1.2. Daily Food Management

The next category, daily food management, looked at how students structured their daily food habits and the subcategories sustainability, health, lifestyle and time management, influence of COVID-19, importance of taste and enjoyment and procurement of food were established.

Sustainability looked at how students included aspects of sustainable foodways into their daily habits. The results showed that sustainability pertains the students differently. While both think about issues of sustainability, for the German students issues of industrialized and globalized foodways such as buying food without plastic wrapping, carrying a shopping bag or buying organic food are of concern to them. The Lao students are instead concerned with issues that relate to them more directly such as sustainable agriculture. The issues raised by students reflected on their personal living circumstances. Again, possible issues of miscommunication or hindrances to reflection were identified. For example, in Lao students reflection on food packaging: “The past are popular putting in jar or [bamboo] cylinder but now for distribution [of food] people use plastic [...] and there are packages is beautiful. In addition, it can protect the dirty in one level.” showcases the issue of students being aware of different possibilities to package food but preferring plastic as it is more convenient and hygienic for them in scenarios such as open-air markets where hygiene is valued in comparison to highly industrial supermarkets that offer food security in the sense of health. While many natural resources such as bamboo exist and were used traditionally to prepare and store food, nowadays many Lao prefer to use plastic utensils in daily life for food preparation and storage as it is cheaper and more convenient to use. German students that are not aware of the Lao

students living situation might not understand reasoning for choosing plastic over other sustainable material as they have not thought about such issues before. On the other hand, an example from the German students in relation to sustainable product seals such as *Demeter* stated that German students are aware of them and take them into consideration when food shopping. This might showcase ways in which German students thought about the influence of their food habits in relation to sustainability but it needs to be pointed out that such issues do not relate to the Lao students. Product seals such as *Demeter* do not exist in Laos and are unfamiliar to the students. These two examples elucidate while one identical issue might be raised there are many cultural nuances to it. Therefore, one possible way to counteract such discrepancies would be exercises for students to think about possible issues of sustainability that pertain to the partner students lifestyle, or for lecturers to introduce and explain possible differing issues prior to the students exchange. This might improve relation and reflection of sustainability issues faced by partner students. As sustainability is considered an important issue by most students its inclusion in discussion is given but questions to be posed could scrutinize how such a discourse could be planned out: *Which aspects of sustainable foodways are of importance to the students? How can issues of sustainability be thematized without ignoring vastly different living conditions?*

Regarding health, both student groups had mentions of being concerned with issues of health in relation to food. They did, however, not take up major concern for either. It would be of interest to explore issues of health in comparison as both student groups bring in different factors such as German students considering the best structure of their meals for health purposes and Lao students the nutritional value of food. While the WHO states: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (World Health Organization, 2006), it would be of interest to see how students from Laos and Germany, in face of differing food health issues, as established in the theoretical part, explore the following questions: *What is considered a healthy diet by students? Is the concept of health similarly understood by both student groups or not? How do they seek to establish healthy food habits? Is health only definable by nutritional facts or are other factors in relation to food of importance as well?*

Lifestyle and time management are another issue raised by the students. The results showed that many German students find time management to be of concern

in their student life and that it mostly affects them negatively. Most report they wish to improve the relation of time management to daily food habits. Lao students did not explicitly thematize the issue of time management in their food ways but one group pointed out that they preferred food that offered convenience in regard to time. Again, this needs to be reflected back on student lifestyle offered – here in Berlin and Savannakhet. Both groups showed preference of convenience or better time management in regard to their lifestyle. This can be linked to high time pressure experienced due to busy university schedules. German students however were particularly concerned with time management. One possibility is that German students are more concerned with issues of time, like established beforehand, were Germans were classified as being culturally more involved concerning issues of punctuality and pressure, while Lao are more considerate of harmony. Therefore, questions posed by this issue are: *Is the interest in time management linked to students schedule? Are differences in perception of time culturally based? How can the issue of time management in relation to lifestyle and foodways be embedded in the cultural exchange and what perspectives can it possibly offer?*

The influence of COVID-19 was another matter established in the videos produced by the students. Due to Covid-19 Lao students were particularly affected in their ability to produce videos. The influence of a lockdown might be one reason why their daily eating habits were not fully able to be presented. They did not thematize the pandemic in their videos though. As has been discussed beforehand, there are other factors as well that might explain why the Lao students did not consider it in their presentation. In comparison German students related the issue actively to daily eating habits in their videos. Here, political and social background play greater roles that are difficult to investigate further. For future research it would be of particular interest to see how students present food habits without the influence of a global pandemic. Questions posed in relation to this issue would be: *Is the influence of current global issues such as a pandemic universally felt on foodways? Are there differences in the perception of the influence of COVID-19 on food habits? Are global issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic beneficial particularly in discourse of global food culture and should therefore be made a point of importance in discussion?*

The importance of taste and enjoyment was another point that was raised by the students. Some issues of food culture and food habits stayed the same for Lao and

German students - German and Lao students seem to factor taste and enjoyment of food equally into their considerations of food they consume. Most also seem to favour communal settings when eating rather than being alone during the meal. This is a strong basis to build on in exchange as such similarities showcase the importance of enjoyment and community when talking about food for both parties. A question to be posed for the future would include: *How can similarities such as the importance of taste and enjoyment be used in building relations and reflecting food habits?*

Lastly, the point of procurement of food was another category established. Here, vast differences between the procurement of food could be seen. Both student groups did not share similarities in regard to where food was generated from, the distinctive differences between a highly industrialized and developing country can be seen by the places described or shown by the students. German students procured food through supermarkets or ordering online while Lao students obtained food from open-markets or even self-sustained through agriculture, fishing and so on. Here, questions would be: *Is it valuable to include issues of food procurement in exchange or would differences be a hindrance? How can differences in procurement of food be used for discourse and reflection on food habits?*

Ultimately, an important observation was that the teacher students were stimulated to reflect on their daily food habits through the seminar. This reflection of their own position in contrast to the contemplation of their intercultural partners standpoint fostered individual and, in the seminar setting, also communal discussion and critical observation of their food experiences – a transnational experience of food culture and habits. As discussed beforehand, it is vital to teacher education to foster teacher students to navigate their worlds critically as to support them to teach their students to be sufficiently prepared in international settings that are all around. This means that students need to have knowledge of the target culture, possess skills to identify differences, compare them to oneself and reevaluate their own perspective. In addition, they have to contain an open attitude towards unknown and the ability and willingness to change their point of view for productive and successful communication. This is a difficult process but all steps mentioned can be achieved or have been observed to have been achieved through the exchange. The issues identified in this paper and the formulated questions can guide such processes in the field of food studies. The digital exchange was therefore considered of support

to such developments and possible future development for nutrition and consumer education. Even when limited options for exchange exist virtual exchange is considered a good alternative to foster intercultural learning through immersion.

#### 4.1.3. Communication

The last category, communication, looked at verbal and nonverbal communication tendencies of the students in the presentation of their videos. The results showed that the German students preferred to verbally express themselves about issues of daily food habits but preferred to nonverbally communicate issues of food culture and the Lao students preferred to communicate about food culture rather than daily habits and used about the same mixture of verbal and nonverbal communication as their German counterparts. In relation to the amount of communication it can be said that both German and Lao students communicated about the same amount verbally and nonverbally with the German students expressing slightly more in relation to food issues. In conclusion, the findings of German and Lao communication can not be related to possible pre-assumptions of Lao students communicating more nonverbally and German students more verbally as established in the theoretical part. While Lao students communicate not as much information as the German students they are equal in their tendencies to use verbal and nonverbal communication. However, an interesting observation is that German students are much more likely to communicate verbally about issues of daily food habits while for Lao students they preferred to thematize issues of food culture verbally. Being aware of differences in style of communication can give better insight when talking about food communication, as cultural views are reflected in how we present ourselves and therefore in how we communicate food. Different styles of expressing oneself can lead to a different style of videos produced and are therefore important to consider. This categorization has shown that while topics are thematized differently, structures of nonverbal and verbal communication are similar for the students. Further research into this aspect can give more insight into the matter and the field of food communication in general. Further questions would be: *How can patterns of nonverbal and verbal food communication be researched more deeply? How can the results about communication be used in the improvement of future exchange?*

#### 4.1.4. Conclusions for the Discursive Examination

To conclude, students from Laos and Germany communicate about food issues mostly different but also share some similarities. In regards to how the students communicate it can be summarized that Lao students tend to be motivated by being representative of their collective experience and are strongly influenced by distinctive Lao culture while German students work more reflective and are strongly influenced by individual factors. A question would be where this degree of deviation stems from despite the students receiving identical tasks. Possible factors in these differences might be that there are many elements that differ from the background of the students. Some of them have already been discussed in the theoretical part of this paper such as prior experiences with the issues of nutrition and consumer education, sustainability and intercultural competence and differences of possibility in a developed and developing country. Additionally, students in Laos are on the Bachelor level while students in Germany are on the Master level and therefore of different academic status and abilities. Another factor not considered yet would be differences in verbal explanation of the task as the instructors have different academic backgrounds, with the German side having a focus more in social science and the Lao side more on nutrition. This means that despite the design and construction of the task being the same for both groups the instruction of lecturers and understanding of how to implement the task by students might differ due to such contrasting backgrounds. This could possibly affect results. However, it can be argued that the differences in student teacher groups contribute to more insight and that the creation of almost similar groups is near to impossible due to vastly different conditions in the two countries e.g. Master level degrees are not commonly available or offered in Laos. If possible, however, similar student levels might support more equal insight into the academic approach by students. Another point would be that of prior experience with the other students. For this seminar, students did not have the possibility to meet before the presentation of the videos mostly due to the influence of COVID-19. Personal contact with other students before the production of videos might have influenced the students in their choice of presentation. Ultimately, differences such as the ones mentioned can reflect in the teachers task assignment, the students perception of the task and finally the videos as products of such environments. One of the most important questions would be, if such

differences disrupt the exchange or pose potential for further discussion? One could argue that only through experiencing differences critical reflection can be lived out, because unplanned and unknown perspectives are brought to the table. This is also more reflective of *real life* and real social situations which social science aims to observe. As long as such differences are recognized and accounted for, there is no reason why such differences would disrupt further exchange. This means to be open for the unplannable, but still consider possible differences and plan for them. In conclusion, it can be said that it is of importance for the transnational exchange to build on similarities and reflect on differences to develop understanding of different cultural structures in relation to food studies and foster reflection of individual food habits.

Lastly, the question what conclusions can be drawn in regard to cultural tools for the students in transnational exchange is posed. Considering the many differences in background and empirical results it becomes clear, that it is important to transmit tools for students to better navigate the cultural exchange. Therefore, the findings from three institutions of food culture and daily food management should be transferred to such tools to help build a framework or avoid obstruction for future exchange. A possible tool would be assistance for the students in targeted observation. One possible method would be the incorporation of recipes, as mentioned in the theoretical part, or other cultural food artifacts. This can help to observe elements of food culture – specifically the three institutions of food culture – through observation and compare them to ones own experiences as a method for first thoughts about Lao-German food culture in context. For daily food management, the issues of importance to the students such as sustainability and time management have been identified in this paper and possible differences and similarities can also be used in further design of exchange. Many other possible methods and didactical designs would be possible but unfortunately, limitations are given in this paper. The suggestions given and questions posed serve as stimulation for future thought and research to establish concrete didactical frameworks for the design of Lao-German exchange.

## 4.2. Methodological Reflection

In the last step of the discussion, the verification that the qualitative content analysis met the quality criteria of qualitative research, will be made. This is to ensure the quality of the empirical research and examine the suitability of the chosen research design. There are no standard quality criteria for qualitative research. However, important aspects of quality criteria have been identified by academics and the author has chosen to look at three aspects in particular: transparency, range and intersubjectivity. Transparency is concerned with making one's own approach transparent for the readership. It poses the question if what was measured really was what should be measured. Range refers to the reproducibility of the qualitative content analysis, so whether the qualitative content analysis is reproducible when done again by somebody else. Finally, intersubjectivity excludes too much subjectivity in the qualitative content analysis by investigating if excessive subjective influences can be excluded.

First, transparency, which concerns itself with the question what was studied, and how and why the research was conducted. The author argues that this paper is transparent as all important steps in the working process have been documented in detail and make them comprehensible for outsiders to follow. This includes the generation and selection of research material, in this case videos self-produced by students, the choice of methodology design, here the qualitative content analysis by Mayring, as well as the execution and evaluation of the research by clear explanation of the steps taken during the analysis. The reason as to why the research was conducted is established in the theoretical part which argues for the need of more research in this field and the conditions given for the research question that make research compelling.

Second, range, which concerns itself with the question if similar results can be achieved by repeating a similar or the same process. This was ensured by conducting a reliability test during the empirical research. Intercoder reliability is a specific tool for qualitative content analysis. It is determined by several people i.e. coders coding the data material independently of one another using the category system and the coding guide. In this way, it can be verified whether the categories are formulated in an understandable manner. Following this process, the results of all coders are compared. For this paper, apart from the author, another independent



coder conducted the qualitative content analysis using the established coding guide after thorough explanation of it. While, according to Mayring, a high degree of agreement is difficult to achieve intercoder reliability represents an elementary pillar of the content-analytical quality criteria (Mayring, 2000). The intercoder reliability is calculated using the Kappa coefficient. According to Fleiss et. al., kappa values between .61 and .80 are classified as “substantial”, values between .81 and 1.00 as “almost perfect” (Fleiss, Levin, & Paik, 2003). For this paper, the calculated value for intercoder reliability is  $\kappa = 0.862$ . This means that the established data is categorized as “almost perfect” and the verification of range has been established. However, the coder has been given extensive explanation for the coding guide which might give additional explanation for such positive results.

Lastly, intersubjectivity becomes of focus. It deals with the discussion and reflection of the data to ensure that intersubjectivity can be obtained and subjective influences excluded. First, the method chosen is highly regulated and therefore intersubjectively verifiable as established beforehand. However, it also needs to be pointed out that most academics agree it is almost impossible to develop a completely objective coding guide as the coder will always have subjective influence on the process. The author has reflected on the process and method chosen to control subjectivity and contribute to the improvement of intersubjectivity. Additionally, through the reliability check additional input has been given to avoid subjective coding.

Another important aspect of qualitative research is carrying out ethical research. While it was not of major concern in this thesis as no ethical questions were posed or humans directly affected, it is important to point out that consent was given by students to have the material that was produced be used in relation to empirical uses and all data was used with the explicit consent of the people involved.

Lastly, all aspects of quality criteria of qualitative research have been established and verified. However, one negative aspect of the research methodology needs to be pointed out. The quality of the content analysis depends on the content to be examined: Is it relevant, authentic, credible, and representative? It is therefore difficult to answer why-questions with content analysis as there tends to be speculation. Through the method the reconstruction of *what* students are communicating can be answered but to explore the *why* other methods would be more suitable. Due to the time constraints the content of what students

communicate was set in relation to theoretical findings to generate a conclusion, but other empirical methods would have been better at achieving this. However, qualitative content analysis can show latent and subjective meaning, often through frequency, as established beforehand. Further questions for future research were formulated instead of exclusively focusing on the interpretation of results. Therefore, content analysis is suitable for the research question which concerns itself with the direct content communicated by the students as well as the possible background to it, but further research into the interpretation of results would add to the findings. In consideration of the time frame and scale of this research paper it can be argued that a first look into the research matter was given and the chosen research methodology was suitable for the research question.

## 5. Conclusion and Outlook

This paper looked at questions of global food culture and daily food management. The research question intended to investigate what contents the students in the Lao-German exchange communicated in self-produced videos that had the task to reflect their daily food habits. To investigate this issue this paper looked at theoretical aspects of Lao-German relations of food studies and food culture in a globalized world. Therefore, issues of food studies and social sciences in a globalized world were looked at starting with an introduction into the Lao-German relationship in the educational context which established that growing relations in the educational sector fostered opportunities of exchange but that the field of food studies was still underdeveloped with very few partnerships established. Following this, nutrition and consumer education became of focus. Vast differences in an approach to the field were noticed in the two countries, with Germany struggling with issues of nutrition and consumerism in a developed country and striving to include the field in their educational curriculum and Laos focusing on food stability and issues of nutrition on the background of being a developing country. An issue of great importance in an ever-changing and industrialized world, sustainability, defined what sustainability is and investigated the importance of the topic for a global audience. The issue takes precedence in both Laos and Germany, however, with differing nuances in its execution. Next, the chapter on intercultural competence established the need for intercultural skills on the background of a shift to 'global citizenship' and in particular

in teacher education. Here, differing approaches to intercultural skills could be noted. Germany aims to include the topic extensively in its educational curriculum, while Laos considers issues of intercultural competence in education as well but mostly in relation to their own diverse population. The relation of intercultural competence and communicating foodways was also established and in conclusion its importance for food studies. Following this, many academic approaches to the field of food communication were reconstructed and the link between food, not only as a nutritional item, but also as a sender of a message in a greater social construct established. Finally, food culture was defined as a flexible, ever-changing social construct that describes how humans structure their relationship towards food and its consumption within their communities and three institutions of food culture were introduced following Barlösius *Soziologie des Essen*. In accordance with the established institutions Lao and German food culture was conceptualized. In the empirical part the research methodology was introduced, a qualitative content analysis by Mayring, with an inductive-deductive approach. The execution of the research was also documented. The evaluation and research results could be structured into three parts - food culture, daily food management and communication. Here the results of the research were presented. In the discussion part, the results were analyzed from a discursive standpoint. Similarities and differences between students presentation were identified, particularly the preference of Lao students to communicate themes of food culture and take a representative approach, while German students preferred to discuss issues of daily food management and take individualized processes. The findings were related back to social structures and partly different background conditions. Results can be used for future design of Lao-German exchange. Leading questions as well as possible approaches to design were identified with the suggestion to build on similarities and reflect on differences through exercises in the seminar. Lastly, the suitability of the chosen methodology and the quality criteria for qualitative research was inspected and found to be adequate. Possible opportunities and directions of future research have been established during the empirical research and questions formulated. Particularly, the concrete design and methodology that is appropriate for Lao-German exchange remains of interest. Additionally, how issues raised by students can give opportunity for nutrition and consumer education to develop in face of globalized food issues is also of concern. In conclusion, the field of food

studies remains of great interest for a continuously changing world and research into food culture and daily food habits can further aid our understanding of transnational experiences and exchange.

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## 8. Statement of Authorship

I certify that the attached material is my original work. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where I have clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, it has not been presented by me for examination in any other course or unit at this or any other institution. I understand that the work submitted may be reproduced and/or communicated for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. I am aware that I will fail the entire course should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.

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